

THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS



**For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness;
but unto us who are saved it is the Power of God.**



Mark 15:25-36 (HCSB)

²⁵ Now it was nine in the morning when they crucified Him.

²⁶ The inscription of the charge written against Him was: **THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

²⁷ They crucified two criminals with Him, one on His right and one on His left. [

²⁸ So the Scripture was fulfilled that says: And He was counted among outlaws.]

²⁹ Those who passed by were yelling insults at Him, shaking their heads, and saying, “Ha! The One who would demolish the sanctuary and build it in three days,

³⁰ save Yourself by coming down from the cross!”

³¹ In the same way, the chief priests with the scribes were mocking Him to one another and saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself!

³² Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, so that we may see and believe.” Even those who were crucified with Him were taunting Him.

³³ When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

³⁴ And at three Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lemá sabachtháni?*” which is translated, “**My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?**”



APOSTLE PAUL

1Corinthians1:18(ASV)

18 For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the Power of God. It is necessary to examine this verse for a moment so that we might arrive at an understanding of what Paul is really saying.

There are three words here that concern us. The first is **“word”** — **“for the word of the cross.”**

Paul had a great deal to say in this epistle of **1 Corinthians** about the gospel. He said to the Corinthian believers, **“For I determined not to know any thing among you, except Jesus Christ, and him crucified”** (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Then, at the 15th chapter, he said,

1 Now brothers, I want to clarify for you the gospel I proclaimed to you; you received it and have taken your stand on it.

2 You are also saved by it, if you hold to the message I proclaimed to you—unless you believed for no purpose. **1Corinthians15:1-2(HCSB)**



GOSPEL FACTS

Then he gave the gospel facts: **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.**

According to Paul, that is the gospel. It is *all* the gospel, nothing else but the gospel, and anything else is *not* the gospel. Therefore, I would like to use the word I think Paul had in mind:

“The *gospel* of the cross is to them that perish foolishness.”

Now “foolishness” is another interesting word. Although “foolishness” is a good translation,

Paul was saying more than that. Actually, it means **something that is good for nothing, something stupid**. For the **word** of the cross — the **gospel** of the cross — is to them that perish good for nothing. **It means nothing to them.**

To the crowd in the stadium watching soccer, the cross probably is good for nothing. It doesn't fit into their program. If I would attempt to tell them about it, they would say, “That's stupid.” This is exactly what Paul said: **the gospel of the cross is to them that perish stupid, but unto us who are saved it is the power of God.**

There are two classes of people who come to the cross of Christ. To one class of people, the cross of Christ is good for nothing.

Another group of people come to it and find in it the **power of God unto salvation**.

Men have come to that cross, looked at it, and said, “It is foolishness to me; it has no meaning for my life,” and they have gone in one direction to their place.

Others have come to this cross and have found in it the power of God; it has saved them, and they have gone a different direction into eternity.

Our viewpoint of Jesus Christ and the cross will not change Him or that cross — but it will change our eternal destiny.

What we think of the cross tells who we are; it does not tell who He is or what the cross is.

Now I want to bring to the cross certain people who were actually present at the crucifixion of Christ. In some way all of them participated in or witnessed the crucifixion of Christ, and we shall see how that cross separated them.

Two Romans who had a great deal to do with the crucifixion

Pilate and the **Roman centurion** who crucified Him.

The cross divided these two men.

PILATE



ROMAN CENTURION



WHO WAS PILATE?



Pilate

Pilate was a puppet of Rome, a cheap politician. He did not want to make a decision concerning Jesus — he made that adequately clear — but he also did not want to offend the people.

He was a typical politician, wanting to please everybody. When they brought Jesus to him, at first he did not quite understand what they really wanted.

He brought Jesus into the judgment hall and said (*emphasis mine*),

“If You will just cooperate with me, I can get You off. No problem.”

But he found out that the Lord Jesus was not going to cooperate. That made Pilate a little uneasy. So he went out to the people and said,

“Look, this is just a religious matter, and I don’t know much about your religion.

You people take it and settle it; don’t turn it over to me!”

The chief priests said, “We’re sorry, but we cannot settle it. We are not permitted to give the death penalty, and that is what we are demanding.”

Pilate was startled and asked, “What has **He** done to merit death?”

