

A Study of Luke's Gospel
Week Thirty-Three
Luke 23:35-24:12

Day One

35 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." 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

v. 35 – The rulers and people endorsed Christ's ministry while He was hanging on the cross. They acknowledged that He had saved others. So they testified that they had hung an innocent man! But now they demanded one more sign—they wanted Jesus to save Himself. But their definition of salvation was flawed, for Jesus had said:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it" (Matthew 16:24-26).

The cross was a reality for Jesus and it is a reality for you and me. We cannot "save" ourselves from it. We must entrust ourselves to God so that He can save us in His own way and time. Just because Jesus didn't save Himself did not mean that He wasn't the Christ of God, as the crowd referred to Him. And because He doesn't rescue you in the way that you would like—does that mean He isn't your Chosen One either? Can you trust God even in a difficult situation where your life or reputation is being tarnished? It isn't easy to do, but Jesus showed that it can be done.

vs. 36&37 – The people sneered and the soldiers mocked. It wasn't enough that they tortured Jesus; they had to verbally abuse Him as well. Have you ever been verbally abused? If you have, then Jesus knows what you are encountering, for it happened to Him when He was in His weakest and most vulnerable condition. Yet Jesus did not retaliate, nor did He respond.

Now the soldiers offered Jesus a drink to help deaden the pain and His senses. But Jesus refused. Jesus was tempted to take drugs and alcohol, but He declined. If anyone reading is troubled by drugs or alcohol, or knows anyone who is, then we should show them this. Jesus refused alcohol as a means to lessen the rejection and deaden His pain. Jesus is our Source and our help in time of trouble for all the problems and sins of humanity.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so

that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:15-16).

The lesson is that we can all approach Jesus with confidence that He will not reject us and that He knows what we are going through, thus can help us. Do you have that confidence? Are there things that you hide from God, as if He doesn't already know? Come to Jesus as you are! Come to Him with your problems, even if they are alcohol and drug related. He cares for you! He is familiar with your pain.

v. 38 – The Romans put a sign above Jesus that spoke the truth. He was indeed King of the Jews. And this is what the Jews did to their true King. They had wished for a King to sit on David's throne, but when He came, they rejected and killed Him.

Day Two

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

v. 39 - So far we have seen the Jewish people and leaders mock Jesus, then the Roman soldiers and now the criminals. No rank or education can keep anyone from sin. The highest and lowest levels of society rejected and mocked Jesus. The educated leader didn't treat Jesus any better than the common criminal. While education is important, there is nothing that can disguise or undo man's sinful behavior, except the grace of God. And that was why Jesus was hanging on that cross.

The criminal cried out for Jesus to save Himself and them. In a manner of speaking, Jesus answered His prayer. Jesus had said that if a man wanted to save His life, He must lose it. So Jesus was doing what the man requested, although it didn't look like it. Then Jesus saved the other criminal, whose petition was spoken in faith.

vs. 40&41 – This criminal proves that it is never too late to turn to God, nor is there anyone beyond the reach of God's grace. This man knew who Jesus was and that He was innocent. He acknowledged that he was receiving the death sentence that He deserved, which is unusual for a criminal. Most proclaim their innocence or excuse their misbehavior for a variety of reasons. But this criminal was different.

vs. 42&43 – Jesus was hanging naked on a cross, beaten beyond recognition, dying an agonizing death as He drowned in His own bodily fluids, mocked and observed by family, friends, followers, and enemies. And yet He had the focus, courage and grace to fulfill His purpose to seek and save the lost (see Luke 19:10) even on the cross. If Jesus fulfilled His purpose under those conditions, you and I have no excuses. Jesus was true

to His mission to the very end and managed to bring one more lost sheep with Him before He died.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

Do you have the same attitude that Jesus had? Can you empty yourself, become a servant, give your life to God's service, and then trust God for the results? That is what Jesus did and that is what He commands you and I to do as well.

Day Three

44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. 47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." 48 When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. 49 But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

vs. 44&45 – There is an interesting connection here between the things that were happening in the spiritual realm and the natural realm. Jesus was dying on the cross in the natural and there was darkness in the natural. Of course, His death was of tremendous spiritual importance, so much so that the spiritual actually darkened the sun for three hours (from noon to 3). Nature was affected by this cataclysmic event. So what, you ask? I just wonder if our prayers and other spiritual activity can't affect the weather and other events in nature. Just a thought.

The most significant event for us was the tearing of the temple curtain. The temple curtain separated the holy place where the priests ministered from the holy of holies, where only the high priest could go once a year to make sacrifice for the sins of the people. Now that secret holy place was no longer needed, for the High Priest Jesus had gone into the heavenly holy place and made a sacrifice for sins once and for all. No other sacrifice could or need ever take place. The writer of Hebrews explained this act when he wrote:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is,

his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:19-22).

We can now enter the holy place, where only the high priest could go, because of what Jesus did. We should enter this place with boldness and confidence not in our own ability but in the power of Jesus' blood and sacrifice. Are you doing that, even when guilty of when you have sinned? Someone once said when we sin, we shouldn't run from God but to God. That is what the torn curtain means for you and me.

v. 46 – What faith! Jesus entrusted Himself to His Father and the promises that God had made toward Him. In other words, Jesus died in faith, believing God for this promise:

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay (Psalm 16:9-10).

I decided long ago I would rather die in faith, believing God for His promises, than live in presumption and “unfaith.” Jesus died in faith, believing the Father would do what He promised. I want to do the same. How about you?

v. 47 – When the centurion watched Jesus and the way He died, He broke out in worship and declared Jesus a righteous man. I want someone to watch me give my life to God and truly live it in that manner and then say, “John was a righteous man!” What a great testimony that would be!

v. 48 – The people who witnessed Jesus' death went away, beating their breasts—a sign of humility and sadness. They recognized that something wrong had taken place. They had also beheld the darkness and an earthquake, which Luke didn't mention (see Matthew 28:2). And the people went home in distress.

v. 49 – The followers of Jesus who knew Him, stayed until the bitter end, watching the events and identifying with their Lord to the very end. Even when we don't understand what is going on, we as believers must have faith and endure. Even Jesus said, “All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22-23). And Paul wrote, “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13-14).

You may be in a situation where there is nothing you can do, but you can't quit. You must simply endure. If that's the case, then there is nothing wrong with simply standing your ground and watching what God is doing. There is spiritual merit in doing that.

Day Four

50 Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, 51 who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. 52 Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. 53 Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. 54 It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. 55 The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. 56 Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

vs. 50-52 – Even though Jesus had died, the Father began to raise up a people that would continue to identify with their Lord. The first was Joseph, a Jewish leader. He was a good man and had not consented to the actions of his fellow leaders. While most would have felt that Jesus' death would have demoralized and disbanded His followers, His death actually energized and gave them courage. John told us:

Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away (John 19:38).

Joseph no longer feared the Jews and showed tremendous courage in coming forward to claim Jesus body. The Holy Spirit honors this man's courage by mentioning him in all four gospels. He asked Pilate for Jesus' body and Pilate consented.

v. 53 – Many feel that Joseph was wealthy for he owned a hand-hewn tomb, which would have been very expensive. Of course Joseph would receive his tomb back shortly, but he didn't know that would happen. He was willing to give his own tomb to Jesus. But Jesus had something different in mind. Instead of Jesus taking Joseph's place of death, Jesus gave Joseph a place of life that would render his tomb less meaningful. While Jesus showed us how to die, He more importantly showed us all how we would live and that we would live forever if we put our trust in Him. Thank you, Jesus!

vs. 54&55 – The Sabbath begins on Friday evening at sundown, and Joseph did not wish to profane the Sabbath. What Joseph did had many witnesses, for the women followed the funeral procession to the tomb and saw Jesus placed in that tomb.

v. 56 – The women went home to keep the Sabbath, but it would be the last normal Sabbath they would ever observe. The women had no hope or idea that Jesus would come back to life, for they were preparing the embalming ointments. But they, like Joseph, were prepared to publicly declare that they were disciples of Jesus, and were ready to risk their lives to identify with Him in death. But there would be no need. Now begins the most exciting chapter in the Bible, for it tells of the unthinkable—that God would raise a dead man back to life.

As we read on, let us summon our own courage to identify with Jesus, no matter what situation we find ourselves in. Because I travel extensively and sometimes go to

dangerous areas, people ask me if I am scared. I respond that at times I am, but I surrendered my life to Jesus on May 18, 1973. I didn't loan Him my life on that day—I gave it to Him. Therefore I will not take it back, nor will I shrink from wherever it is He wants me to go and do. I hope I am following in the footsteps of Joseph and the women when I do that. Are you prepared to join me and do the same?

Day Five

24:1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.

v. 1 – The women were diligent and as soon as there was no danger of violating the Sabbath, they went to the tomb to embalm Jesus' body. Jesus had women disciples—this was unheard of at this time in history. Jesus always made room for women, so what has happened to the Church in that regard? Some groups are so “hung up” on the role of women? I don't understand. William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, used to send women ministers into the toughest areas and they ministered effectively. In fact, Booth said once, “Some of my best men are women!” These women showed tremendous courage and commitment, although they were are misguided as the men. They never expected the tomb to be empty as Jesus had intimated on more than one occasion.

If you are a woman, are you doing all that God wants you to do, or are you intimidated by the disapproval of men and women alike? If you are a man, are you open to God using women to do His work?

