

Luke Chapter 23 v 32 - 43 (B)

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] Lord, I lift your name on high. Lord, I love to sing your praises. I'm so glad you're in my life. I'm so glad you came to save us.

You came from heaven to earth to show the way, from the earth to the cross. I came to the name, from the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky. Lord, I lift your name on high.

Just to remind you that immediately following our time this morning, there's going to be some hot cross buns. Is that right? No? Okay. There's going to be some tea and coffee. Is there going to be tea and coffee?

Yes. Hey! Okay. One out of two isn't bad, is it? Okay. Please do stay and have tea and coffee with us following our service this morning.

Okay. So, we've thought about these two men, these two robbers, these two criminals, caught and executed, put upon the cross to die. They're still alive, but they're on the cross and they're dying.

But there's somebody else there as well. Okay. Who's this person?

[1 : 26] I wonder if you can, boys and girls only, work out who this other person is there. This other man was executed between the two of them. He also was put upon a cross to die. He also was put to death and executed by the authorities, the Romans, who were in charge.

But, amazingly, he prayed, Father, forgive them. Well, on the cross, as he's dying, he prays to God, his Father, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they're doing.

That's the people who are crucifying him and killing him. Can you imagine that? That's somebody who's just put nails into your hands and nails into your feet.

Somebody who's put you to death that you could say, I forgive you and I want God to forgive you.

Surely you'd be angry at them. Surely you'd say, curse you, damn you, what have you done to me? Perhaps that's even what the other criminals shouted as well and said.

They'd never known anything like this. Forgive them, Father, if they know not what they do.

Something else that tells us about him was a sign above his head. Every person who was killed and crucified had a plaque above their head which said the crimes they'd committed, the things they'd done wrong, and that's why they were dying.

[2 : 41] But this person just had above their head, written in three different languages, Aramaic and Latin and Hebrew, King of the Jews. King of the Jews.

The middle of these two criminals. How can that be deserving of death? How can that be deserving of such an awful, terrible thing? But that's what they put as the accusation of his crime. That sign above his head.

We're told that the religious leaders mocked him. People came up and they sneered at him and said to him, if you're so great, if you're the Christ, why don't you come down off that cross?

Prove to us that you're great. Prove to us that you're God's son. And come down off that cross and we'll believe in you, which of course they would never do. But they mocked him and sneered at him, the religious leaders.

Even one of the thieves said horrible things against him, the same thing. Come and help us, get us off the cross, if you're so great, if you're God's son, if you're the Christ. But the other one, the other one of the thieves replied this.

[3 : 45] No, he's done nothing wrong. In fact, he said this. The other criminal rebuked him. Don't you fear God, he said, since you and I are under the same sentence.

We are punished justly for we are getting what our deeds deserve. This man has done nothing wrong. Who can this person be? This person who is crucified and yet prays, Father forgive.

This person who is the king of the Jews, who the religious leaders hate and mock. But one of the thieves says he's done nothing wrong. Boys and girls, can you tell me who it is?

Boys and girls, can you tell me who is it? Jesus, well done. It's Jesus, of course. We know it's Jesus. He's on the cross between them. He's suffering and dying where they are. So they teach us about Jesus. What do we know about this Jesus? We know this, that he is exactly like us too. The amazing thing about Jesus is that he is truly, really, a man who has lived and experienced the things that we live.

[4 : 48] But, apart from one thing, apart from sin, he never sinned. You and I, as we've established in the way that we speak, the way we act, the way we think, we have sinned.

We have broken God's commandments. We have been hateful, spiteful, proud, greedy. So many different things. But Jesus is the only person who never, ever did anything wrong. And I would challenge you, if you don't agree with me, read about his life in the New Testament.

Read about the four biographies that we find called the Gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They all show us that he never said or did anything wrong against God's word, against the truth. He was compassionate and loving and faithful and good because he's the Son of God who made himself man. That's the incredible person of Jesus Christ.

Not just a person of history, not just a man who lived many centuries ago, but the Son of God who came into our world, who experienced the things that we experience. Why?

[5 : 50] The Son of God who made himself man to take on our sin at the cross. Why was he dying there? We've already established that he'd done nothing wrong. The only crime they had against him that he was called the King of the Jews, and he claimed to be God's Messiah, God's Christ.

