

"What Happened on the Cross?"

A Discussion Guide

Outlines & Questions for Reflection and Discussion

The following outlines and questions are designed to help the reader grasp the significance of what Jesus said from the cross. They may be used in personal or group Bible study.

Following a brief outline of the highlights of each chapter, there are a series of questions. The list includes two types of questions. The first type is intended to clarify ("What did Jesus mean?"). The second type is intended to apply ("What difference will this truth make in my life?").

Chapter One: "Forgiveness at the Cross"

Proposition: In Luke 23:34, we learn that Jesus' forgiveness on the cross involved 3 actions.

Context: What happened to Jesus?

1. The Violation of His Rights

2. The Violation of His Reputation

I. Jesus' forgiveness involved Intercession.

"FATHER, forgive them..."

II. Jesus' forgiveness involved Intervention.

"Father, FORGIVE them..."

A. He asked for Permission.

B. He asked for Protection.

C. He asked for Pardon.

III. Jesus' forgiveness involved an Indictment.

"...for they KNOW NOT what they do."

1. Imagine being there, hearing those words, "Father, forgive them." What do you think the soldiers thought when they heard what Jesus said?

2. For whom did Jesus pray on the cross?

3. The first word Jesus uttered from the cross was a prayer. Why and how is that significant?

4. Jesus did not say, "I forgive them," but "Father, forgive them." Why?

5. When Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them," there is a sense in which He was asking the Father for

permission. Permission for what?

6. If Jesus had not prayed this prayer, what would have happened?

7. In what way was Jesus' example of forgiveness used as a Model in the early church? Check out: Ephesians 4:32; I Peter 2:13-24

8. When Jesus said, "for they know not what they do," was He saying that the ignorance of His executioners excused their behavior?

9. Of what were those at the cross ignorant? What did they not know? Check out: I Corinthians 2:8; John 1:10-11

10. When Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them," He was not asking His Father to overlook the sin. A holy God can't overlook sin. The penalty must be paid. What was the unspoken implication of what Jesus said?

11. Was Jesus' prayer answered? In what way?

12. Suppose your non-Christian neighbor, who has very little understanding of Scripture, asked you, "Why did Jesus die on the cross? What made His death different from the death of other great men? What is it that makes the cross so significant for you Christians, 2000 years after the fact?" How would you answer these questions?

Chapter Two: "It's Never Too Late"

Proposition: Two events related to Jesus' saying in Luke 23:43 reveal that it is never too late.

I. At the cross, a Man admitted his need for Eternal Life (39-42).

A. He recognized the truth about himself.

1. I am guilty (40).

2. I deserve punishment (41).

B. He recognized the truth about Jesus.

1. Jesus is sinless (41).

2. Jesus can save (42).

II. At the cross, Jesus provided Eternal Life (43).

A. Jesus' statement revealed His Control.

"VERILY, I say unto thee, TODAY..."

1. Over the destiny of the sinner

2. Over His own destiny

B. Jesus' statement revealed His Compassion.

"Verily, I say unto THEE..."

C. Jesus' statement revealed His Completion.

"...with Me in PARADISE."

1. How did the crowd at the cross respond to Jesus' first saying? What impact did His words have on those at the scene of the cross? (Note: Luke highlighted several responses in verses 35, 36, 39).
2. The rulers, the soldiers, and the first thief all hurled the same accusation at Jesus. What was it? See verses 35, 37, 39.
3. What do we know about the second malefactor?
4. Something happened in the heart of the second malefactor. How do we know that, according to verse 40?
5. One moment the second thief was attacking Jesus, while moments later, he was defending Jesus. What made the difference?
6. What did the thief admit about himself? In verse 40? In verse 41?
7. Why is it so hard for us to admit the truth about ourselves?
8. Is a person saved the moment he admits the truth about himself? If not, what else is needed?
9. What did the thief recognize to be true of Jesus? In verse 41? In verse 42?
10. Was the thief saved that day? How do we know, according to verse 43?
11. How could you use Jesus' statement in verse 43 to respond to individuals who said to you: "You must be baptized in order to be saved." "If you don't watch how you live, you'll end up in purgatory." "Unless you keep the sacraments, you can't go to heaven."
12. In what way do Jesus' words in verse 43 reveal His control over His own destiny?
13. Sometimes we forget that both thieves appealed to Jesus that day. Both even had a faith of sorts. Even the first thief asked Jesus to save him (39). But it was a deficient faith. Something was missing. What was it?
14. The second thief was different. He wanted to be saved, not from his cross, but from his what?
15. To which man did Jesus offer eternal life?
16. Is it possible for a person today to ask Jesus to "save" him for the wrong reasons? If so, when is that the case?
17. What are some examples of gospel presentations used today that appeal to "felt" needs?

18. Suppose a friend said to you, "I have wasted my life. I wish I could change my past, but I can't. Eternity is staring at me, and I am afraid. I have never been religious. Is it too late for me?" How could you use the incident of the repentant thief to help this friend?

Chapter Three: "No One Ever Cared Like Jesus"

Proposition: Jesus' third saying on the cross, as recorded in John 19:26-27, shows in a very practical way that He cares for the needs of His own.

I. Jesus comforted Mary (26).

A. He fulfilled His Duty as a Son.

B. He established His Dominion as the Savior.

II. Jesus commissioned John (27).

A. He gave him a new Responsibility.

B. He introduced a new Relationship.

1. Of the four gospel writers, John alone records Jesus' third saying from the cross, and in his gospel, John puts this saying first.

a) Why is the material in the four gospel accounts different?

b) Which of the four writers had a firsthand, eyewitness perspective of what happened on the cross?

2. John says there were women at the cross that day (25). How many were there, and who were they?

3. John refers to the second woman as Jesus' "mother's sister" (25).

a) What was her name, according to Matthew 27:56?

b) Why didn't John record her name?

4. Matthew 27:55 says there were "many women" at the cross that day, loyal to Jesus. Where were all the men?

5. To what individuals did Jesus speak this third saying?

6. When Jesus spoke to Mary (26), He fulfilled His duty as a Son. In what way? Check out: Exodus 20:12

7. Just think of what Mary had been through in her life. List some of the painful experiences she had already endured.

8. Did Mary have other children? Why did Jesus not entrust Mary to their care? Check out: Matthew 13:55; John 7:5

9. Jesus here addressed Mary, not as "Mother," but as "Woman." Is that significant?

- a) Does the Bible teach that Mary is the "Mother of God?"
- b) Jesus' words to Mary establish His dominion as the Divine Savior. How?
- 10. In verse 27, Jesus commissioned John, "Behold thy mother." What did Jesus mean?
- 11. Jesus gave John an important responsibility. Did John fulfill it? For the answer: Check out John's narrative in verse 27.
- 12. In what does Jesus' third saying from the cross reveal His Compassion?
- 13. The significance of Jesus' third saying goes far deeper than mere sentiment. When Jesus committed the care of His earthly mother to His spiritual son, He introduced a new relationship. What type of relationship?
- 14. As followers of Christ, we are part of the family of God. What responsibility do we have to each other? See: John 13:34-35
- 15. When Jesus Christ established the Church, He formed a new humanity, a new people. As followers of Christ, our bond in Christ is stronger than blood ties. What does that mean practically? Check out: I John 3:11, 16
- 16. What are some practical ways we can express care to one another in the church this week?

Chapter Four: "Alone on the Cross"

Proposition: As we ponder Jesus' fourth saying, as recorded in Matthew 27:46, we learn that while all alone on the cross, Jesus felt 3 horrid pains.

I. While alone on the cross, Jesus felt the Anguish of sin.

"My God, My God"

A. He fulfilled prophecy.

B. He faced hell for us.

II. While alone on the cross, Jesus felt the Agony of silence.

"Why"

III. While alone on the cross, Jesus felt the Abandonment of a Son.

"Have you forsaken me?"

- 1. Notice, from Matthew's perspective, the details at the scene of the cross. The crowd mocked Jesus with three accusations in verses 39-44. What were they?
- 2. Darkness covered the land (45). What does darkness signify in the Bible? (see Amos 8:9-10)
- 3. In His fourth saying, Jesus cries out, not "My Father," but "My God." Why is that significant? (two specific reasons)

4. Why did Jesus identify with Psalm 22 while hanging on the cross?
5. II Corinthians 5:21 is a key which unlocks the mystery of Jesus' fourth saying. What actually happened during those three dark hours of anguish on the cross?
6. The text says that Jesus "cried with a loud voice." Why is that significant?
7. In His prayer, Jesus cried, "Why?" Is it appropriate for us to ask "Why" when we pray? When is it inappropriate?
8. During those hours, the Light of the world was hanging in darkness. Meditate on this. What was Jesus feeling when He said He was "forsaken" by God?
9. To be forsaken of God was much more a source of anguish to Jesus than it would be to us. Why?
10. How did the crowd respond to Jesus' words? (see verses 47-49)
11. In light of Jesus' fourth saying from the cross, what should be our attitude towards sin in our lives?
12. By His example, what does Jesus teach us about how to respond when we feel alone and forgotten by God?

Chapter Five: "Suffering on the Cross"

Proposition: As we consider Jesus' fifth saying from the cross, recorded in John 19:28, we learn that there were three reasons our Lord uttered these words of suffering.

I. He fulfilled prophecy.

II. He felt pain.

A. Physical pain

B. Spiritual pain

III. He finished the plan.

Challenge:

1. He thirsted so we might never thirst.

2. In a sense, He still thirsts.

1. Verse 28 begins, "After this." What had just happened that set the context for Jesus' fifth statement from the cross?

2. Why did Jesus say, "I thirst"? Verse 28 says that the Scripture might be fulfilled. What particular Scripture(s)?

3. When Jesus cried, "I thirst," it was not merely liquid that Jesus wanted, but something else. What was it, in light of John's narrative in verse 28?

4. What other facets of the Messiah's death did the Scriptures predict in the Old Testament? Check out the following: Ps 41:9; Ps 31:11; Ps 35:11; Isa 53:7; Isa 53:9; Isa 53:12; Ps 22:16; Ps 109:25; Ps 22:16; Ps 109:25; Ps 22:7; Ps 22:18; Isa 53:12; Ps 22:1; Ps 31:5; Ps 34:20; Isa 53:9
5. What was Gnosticism, and what did the gnostics teach about Jesus? In what way did John's record of Jesus' fifth statement correct the false teaching of the gnostics that afflicted the church at the end of the 1st century?
6. Jesus cried out "I thirst" at the close of the three hour period of darkness. Why is that significant? What had Jesus just endured?
7. Notice that when Jesus said, "I thirst," it was not a request, but a statement of condition. He did not ask for a drink, but rather stated how He felt. What do these words reveal to us about our Savior?
8. He Who caused water to flow from the rock in the wilderness, and He who turned water into wine, could have easily spoken the word, and quenched His thirst. But Jesus did not. Why not? Check out John 7:37.
9. On the cross, Jesus thirsted due to the physical and spiritual pain He endured. Yet He also thirsted for the lives of thirsty men and women. Is there a sense in which Jesus still thirsts? Think about Jesus' words in Revelation 3:20.
10. What are some practical steps we can take to learn to appreciate more fully what our Lord endured on the cross for us?

Chapter Six: "The Day He Finished What We Started"

Proposition: According to John 19:30, there are two reasons we can know for sure that Jesus won the victory at the cross.

I. We can know that there is victory at the cross because of what Jesus SAID.

"It is finished!" (tetelestai)

A. He finished His life.

B. He finished His Work.

1. He won the victory over Sin.

2. He won the victory over Satan.

3. He won the victory over Death.

II. We can know that there is victory at the cross because of what Jesus DID.

A. He died as a Victor.

1. He bowed His head.

2. He gave up His spirit.

B. He conquered death as a Victor.

Implications for us:

1. We must live in light of what Jesus finished.
2. There's no need for us to add to what Jesus finished.

1. Discuss the following, "There is victory at the cross. Jesus finished the problem we started." What does that mean?
2. In His sixth saying from the cross, Jesus did NOT say, "I am finished." He said, "It is finished." Why is that significant? What had He finished?
3. On the cross, Jesus won the victory over three great enemies that have plagued mankind since the garden of Eden. What are these enemies?

- a. He won the victory over Sin.
- b. He won the victory over Satan.
- c. He won the victory over Death.

4. Suppose a friend said to you, "I am struggling in my life. I feel defeated and powerless to change. How can I experience victory?" How would you help that friend? What passages from Scripture would you use to help your friend see that victory is available through Christ over the enemies of sin, Satan, and death?

- a. Victory over Sin?

See: Romans 3:23-24; 6:6-7

- b. Victory over Satan

See: Hebrews 2:14; Colossians 2:14-15

- c. Victory over Death

See: Hebrews 2:15; I Corinthians 15:20-22, 54-58

5. Give support for the statement, "Jesus did not die like other men."
6. If Jesus won the victory over sin, Satan, and death, why do we still struggle?
7. The problem is not with Jesus' provision. The problem is with us. How so?

We need to learn to live in light of what Jesus finished.

Check out: Romans 6:11-13

8. Since our redemption is complete, there is no need for us to add to what Jesus finished. Yet many try. What are some specific ways people ignore the sufficiency of Jesus' redemption?
9. Think about this follow-up question. How does a "legalist" ignore the sufficiency of Christ's redemption?

What does a legalist do? What counsel does the Bible give to legalists?

Check out: Colossians 2:20-23; Galatians 4:8-11; 5:1

Chapter Seven: "Where to Find Contentment"

Proposition: As we consider Luke 23:46, we learn that our Lord had two aims in mind when He spoke His final words from the cross.

I. Aim #1: Jesus calls our attention to His Plan.

A. It was His plan to fulfill prophecy.

B. It was His plan to free fallen humanity.

II. Aim #2: Jesus calls our attention to His Power.

A. Jesus revealed His power over death.

B. Jesus revealed His power over the devil.

Implications: We can know 2 vital truths...

1. Our contentment does not depend on our circumstances.

2. When we know Christ, death is not the end.

1. What is contentment? In general, how does Jesus exhibit contentment on the cross?

2. Of Jesus' seven sayings from the cross, Luke recorded three: the first (34), the second (43), and the last (46). Notice particularly the first and last sayings. What are the similarities and differences between Jesus' first and last sayings from the cross?

3. Notice the comment in Luke's narrative in verse 46, "And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice." What did Jesus say with a loud voice?

4. In Jesus' seventh saying, He quoted from Psalm 31:5. What is significant about the fact that Jesus identified with this particular Psalm? (clue: notice the contrast in the use of the word "hand" in Psalm 31; see verses 5, 15)

5. When Jesus uttered from the cross, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit," it was not for His benefit, nor for the Father's. He said it for our benefit. How so?

6. What happened right after Jesus uttered His seventh saying?

See: The end of verse 46, "And having said this, He gave up the spirit."

7. Respond to the statement, "Jesus died unlike any other person."

8. How does Jesus' seventh saying from the cross teach us that our contentment does not depend on our circumstances?

9. How does the following observation encourage you? "The same hands that received our Blessed Lord hold us. The same ears that heard our Savior's prayer from the cross hear our humble cries."

10. Suppose a friend said to you, "I don't seem to have very much contentment in my life. Can you help me?" How could you use the statement Jesus made from the cross to help your friend?