

Intro of me:

I'm Daniel Simmons, one of the pastors here at the church. It is an honor to preach God's word to you today.

Let me pray, I'm going to ask God to speak to us through His word and change us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

-“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord my Rock and my Redeemer.” Work in us mightily today, draws us to you, sets us free through the power of the gospel, and empower us to live for you and to love others and to make disciples Amen.

Introduction to Sermon:

Last week, Pastor JD preached out of Luke 23 and said that Luke 23 a dividing line of eternity.

- He talked about the continental divide that runs through the Appalachian Mountains, and that when it rains on them, some will flow to the Atlantic Ocean and some to the Gulf of Mexico. The rain starts from the same cloud, falls and lands at the top of the mountain only inches apart, but winds up separated by thousands of miles simply bc/one drop fell east of the diving line and the other west of the diving line.

Pastor JD showed us that Luke 23 says that same principal is true about us in relation to eternity. He preached about 5 different people and their response to Jesus. He challenged us to think carefully and see which of those people we saw ourselves in.

My job is easier bc/ I'm going to bring us home by just looking at 2 men. I have a simple dichotomy for you today displayed through two men who were crucified with Jesus. One man rejects Jesus, one man accepts him. They are emblematic of the choice we have before us today.

These two men's lives call out to you today from the Word of God and ask:

What are you going to do with Jesus on the cross? One day you are going to die just like these two men, so **Which side of eternity will you fall on?**

Church, **it isn't enough to believe that Jesus died on the cross in some general sense.** All of these people knew that, and I've met people my whole life that knew Jesus died on the cross and it didn't make any difference in their lives. **You need to know why Jesus died, and then to make a decision: how you will respond to Jesus on the cross?**
Let's get started.

³² 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, That can't be a good place. Someone picks you up for a date and says they are taking you to a place called the Skull, run. Don't go there. If one of my daughter's says a guy has asked her out on a date and tells me his name is Skull, she isn't going. there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. 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!" 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."

I want to point out just one thing in this paragraph, and I know there is much here. It is in verse 35: **And the people stood by, watching**

There is a time and a place to think, to ponder and to weigh the claims of Jesus. There is room for that, and there is room for that here, today, right now. But I would remiss if I did not tell you that at some point, you will need to respond to Jesus on the cross. Ultimately, **to not respond to Jesus is to reject him**

Think about it like this. If a man asks for a woman's hand in marriage, and she says she needs some time to think about it, at some point, she will need to come back and say yes or no, OR, the man should realize that her silence is a rejection.

While we know you do need to think, ponder and pray about the claims of Christ, you and I both know that you do not know what tomorrow will bring, and given that this decision determines your eternity, it should and it must carry a sense of urgency in your heart.

So let's look at these two men who are killed with Jesus.

These two men begin their last day on earth in the same exact spot, they are almost identical when the story begin, but by the end of the day they are separated by eternity. (they are two drops of rain that fell inches apart on the continental divide but wound-up thousands of miles apart)

Let's look at the first man who rejects Jesus, verse 39:

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

It is easy to look at this man and judge him as a wicked man who is also an idiot and getting what he deserves. I'm mean, after all, he is a serious criminal. He's not getting crucified for a speeding ticket. But you need to ask yourself, **why did this guy reject Jesus?**

2 Reasons:

1. He gets carried away by the crowd.
2. He get carried away by his circumstances

Most of us, if we are honest, can relate to these. We know what it is to be caught up with the crowd and we know how easy it is to get caught up in our own circumstances.

· It is like when you go into the ocean, and before you know it, you are 200 yards don't the beach. You don't even realize your moving, and yet the truth is that if you did nothing about it, you would be carried 2 or 3 miles down the beach.

This man is swept along without ever really considering why Jesus is dying.

We shouldn't be too harsh on this man. In terms of the crowd, the religious leaders say he can't be the savior, the secular rulers say he isn't a king. He does put a test out there for Jesus, right? Jesus could prove in that moment his power to save this man physically by taking him off the cross, but Jesus doesn't do it.

If you look at Jesus like this, maybe it isn't so hard to understand why so many people reject Jesus on the cross.

SO WHAT IN THE WORLD DOES THE OTHER DYING MAN SEE THAT Everyone else seems to be BLIND to?

Let's take a look:

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

First Thing He Sees That No One Else Sees:

1. **He sees his greatest need**

Unlike everyone else, who sees God as a means to an end, this man sees Jesus as the end.

Time in Poland when this became real to me...

Hebrews 11:6 changed my life forever. It says, *"And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."*

It was the "rewards" part that tripped me up. I kept thinking over and over again, writing list of rewards like health, success in sports, work, with girls, and in my case, Wendy, and yet when I was honest about what the Bible said, I could see no promise of any of these. And somehow in my study, I stumbled across Genesis 15:1 "Do not be afraid Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." It hit me like a bolt of lightning, the one reward that God promises is the best reward, it is the one that changes eternity, it is the one I have no control over, I didn't earn it, I can't lose it, and it is a relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus is the reward. I need nothing else in this life except him. I can be single and be full of joy and live a fully satisfied life, I can be married to someone other than Wendy and be full of joy, I can be married to her and be full of joy, but I cannot be separated from Jesus and have joy and have a satisfied life. He is the non-negotiable. I don't need a great career, I don't need health, I don't need long life, I don't need wealth, I don't need a big ministry, I need Jesus. Period. End of Story. If I have Jesus, I have everything I need for life and godliness.

This dying man believed that. **He knew his greatest need was to be with Jesus.**

2. He understood his guilt before God
we are receiving the due reward of our deeds

The first dying man didn't see much difference between himself and Jesus. They both had the same fundamental problem: dying on a cross.

The second dying man sees something much different. He sees his own guilt and he sees that he deserves this punishment. This man wouldn't be talking about his punishment from Rome. He was like Barabbas, an insurrectionist. He would have called himself a freedom fighter or a patriot. He would have considered the verdict from Rome to be unjust. This man sees something much bigger bc/he sees Jesus clearly.

He is seeing his own life in light of the life of Jesus, and he knows that before God, he is guilty and deserves to die.

When someone sees God AND their sin will know that sin is first and foremost against God.

When you sin against your spouse or your friend, you have first sinned against God.

A person who sees Jesus clearly recognizes this, confesses this, and then...makes an audacious request...

3. He makes an audacious request of God

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

What nerve. "When you come back and set up your kingdom, whenever that is, will you remember me, a criminal that brings nothing to the table and that you have only known for about an hour?"

To quote Pastor JD here, **"the only thing crazier than the request is that Jesus grants it."**

And Jesus grants it the only way Jesus ever grants a request: Better than we can ask or imagine.

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

The guy asks to be merely *remembered* at some time in the future. Jesus says, "No, no, TODAY you will not be merely remembered, you will be WITH ME." Paradise is not the big win here, Jesus is, he's the prize. He's the prize for this dying man, and he is the prize for me and you. The great gift of Christianity is being united with Jesus.

For this to happen there has to be a change in you that you cannot produce. It is not a change of circumstances (this man is going to die on a cross). It isn't behavior change (this man isn't going to have a change for that). **It is a change of identity and position.** (Write that down)

When you confess and repent of your sin, he takes your sin from you and puts it on himself. But he doesn't just take your sin, he gives you his identity and position before the father. Ephesians 2:6 says, *"And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."* Notice that the word seated is in the past tense. That means if you are a Christian, you are already seated with Jesus. So whether you live or die, today, right now, you are with Jesus.

He gives you his place before the father and he takes your place on the cross. He will pay for all the sin you have ever done and ever will do and He will give you all of his righteousness. When God looks at you, he will see the splendor and the goodness of Jesus, and he will love you the way He loves his son.

Here is how you know you have been changed by the gospel when:

1. You will live in freedom, bc/you will stop striving to earn salvation by good works. You know that you already have a right standing before God, and you can never lose it.

2. You will live in freedom bc/you can handle the criticism of others bc/you know you have the approval of God. Nothing in this world will ever need to be a master to you again. You have the unending and unshakable approval and love of God. His word over you is more powerful and more true than anything anyone can say to you or anything you can even say to yourself.
3. You will be incredibly grateful and humble bc/your salvation was a complete and total gift. You brought nothing to the table but you received everything.
4. You understand joy even in suffering and sorrow. You may not understand the particular reasons for every trial or season of suffering, but you know that since Jesus suffered for you, he is with you. You will know that since it was through suffering that salvation was earned for you, that your suffering does have some type of purpose.
5. You see sinners and feel deep compassion and love, not judgment or pride (Father forgive them they know not what they do.) You will remember that you were just like that criminal on a cross, and Jesus saved you as radically as he saved that man. You will desire that for anyone and everyone who does not know Jesus.

Closing: Is this you yet? Is your life with Jesus yet? I want this for you, all the people here who know and love God want this for you, but most importantly, this is what God wants for you. That is why he died on the cross.

--Make a call for salvation?