

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION COMPLETED

Epiphany 3A
January 22, 2023
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Luke 23:26, 32–46
Ida Grove, IA
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Grace, mercy and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The text for today's sermon is Luke 23:26, 32–46

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus.

Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

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.

Last week, we looked at Jesus' public ministry, His teachings about the nature of God's kingdom of grace, and His miracles, which revealed His identity as God's Son as well as His power over creation, the devil, and death itself.

I.

This week, we will look at that climactic moment each of our Old Testament sermons pointed forward to—

when the seed of the woman crushed the serpent's head;
when God provided the Substitute for Isaac and each of us;
when Christ, the great Passover Lamb, was sacrificed;
when David's Son slayed Satan, the giant;
and when Jesus was sealed in the lions' den of death.

II.

Now, after three years of ministry, the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy, or speaking lies and insults against God. They bribed Judas, one of the Twelve, to hand Jesus

over to them to be tried at a time when the crowds that followed Jesus would not be around. So, after celebrating one final Passover, Jesus was betrayed by Judas and handed over to the Jewish leaders. They worked quickly behind the scenes to get Jesus falsely convicted and sentenced to death by the Roman governor, Pilate. Jesus then willingly went to the cross to die for the sins of the world. The Gospel of Luke starts out our look at Jesus' great sacrifice.

And as they led [Jesus] away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. . . . Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with Him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on His right and one on His left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:26, 32–34)

Isn't that remarkable? Jesus reveals the love that fills Him. Though He has every reason to lash out at us ungrateful creatures whose sins nailed Him to that tree—He pleaded instead for the heavenly Father to turn from the wrath and punishment we deserve and to give us forgiveness. In essence, He was saying, "Father unleash Your furious wrath at their sins on Me instead of them."

Luke continues:

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." (Luke 23:39–43)

Many Christians have found great comfort in Jesus' promise to the repentant thief at His side. After all, this was a deathbed confession. The thief had no time and no opportunity to make amends for the wrongs he had done. His death was rapidly approaching. Yet out of pure love, grace, and mercy alone—without any merit on the part of the thief—Jesus forgave him and promised him that very day he would be with Jesus in paradise.

When death approaches us or a loved one, what sweeter promise can Jesus Christ give when we are racked with guilt, remorse, and regret over the things we have said and done and the things we have left undone and unsaid? Jesus suffered for all those sins as our Substitute, and He completely satisfied God's wrath. Now we can die in peace knowing our Savior will bring us home with Him.

The Gospels record seven sayings Jesus spoke from the cross. Luke just gave us the first two. We turn to John's Gospel for the third.

After this, Jesus saw His mother Mary standing by the cross with His disciple John. Knowing He would no longer be on earth to provide for her, Jesus entrusted His mother into John's keeping. He told Mary,

Woman, behold, your son! (John 19:26)

And He told John,

Behold, your mother! (John 19:27)

Though He is suffering the punishment for all the sins of all people of all time, Jesus still cares about His mother. He still fulfills His obligation to provide for her. By this word, we know that Joseph, Mary's husband, has died. If not, Mary would be in his care, and Jesus would not have to concern Himself with providing her a caretaker. John is faithful to his charge, taking Mary into his home from that very day.

As we return to Luke, we reach noon when Jesus was cast into darkness:

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. (Luke 23:44–45).

In His parables, Jesus often spoke of the judgment to come, how believers would be welcomed into the glorious presence of God while unbelievers would be bound hand and foot and cast into the outer darkness. At that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now, that bitter agony of hell had come upon Jesus. His hands and feet immobilized by the nails in the cross, cast into the utter darkness of a sunless sky, and weeping and gnashing His teeth as He endured the fiery wrath of God for all of our sins, Jesus paid for each of our sins, moment by moment. His heel was being bruised by the serpent's fangs. He was the ram caught in the thicket by its horns, sacrificed as our substitute. He was the Passover Lamb shedding His blood that the angel of death might pass over us on Judgment Day.

Finally, at the end of those three dread hours, Jesus cried out in agony,
My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? (Matthew 27:46)

We are the ones who should have been forsaken throughout this lifetime and through all eternity, suffering the agony of the undying fires of hell. But Jesus suffered that in our place. As a result, we who confess our sins and trust in Him will never know what it is to be truly forsaken by God.

Shortly after, John records the completion of Jesus' suffering and payment for our sins:

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." (John 19:28)

Then, after drinking the sour wine, He loudly proclaimed the completion of our salvation,
"It is finished." (John 19:30)

Jesus used a Greek accounting term we could translate, "Paid in full." Oh, what sweet comfort and reassurance that single Greek word brings. The debt of our sins is paid in full. There is nothing we have to do to win our place in God's heaven. There is no punishment in this life or after, no purgatory, nothing awaiting us when we die but the outstretched hands of our Savior and God our heavenly Father.

Even the dread of Judgment Day is removed. When Jesus looks upon us, His believers, He will see no sin or guilt, only His holiness shining back into His eyes. Spotless and pure through His blood, His Baptism, we will rejoice in His presence forever.

Finally, restored to His Father, Jesus offered His final prayer, recorded for us by Luke.

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. (Luke 23:46)

And with that, Jesus died.

As the sun lowered in the sky, the Jewish leaders asked Pilate to break the legs of the criminals. They wanted to hasten their deaths so they would not die on the Sabbath when it was not lawful to take them down.

Pilate granted their request. The centurion, the Roman soldier in charge of the crucifixion detail, gave the orders, and the legs of the criminals on Jesus' sides were broken and both quickly died—fulfilling Jesus' promise to the repentant thief, **“Today you will be with Me in paradise.”**

But when they came to Jesus, they saw He was already dead, so they did not break His legs. Instead, a soldier took a spear and pierced Jesus' side. Water and blood flowed out of the wound, proving without a doubt that Jesus had indeed already died. Since then, the Church has associated the water with Holy Baptism and the blood with Jesus' body and blood in Holy Communion. These physical elements remind us that the benefits we receive in each of those sacraments flowed from Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

By the way, God gave one law through Moses regarding the treatment of the Passover lamb. Not a single bone was to be broken. That was fulfilled in the death of the Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ.

When evening approached, a prominent Jewish leader named Joseph of Arimathea appeared before Pilate. He was secretly a disciple of Jesus and requested permission to remove Jesus' body from the cross and bury Him. Pilate granted him permission.

So Joseph along with Nicodemus, another secret disciple who was a prominent Pharisee, removed Jesus' body, wrapped it in linen and spices, and laid it in Joseph's own never-before used tomb, which was nearby. They rolled a large stone over the entrance and left—just like Daniel's lions' den. The loyal women who had followed Jesus from Galilee followed behind and noted where the tomb was. Then they went off to buy spices so the day after the Sabbath they could return and more properly bury Jesus' body.

The next morning, Sabbath morning, the Jewish high priests went to Pilate. They told him how Jesus had said He would rise again on the third day. So they requested a guard be set at the tomb—so Jesus' disciples would not come and steal His body. Pilate granted their request, gave them soldiers and a seal that would indicate whether the tomb had been tampered with. The guards took their watch and sat down to wait through the long night.

Jesus' suffering and death fulfilled God's promises throughout the Old Testament. It satisfied and stilled God's wrath against our sins and rescued us from an eternity in hell. Satan, sin, and hell lay vanquished. Now one last enemy remained to be conquered — death. Jesus, like David when he killed Goliath, would accomplish His great victory over death for us as our Champion on the third day. Amen.

Acknowledgments: Adaptation from [Tree of Life](#), © 2022 Concordia Publishing House. Scripture: ESV®.