Why did he come? He came particularly, and he died particularly on the cross, to take our sin and endure the punishment we deserve, to rescue us and give us eternal life.

That's what happened on Good Friday. That Jesus Christ, God's Son, there was punished in your place and mine. There he suffered what we deserve. We deserve to be cut off from God.

We deserve to be executed. We deserve to be separated from God now and forever. But God so loves you and me that in Jesus the punishment was paid.

In Jesus the sentence was carried out so that we could be forgiven, so that we could be right with God, so that we could be rescued and have everlasting life. Because of sin, because of the things that we do wrong and think wrong and are wrong, our attitudes to God, we do not know God now.

[7 : 01] That's why many people this morning probably will think, I can't see God. I can't hear God. I don't even know if I believe in God. And maybe that is because, and the reality is, because we are cut off from him.

Our sin has blinded us to him. Our selfishness and greed and pride has blinded us to the reality of who God is and cut us off from him and placed us under his anger and his justice and his judgment. As I said before, God is never going to punish you for something you've never done. But he's just and he's good and he'll punish us for what we have done. But in his love, Jesus took that punishment for us.

He stood up for us and he took the penalty we deserve so that we can be rescued, so we can be brought back to God. We're going to find out how that happens in a moment.

But we're going to sing again, this time another wonderful hymn. And we're going to stand and sing, Oh, to see the dawn of the darkest day, Christ on the road to Calvary.

[8 : 01] Let's stand as we sing together this hymn. Thank you. Oh, to see the dawn of the darkest day, Christ on the road to Calvary.

Christ on the road to Calvary.

CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS

Christ be gave, sing for us. Turn the way, Father of peace and forgiven at the cross.

Now the day of peace, now the ground beneath. Waits as its maker, house is fed.

[10 : 57] First and foremost in tune, let our race survive. Finish the leaves we've found.

It's the crown of the cross. Turn the way, sing for us.

What a love, what a cross. Peace and forgiven at the cross.

So far in what's happened, two men, two thieves, two robbers are crucified. In the middle is Jesus crucified with them. One of them mocks and ridicules Jesus.

The other one says, whoa, wait, he's done nothing wrong. We're getting what we deserve. We were robbers, murderers. This is what we deserve. I know that I don't want this, but he's done nothing wrong.

[12:12] And so, this one man teaches about Easter. What does he teach us? Well, of course, he's expecting to die soon.

He knows that he's going to die. In fact, just within a few minutes later on, maybe an hour or so, he would be dead because he would have his legs broken to speed his death.

A horrible, horrible thing would happen. Because they didn't want the bodies to be left upon the cross for days, they would come and smash the shins of the men so that they would very, very quickly suffocate, wouldn't be able to breathe, and they would die quicker.

But he knows he's going to die soon. So what's he going to do? He knows that death is coming. He can't escape it. He knows that he is receiving the judgment he deserves. He asked Jesus, remember me.

In fact, he says this, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. He turns to Jesus and asks him to do something for him. How could he ask a man who was dying to do that for him?

[13:18] We'll find out. What does he reply? Surprised. Jesus replied. Jesus doesn't say, look, tough. You've got it wrong. You're dying for what you deserve.

I have nothing to do with you. I am the son of God. I'm holy and good and innocent. You are wicked. Therefore, you've had it. No. He's surprised because Jesus replies, today you will be with me in paradise.

He gives to Jesus an incredible promise, an impossible promise. This man is dying. Jesus is dying. But Jesus says, today you will be with me in paradise. What does he mean?

Even though he's a sinful man, he would be raised to life eternal with Jesus. Jesus made him a promise. Because Jesus knew that this was not the end. His suffering and his death was the taking away of sin, to bring forgiveness, even to a man like that, even to a murderer, even to a robber, even to a sinful man.

And the promise of life everlasting, to be raised up, the resurrection of Jesus assures us that this life is not the end. This isn't all there is. Whatever you've accumulated in the way of money, whatever we've done in the way of prestige, of trophies, or prizes, or awards, or degrees, or doctorates, whatever those things are, all of them are just temporary for a while, and none of them can we take with us.

[14:44] Death is real, but death is not the end. Death is just the beginning, either of life everlasting, or of death everlasting.

And the Bible, when it uses the word death, when it speaks about that death, which is not just the body dying, but us spiritually being separated and cut off from God, forever in a place the Bible calls hell, a place of sorrow and grief, heartache and misery.

