

## Day Nineteen

### Jesus: Real, Relevant, Raw and Radical!

#### Today you will be with Me

**Luke 23:32-43(NLT)** Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. <sup>33</sup>When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. **And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left.** <sup>34</sup>**Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”** And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. <sup>35</sup> The crowd watched and the leaders scoffed. “He saved others,” they said, “let him save himself if he is really God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” <sup>36</sup> The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine. <sup>37</sup> They called out to him, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” <sup>38</sup> A sign was fastened above him with these words: “This is the King of the Jews.” <sup>39</sup> **One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you’re at it!”** <sup>40</sup> **But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? <sup>41</sup> We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.”** <sup>42</sup> **Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”** <sup>43</sup> **And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”**

**Matthew 27:35-44(NLT)** After they had nailed him to the cross, the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. <sup>36</sup>Then they sat around and kept guard as he hung there. <sup>37</sup> A sign was fastened above Jesus’ head, announcing the charge against him. It read: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” <sup>38</sup> **Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.** <sup>39</sup> The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. <sup>40</sup> “Look at you now!” they yelled at him. “You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, if you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!” <sup>41</sup> The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus. <sup>42</sup> “He saved others,” they scoffed, “but he can’t save himself! So he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him!” <sup>43</sup> He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him! For he said, “I am the Son of God.” <sup>44</sup> **Even the revolutionaries who were crucified with him ridiculed him in the same way.**

**Isaiah 53:8-9(NLT)** **Unjustly condemned,** he was led away. No one cared that he died without descendants, that his life was cut short in midstream. **But he was struck down for the rebellion of my people. <sup>9</sup> He had done no wrong and had never deceived anyone. But he was buried like a criminal; he was put in a rich man’s grave.**

Jesus is crucified. Next to Him two others are crucified. Two criminals, one on the left and one on the right. Jesus is here because He is fulfilling the very purpose for which

He came. Jesus was born for this moment. He is the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is on the cross because of the Father's plan. Next to Him are two men with their own stories. Even in Jesus' time, kids grew up hoping for a good life, a decent life. Archaeologists have found toy animals on wheels, whistles, rattles and spinning tops. Kids will be kids. Children in Jesus' day played games similar to hopscotch and jacks. When these two criminals were young, they did not think that one day they would end up on a Roman cross.

Life obviously did not turn out the way they wanted. One bad decision led to another bad decision and, before they knew it, so much negative momentum was built that it was impossible to stop. We don't know what crimes they committed, but it had to be pretty bad for them to be in this position. The society they lived in found no more value for them. They could not be sold as slaves, and they could not be enlisted in some form of forced labor. So, they are condemned to die in the most horrific way. "How did we get here?", must have been a question they asked themselves repeatedly. Now as they hang naked on a cross, displayed for everyone to see, their final moments have arrived.

Their sad lives are coming to an even sadder end. When we are young, we painted a picture of a good future. We dream that life will turn out well, and we are filled with hope. But for them, all hope is gone, all dreams abandoned. Nothing to look forward to but a painfully brutal death and last moments of total degradation and shame. But Jesus! Of all the days they could have been crucified, they happened to be crucified with Jesus. They find themselves taken in by all that is happening around them. So many people have come out to see this failed Messiah. As these people pass by, they hurl insults at Jesus, they mock and shake their heads in disapproval. The crowd watches, the leading priests mock, and the soldiers gamble. Mark and Matthew write that both the criminals chimed in and ridiculed Jesus.

Maybe, just maybe, the one criminal thought, "If this is the Messiah, He could save Himself and save us." But that's just the thing, in order to save us, Jesus could not save Himself.

What does Jesus do? Jesus prays. What does He pray? Is He praying for Himself? Is He asking God about the injustice He is suffering? He prays; **"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."** Jesus' first words from the cross are addressed to His Father about the need to forgive those who hurt Him the most. One of these men next to Jesus hears these words, and they are words he never thought he would hear from a Roman cross. In that moment, he thinks about his own life, his misdeeds and where it has led him. He hears the cruel mockery. He sees the vicious taunts. He watches the vile greed of the soldiers. Then he looks at the broken, bloodied

body of Jesus. He sees Jesus' face marred and swollen beyond recognition, and from this mangled mass of flesh comes grace.

This criminal knows his own feelings towards these Romans, and forgiveness and grace are the last thing that comes to mind. How can this Man pray "Forgive them," when He is surrounded by hate? How can this Man pray "Father," when He seems completely abandoned? Something happens to him that would change him forever. He comes to Jesus' defense. He sternly rebukes the other criminal, telling him to shut his mouth. He admits that he is getting what he deserves and then simply say,; **"Jesus remember me..."** Then one of the most poignant things happen that we read in the Gospels. Jesus' last conversation, not His last words, but His last conversation is with a criminal.

Jesus speaks to someone at the end of a failed life. The end of a wasted life. The end of a disappointed life. What would Jesus say to someone, who has wasted all their potential? What would Jesus say to someone who hurt others? What would Jesus say to someone that added no value to society? What would Jesus say to someone who has run out of time? ***And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."***

What about restitution? What about making things right? You see, that's the power of grace. Jesus received what He did not deserve, so that we would not receive what we do deserve. Grace does not demand what it knows we cannot produce. Mercy always triumphs over judgment. One day when we step into glory, and we meet the criminal that is now our brother, he will tell us triumphantly, "Thank God for Grace that hung on a cross!"

**Prayer:**

- **Who do you need to forgive? Give them the gift of forgiveness...**
- **Ask the Lord to help you see people's potential instead of their failure.**
- **Don't stop praying for those who seem to mock your faith in Jesus. Grace changes mockers into saints.**
- **Pray for God's grace to flood your relationships, especially in those you struggle with.**