“**He** has made Himself a king! We worship and honor Caesar we don’t honor *Him*. We think **He** is a traitor.”

Pilate said to Jesus again, “Come on inside and let’s talk this over.” When they were again inside the hall of judgment, Pilate said,

“Now look, all You have to do is just say You are not a king and that You do not want to overthrow Rome.

Just cooperate with me, we’ll go back out there, and I’ll have You freed in a few moments.” But he found that Jesus was not cooperating.

So the third time he took Him inside, and again Pilate tried to get off the hook.

It was not Jesus trying to escape; it was Pilate. You can see that Jesus was not on trial; Pilate was the one on trial. Pilate was attempting to free himself, Jesus was not.

For example, the enemy had said, “We will not take Jesus during the feast because of the people. He is popular with the crowds; so we’ll wait until after the feast when the crowds are gone.” But the Lord Jesus, when He met with His own men, told them, **“I’ll die during the feast.”**

Jesus died on the feast day! He had set the time of His death. He is a King all the way through. He was a King, every inch a King. He was in command even during His trial, and Pilate in desperation asked His accusers (imagine a *judge* asking this), **“What shall I do then with Jesus, who is called Christ?”** **(Matthew 27:22).**

He couldn't believe his ears when that crowd, that mob which had been coached and brainwashed, demanded, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him and release to us Barabbas” — the worst criminal he had in incarceration. You see, this man Pilate thought he had a way out when he offered them Barabbas.

CHRIST WAS CRUCIFIED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE

Pilate, thinking he could escape the guilt of it, called for a basin of water, and he washed his hands before them, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this righteous person”
(Matthew 27:24).

It is ironic that the oldest creed of the church still says, “Crucified under Pontius Pilate.” Pilate did not escape. He had to make a decision relative to Christ. His decision was that Christ’s death was good for nothing. I am sure his thinking was, *He did not have to die; I could have Him free. That was stupid!* **And Pilate went into eternity his way.**



Who was a Roman Centurion?

The Role of the Roman Centurion

The Roman centurion was equivalent to a Captain in the Roman Army. The Roman Centurion was often of the humblest origin; promoted from the ranks simply on account of bravery and military efficiency. At the drill, on the march, and in battle, they were at the same time the role models and the leaders of the soldiers.

Centurion officer commanded a century in the ancient Roman army. A century was made up of 100 men, and 60 centuries constituted a legion. Within each Roman legion, centurions held degrees of rank; the senior centurion took part in councils of war. Centurions were chosen from among veteran soldiers by the six tribunes in command of a legion..

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A ROMAN CENTURION

On a certain day, there was delivered into his hand men to be crucified. The gospel records tell us about three who were crucified. on this particular day when the centurion started out from home, I suppose his wife said to him, “Shall I fix you a good lunch today?” And he answered, “Yes, I’ve got a big day ahead of me — I’ll be crucifying quite a few men today.”

He went out to his job that day and paid very little attention to the men he was executing until there came this One — **Jesus.**

Something very strange took place at the beginning. This man knew what it was to handle criminals at the time of death.

On this day there was put into his hands this One, Jesus of Nazareth. When he read the charges against Him, he could not believe it.

Then he heard Jesus say, **“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).**

That alerted him to this Man. So he began to watch.



Mark 15:25-36

At nine o'clock Jesus was put on the cross. For three hours there was physical light, but it was spiritual darkness. The last three hours, from twelve noon to three o'clock in the afternoon, there was physical darkness, but it was spiritual light.

In those first three hours, man did his *worst*; in the last three hours, God did His *best*. In the first three hours, it was man venting his hatred upon this One who was dying there.

They did everything they could think of to ridicule Him as He was suffering.

Then at twelve noon, God dropped down the mantle of night upon that cross as if to say to the world, "You can't see how horrible this really is."

Therefore, during the last three hours — — that cross became an altar on which **"the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world" was offered (John 1:29).**

It was in those three hours that the Lord said through the prophet Isaiah, **"It pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief" (Isaiah 53:10).**

“Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39)

In those three hours was the fulfillment of what John the Baptist had said: **“Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world.”(JOHN1:29)**

And during those three hours, He **“who knew no sin [was made] to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21)**. He took your place; He took my place. He died in your stead and in my stead. That is the way God must treat sin and sinners. Although the Lord Jesus is the holy Son of God, in those three hours He bore the sin of the world. Then as light broke on that cross, I think the centurion looked at the most horrible sight he’d ever seen, because Isaiah said **that our Savior was bruised more than any man (see Isaiah 52:14)**. He must have looked terrible, hanging there. This centurion stepped out from the crowd, took his place beneath the cross, and said, **“Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39)**.. Although he did not know a great deal, he knew enough to take his place beneath the cross of Christ. Do you know that all God has ever asked any sinner to do is to take his place beneath the cross of Christ?

It’s not how much you *know*, it’s whom you *believe* — that’s the thing that is important.

And the centurion went into eternity a different way than how Pilate went.

The Cross Divided Two Apostles

JOHN



JUDAS ISCARIOT



The cross also divided two apostles who, before the Lord Jesus died, heard Him that He was going to Jerusalem to die. He outlined this in detail, saying, “I will be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, I’ll be crucified, and I will be raised from the dead on the third day” (**Matthew 20:17-19**). I don’t think they got the message — I don’t think any of them did.

Judas

Let's see Judas and John in contrast, for the cross divided those two men. They came closer to Christ than any other two. Judas kissed Him, and John reclined on His bosom. Although they both got close to Him, the cross divided them.

As they came down to Jerusalem, this man Judas bargained to betray Him!

I really don't understand Judas. I never have understood him. And I find that I don't understand evil today. Do you understand evil? Evil is complicated; I don't understand Judas — never quite figured him out.

But I do know that the Lord Jesus gave him ample opportunity to turn to Him.

Some people says, Judas was predestined to betray Christ. I do not think so, but I do know this:

The Lord Jesus didn't turn against Judas even when he came that night with the crowd of armed men with the understanding that the One he kissed would be the One to arrest.

When Judas kissed our Lord, Jesus said this strange thing to him, **Matthew 26:50 (HCSB)**

⁵⁰ **“Friend,” Jesus asked him, “why have you come?”** Then they came up, took hold of Jesus, and arrested Him. In effect, He was saying,

“Judas, you have now fulfilled prophecy, but it's not too late for you. I can still call you *friend* because I'll be dying for you in just a few hours. I'll be taking the penalty of your sin.” **Judas had that opportunity to turn to Him in confession and repentance.** When they were leading Jesus away through the temple to crucify Him, this man Judas came, threw the money down, and said, **“I've betrayed innocent blood”**
Matthew 27:3, 4

But to whom was he confessing it? He confessed to the priests.

Why didn't he fall down before *Jesus* and say, “Forgive me!” If he had, he would have been forgiven, but he did not. I don't understand him.

Judas went into eternity his own way.

JOHN

John stands in sharp contrast to Judas. Jesus called him a

son of *thunder* Mark 3:17 John was a big rugged fisherman, —

What kind of man was John? Listen to him: **Luke 9:49-50 (HCSB)**

⁴⁹ John responded, “Master, we saw someone driving out demons in Your name, and we tried to stop him because he does not follow us.”

⁵⁰ “Don’t stop him,” Jesus told him, “because whoever is not against you is for you.”

Then later when the Samaritans did not receive Jesus into their village, the record tells us: **Luke 9:54-55(HCSB)**

⁵⁴ When the disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?”

⁵⁵ But He turned and rebuked them,

Imagine him saying, **“I think we ought to bring fire down from heaven and get rid of them!”**

Does that sound like the apostle of *love*? Then again, he and his brother James came to the Lord Jesus, and he said something like this: **“Now these other men You have are fine men, but James and I have talked it over and we want You to give us places of honor in Your kingdom, one on Your right hand and one on Your left” Mark 10:35-37.**

Does that sound like an apostle of love? But that was John.

However, that man stood a far at the cross of Christ, and when Jesus was dying He turned over His mother to John’s care. When John wrote his gospel, he could write:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

(John 20:30, 31)

John went into eternity by a different route than Judas.

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The Pharisees

PHARISEE NO 1



PHARISEE NO 2



The Cross Divided Enemies the Pharisees

Pharisee Number One

One of the Pharisees was an enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ . One Sabbath day, he invited the Lord Jesus home to dinner. You would think that if this man invited Jesus to dinner, he couldn't be His enemy. His invitation was not a gesture of friendliness. He invited our Lord to dinner in order that his crowd might find something with which they could charge Him. **The fact of the matter is they planted a crippled man at the very door.**

And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat on the Sabbath day, that they watched him. And, behold, there was a certain man before him who had the dropsy. (Luke 14:1, 2)

They had put him there, knowing that our Lord would heal him (and He did), even though it was the Sabbath day. (His enemies paid Him the finest compliment.) They were ganging up on Him, and His host was the chief, leading the opposition against Him.

In no sense was his invitation to dinner an expression of friendship. You know, when a family invites you to dinner, it means they are your friends. That is one place where you never are to be betrayed. One of the worst things a person can do, is to betray one whom he has invited into his home for dinner.

But this Pharisee, soon found that he had a guest who could take care of Himself. In fact, when dinner was announced, our Lord watched as the guests took their places at the table.

There were no place cards in those days, so they all tried to get the chief place.

When He came in and sat down — probably in the lowest place — He said something like this:

Luke 14:8-12 (HCSB)

⁸ “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, don’t recline at the best place, because a more distinguished person than you may have been invited by your host.

⁹ The one who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and then in humiliation, you will proceed to take the lowest place.

¹⁰ “But when you are invited, go and recline in the lowest place, so that when the one who invited you comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ You will then be honored in the presence of all the other guests.

¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

¹² He also said to the one who had invited Him, “When you give a lunch or a dinner, don’t invite your friends, your brothers, your relatives, or your rich neighbors, because they might invite you back, and you would be repaid. So he corrected their manners.

Christ had gone to the home of an enemy, a ruler of the Pharisees. This man joined with those who crucified Him. When he looked at the cross and the crowd beneath it, this Pharisee said, “It is foolishness — I see nothing in that cross.” And so he went into eternity his own way.

SAUL OF TARSUS

Pharisee Number Two

Now I want to introduce to you another Pharisee who eventually came to the Lord Jesus. He probably was the greatest enemy the Lord Jesus Christ ever had. I do not believe that anyone has ever hated Christ as Saul of

Tarsus hated Him. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, the best prospect that they had. He was a young man; he had been trained in the best school, the school of Gamaliel.

He was brilliant, probably one of **the most brilliant men the world has ever produced.**

— so much so that Festus the governor said, “Much learning doth make thee mad.” He was an educated man, and he hated Jesus.

We know how much Saul hated Christ. We know that after the death and resurrection of Christ, and after the Day of Pentecost when the church began and persecution broke upon it, the man who led the persecution was **Saul of Tarsus**

All the other Pharisees, when the Christians had been driven out of Jerusalem, seemed satisfied and did not care about pursuing them any further. But Saul of Tarsus went to the chief priest and asked that he be given letters to the synagogues in Damascus, for he had heard that numbers of the Christians had gone that way and he did not intend to rest until he was assured that everyone who named the name of Jesus was either imprisoned or put to death.

•

Acts 8:3 (HCSB)

³ Saul, however, was ravaging the church. He would enter house after house, drag off men and women, and put them in prison.

Philippians 3:4-6 (HCSB)

⁴ although I once also had confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more:

⁵ circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee;

⁶ regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

Acts 23:6 (HCSB)

⁶ When Paul realized that one part of them were Sadducees and the other part were Pharisees, he cried out in the Sanhedrin, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees! I am being judged because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead!”

- **Acts 9:1-6(HCSB)**

¹ Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He went to the high priest

² and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any men or women who belonged to the Way, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

³ As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him.

⁴ Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

⁵ “Who are You, Lord?” he said. “I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting,” He replied.

⁶ “But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

Saul of Tarsus

He hated Christians because he hated Christ. Imagine this brilliant young Pharisee, hating Jesus as he did and as energetic as he was, staying home on the day of the crucifixion, saying, “Well, I have some studying that I have to do” or “I have something else that will occupy my mind for this day.”

No, I think he joined that group of Pharisees that sat down, mocked Him as He hung on the cross. Later, on the way to Damascus with papers, breathing out threats, hating the Christians and hating Christ, the Lord Jesus waylaid him, knocked him down into the dust.

This man, Saul of Tarsus, found out that Jesus of Nazareth was alive and that He was his Savior and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

And he yielded his heart and life to Jesus Christ (see **Acts 9:1-16**). Years later he wrote,

“He loved me and gave Himself for me” (see Galatians 2:20).

APOSTLE PAUL

I believe he was remembering that day he stood ridiculing beneath the cross and heard Jesus say, **“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).** He had thought he knew what he was doing. At that time, **the cross was foolishness to him, but years later he declared, “It is the power of God unto salvation.”**

It transformed his life.

Two Pharisees came to the cross. One of them said, **“It’s foolishness,” and he went into eternity**

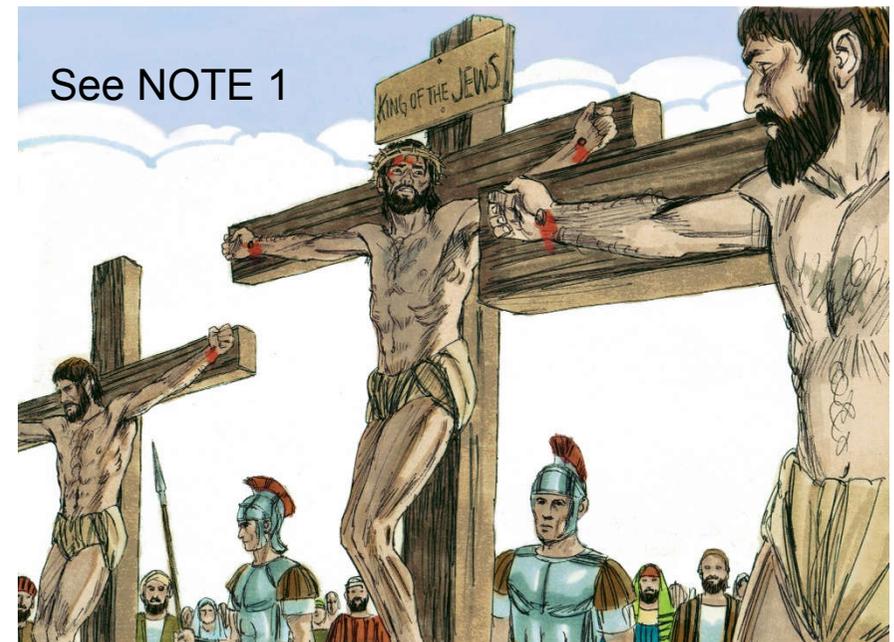
his way. Another Pharisee came to the cross, and for him it had no meaning — but then he met the One who died on that cross, and was able to say, **“He loved me and gave Himself for me...for the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God” (see Galatians 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 1:18).**

THE CROSS DIVIDED THIEVES

39 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."

40 But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

43 And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."



ISAIAH'S PROPHECY OF THE TWO THIEVES

- Mark 15:28 – They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. ²And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And He was numbered with transgressors.” [KJV].
- Isaiah 53:12 – ...He poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors; for He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

THE CROSS DIVIDED THIEVES

These two men were there, hanging on crosses on either side of the Lord Jesus Christ. The cross divided the two thieves — and I do mean in the sense that one was on the left and one was on the right. But the cross also divided the two thieves for eternity. I have a question to ask you as you look at those men: What was the difference between those two thieves?

Both of them had been tried before a Roman court, Both were convicted for the same kind of crime, both merited capital punishment, and they both agreed that it was a right sentence.

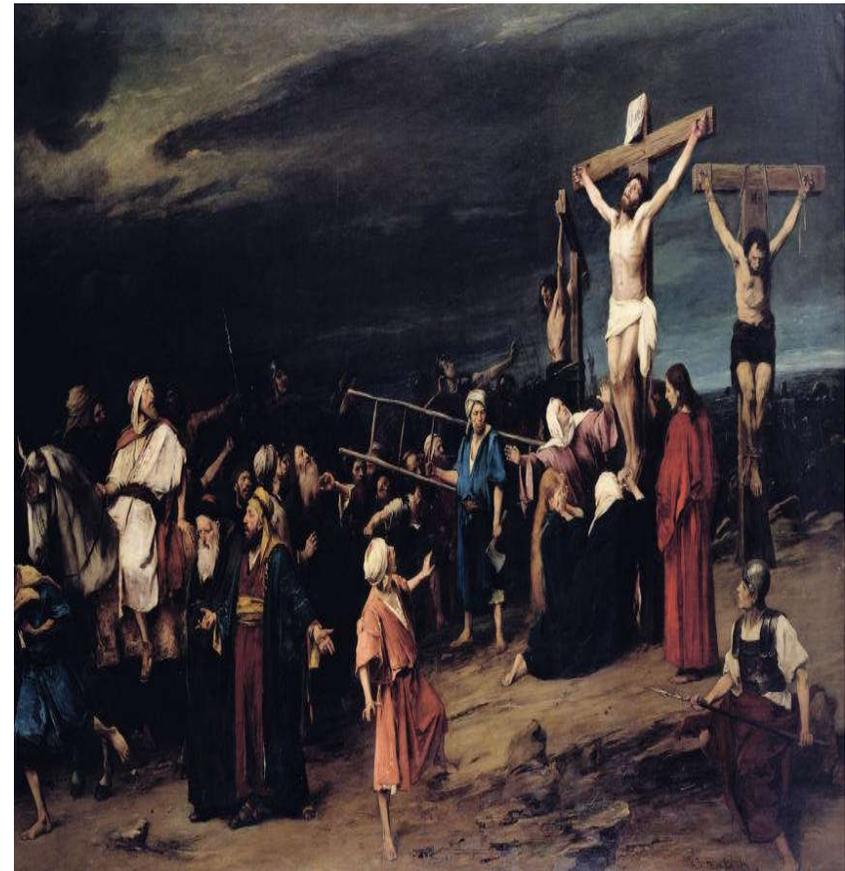
What was the difference in the two thieves?

“One of them was a good thief and one was a bad thief.”

I am of the opinion that a great many people today think that was the difference — one was a bad thief and one was a good thief.

Thieves come in only one classification — *bad*. There is no such thing as a good thief.

Both of these men were bad, and both at the beginning ridiculed Christ.



I have another question to ask you:

To what church did the two thieves belong? What ceremony did they go through? Don't I believe in baptism, but what about those two thieves? They were divided. What divided them?

“What would you tell that thief on the cross to do in order to get to heaven?”

“Well, you had better hurry and tell him something, because he is dying.”

“Don't you think there might be the *rule* that is being set for time and eternity?

Are you going to tell him to perform some good works with his hands? If you said that to him, you'd mock him. He would say, 'Look, my hands are nailed to the cross, and they'll not be taken down except in death.'

Tell me something else, would you tell him to run on errands of mercy?

He would reply, 'Again, you mock me! My feet are nailed to this cross.' What are you going to say to him?”

That thief who started out ridiculing Christ, came to the conclusion that the One dying on that central cross was not only innocent, but He was dying for somebody else. In fact, He was dying for *him*, and He was in contact with God. **So he in faith looked to Him and said, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Luke 23:42). He had nothing to offer but his simple FAITH. To that man, whom society said was not fit to live on this earth, the Lord Jesus said, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). One thief went with Christ; the other went the other way.**

Three men shared death upon a hill,
But only one man died,

Now friends there are only two classes of people in this world today, because of the position they occupy not because of who they are or because of what they have done.

There those the scripture says are “**without Christ**” (**Ephesians 2:12**) which means to be lost - and those that are “**with Christ**” which means they are saved. Those who are saved are in Christ. Those who are lost are without Christ.

Either you are in Christ or you are without Christ, there is no middle ground, there is no other place for any man to be. And my friend you have to make a choice, you have to come. He is waiting for you.

Now You What do you see in the cross?

An innocent man dying unjustly? Or do you see the cruelty of the execution and your heart goes out in pity?

He said to the daughters of Jerusalem, “**Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves” (Luke 23:28). He does not want your sympathy.**

Can you see in the cross of Christ what the dying thief saw? What John the beloved saw?

What the Apostle Paul saw? The cross is the sign of God’s redeeming grace. Multitudes have

come to it and have found the power of God.

What does the cross mean to you? Have you really turned to Christ?

He is the One who died for you on the cross, rose again, paid the penalty for your sins, lives today in glory, and is returning to earth some day.

Have you really trusted Him?

For the preaching of [the gospel of] the cross is to them that perish foolishness [stupid; good for nothing]; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God [unto salvation]. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

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