

Jesus Final Journey Discussion Questions

The Cross Luke 23:33-43

Drawn from the March 24, 2024 sermon by Dr. Jeff Chandler

Opener: What are some of the ways you were changed when you encountered Jesus?

Luke 23:33-43 NIV

³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”^[a] And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. ³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” ³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar³⁷ and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews. ³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” ⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³ Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

1. What do you think of Jesus’ prayer in this passage? Why didn’t the people know what they were doing?

2. What might have motivated the first thief to hurl abuse at Jesus?

3. What can we learn from the second criminal’s request of Jesus and from Jesus’ answer to him?

4. How does the 2nd criminal's response help you acknowledge your own desperate condition before God apart from Christ?

Pastor Jeff in this message described three different understandings of Atonement. (The sacrifice that Jesus Christ made to reconcile sinners with a holy God. His death on the cross is seen as the ultimate act of atonement, bringing forgiveness and redemption to humanity.) Let's explore these:

Penal Atonement (Advocated by Augustine) – Christ paid a ransom to save us.

¹⁸ For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. ¹⁹ It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. 1 Peter 1:18-19 NLT

5. Why would the blood of Christ have more value than gold or silver?

Substitutionary Atonement (Advocated by Anselm of Canterbury). Christ's sacrificial death as a substitute for fallen humanity.

"The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isaiah 53:6

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21:

6. Talk about how "he who knew no sin, became sin". What does that mean?

The moral influence theory of the atonement (advocated by Abelard) emphasizes that Jesus' death on the cross serves as a demonstration of God's love.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

7. When you first saw John 3:16 how did it influence your understanding of what God did in sending his Son for your salvation?

Group Prayer Time: Thank the Father for sending His Son Jesus to die for our sins. Ask the Father to help us remember that we are saved not by our works, but by the grace and mercy of Christ. Pray that we will be bold enough and humble enough to share the joy of Christ's death for our sins and His resurrection with others. Pray also for any needs among group members.

For Further Reflection (either in the group or on your own)

Life Starts Now: Luke 24:1-12 - On Easter we will not have a small group study, but this is the passage that will be covered. Think through the following questions.

How do you think Jesus' followers felt when Jesus died?

How is it meaningful to you that Luke included the testimony of women in his account of Jesus' resurrection?

How did Peter react to the news of an empty tomb? Why do you think he was the one to run to the tomb?

Next week, March 31, is Easter and there will not be a small group study. The next sermon on April 7 is "Love one Another" by Dr. Jeff Chandler and there will be discussion questions available in "Downloads" on the SCC website.