



5.29.11/Luke 23:39-47

Materials Needed

None!

Read Luke 23:39-47

"One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!" (ESV)

Discussion:

Would you rather be run over by a truck or by the truck's shadow, and why? *The shadow. The shadow wouldn't hurt us.* Well 2,000 years ago, the truck of death ran over Jesus so that only the truck's shadow would run over us. **

Today's passage may seem familiar as we just passed the Easter season and learned about Christ's death on the cross. These verses from Luke tell the story of the last few moments before Jesus died and how, even to His last breath, He shows Himself to be a gracious and loving God.

Questions:

1. As we see in this passage, there were three crosses on the hill where Jesus died. Jesus hung in the middle, and a criminal was hung on each side. Death on a cross was considered the worst punishment one could receive because it was so very painful. Although Jesus was completely without sin, we know that each of the men hanging beside Jesus broke some kind of law that brought them there. But each man reacted very differently to Jesus. The first man says, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" What do you think the first man thought about Jesus? *He was taunting Jesus and trying to insult him. He probably never thought that Jesus was actually God and if he did, all he wanted was to be saved from the death they were about to receive, rather than from the sin that brought him to the cross.* The second man warns the first man that he shouldn't be taunting Jesus. Instead, he says, "we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." He then speaks directly to Jesus and asks him to "remember [him] when [he] comes into [his] kingdom." What do you think the second man thinks of Jesus? *He knows they deserve the punishment they are receiving, but that Jesus did nothing wrong and is unfairly hanging beside them. Most importantly, he recognizes that Jesus IS God and knows that after death, Christ will continue to reign in heaven for eternity. He asks very simply if Jesus would remember him when he is there.*

2. What is Jesus' response to the criminal who asks Him to remember him? *He says "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."* Remember that while this conversation is taking place, Jesus has been falsely accused in a mock trial, beaten horribly and is hanging on the cross in great pain and agony. Knowing this, how does Jesus' response show what a loving and gracious God He is? *With all of the pain and suffering that Jesus is experiencing, it would be very easy for us as mere humans to focus on how much we were hurting. People have turned their back on Jesus and it would be hard to blame Him for turning His back on us because of how horribly the people have treated Him. But because He is fully human AND fully God, even in His last few moments, He loves and extends His saving grace to a criminal who recognizes his need for forgiveness.*



3. Towards the end of the passage we see that just before Jesus died, He cries out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" Here we see that Jesus WILLINGLY died, even though He was completely capable of saving His own life. Why is it important to remember that He CHOSE to die? *Because Christ's death is a VICTORY! Jesus died to show us how much God loves us, to defeat sin and Satan. When Christ chose to die, He became our sin and destroyed it forever.*

Reflection/Prayer

Maybe there were three crosses on the hill the day that Jesus died because it shows that God gives us the gift of choice. We can choose to do what the selfish and bitter criminal did, and taunt and reject God. OR we can choose to do what the repentant criminal did and recognize that without God, we waste our lives away and that our only hope is to ask Jesus to forgive us, worshipping Him as King.

As you pray together, thank Jesus for always forgiving us when we truly repent. When we are truly sorry for what we've done and recognize that Jesus took our place for the punishment we deserve, He accepts us joyfully to spend eternity with Him in paradise. The forgiveness and mercy of God is so important to understand about being a follower of Jesus and you should talk about this with your parents often! If you'd like to know more about following Jesus, please ask your parents about what this means.

**Example derived from Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse