

Luke Chapter 23 v 32 - 43

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Preacher: Gareth Crossley

[0 : 00] Well good morning to everybody especially those people visiting with us. It's good to see you here this morning and we give a warm welcome to everybody. This morning our preacher will be Gareth Crossley. He's agreed to step in at short notice because our minister Peter is going to be off for a few weeks and we're very grateful to Gareth for coming along. I hope it's on the screen.

It is. Psalm 136 says give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His love endures forever and if you know the psalm it goes on to repeat that refrain 24 times. His love endures forever. I think the psalmist wanted us to know that his love endures forever and that's a tremendous comfort as we come this morning that whatever the situation we find ourselves in when we come to worship we know that the Lord will be with us and not only now but forever. So let's just worship him as we sing our first hymn which is going to come up on the projector behind us. Speak O Lord.

mouth sealed possible. mouth closed. mouth mouth in It's always the time when we first get up in the morning that we hear part of the service that's going on at some church around England.

I don't know if I remember correctly where it was from this morning. Somewhere in London, a big church. And they always seem to have a fantastic choir. And I ask Kath, do you think they actually buy them in specially for the day?

But I have to say, I did hear some harmonies there being sung, so well done those who were singing them. I really enjoyed that hymn. Let's come to our worship now by having a prayer as we begin our worship.

[2 : 18] Let's pray together. Lord, we do indeed thank you that we can come into your house on this day to worship you. And as that last verse of that hymn told us, that as we walk with you day by day, you're there with us, guiding us, keeping us, making your word known to us.

And Lord, we thank you for that promise that you'll never leave us or forsake us. So that whenever we gather together, we know that you're in the midst of us.

And Lord, that you hear our prayers, that you hear our songs of praise. And Lord, that you work in our hearts to teach us the things of God.

And so Lord, we do pray especially this morning that you'll be with us here and with all churches who are preaching the gospel this morning. Be with all those who open your word and read and preach to the people.

And Lord, we ask that we might learn something more about you today. Something that will sustain us in the weeks ahead. And Lord, we know that in this world, which seems day by day to get more and more problems, that Lord, we can continue to trust in your grace to your people.

[3 : 38] Because you're building your church. Whatever the world might believe, Lord, your church will continue to grow until the day when you come again.

And so Lord, we can come confident this morning that though we confess our sins before you, nevertheless, despite our sinfulness, you'll hear our prayers and that you'll respond to them.

So we thank you for these great promises. And we ask you now to be with us. Let your Holy Spirit guide us. Because we ask all these things in Jesus' precious name.

Amen. Well, we're not exactly going to have a children's address this morning. But Brenda is going to come forward. I'm looking for her.

There she is. And Brenda is one of our newest church members. Or should I say one of our newest old church members.

[4 : 36] Brenda, welcome into the church. And we're really glad that you're with us this morning. And Brenda is just going to tell us a little bit about her story. Right.

I've been asked to tell you how I became a Christian. I was brought up on a very small farm in Teesside in the 1960s.

We had no television. We had no television. And we didn't take holidays. And when I wasn't at school, I helped my dad in the fields with logging and with the cows mucking out and milking. Well, you might think that sounds like hard work for a child. Well, it was. But I didn't know any different. However, I did play games most evenings with my mum.

And she told me a lot of stories. And I loved those things. I'm actually really thankful for my childhood because my parents were Christians. So they prayed for me every day.

[5 : 39] And they taught me the Bible. Now, there were certain Bible verses which I heard from my dad many times, which really stuck in my mind and formed my thinking.

I was taught that life is actually very short, swifter than a weaver's shuttle. I also learned from the Bible that the heart is desperately wicked, that the problems of the world are not the environment, but inside the human heart.

And I knew this for my own life. I also learned from the Bible, I came to understand that we must all appear before the judgment seat of God, that death is not the end, and that I would meet God when I died.

And I believed that this, at that time, was the most important thing that I could know about my life, that at the end of it I would face my maker and answer for how I'd lived.

So I needed to know him before that day, and I needed to be reconciled with him, because I knew I was sinful. Again, at this point, you might be wondering, well, what is there to be thankful for with all that serious talk about life, sin, death, and God?

[6 : 58] It was serious, and that was actually a blessing. But that wasn't all that my parents taught me. They also introduced me to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I came to see that he's God, that he left heaven out of love for his rebellious world, and came to live the life that I knew I was failing to live.

When I heard about his life, and what I heard about it, it was wonderful. He had no sin. He was fearlessly honest.

He healed people. He raised them from the dead. And he was full of compassion, and he was patient.

He'd come to save sinners, to die in their place, and to take the punishment that they deserve. I was taught that he'd risen from the dead, and that he's now back in heaven, preparing homes for all those that trust in him.

[8 : 07] He's coming back to judge the world. I believed all this completely. I came to understand that life was not about collecting things, and collecting experiences, but it was about getting to know him.

But I was really troubled for many years, because of a question that my dad asked me, on a weekly basis. It was this.

Are you sure? Really sure? That you're trusting only in the finished work of Christ to save you? I can still hear him saying that in my head, even now.

And I used to wonder, am I really sure? And frankly, I wasn't. And that terrified me, because I knew it mattered more than anything else.

So after years of praying, and laying it all out with God, I finally came to understand and believe that I shouldn't listen to my doubting heart, but I should take Jesus at his word.

[9 : 18] Just believe him. So now, every day, when I read his words from the Bible, words like, whoever comes to me, I'll never cast them out, or whoever calls on me will be saved, I tell myself, that's the Lord Jesus Christ talking to you, and he can't lie to you.

So I've come to put all my hope in him, and I've found him to be completely trustworthy, like nothing, and like no one else.

So I give him back the promises that he's made to me. I quote them to him. He's my saviour. I love him because he loved me first.

He's preparing a home for me now. And at the end of my life, I will see him and be with him forever. So I would just encourage you to read the Bible, to get to know the Lord Jesus Christ, because he won't disappoint you.

The best is all ahead for me, and for all those who put their trust in him. Thank you for listening.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. over the The great high priest whose name is God, Whoever lives and pleads for thee.

[11 : 06] Thy name is greater in His hands, Thy name is greater on His heart, I know that while in heaven He stands, Your tongue can't meet me then, sweet heart.

Your tongue can't meet me then, sweet heart. Well, it's so good to be with you again.

It's becoming a monthly visit. Hint, hint. But it's sad that the reason on this particular occasion is not a holiday, But illness.

And we trust that the pastor will soon recover. And be back on duty. Let's turn to God's Word. Now, unfortunately, when I first was invited earlier the week, I prepared on Acts chapter 2 and was surprised to see it sitting up there.

But then, late Friday evening, I became very, very disconcerted and anxious. And the word says, be anxious for nothing, but by prayer and supplication.

[12 : 37] And so I set to and prepared something different. Now, whether the Lord is in this, you will be able to tell me afterwards. Or He might make it obvious to me that it wasn't.

He wasn't. Now, let's turn to Luke chapter 23. And we're going to read from verse 32 to verse 43.

Luke chapter 23. Luke chapter 23. Luke chapter 23.

Luke chapter 23 and verse 32. This is the Word of God. Jesus is being led to the cross at Calvary. He's led with His cross to Calvary. And we read in verse 32. Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Him to be executed.

[13 : 46] When they came to the place called the skull, there they crucified Him, along with the criminals. One on His right and the other on His left.

Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. And they divided up His clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching and the rulers even sneered at Him. They said, He saved others. Let Him save Himself if He is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.

The soldiers also came up and mocked Him. They offered Him wine vinegar and said, If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself.

There was written a written notice above Him which read, This is the King of the Jews.

[14 : 59] One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Him. Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us. But the other criminal rebuked Him.

Don't you fear God, he said, since you are under the same sentence. We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve.

But this man has done nothing wrong. Then he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Jesus answered him, I tell you the truth. Today you will be with me. In paradise.

Lord, let us take a moment, just a few moments, to give thought to what we've read from your word.

[16 : 29] And to thank you. And to thank you. And to praise you. For our wonderful Lord. In his precious name.

Amen. Our subject this morning is a very surprising conversion.

A very surprising conversion. Someone became a Christian within hours of death.

It's a wonderful story. Let's look at the context. Jesus Christ had been sentenced to death. He was sentenced unjustly.

It broke the law of the Jews. The Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews, had no right whatsoever, no just cause, to sentence Jesus to death.

[17 : 43] But they did it, nevertheless. Nevertheless. He was taken before Pilate, who was the governor, the Roman governor. They were the ones who had the real power over the Israel at that time.

And he was sentenced to death after a lot of argument and discussion and sending him back to Herod and then back to Pilate again.

Pilate eventually sentenced the Lord Jesus Christ to death against Roman law. So there is injustice among the Jews, the Israelites.