But why did this thief turn to Jesus? Why did he ask Jesus to remember him? Why did he do this? He was dying next to another man who was dying. How did he come to the conclusion that this Jesus who was dying was somebody worthy of putting his trust in, somebody who he could believe in?

He learnt that because this one man teaches us, this one man teaches us this, everyone's sins can be forgiven. Remember, he heard Jesus on the cross praying, Father forgive them.

Who? The people who were killing him, the people who were putting him to death. And he thought to himself, surely if this Jesus, if this man, this God can forgive those people, I can be forgiven too, even though my crimes are terrible and awful.

[16:04] See, this is the wonderful good news of Easter. No matter what you've done, no matter what your past, no matter what guilt you carry around with you, regret for what has happened in the past, sorrow and sadness, Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection at Easter, say to us, everyone can be forgiven.

It's possible. It's a reality. We can know it. We can know the guilt taken away. We can know the shame and the sorrow and the regret removed. And we can know what it is to be right with God, forgiven by him.

He knew that because Jesus had forgiven his killers. He'd heard that. And he thought he could be forgiven too. Then, of course, there was the sign. The sign above Jesus' head, King of the Jews. Why did he say to Jesus, remember when you come into your kingdom? Because there was the sign. The King of the Jews. And this man knew that the King of the Jews was not just like our Queen.

To be King of the Jews meant that he was God's special King, his Messiah, his Christ. The one that God had promised all through history would come and bring rescue.

[17 : 16] A new kingdom. A real kingdom where God's people live. And so he knew that this person was somebody special. A king who had a kingdom.

But then, surprisingly, some other people made his faith grow. Those who mocked him. Remember the religious leaders. Here's what the religious leaders said to Jesus before the cross when they saw him there.

They said, He saved others. Let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the chosen one. I'm sure that as they mocked Jesus, they didn't intend that the other man on the cross might believe in Jesus.

They thought that they would mock him because it was fun to do so. But as they spoke about him saving others, he thought to himself, perhaps he can save me. Perhaps I'm not too far gone to be saved.

Perhaps he is the promised saviour, the Messiah that God said would come. And he believed these things were true. Even though they were spoken by people who mocked and ridiculed.

[18 : 25] We hear lots of things being said about Jesus in the world today. Lots of television documentaries, it seems, if you want to make your name, make a documentary which poo-poo's the Bible or ridicules Jesus or puts down Christianity.

And you'll definitely get it shown on telly. For all those things, why do people have it in for Jesus so much? Have you thought about that? Why do they try so hard to deny Jesus?

Why do they try so hard like Richard Dawkins to deny God and be so militant with their atheism? It's because deep down they know there's some truth in it. There's something to be afraid of.

Because if God is real, then we really need to pay attention. And so they want to push it down and push it down. Perhaps you've done that yourself. Push down. The thoughts about Jesus being the Son of God.

You made all sorts of excuses not to believe or trust in Him. But let me say this to you. Without a shadow of a doubt, Jesus Christ is God. And He came into this world and He died and He rose again.

[19 : 26] The reality is all around in the lives of the people here and in millions of lives throughout history and throughout the world today. That Jesus is someone who can be trusted, who is the Son of God.

The thief believed that Jesus could save him. So what did he do? Empty handed with only his sin to give. He repented, believed and was saved.

Something happened in that thief on the cross in the last hours of his life, in the 11th hour as he was about to die. He heard of Jesus. The words of Jesus, forgive.

He saw the sign that said Jesus is King. He heard the words of the mockers. You are the Christ and you've saved others. And he believed that Jesus, even though He could do nothing to earn God's forgiveness, even though He could do nothing to make Himself right with God, He believed that Jesus was the one who could save him.

And he says, remember me. Help me. Save me. That's what he's saying. Think of me. Don't give up on me. And let me say this to you.

[20 : 32] Sometimes people think being a Christian is the hardest thing in the world. You've got to study all these things and you've got to know all these things and you've got to understand all these things and you've got to go to church and you've got to say all your prayers and you've got to kneel here and stand there.

The Bible makes it very clear. Here's a man who had nothing and could do nothing religious. He simply believed and he simply said, Jesus, remember me. He knew he was a sinner and he knew that Jesus could save him and forgive him.

Do you know that this morning? Do you know that God in his love for you wants you simply to put your trust in Jesus and to ask him to forgive your sin and to save you and make you right with God? He repented and believed. Can you remember the verse that we thought about, our memory verse that was hidden by the Easter eggs? It's that simple word.

If you confess that Jesus is Lord simply by acknowledging that Jesus really is who he said he was, who he proved himself to be, the Son of God. And if you believe in your heart that he's alive, risen from the dead because he died for your sin, you will be saved.

[21 : 44] No great fanfare, no great dramatics, no great doing pilgrimage, simply that, believing, trusting in Jesus. I want to urge you and encourage you this Easter to think about the reality of this. Jesus is alive, risen from the dead. And you don't need to take just my word for it. The Bible makes it very clear. I've got some books here and you're very welcome to have one. They're going to be downstairs.

One is called The Case for Easter. A man called Lee Strobel who was an atheist but he was a journalist and he wanted to find out for sure, is Jesus really alive?

And he went to great lengths to discover and to find out ultimately whether he is or not. I'll leave you to find out what the conclusion is. The Case for Easter. The other one is a smaller pamphlet by a man called John Blanchard explaining why the cross.

It seems macabre, weird to us perhaps. Why did God come and die? Why did Jesus suffer in that awful way? It doesn't seem to make much sense. If he was God, he could come with great power.

[22 : 48] He could blow up the world. He could do whatever he likes but why did he die on the cross? It explains why it was necessary for you and for me that Jesus should die in my place and yours as our substitute.

They're going to be downstairs where we have tea and coffee. Please do take one. If you've got questions about Easter, questions about Jesus, questions about Christianity or church, myself and others are here.

We'd love to be able to help you and to talk to you about these things. We believe that what we've been talking about this morning is not fairy tale, not myth, not made up, not just some man's invention, not just the invention of the church.

It's God's truth and if it's God's truth then surely it must be worth finding out more about. It must be worth investigating. That man, two men on those crosses either side of Jesus, both of them executed for robbery, both of them dying, both of them in one sense representing the whole of humanity and the whole of this congregation this morning.

One of them ridiculed. One of them wouldn't believe. One of them died in his sin, unforgiven and went to hell. One of them, a robber just the same, wicked just the same, but he saw in Jesus a saviour, someone who he could trust, someone who loved him and cared even about him and he put his faith in him and yes he died but as he died he remembered the words of Jesus, Father into your hands I commit my spirit and he trusted himself to God.

[24 : 28] The Bible assures us that even today he is in paradise, he is in heaven, he is with Jesus Christ, he is with God. We are going to sing a final song this morning.

We do wish you a wonderful Christmas, Christmas. We start early here in this church, a wonderful Easter and we are going to sing a wonderful Easter hymn.

See what a morning, gloriously bright, somehow I have got that wrong. So, Martin is going to help me out.

Just always, without a doubt, I muck it up. Okay, whenever we do these things on the screen, that's why we only do them twice a year. So Martin is going to find the hymn from the, our proper hymns because I didn't put it on my list of slides that I was doing and then when he's found it he's going to put up for me, he's going to save my bacon and we're going to stand and sing as we close together. Thanks Martin. Let's stand and sing. Let's stand and sing. See what a morning, glorious delight, with adoring of hope in Jerusalem.

[25 : 58] Hold in the great woods, soon filled with light, as the angels are now, Christ is risen.

Christ is risen. See God's salvation plan, brought in love, born in pain, made in sacrifice.

Fulfilled in Christ the man, for he lives, Christ is risen from the dead. BÜNDNIS 90 hashtag, tall and pussy God's happiness.

George screwing, mover and let bless you and the dead provide for you in the sea. All the ■chn■ and guitar aspers may feel going.

Let it thoroughly just google so in heaven and sing it out as the life of everybody. The Lord prays to thine again.

[27 : 01] His voice fast and slow years, Speaking light, stirring hope, Draining peace to us.

We'll sound till he appears, For he lifts Christ his risen from the dead. Come with the Father, Patient of taste, Through the Spirit will close faith with certainty.

Honor and blessing, Glory and praise to the King, Round with power and authority.

And we are raised with him, Death is dead, Love has won, Christ has conquered.

And we shall reign with him, For he lifts Christ his risen from the dead. Christ is risen.
[28 : 19] He is risen indeed. Amen. Please be seated. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen.