

I'm teaching my children how to pray. And so at every meal we pray the same kind of liturgical prayer with some adjustments every now and then. "Jesus, thank you for our food. Thank you for our family." and we always end the same way. We always end by thanking Jesus for the cross. Why would I always want my children to end with the cross? Because the cross of Jesus is central to our faith. It is the most significant moment in history. It is the climax of reality. And it is the climax of the gospel of Luke.

This is what we have been building towards since we started the gospel of Luke back in November 2022. We have been in this book a long time. I have preached through this book longer than any other one we have done together. And we've taken a number of breaks to study other books in between. And as we've studied the gospel of Luke, we've been looking at the directions of Jesus is heading. His ministry in Galilee. Him heading towards Jerusalem and he's in Jerusalem. The whole book has a geographical force. Jesus is a particular direction. And really the entire book He is heading towards the cross. And this morning on Palm Sunday, we finally get there.

We're gonna take some time to talk about the centrality of the cross. Because without the cross, the gospel of Luke doesn't make much sense. And without the cross, our faith has nothing to stand on. And so in light of the cross we're really gonna talk about three things that we need to do because of the cross. Three applications of the cross. Or three ways that cross should change our lives.

Turn in your Bible to the gospel of Luke 23:26

Point number one is to **follow in Christ's footsteps (v. 26-31)**.

Jesus has a very interesting interaction here on his way to the crucifixion. And Luke includes some things that none of the other gospel writers do. Honestly as I had been studying the past this week, this is where I kept getting stuck.

I had a hard time trying to figure out.

What is Luke doing? What is Jesus doing? Why are these details included?

Because what happens is someone carries the cross for Jesus.  
Some women are coming behind Jesus and they're weeping.  
Jesus tells them to cry for themselves instead.  
And it seems as if he gives some last-minute eschatological teaching.

It took me a while to figure out what is going on here.  
What any of this has to do with the cross.  
I'm offering what I think is doing and I want to help you try to see this too.

I think it is all about following Jesus.  
We know that as disciples of Jesus and as followers of him,  
We are to walk after him.  
We are to become more like Jesus.  
We are not to do that just generally.  
I think that we also are too follow Jesus, even in his crucifixion.  
To follow Jesus on the way to the cross.

Let's take a closer look at verse 26, **"And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus."**

Usually they made victims or crucifixion carry part of the cross.  
The parade as they walk towards their execution was part of the shame of crucifixion.  
But Jesus is too weak to carry his.  
Jesus has not slept all night.  
He probably didn't get much sleep this week.  
He has just been beaten and tortured.  
The other gospels tell us that his back was whipped and torn apart so much that he could barely stand and was unrecognizable.  
He doesn't have the strength to carry anything.

So they seize and force a man from North Africa to carry Christ's cross.  
And he follows **"behind Jesus."**

Simon walks behind Jesus.

Back in Luke 9, Jesus told his disciples that they need to be ready to carry their own cross.

Simon is literally fulfilling Jesus's words.

Simon is following Jesus and he is carrying a cross.

Simon's sons are later, going to become leaders of the church in Rome.

As they follow the footsteps of their father, who followed after Jesus.

It is significant to note that none of Jesus disciples were there to carry the cross for him.

Peter, who said he would be with Jesus to the death, failed and ran away.

And now another Simon takes his place.

That is no coincidence, but divine providence.

Simon Cyrene is a model disciple for us.

He shows us how to follow Christ.

Verse 27 shows us that there are others following Jesus.

**"And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him."**

There is a great crowd of people, and specifically there are the women.

Jesus is disciples seem to have all run away, but the women are still following Jesus.

They are lamenting what is happening to Jesus.

They are lamenting the death and the humiliation that he is about to suffer.

Verse 28 Jesus says something strange.

**"But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."**

Because Jesus tells them that they need to stop crying for Jesus.

They should mourn for themselves.

Jesus wants them to see that he doesn't need their lamenting.

Now, what is happening to Jesus is an injustice.

The Roman government deciding to execute him is wrong.

The religious leaders rejecting the Messiah and their God, and deciding to kill him is wrong.

But Jesus is going to die on the cross on purpose.

Jesus is willingly submitting to this injustice, as a part of the plan to save the world.

They do not have to weep and wish that was not so.

Because it must be so.

Jesus goes on in verse 29 and 30, **"For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' 30 Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.'"**

It seems as if Jesus is talking about the things that are to come.

But it is a little unclear.

Perhaps Jesus is talking about the judgment that is going to come against Jerusalem from the Romans.

He could be talking about the judgment that will come when he returns.

Verse 31 gives us a hint. **"For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"**

Jesus is using the metaphor of fire.

Because fires are typically used as a metaphor for judgment.

The fire consumes and destroys what is to be judged.

If you are going to start a fire, you want dry wood.

You do not want wet and green wood.

And Jesus is saying that he is the wood that is green.

He is innocent. He is perfect.

Jesus has never sinned once or done anything wrong.

Jesus is not deserving of crucifixion.

Jesus is not deserving from any punishment or discipline from anyone ever.

And yet Jesus is about to take all of our punishment on the cross.  
And yet Jesus is about to have all of our sins, put on his shoulders.  
Jesus has been, and is going to be killed as the greenwood.  
He will face the judgement we should.

And Jesus says, if this is how they will treat me what do you think will happen to you?  
If the sinless lamb must be sacrificed and die what will become of us?

Implicit is, unlike Jesus we are the dry wood.  
We are primed for judgment and for punishment.  
We have many sins.  
We are broken.  
All of us have fallen short of the glory of God.  
All of us have done things that we are ashamed of, and not proud of.  
All of us no we are not as we should be.  
We are not even as we wish that we were.

If we want to escape judgment, how can we do it?  
The only way to escape judgment is through the cross.  
It is through following Jesus.

I think Simeon and the crowd in the women are being juxtaposed against each other.  
We can either be willing to bear cross and follow Jesus to participate in his suffering in his death.  
Or we can weep and wish that there is another way.

If we're honest, think a lot of American Christians.  
Especially white American Christian struggle with the cross because we like winning in victory.  
We want to be first and the best.  
We want to follow Jesus in his second coming in victory.  
But we're not sure we want to follow him heading to his death.

But the way of Jesus is cross.

The path of salvation in the path of following Jesus goes through defeat and death.

And it follows a great shame.

The most of us are like the women here who mourn and lament, but we don't want to carry the cross.

We are like the crowd where we're happy to follow Jesus when everything is going well, but we don't really wanna follow him when it's not popular anymore.

We're not sure that we wanna follow Jesus when it might involve our own suffering or our shame.

We might be happy to follow Jesus when it is popular and revolutionary, and seems interesting.

But we don't when the tide of history seems to have turned against him.

If you were going to be a Christian, you have to follow Jesus in his cross. We do so, because of the cross is the only way to escape. If you want to escape the fiery judgment that is coming for everyone and for all of us. The only way is the cross.

But how can the cross help us escape the judgment to come?

Point 2: **Accept the Salvation Christ offers (v. 32-38).**

Jesus died in our place, so that we could escape judgment.

The entire purpose that Jesus came is the cross.

The cross is with Jesus has been working and heading towards.

Throughout the whole gospel of Luke, he has been heading to Calvary.

Jesus came to the cross to offer salvation to all of us.

He came to offer us a forgiveness of our sins .

He came to offer us eternal life.

In the offer of Jesus extends to even the worst of us.

Because look, who is around Jesus as He dies.

Verse 32 and 33, **"Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 33 And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left."**

Jesus dies surrounded by criminals.

Jesus is executed as one.

As if He is someone who deserves it.

When you hear the word "criminal" here do not think of a thief or drug dealer.

You need to think more like serial killer or terrorist.

These are people who admit and know that they deserve to be killed.