Injustice among Romans. Jesus Christ of Nazareth was sentenced to death to be executed by crucifixion on false charges that had no weight whatsoever.

He was led away to Calvary to go from the city outside the city walls to Calvary. It was by the city rubbish dump known as Gienah.

[19 : 04] And they crucified him there. They took two men along as well, two other criminals. to crucify them at the same time.

And as he was being crucified, that is, as he was being laid down on top of the cross and nailed to it through his wrists and ankles, he prayed, he prayed, Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.

They don't know what they're doing. There are seven sayings that Jesus said from that cross which are recorded for us in the scriptures.

and it's good to be able to reflect on all those sayings that have been faithfully recorded.

That prayer was the first, Father, forgive them. And then he spoke to the thief and gave him reassurance.

[20 : 18] Today you will be with me in paradise. And then he turned his attention to his mum. There he is hanging.

It must have been horrific pain. but his mum is there and John, the disciple who loved him very much.

And he glances down to mum, looks in the direction of mum and says, woman, behold your son.

And then he must have just turned his glance a little from that cross just that little to look at John.

And he said to her, behold your mother.

Very beautiful to think about that. Here he is suffering horrifically and he's concerned about his mum. And what he's doing, he's passing over responsibility to John for his mum.

[21 : 30] he wants him to regard Mary as his mother and to look after her as he would look after his own mum.

And then there's that terrible darkness and the cry, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? horrible, horrible sense of being cut off from God, an experience he'd never ever known to feel abandoned, to feel deserted, alone.

He had to go through that. He had to experience what it's like to be cut off from God in an eternity of hell, to suffer what his people would suffer if he didn't do it for them.

He had to feel deep within that he was cut off from God and yet he still says, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[23 : 01] Then he says, a little later, I thirst. Christ. And then there's that cry of victory that ran out with every ounce of energy that he could summon up.

It is finished! This cry of victory. He'd done it. He'd done all that was asked of him from heaven.

He'd done all that was necessary to honour the Father in heaven and to save his people.

Everything, everything, even in the smallest details had been covered by him in his life, suffering and death.

It's finished! And it's finished forever! He'll never suffer again! And finally, he says, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

And he bowed his head and died. So our centre of attention here is with the second saying from the cross where Jesus addresses one of the thieves.

[24 : 25] They were crucified together, three of them to be crucified and probably to make a bigger issue, Pilate or the centurion raised Jesus up in the centre and then put criminals, one on either side.

That was probably because he was being called the king of the Jews and it may have been in mockery, even the positioning. And yet under God it's very significant.

There he is numbered with transgressors right in the middle of criminals. As they were crucified the rulers began to jeer.

They didn't want any silence, they didn't want people to be thinking about it too much so they started their jeering. Rulers began it all, the priests, Pharisees, people who were responsible.

He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Christ, the son and chosen of God. Soldiers joined in and mocked him, offering him sour wine as we read in our scripture reading.

[25 : 49] Even travellers going past the place but it was a public route, well trodden route. Even the travellers as we read from Matthew chapter 27 they also blasphemed him wagging their heads and saying you who would destroy the temple and build it in three days save yourself if you are the son of God come down from the cross.

Even the criminals crucified with him mocked him in the same way. So we have this cacophony this loud discordant shouting this rubble save yourself save yourself save yourself if you are the Christ come down come down mocking and jeering and scoffing but it wasn't going to be all mocking for God heavenly father and the holy spirit had plans what would encourage the son of God and the

savior of sinners most at this horrific time what would be of the greatest blessing at this time going through all that he knew he had to go through he'd known all along he'd known long before he'd left heaven he'd known actually before creation so we're told in

God's word he knew what was before him but what would really really encourage the savior of sinners that's if someone right there and then is brought to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that was the plan and that's what they did because one of those criminals changed one of those criminals changed dramatically J.C.

Ryle in his commentary on this passage a godly man of years gone by he said two criminals crucified one saved the other lost one brought to faith in Jesus one not brought to faith in Jesus one saved so that everybody may have hope only one saved so that nobody can presume deathbed repentance deathbed sorrow is rarely occurring it does occur sometimes there are a few occasions when someone turns even in their last moments of life

I knew a man some years ago his wife was a sister of one of our church members she didn't come to church she wasn't interested she wasn't a Christian but her sister a godly woman and that sister of the godly woman was present with her husband when the doctor visited and told her husband that he had only about a month to live his wife said to him would you like me to ask Garth to come knowing my name only from the connections with her believing sister I went along to see him and over the next weeks we spent a lot of time together and he wanted to know lots and lots and things about the

[30 : 26] Lord Jesus and what were the possibilities before him when he died and he came to faith in the Lord Jesus what I never really understood was it didn't touch his wife spiritually one bit that was a strange thing she saw a wonderful change she saw a man who was anxious man who was fearful of dying being changed to have an amazing sense of peace and calm and tranquility and to be able to face it even with expectation even with a certain amount of excitement at the prospect that was before him and I would have thought humanly speaking that would have burst his wife's heart wide open but it didn't but he gave real evidence of being brought to faith in the Lord

Jesus what do we mean by being saved we mean that all the things that we've done wrong against God are wiped away forgiven sin is a very significant word it's not to be judged by crimes civil wrongdoing the only real meaning of sin is in relationship to God himself the shorter catechism what is sin sin is doing what God does not want you to do and it's doing what God does sorry it's doing what God does not want you to do and not doing what God does want you to do I can remember it better in theological terms sins of omission and sins of commission it's doing what God doesn't want us to do but that's only half of it it's not doing what God does want us to do do I need to spell it out do I need to give you some of the lists that are found in the

Bible of what wrongdoing is in the sight of God if anybody has any doubt I gladly point you to the passages afterwards but I want to move on Jesus Christ has died at Calvary sentenced to death by Jews and Romans for a crime that he didn't commit there was no crime the only thing they had against him among the Jews was he said he was the son of God they accused him of blasphemy but how can he blaspheme when he is the son of God he was just telling the truth it was no blasphemy Jesus died under the judgment of Israel and Rome but God had planned father son and holy spirit had planned that something more would occur at

Calvary something more would occur on that cross something more would happen to Jesus of Nazareth more than the feeling of pain and suffering for what he was experiencing in his body and mind they had determined that this was the time when God in Christ Jesus would pay all the price take all the punishment for his people's sins his people's wrongdoing so there was an even more intense suffering for Jesus than that which other crucified people experienced more intense so intense that it's beyond our comprehension to grasp it's no wonder he cried out my

God my God why have you forsaken me he was going through it then and what we're told in God's word is that that suffering and that death there at the cross was taking the penalty that his people deserve he was paying the price he was standing in our place taking our death taking our punishment so that we who love him and all those who are going to come to love him and all those who have loved him in the past will be totally and completely and forever forgiven and it will never ever be counted against us God will not remember it again so here on the cross two men one continues to mock the other something has happened he started off mocking just as they were being crucified but something's happened it's like the story of the prodigal where Jesus says of the prodigal when he'd been in a position where he'd lost all his funds all his money and all his friends

and there was no work and he was feeding pigs

[36 : 33] Jesus says there when he's there with the pigs he's looking at their food and he just longed to fill his own stomach with the food that the pigs were eating Jesus puts words into this man's mind mouth when he came to himself when he came do you know when you become a Christian when you start thinking about Christian things you're not becoming an oddity you're not doing anything funny strange peculiar you're coming to your senses we're coming to understand who we are and what we are and where we've come from and why we're here it's all beginning to make sense he came to himself that prodigal and this thief here is coming to himself he just really he says just a minute hey do you not fear

God he says as loud as he could over to the other his colleague on the other side don't you fear God God's word tells us on more than one occasion that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom that's where you begin fearing God I had a pal who studied psychology when I studied theology many many years ago not quite back to the ark but not far away ages and age ago he told me a lot about psychology and I tried to tell him something about theology he was more successful in his teaching than I was in mine sadly he never came to faith at least I haven't heard yet but on one occasion he said to me he said the trouble with you people Gareth trouble with you preachers you want people to feel guilty he said for my part as a psychologist

I don't want people to feel guilty they shouldn't feel guilty I said oh they should feel guilty I want them to feel guilty you're absolutely right how long that everybody in the world should feel guilty before God but I said you've also got to admit that I'm ready to tell them how to deal with that guilt I don't leave it half cooked I don't give them half guilty I tell them there's one here in Jesus Christ who can deal with all your guilt completely perfectly do you not fear God and then he says we are suffering justly what's happening to us is right it's right we've done wrong and we're being punished but this man has done nothing amiss how did he know this how could he say this you've got to sort of imagine back how could this man have come to know these things he knew he was guilty himself that's fair enough he realising he's accepting responsibility for his own wrongdoing but how did he know about

Jesus had he been near when Jesus was being interrogated by Pilate had he been in the next cell when the soldiers were manhandling him and scourging him had he been there when Pilate passed the sentence did he hear things had he met Jesus at some time when Jesus was going around preaching and teaching we just don't know where he got this information it wasn't just something that fell out of the sky at that particular moment he must have had something that was brought to life in him which he thought about and reflected on just a little side to those of us who are Christians don't fail to tell your children about the things of God will you tell them we heard it in the testimony earlier didn't we mum and dad were faithful telling about the

Lord Jesus Christ you don't necessarily expect to see a conversion instantly or maybe not for a while but it may be of immense good when God touches that life all that information all that truth in mind and heart God brings it into a real living experience and it's immensely valuable some of us from non-Christian homes could be tempted to be a little bit jealous we've had to start from scratch I had to start from scratch when I was 19 and it's a tough old road when you know nothing about much but there are those who have been brought up in a Christian home who've been taught the things of the Lord

[42 : 06] Jesus what a blessing and here is this criminal somewhere he's got the information but now it makes sense now he's beginning to realize now he's beginning to understand we've done wrong we're being punished justly this man has done nothing amiss and then he says to the Lord Jesus Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom how did he know there was a kingdom how did he know that there was life after death how did he know that there was something going to happen where there was going to be choices where there were two at least two possibilities well there are only two actually one to know God and to be with God and enjoy God forever and ever and ever and live life as God intended it right from the very beginning or one to be separated from

God separated from his love and mercy and kindness separated from God's people and however whatever God means in his word by hell it's certainly horrific can't imagine any right thinking human being wanting to choose hell rather than heaven with God Lord remember me how does he know that this man Jesus has got some pull in the next world remember me when you come into your kingdom this is this is an enlightenment that some Christians don't aren't clear about and he puts his confidence there if you will remember me remember me remember me when you come into

your kingdom and then Jesus said assuredly I say to you today you will be with me in paradise amazing what an amazing promise now we know that man that criminal was converted we know for sure that that man was converted and for this reason if you look into John chapter 16 16 and verse 8 look into

John chapter 16 and verse 8 you'll find Jesus speaking about the Holy Spirit and he says when the Holy Spirit comes the Holy Spirit will convict convince of sin righteousness and judgment that's going to be one of the specialities of God's Holy Spirit once Jesus has returned to heaven and the Holy Spirit is sent in a new way to the earth this is going to be one of the Holy Spirit specialities he's going to convict convince this word convict or convince it's exactly the same in the Greek but we use it in two different ways we talk about it in the context of something wrong conviction and in something right convincing that's why we say convict or convince because it's convicting of sin it's convincing of the righteousness of Jesus

Christ and convicting or convincing of judgment to come depending on where you stand in relationship to the Lord Jesus he was convicted for his sin we've been punished justly he was convinced of the righteousness of Jesus Christ this man has done nothing wrong he knew that there was going to be a judgment he was convicted he knew there was going to be a time when he would stand before God and Jesus was his only hope and that's the truth Jesus is your only hope today you will be with me in paradise you'll be amazed at the number of articles and lectures and books that have been written about where is paradise my friends it doesn't matter one bit it's missing the point paradise isn't the important thing that Jesus is saying here it's not the where it's the who you will be with me that's all that matters to any of us to have

Jesus say through his word convincing us by his holy spirit you're going to be with me I don't care whether it's called paradise seventh heaven or heaven or I don't I don't mind doesn't matter as long as you're with him because wherever he is it will be heaven it will be paradise it will be great I have not seen nor ear heard nor has entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him what blessings we have what blessing we're going to be with him and we're going to be with all who are his that a wonderful prospect we're going to meet the old patriarchs patriarchs I've got some questions I'd love to ask Abraham when I've got used to being there with the

[48 : 26] Lord Jesus I've got lots of questions to ask about the Bible as well that I want to ask Jesus where I didn't understand at all but I don't suppose we're going to be bothered about those things in heaven we're just going to be looking at the Lord Jesus and pinching ourselves it's real I'm here by God's grace I'm here to enjoy God and his people and all those godly ones that have gone before us we shall see him again you know we can say au revoir in the sense of the French you know see you again we don't say goodbye when anyone dies in the Lord we say we'll see you again it is a wonderful wonderful blessing to come to your senses and turn to Jesus oh dear God our father what a blessing what a privilege to be able to say

I call this savior mine we know Lord we can only say that because he has said he is mine she is mine I love him I love her convince us dear God convict us where we need conviction but Lord grant that before we rest this day we shall be at peace with you through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen He He