The Church will never accomplish its task if it isn't using all of its members to their full extent.

vs. 2&3 – I can't imagine how confused these women were by what they found at the tomb—the stone rolled away and the body of Jesus gone. This isn't what they expected at all and that is how the faith journey is—constant surprises and “mind-blowing” experiences. Paul wrote:

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Eph 3:20-21).

Is there a situation you are facing that you think you know the outcome? Are you approaching a situation, just like the women, prepared for what you think will happen? Why not trust God for the impossible? Why are you so downcast? Why is your expectation so low? The message of the tomb is that God can do anything! If God can raise the dead, He can intervene in your situation and bring victory from defeat. And

what's more, God wants to surprise you! He wants to show Himself strong on your behalf! Will you let Him? You may not know how God will do it, but that doesn't mean you can't believe that He will do it. Allow yourself to be surprised today by the power of God. He can roll away any stone and do the impossible in your situation.

v. 4 – As they were trying to figure out what had happened, two men dressed in bright clothing appeared to them. Some people are infatuated with angels and even pray for God to send His angels to protect them. I usually pray for God to protect me and allow Him to determine if He wants to do it by using angels. At any rate, two heavenly beings came to explain to the women what was going on. I cannot imagine the joy among the angels when Jesus was raised from the dead. Their Lord and Champion was back! And they could not wait to tell someone the good news. The women were the lucky audience, because the women got to the tomb first.

I want to know what God is doing and I want to know it as early as possible. That often means I must be at the right place at the right time, even for the wrong reasons! The women were at the right place at the right time, but to embalm the Lord, not to talk to Him. But God looked past their lack of perspective and sent two angelic beings to explain to them what was going on. Our God is a great God and He is for us, even in our imperfect and weakened human state.

Day Six

5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 7'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" 8 Then they remembered his words.

v. 5 – Almost everyone who had an encounter with angels in the Bible was fearful. Angels aren't the cute little chubby cherubs that are portrayed on Valentine's Day. They are awesome beings. These women, who were brave enough to come to the grave and identify themselves as Jesus' followers, fell to the ground in fear. Do you pray for or crave supernatural experiences? If so, then be prepared to be confronted with your own insignificance!

The angels asked the women a straightforward question: Why come to a place of the dead to find the living? Of course, the women still had no idea that Jesus was alive or the meaning of all His promises before His death. They were living below the promise that Jesus had given them. Are you doing the same? Are you living "below" God's best for you? What can you do to get "up" to where you should be?

vs. 6&7 – The angels gave the women the good news. Jesus was alive! They reminded the women of what Jesus had told them before He died—that He would be delivered into the hands of sinful men, die and then be raised again. Yet the women and the men could

not understand this strange talk because they could not conceive of such a thing. But don't be too hard on them. C. S. Lewis said in order to understand something, you must roughly know what you what you are looking at. If someone had told you about a laptop computer 25 years ago, you could not have known what they were talking about, nor could you have even pictured it, because you would not have had a "rough idea" of what they were talking about. Today it is easy to picture a laptop because they are so commonplace. Is there a promise that Jesus has made to you that you can't receive because you can't see it?

v. 8 – After the men spoke, the women remembered Jesus' words. The men were fulfilling a promise that Jesus had made:

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:26-27).

Remember, you are not alone as you follow the Lord. The Holy Spirit is with you, to remind you of what Jesus said and direct you in His paths. But that doesn't mean you don't need to cooperate with the Spirit by writing down what you are hearing and learning. Do you have some way to record what you believe you are hearing from God? I hope you do and that you look over it regularly.

Day Seven

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. 12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

v. 9 – The women obviously knew where to find the apostles, who were in hiding for fear of the Jews. And it wasn't only the Apostles who were present, but other believers as well. So the church was actually having its first meetings, although they were unstructured and unplanned! It is amazing how many good things began to take place immediately after Jesus died and the good things haven't stopped for the last 2,000 years!

v. 10 – Luke then told us exactly who was in this embalming party that had the unexpected encounter with the angels. You can never do anything for God and stay anonymous, at least with Him. He remembers it all and gives credit where credit is due:

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Galatians 6:9).

v. 11 – The apostles could not believe the report of the women, for the apostles could not fathom the concept of resurrection in their minds. The women were standing there telling

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the apostles what they saw and what they knew. Just because you tell someone the truth doesn't mean they will or can believe you. Don't take it personally.

v. 12 – Good old spontaneous Peter. He ran off from the group and went to see for himself. When he got to the tomb, he saw it was as the women had said. Don't just take anyone's word for it; go check things out for yourself. That's what Peter did and now he had to deal with reality, although he could not understand it.

When you walk with the Lord, things should happen that you don't understand. That makes perfect sense to me. I am following an infinite God and I am trying to contain His magnificence in my finite mind. I would expect that things should take place that I just can't grasp. Remember the word of the Lord:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

I am glad I serve a God who is much bigger than I am. Aren't you?