The worst kinds of people is who Jesus is counted among.

And Jesus dies beside them.

As Jesus dies, slowly and painfully, they gamble for his clothes.

**"And they cast lots to divide his garments."**

They are throwing dice to see who gets his robe and shoes.

They are robbing the corpse before he has finished dying.

What would you say?

If you were being robbed as you died.

Personally, I would probably do lots of cursing and crying.

I might ask that they wait a few minutes at least.

But that is not what Jesus does.

But what does Jesus say as He is being crucified?

Verse 34, **"And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."**

Jesus offers forgiveness from sins.

Jesus forgives the men who are killing Him.

Jesus forgives the men who are murdering Him.

Jesus forgives the men who are robbing Him.

Jesus forgives the crowd cheering His death.

It seems like Jesus forgives everyone.

He does not just do this because He is amazing and gracious.  
He does this because this is what His death is about.  
He is dying on the cross to offer all of us salvation and forgiveness.  
Because we don't realize what we do.  
Most of the time we do not realize the significance of our sins.  
We do not realize how broken we are and how much trouble we are in.

Some of us might realize how bad we are.  
We might know the depth of our brokenness.  
But we do not recognize the depths of Jesus' grace and mercy.  
Jesus died to forgive us.  
He died to offer us a way forward.

Unfortunately, not everyone wants it.

Verse 35, **"And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"**

The people mock Jesus.  
They hear His offer of salvation and find it funny.  
It seems impotent and without power.  
They wonder how Jesus could work all of those miracles.  
How He could deliver people from demons,  
How He could stop the wind and the waves,  
How He could cast out leprosy,  
How He could command angel armies,  
But now He dies powerless.  
He cannot save Himself.  
They mock because they do not understand.  
He is not saving Himself right now because He is trying to save them.

They mock His divinity.  
Jesus claimed to be the Messiah.  
Jesus claimed to be the one who was coming to save all of Israel.  
He claimed to be the chosen one of God.

Verse 36 **"The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine 37 and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 38 There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."**

Jesus claimed to be the king.  
And the executioners join in the mockery.  
They wonder at what kind of king this is.

Because they do not realize that He is the king.  
He is not just the king of the Jews, but of all the nations.  
He is the King of the Cosmos.  
This King did not come to kill but to be killed.  
He did not come to be served, but to serve.  
He did not come to save Himself, but to save us.  
He came to die.  
His salvation can only come through His death.

At the cross, Jesus became sinners like us even though He was not, so that we could become righteous like Him even though we are not.  
At the cross, Jesus died in our place as a ransom for sinners.  
At the cross, Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins.  
At the cross, Jesus paid the wages of our debts so we could be free.  
At the cross, Jesus satisfied the justice of God.  
At the cross, Jesus defeated sin and death.  
At the cross, Jesus died so that you could be justified and made holy.  
At the cross, Jesus took all of our sins on His own shoulders.  
At the cross, Jesus died for you because He loves you.  
At the cross, Jesus offers you salvation.

And this salvation is available to anyone who wants it.  
But not everyone does.  
There were two criminals crucified next to Jesus.  
And they show us the two choices we have in response to Jesus.  
We can either accept His salvation or reject it.

The first criminal rejects it.

Verse 39, **"One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!'"**

He joins in with the mockers.

He wants Jesus to prove His divinity by saving Himself.

Not just Himself, but the criminals too.

It is interesting how when we want God to prove Himself,

we want Him to do it in ways that benefit us.

Prove that you are God by doing "blank" for me.

He does not understand, Jesus is proving Himself right now.

Some of us respond this way when we suffer.

We lash out at God.

We scream and tell Him to prove Himself to us and make it stop.

But this criminal does not realize God is dying next to Him.

Jesus is suffering with Him.

Jesus is suffering for Him.

Jesus is offering something greater than a life with less pain.

Jesus is offering eternal life.

But the first criminal can't comprehend it.

God is laying beside Him offering salvation, but He wants more proof.

The second criminal accepts it.

Verse 40, **"But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.'"**

The second man rebukes the first.

This man acknowledges his need for salvation.

He asks the other man if he fears God.

Part of that is, I think him acknowledging that Jesus is God.

He is not just saying, "How can you act like that way you know God is going to judge you?"

He is also saying how can you act like that when God is right here?

The second man acknowledges that they deserve to be crucified. They are facing the righteous and just reward for what they have done. I don't know what they've done, but I must've been pretty bad. Must be bad enough that one says, "Yeah, you know what? Y'all are right I do deserve this."

But what is incredible is that he acknowledges this. He does not come to Jesus yelling at Jesus. He does not come to Jesus, demanding what Jesus needs to do for him. He does not go to Jesus telling Jesus how Jesus needs to prove himself. He does not go to Jesus saying why he is deserving of Jesus saving him. He starts by acknowledge that he is getting just what he deserves.

This is part of where all of us have to start. We have to start by just acknowledging that we need salvation. That we need Jesus. Listen, you don't have to have a complete robust theology of sin. I don't know how much theology this guy had. I don't know how much he figured out.

It doesn't seem like he understands that he has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. He doesn't know sin creates a debt that he needs to pay, but he can't. He doesn't know someone to stand in his place for the forgiveness of sins. All he knows he's a bad person. All he knows that he needs help .

Some of you might not have great theology. It's really OK if you don't know anything about hamartiology or soteriology. It's totally fine if you don't know any of those words mean. All you need to know is that you need Jesus.

All you need to know is that your way of doing life on your own through your own strength is not gonna work.  
You need to know that you're broken.  
There's something wrong with you.  
Just like there's something wrong with all of us  
In the only person who can fix it is Jesus.  
Jesus would love to fix it.  
Jesus wants to give you salvation.  
You just have to ask.

Verse **42** **"And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."**

The man asks. He just ask Jesus to remember.  
He just asked Jesus to not forget his face  
It is the most tepid, scared prayer of salvation I've ever heard.  
It is also one of the most beautiful.  
He seems scared to presume that salvation is available to him.

But Jesus says yes

Verse 43, **"And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."**

There's so much to be found in the story.  
And Luke is the only gospel writer to include it.  
One of the things the story reminds us that salvation doesn't come from having perfect theology.  
Salvation doesn't come from being someone who deserves it.  
Because this man does not.  
No matter what you have have done, there's forgiveness,

This man is hours, possibly moments from death  
He has absolutely nothing to offer Jesus.  
All he can offer Jesus is some moments dying and pain that will probably be filled with more sin And cursing.  
But Jesus welcomes him into the kingdom.

Because no one gets into the kingdom based on what you have to offer Jesus, you get in based on what Jesus has to offer you.

You might think that you can't follow Jesus or you can't be a Christian because you're not sure that you're good enough.

Or you're not sure why Jesus would want you.

Remember this name this man who died next to Jesus.

The man, whose only good moment of life was asking Jesus for salvation, while he died.

And I want you to see that while there is breath in your lungs, it is not too late to find salvation.

You can find it on your deathbed.

You can find it while you die if you ask.

I don't recommend waiting.

You should come right now.

But if you do, know that Jesus is waiting for you.

And that all who have faith will get to be with Jesus in paradise.

What does faith look like?

### Point 3: **Acknowledge Christ's divinity (v. 39-43).**

Faith acknowledges that Jesus is divine.

Faith believes Jesus is God.

The man on the cross did not know much.

He did not know how the Trinity worked.

But he knew that Jesus was really God.

And Jesus' death testified to His divinity.

Verse 44, **"It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour,"**

The sixth hour is about noon. In the ninth hour is 3 PM.

While Jesus dies in the middle of the day another miracle happens.

The entire land is covered in darkness for three hours in the middle of the day.

Some kind of supernatural eclipse happens.  
Because while the people will not acknowledge that Jesus is the son of God.

While the people who are nearby were mocking Jesus's death,  
Creation itself was not.

The sun and stars knew what it happened.

The sun disappeared was covered.

Pastor Rob reminded us a few weeks ago that if we don't cry out the stones will to praise God.

The world cries out to say that this is God.

Verse 45, **"while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two."**

As Jesus dies another miracle happens.

The massive curtain in the temple tears.

There's a couple different curtains that this could've been.

Most scholar agree and it seems most likely that it was the curtain leading to the holy of holies.

It was the curtain that separated, the most holy place of the temple.

The place that the presence of God was in.

The place that the high priest was the only one who was allowed in there

And he went in there once a year to make an atonement for sins.

This curtain is close to 60 feet or 18 meters high.

It is 4 inches or 10 cm thick.

Those don't just randomly tear in half from top to bottom.

But now, with the death of Jesus, curtain is torn.

The salvation of Jesus offers gives us access to God overnight.

Now the lowliest, and the weakest of us can go boldly into the presence of God, because of the grace in the blood of Jesus.

The next first Jesus cries out his last words.

**"Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last."**

Jesus dies at the moment that he chooses.

Because even while he is being murdered, he is the one who is in control. He controls the sun and the stars, light and darkness, and He runs the temple.

The other gospels tell us that the curtain tears at this exact moment. And a massive earthquake shakes the whole city.

Verse 47, **"Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, 'Certainly this man was innocent!'"**

The centurion is the one in charge of killing Jesus.

He saw all that happened.

He was an eyewitness to how Jesus died.

A witness to the way Jesus talked and carry himself as he was tortured and killed,

He was in my witness to the miracles that happened when Jesus died.

Because Jesus dies that the world is covered in darkness

Creation has been crying out to Jesus

But now the centurion joins in its chorus.

Verse 48, **"And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. 49 And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things."**

It seems like the disciples are gone, but the women have stayed.

The story ends on a cliffhanger.

Jesus dies and is buried.

Because it is not Easter or the resurrection yet

For all of us the question is, are we acknowledge that Jesus is God?

In many ways, we stand here like crowd women.

Jesus has worked all of these miracles.

We have the words that Jesus spoke in front of us.

And Jesus died for us.

Do you believe him?

Will you cry out like this centurion and like the sun and say surely Jesus was God?

Or will You not?

We live post Easter after the resurrection of Jesus.  
But in many ways we live in the day between.  
Every day can feel like Jesus is dead.  
And we don't know if he will come back.  
We are not quite sure if the resurrection is coming.

Some of us believe and hope.  
And there's some of us who don't.

Some of you are not sure that you believe in Jesus.  
You may not believe he really was the true and only God.  
But He believes in you.  
He believes you are worth dying for.  
He believed that you were worth living for.  
Be believed you were worth leaving all that is in heaven to come down to our broken world and have to walk around in human body.  
And Jesus is with patient and loving arms waiting for you to ask him to remember you.

Jesus has not forgotten you.  
If you want to experience this salvation of the offers and acknowledge that he is God.  
He is not just one God. He has not just one way. He is the only way.  
He is our only hope in life and death.  
And He loves you.

If you have never asked for the salvation of Jesus.  
Or maybe you did once long long ago and you've forgotten him.  
I invite you to come back.

I invite you to come to the arms of Jesus, and find the rest that your soul was made for.

I'm not gonna lead you in an exact prayer.

If you need that I will do that for you come and ask me gladly.

Or ask Pastor Rob, or any of our elders, or some of the women who lead our ministries.

I want you to know that just like the criminal on the cross, you can cry out and whatever words you have as Jesus mercy.

And for all who do they will be with Jesus in Paradise, and the resurrection in the new life that is to come.

As a reminder of where we have been.

We need to follow in Christ's footsteps.

We need to accept the salvation Christ offers.

We need to acknowledge Christ's divinity.

Because Easter is coming.

Resurrection and eternal life are coming.

And they are here for anyone who asks.