

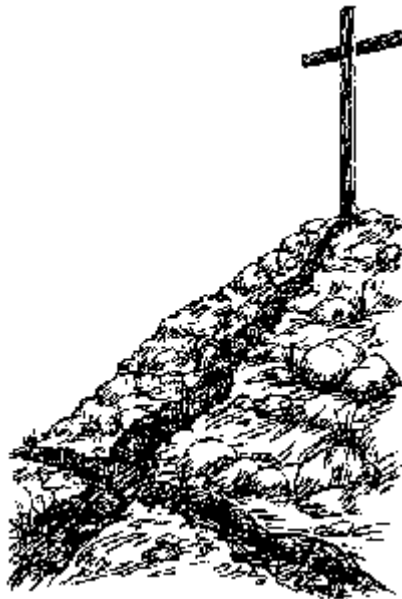
# Three Crosses

Luke 23:32-46

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*Luke 23:32-46 (KJV) " And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. {33} And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. {34} Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. {35} And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. {36} And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, {37} And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. {38} And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. {39} And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. {40} But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? {41} And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. {42} And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. {43} And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."*

Next week we will celebrate a holiday we call "Thanksgiving". During this holiday we will, most of us, gather family about us. Our children will come to visit. We will watch parades on television, eat too much, take a day or two off from work, and enjoy ourselves. Thanksgiving - it's such a wonderful time.

As Americans we have so much to be thankful for. As Christians, however, we have much more to be thankful for. Three crosses were on a hill called "Calvary" ... and *we can be thankful that our Lord Jesus Christ hung on that center cross.*

### 1. Be Thankful That We Who Believe In Jesus Will Not Go To Hell

*Luke 23:32-34 (KJV) "And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. {33} And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. {34} Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do ....*

Everything about this passage is significant for us. First of all, we need to look at the **name** of the place, **Calvary**. This is the Greek kranion

{pronounced kran-ee'-on}, and our English word "cranium" comes from it. The more common Jewish or Chaldean name for this place was Golgotha {pronounced gol-goth-ah' - see **Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22; John 19:17**}. In ancient times places were named based on their function or their significance in history. There was a reason that three crosses were on a hill called Calvary. Calvary was a *garbage dump*, a place outside of the city, a place where human refuse was punished, a place where all hope was lost. When man wanted to work his way to God, our Creator had him scale Mount Horeb to receive the Law on tablets of stone. When God the Father wanted to save us by Grace He sent God the Son to a garbage dump to die for us.

When we imagine Calvary we imagine it as a grassy knoll with three, pristine crosses neatly placed on top of it. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Only here, in our focal passage, in the *entirety of Scripture* - Beloved, only here is this place of execution called "Calvary" or *kranion*. In all other Gospel accounts the harsher Chaldean word *Golgotha* is used - "The Place of the Skull". Golgotha was not a nice place. It was a place where criminals were carried off to die that terrible death called crucifixion. This was a death *specifically reserved* for criminals. Roman

citizens were often executed in front of their homes by being beheaded - but criminals and non-Roman citizens were taken to Calvary - the place of the Skull.

The place of the Skull was a hopeless place. The sun bleached bones of others who had died littered the landscape here and there, as criminals were not usually given proper burials. Periodically you could hear the cries of lepers, poor diseased souls cast out of the city, yelling "unclean, unclean".

*Leviticus 13:46 (KJV) "All the days wherein the plague shall be in him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be."*

The dispossessed perhaps poked through the garbage heaps, looking for food or something to sustain life. Calvary was a terrible place.

Calvary was also terrible because our Lord Jesus often pointed to that very place when He taught the people about Hell. We like to represent Jesus Christ our Savior as a loving Person, a gentle

Person, a kind Person. And, Beloved, He is all these things. But our Savior spoke more of hell and eternal punishment than any other preacher in the Bible. Our Jesus was a fire and brimstone preacher who taught that mankind is lost and condemned if it does not believe in Him.

Our Savior preached of hell, and warning us:

*Mark 9:43-48 (KJV) "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: {44} Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. {45} And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: {46} Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. {47} And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than*

having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:  
{48} Where their worm dieth not, and the  
fire is not quenched."

Our Savior looked up from His teaching and looked out on Calvary, that garbage dump. He saw fires burning all around, fires that were never quenched, for the city kept tossing refuse into this place. Our Lord saw the worms, the terrible critters in the garbage heaps. Then Jesus said a fantastic thing. He said *if any part of your body* would lead you away from salvation, then it would be better for you to remove that body part, that offending member. For Jesus saw Hell as an eternal place of torment, a place where those who are cast out wander, forever separated from God our Father.

Is Hell, *gehenna*, a place of eternal punishment, a place of eternal separation from God, *just a fairytale*, a made up place to frighten people into becoming Christians? No, Beloved! Hell is a real place, and people are *really* sent there by a very *real* God. Jesus warned us:

Luke 12:4-5 (KJV) "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill

the body, and after that have no more that they can do. {5} But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him."

Many preachers refuse to mention Hell, lest they hurt a person's feelings. I have heard preachers say that they will not mention Hell, for they think it *beneath the pulpit* to try and frighten people into repentance. Jesus never preached about Hell to frighten people into accepting Him as Savior - but He preached about Hell because *Hell is a real place*.

Dear friends, many people come to Church to hear precious sermonettes that do little but entertain. But I want you to notice that Jesus spoke of Hell and preached Hell *to His friends*, warning them that our God is a just and holy God who *will* cast the unbeliever, the unsaved, into Hell. Jesus warned the good, moral religious people of His day in the strongest terms. He said:

Matthew 23:33 (NASB) ""You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you

escape the sentence of hell?"

Hell is a very real place to Jesus, and Calvary was a very real illustration of what our Savior did for us. Our Beloved went to the garbage dump for us! Our Beloved allowed Himself to suffer a shaming and painful death *with criminals* so that He could redeem all that believe in Him from God's *certain wrath*.

Many people, in fact many who claim to be *Christian*, do not believe in eternal punishment. They do not believe that God would send an unbeliever to a place so terrible. But the fact that Jesus hung on a tree in between two criminals in a garbage dump proves to - my mind at least - that there must be a Hell. God the Father did not merely *surrender Jesus* to the Cross of Calvary. God the Father *sent His Son Jesus* to the Cross for us:

Romans 4:25 (NASB) "He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification."

This was a *deliberate action*. God the Father

*delivered Jesus to Calvary* for us. If Hell is not real, and if unbelievers do not go there, then God our Father, I believe, is *exceptionally cruel*. The Bible prophetically states that *it pleased the Father to sacrifice the Son* for us:

Isaiah 53:10 (KJV) "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand."

I cannot imagine the Father taking such an action if it was not absolutely necessary. The Cross is necessary. It was necessary that Jesus Christ die on a garbage dump for us *outside the camp*.

Hebrews 13:12-13 (KJV) "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. {13} Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach."

Jesus Christ died a lonely death *outside the camp* for us. If any man wants to be saved then he must go *outside the camp* to the Cross of Christ. We must go to the Cross and believe that He died for us.

Praise God He died for us!

## 2. Be Thankful We Are Under The Blood of Christ

*Luke 23:34b-38 (KJV) "... {34b} And they parted his raiment, and cast lots {35} And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. {36} And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, {37} And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. {38} And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

Consider the *types* of people who were with Jesus on Calvary, and consider the irony of what is happening. The people that are with Jesus are *literally* standing in a garbage heap.

The **soldiers** are kneeling in garbage,

*{34b} And they parted his raiment, and cast lots ...*

playing games at the foot of the Cross! Can you imagine that? We look at Jesus on Calvary, lifted up high above the burning piles of garbage. We see Jesus, with eyes full of love, looking down at a crowd of people who are *indifferent* to what He is doing. The Roman soldiers are playing with dice as our Savior suffers.

*{35} And the people stood beholding...*

The **people**, our text says, stood near the cross of Christ "beholding" {Greek *theoreo* {pronounced *teh-o-reh'-o*}} Him. These people were watching Jesus hang there because, they felt, this was *great entertainment*. That's what the Greek *theoreo* means - to watch in fascination, to watch and be entertained. There is nothing more entertaining to the lost soul than to find fault in someone else. Many lost souls have told me that they don't attend Church services because of the hypocrites there, or for this or that reason. They would rather be *entertained* than come to acknowledge Christ as Savior. Oh, dear heart, are you certain of your salvation? Are you here to be

entertained, to while away the time, or are you here to honor Jesus?

{35} ... *the rulers also with them derided him ...*

The **rulers** {Greek archon {ar'-khone}} stood in a garbage dump at the foot of the Cross mocking Jesus. Who were these *archon*, these rulers? **Matthew Henry** states:

**It was strange that so much barbarity should be found in the human nature: *The people stood beholding, not at all concerned, but rather pleasing themselves with the spectacle; and the rulers, whom from their office one would take to be men of sense and men of honour, stood among the rabble, and derided him, to set those on that were about them to do so too; and they said, He saved others, let him save himself.***

The word *archon* is used in Scripture to refer to princes, kings, but especially in the Gospels of the rulers of the Temple. Our immediate context implies that these rulers are the *religious leaders* of Jesus' day:

Luke 23:13 (KJV) "And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people,"

Nicodemus was a *archon* (**John 3:1**) and Jairus was a ruler (**Luke 8:41**). In fact, there were *many rulers* of the synagogue and of that ruling body called *the Sanhedrin* who heard and believed on Jesus, but refused to speak up lest they lose their position in the Temple:

John 12:42-43 (KJV) "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: {43} For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

Many pastors preach a lighthearted message rather than take our focus back to Calvary. Beloved, it does not matter *who rejects the Cross of Christ*. You can be preacher, priest, or president - and you will go to the same place of eternal punishment, as will all people who reject Jesus Christ as Savior. Religious but unsaved people often emphasize the

importance of morality, especially their own *good deeds*. Religious unsaved people were a blight on Israel, a blight that led that whole nation into condemnation and exile. Religious unsaved and carnal leaders are a blight on the Church of Christ today as well. As C.H. Spurgeon said:

**If sinners be dammed, at least let them leap to Hell over our bodies. If they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees. Let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for.**

Religious unsaved people watched Jesus' as He ministered, then plotted His downfall. Religious unsaved people today are found in churches all across our land, mocking Biblical truths, making light of the Cross of Calvary. Religious unsaved people are *standing in the same garbage heap* that the soldiers and the people were standing in.

Religious unsaved people *go outside the camp* to see Christ on the Cross so they can mock Him, so they can twist His words and His ministry into something that it never was. It may be painful to hear about the Cross and the Blood, and a lighthearted message may be easier to swallow

than the horrible picture we see on Calvary. But Beloved, any other picture just won't save you.

Romans 5:9-10 (NASB) "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. {10} For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

We are justified, that is, *declared righteous before God the Father* because of the Blood of Christ. Be thankful that we are *redeemed from Hell* because of the Blood of Christ.

Ephesians 1:6-7 (KJV) "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. {7} In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;"

### 3. Be Thankful We NOT Saved By Works

*Luke 23:39-43 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. {40} But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? {41} And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. {42} And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. {43} And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*

As our message from God ends, we see two other men, one on Jesus' right hand and the other on His left. These men have something in common *with each other and with us.*

**1.** First, Their *very deaths* illustrate the fact that *we cannot work our way to Heaven.* Look at their hands. These criminal hands were firmly pinned to a tree by heavy iron nails. There was *absolutely no work* that either man could do to work his way to Heaven. Their feet were crossed, one over top of the other, and a brutal spike was forced through them and into the tree. Neither man could walk

about doing good things for God. Neither man could *be baptized*, nor could they do any *religious work* by which they could be saved. As the Scripture says:

Titus 3:5 (KJV) "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;"

**2.** Second, *both men were guilty* of their crimes. They hung on their trees because of sin, and were being punished, surely and certainly, because they were sinners. They deserved the deaths that they were suffering according to Roman law. They were violators of the Law, and were paying the price for their sins. As the repentant thief said:

*{41} ... we receive the due reward of our deeds*

**3.** Third, *both men had ample opportunity to call on Jesus.* Jesus was right beside them, right in the middle of these thieves. Either man had the freedom to accept or reject Christ as Savior.

{39} ... one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

This is *incredible* to me, but it's true. One thief *actually joined in with the crowd that crucified him* and began to mock Jesus. The Bible says that he "railed" or blasphemed {blasphemeo {blas-fay-meh'-o}} Christ. This is amazing! This man knew that, according to Roman Law, he would not be released from that cross. What did it benefit him to join in with all the other mockers. If I had not wanted to accept Christ as Savior I would have controlled myself and tried to extend my life. Instead this man blasphemed our Savior, mocking Him along with the angry mob. It is so true that the god of this world, Satan:

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 (NASB) "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, {4} in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

has blinded the eyes of men so that they cannot

see Jesus. Logic will not work with an illogical person. If we will win others to Christ, we must pray that God will open the eyes of the lost to that glorious Cross of Calvary!

The thief on God's right hand asked Jesus a simple question. He merely said:

"... *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom ...*"

If you don't know Jesus Christ as Savior - if you aren't *certain* of your salvation - today is a great day to meet the Savior. This thief said, "Lord, would you just remember me?" Our Savior replied,

"... *To day shalt thou be with me in paradise ...*"

This thief was saved because he *stepped away from the world* and *turned his eyes on Jesus*. This thief was saved because *he believed* in Jesus Christ for salvation. He saw the Lamb of God high and lifted up, and accepted Jesus as Savior.

God does not care about your past, nor does He consider whether you are *worthy* to be saved or not. None of us are worthy. There are none

righteous, no, not one.

**Light springs from the midday-midnight of Golgotha, and every herb of the field blooms sweetly beneath the shadow of the once accursed tree. In that place of thirst, grace hath dug a fountain which ever gusheth with waters pure as crystal, each drop capable of alleviating the woes of mankind. You who have had your seasons of conflict, will confess that it was not at Olivet that you ever found comfort, not on the hill of Sinai, nor on Tabor; but Gethsemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha have been a means of comfort to you. The bitter herbs of Gethsemane have often taken away the bitters of your life; the scourge of Gabbatha has often scourged away your cares, and the groans of Calvary yields us comfort rare and rich. We never should have known Christ's love in all its heights and depths if He had not died; nor could we guess the Father's deep affection if He had not given His Son to die. The common mercies we enjoy all sing of love, just as the sea-shell, when we put it to our ears, whispers of the**

**deep sea whence it came; but if we desire to hear the ocean itself, we must not look at every-day blessings, but at the transactions of the crucifixion. He who would know love, let him retire to Calvary and see the Man of sorrows die. (C.H. Spurgeon)**

My prayer is that you come to accept Jesus Christ as Savior. That you surrender to Him your everything. When you do this, God will bring eternal life and peace out of the garbage dump. God will take the broken, and make it beautiful.

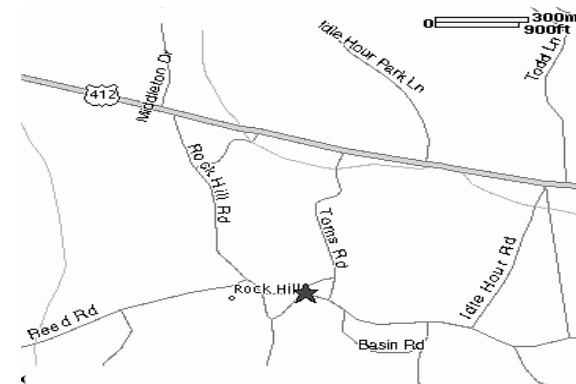
In the name of Jesus Christ,  
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**Luke 23:32-46**

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In Jesus Will Not Go To Hell: **Luke 23:32-34; Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22; John 19:17; Leviticus 13:46; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 12:4-5; Matthew 23:33; Romans 4:25; Isaiah 53:10; Hebrews 13:12-13**

**2.** Be Thankful We Are Under  
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