

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Characters on the Road to the Cross, Part 2

Scripture: Luke 23:26-33

Code: 42-284

We return to the study of the gospel of Luke and I ask you to turn in your Bible, if you will, or there's one in the pew for you to use, to Luke 23...Luke 23. The New Testament begins with four historical accounts of the life of Christ...Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The first three, Matthew, Mark and Luke, are strictly speaking history's of our Lord's life and ministry, right through to His death and resurrection. John focuses more on specific miracles of Christ and the sayings of Christ. All four of the gospels are intended, however, to give us the most complete understanding of the Savior of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have had a wonderful journey through Luke's history which when compared with Matthew and Mark and John, gives us the complete revealed account of Christ. As we come to the cross of Christ, we will be mingling all four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, to understand the events and the elements and the components of His dying and of His resurrection.

But as we come to the text that is before us in Luke 23, there are elements of this text which are unique only to Luke. While Matthew and Mark both refer to Simon of Cyrene as does Luke, there are other characters along the road to the cross to which the other writers do not refer. And so, Luke gives us some glimpses into the characters on the final road to the cross that we don't find in the other gospels.

Let's look at verse 26...Luke 23:26 and I'll read down through verse 32.

“And when they led Him away, they laid hold of one Simon of Cyrene coming in from the country and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus. And there were following Him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 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.” Then they will begin to say to the mountains, “Fall on us,” and to the hills, “Cover us.” For if they do these things in the green tree, what will happen in the dry?’ And two others also who were criminals were being led away to be put to death with Him.”

The Apostle John said, “He came unto His own, His own received Him not.” That is the almost universal summary of the response of Israel to the arrival of their Messiah. After waiting for millennia for the coming of the Messiah, generation after generation after generation with hope burning bright in their hearts that the Messiah would come, finally He came. And in spite of the fact that He taught like

no man had ever taught, in spite of the fact that He spoke divine truth, in spite of the fact that He demonstrated compassion like no other had demonstrated compassion, in spite of the fact that He offered salvation, eternal life in the Kingdom, demonstrated His divine power by casting out demons, curing diseases and raising the dead, in spite of the fact that He had total control over nature and could create food to feed massive multitudes, in spite of all of these things, they rejected Him. This is the greatest story of religious apostasy in all of Israel's rather tragic history. He came unto His own, His own received Him not. That becomes clear again on the final steps to Skull Hill.

As we meet the characters along the road, we find really only two of them out of the multitude of people who will respond savingly to Jesus Christ. One is a stranger from north Africa and the other is a thief to be crucified on one side of Him. Oh, there is a third later on in the scene around the cross, an unnamed Roman centurion who confesses that Jesus is the Son of God. But it is the few for sure, as over against the many who reject Him. And that's exactly what Jesus said way back at the beginning of His ministry when He preached the famous Sermon on the Mount and said, "There's a broad road that leads to destruction and many there be who go in that way. And there is a narrow gate and a narrow way that leads to life everlasting and few there be that find it. And so the biblical record reminds us that it is the few, one stranger, one thief, for the moment, one Roman centurion. The masses, the many, the religious, the crowds under the greatest privilege that any group of people had ever experienced or will ever experience, the very presence of the eternal Son of God do not believe, will not believe and upon them judgment is pronounced.

So here at the end of His life, at the end of His incredible, miraculous, powerful, compassionate, truth-filled ministry as He walks the last couple of hundred yards from Pilate's judgment hall to Skull Hill where He will be crucified, He is accompanied by many from this chosen nation called Israel. But tragically, the many reject Him as they have all along.

Is this a surprise? Did it all go bad? This is no surprise. He is the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. His rejection and crucifixion were in the plans and purposes of God, God having allowed them from before there ever was a creation at all. And all the way through His life He said that He was the one who came to die, who came to give His life a ransom for many. He told His followers again and again that He would be arrested by the Jewish leaders, that He would be crucified and that He would rise again from the dead.

So, here we find Him being escorted out of Pilate's Judgment Hall after the mockery of injustice that has gone on in the night and the early hours of the morning, headed to His execution. It needs to be noted, I think, that there are some people conspicuous by their absence. There is no mention of any of the disciples along the final road to Skull Hill. And we might ask the question, where is Peter? Where is John? Where is James? Where's Andrew? Where's Philip? Where's the rest?

Well we know the story, they have scattered in terror upon the arrest of Jesus, fearing for their own lives and feeling that all their hopes and dreams were smashed and it was all over. They aren't there. When Jesus does arrive at the cross and is being crucified, the Apostle John shows up far away along with the four women who were especially near and dear to Jesus at a distance. But neither the women nor any of the Apostles are mentioned on the road to the cross. He walks this road, as it were, alone, while all those who were nearest and dearest to Him have fled for the moment in fear.

But who is there? First of all, we saw, last time, the mixed murderers are there. Verse 26, "When they led Him away," they referring to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council who put Him on trial and pressed for His execution. The Jewish Council made up of Pharisees and scribes, including Sadducees, the chief priests and the high priests. You can throw in the Roman soldiers because they would be the ones responsible to get Him to His execution and actually execute Him. So it is this combination of mixed murderers made up of the Romans and the Jews and made up predominantly of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leaders, but accompanied as well by the rabble crowd they had seduced into screaming for His crucifixion.

They represent the enemies of Jesus. They are hostile. They are vicious. They want Him dead. They hate Him. And certainly there are those kinds of people today as there have always been those kinds of people in the world who have no love for Christ, no interest in Christ, but rather resent Him, are hostile to Him. They are the anti-Christ's who exist in the world at all times and in all places.

The second that we meet on the way to the cross is the supporting stranger. And we go from a group, mixed murderers, to a solitary individual. They laid hold, the Roman soldiers did, or seized one man named Simon of Cyrene coming in from the country and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus. And we met him in detail last week.

Simon is a common Jewish name indicating that he is a Jew. Cyrene is an area in north Africa which today would be Libya in the area of Tripoli. Josephus tells us, the Jewish historian, that there was a large Jewish community living in Cyrene. And here is one of the Jews from Cyrene who along with a lot of other Jews from Cyrene and a whole lot of other places in the world had come to Jerusalem for the Passover. We also know in Acts chapter 2 and verse 10 that there was a synagogue for Cyrenian Jews in the city of Jerusalem which means there was a significant number of them who came for Passover. This is one of them. He's not a part of the trial up to now. This may be the first time he ever met Jesus because he's just coming in from the country, arriving on Passover day to celebrate Passover. He walks in, finds this entourage leading these three criminals to death, and he is by the Roman soldiers seized and given the responsibility of carrying Jesus' cross.

It might be unusual to have him so identified since he is a rather randomly selected solitary stranger, except for the fact that he is important for us to know because he becomes a believer. How do we know that? Mark introduces him as Simon of Cyrene, the father of Rufus and Alexander. Mark is

writing in Rome to the Roman church and by doing that he identifies this Simon and there were many Simons, it would be like the name Joseph, a very common name, and there were many Simons. The church at Rome needs to know this is the Simon from Cyrene who is the father of Rufus and Alexander. That is to say, a familiar family to you. Romans 16:13 refers to Rufus as a choice man in the Lord in the church at Rome.

So, when you put the story together, a stranger plucked out of the crowd by the Roman soldiers follows Jesus carrying His cross, goes to the cross, watches the event of the crucifixion of Christ. Comes to faith in Christ through that rather humanly speaking random event, ends up going back to Cyrene, is used by God to start the church there. The church in Cyrene flourishes so much that the book of Acts says they sent out preachers, Acts chapter 11, to preach the gospel of Christ. One of their preachers ends up in the church at Antioch and commissions Paul and Barnabas to go on a missionary journey.

It's amazing that what appeared as a random act by the Roman soldiers is, in fact, a divine sovereign work of God. He plucks up this man, leads him to the cross, brings him to faith in Christ, sends him back to Cyrene. A church begins, apostles and preachers from that church are sent out with the gospel. Simon relocates to Rome with his sons and becomes a familiar part of the Roman church.

Nothing is really random at all. The sovereign God oversees everything. So we meet the mixed murderers and this supporting stranger who supports our Lord by carrying His cross.

That leads us now to the third group, the curious crowd. Verse 27, "And there were following Him a great multitude of the people."

Now we're familiar with this great multitude. We met them, first of all, when Jesus came into the city on Palm Monday...it was a Monday actually. The best chronology indicates that. When He came into the city on that prior Monday, He was greeted by a massive multitude who had been basically collected together around the reality that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. The miracle of raising this man from the dead was well-known to everybody in the vicinity and the area and the word had spread like wildfire about His power and they already knew about His power because He had been ministering for three years in their nation. But that final miracle drew the crowd together and there was this kind of growing feeling that maybe He would be the Messiah and fulfill all their messianic hopes and desires. And they're all there saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord," hailing Him as their Messiah as He comes into the city throwing palm branches at His feet as He rides in fulfilling the prophecy of Ezekiel on the foal of a donkey before them.

But He doesn't do what they expect Him to do. What they have ingrained in the core of their minds the Messiah must do and that is bring a military war against Rome, throw the Romans out, take the

nation back, give it its freedom and its independence. Instead of doing that, the second day He comes into town He attacks the temple, not the Romans. And He attacks the leadership of the temple, the priests, the high priests, the chief priests. He assaults Judaism and identifies it as an abomination to God, as apostate.

And they start to turn. And even when He teaches for the next couple of days, they're not seeing what they expect the Messiah to do. And He keeps talking about His death. And eventually the crowd is in such a state of limbo and confusion that the leaders of Israel can seduce them to scream for His crucifixion.

So it is this curious crowd that doesn't know whether they should love Him or hate Him. And it's a large crowd. They are the fickle mass who can be swayed by this and that trend, the whims and the winds that blow at random, vacillating on the one hand, hoping He might be their Messiah, knowing of His divine power. On the other hand, seduced by the leaders to believe He is satanic and that yes He has power but it is devil power.

They are a disappointed crowd. They're not the haters of the leadership, they're just disappointed. If you drop down to verse 48, "After He is crucified all the multitudes that came together for the spectacle when they observed what had happened began to return, beating their chests."

This is the universal sign of grief. They were disappointed. They wanted Him to be their Messiah. It didn't look like it was going to go that way, but probably till the very last, some of them were hoping that maybe He would do something right down to the very end and fulfill their dreams and their desires. Maybe He would come off the cross. It was even suggested to Him that He might get off that cross and save Himself and everybody else if He was really the Messiah. That's what the thief who represented, I think, the thinking of the people thought. You have one final opportunity, then He died. And the crowd left, pounding their chests.

They were confused. They were vacillating. They were fickle. And they were disappointed. They had feelings for Jesus but no commitment to Him. Their minds were dark they were full of ignorance. They were not responsive to the truth He taught. They may have been a little bit ambiguous. They were not His enemies. Neither would they confess Him as Lord. And they are just as tragic as the mixed murderers because they're going to end up in the same hell, under the same judgment.

And fourthly, we meet another group..the mixed murderers, the supporting stranger, the curious crowd, and this is the group that dominates our attention in the text because it is to this group that Jesus speaks...the weeping women...the weeping women. Verse 28...verse 27, rather, "Women also were following Him who were mourning and lamenting Him."

At this point we might say, “Well is this Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of our Lord, several other women who accompanied them?”

No...no, as I said, they don't appear along the road to the cross, although later on they appear far off at a distance from the cross, far enough, by the way, for Jesus to see and to speak to His mother and John. But this is not those women.

Who is this? Well these are the professional mourners. Nobody who was a Jew who was going to a cross to be executed by the Romans deserved to die without an appropriate kind of dutiful mourning. This is traditional for a group of professional female mourners to wail at the death of someone, particularly someone like this, the likes of which there had never lived on the face of the earth. These are the official mourners who are doing their duty. And I'm sure it was not without a measure of sincerity.

By the way, never anywhere in the four gospels is there recorded that a woman was hostile to Jesus, that a woman rebuked Jesus, that a woman spoke evil of Jesus...never. Many of the men did. There is no record of any woman being hostile toward Jesus in the gospels. I think part of that is because there was a beauty about Him, there was a compassion about Him, there was a sympathy about Him that appealed to all that is good in the heart of a woman.

And so, we couldn't assume that these women though they are official mourners, doing their official duty, because that's what you were supposed to do, did it without any sense of sympathy as they watched this most unique of all men who had ever lived in the full bloom of magnificence of His manhood, going bloodied and covered with spit to a cross.

Mourning is a word that means...it's koptomi, it means to pound your chest. Again that's the symbol of the agony of death. The word “lamenting” is simply verbal wailing. So they were beating themselves and verbally wailing as our Lord went to the cross.

And by the way, this is not a fulfillment of Zechariah 12:10 to 14 which says, “Some day in the future, Israel will look on the one whom they have pierced and mourn for Him as an only Son.” That is yet future. There will come a day when the whole of the nation, Israel, will pound their chests and wail and lament, mourning over the fact that they killed their own Messiah. And when that happens in the future, the fountain of cleansing will be opened to all Israel and they will be saved. That's in the future. This is not that.

But clearly, not everyone hated Jesus. And these women represent the feelings of those who felt sad, the sympathizers, those who were sympathetic with Jesus, those who were attracted to Jesus, who find beauty in Him and tenderness and compassion. And there are always people like that.

There are the people who are not the curious crowd who are fickle and vacillating and indifferent, and they're not the mixed murderers who resent Jesus. And they're not the supporting kind of people who ultimately believe in Him. They're just the sympathizers who have some feelings for Jesus. Christianity, by the way, is filled with these kinds of people who have certain sympathies for Jesus.

Roman Catholicism plays on this by showing Jesus as this limp victim, dead in the arms of His mother, soliciting these kinds of sympathies. Jesus wants no sympathy. He doesn't turn to them and say, "Thank you, ladies, for your sympathy. I appreciate your compassion."

Quite the contrary. Verse 28, "Jesus turning to them said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me.'" That's a command. These are not His followers. These are not the women near and dear to Him who believed in Him. These are women who are called Daughters of Jerusalem, that's an Old Testament phrase, an Old Testament identification found in Zechariah 9:9 that simply means the people of Jerusalem. Sometimes daughters of Zion is used, such as Micah 4:8, Zephaniah 3:14. You...you are the offspring of Jerusalem. This is simply a metaphor for the nation, if you will. You women who are a part of Israel, stop weeping for Me.

And it's not limited to just them. Their weeping symbolically on behalf of all the people who were sad about this and He is saying to them, "Stop weeping for Me. If you're going to weep, weep for yourselves and for your children." I don't need your sympathy as if I am a victim, I am not a victim. Weep for the real victims here.

It looked like the one carrying the cross on His way to execution was the victim and He says...Don't weep for Me, weep for the real victims, weep for yourselves and your children.

What do you mean weep? Tears of sorrow, tears of remorse, even tears of repentance. In the nineteenth chapter of Luke when Jesus came in to Jerusalem, it says in verse 41, "As He approached, He saw the city and He wept." He sobbed over it saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace, if you only had known and received the truth that brings peace with God. But now they have been hidden from your eyes."

You might say the time of grace for them was over. "For the day shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, surround you and hem you in on every side. They will level you to the ground. Your children within you, they will not leave in you one stone upon another because you didn't recognize the time of your visitation. That is the time when the Messiah visited you. I wept when I came into the city, and now stop weeping for Me and start weeping for yourselves because judgment is coming upon you."

Chapter 21 verse 20, "Earlier in the week He had said to them, 'When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, recognize that her desolation is at hand. Let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains,

those in the midst of the city depart. Let not those in the country enter the city because these are the days of vengeance.” Next verse, “Woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days, for there will be great distress on the land and wrath to this people and they will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive into all the nations and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”

These are prophecies of the destruction in Jerusalem that started in 66 and ended in 70. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were slaughtered, men, women and children. Following that, hundreds of thousands more were slaughtered as the Romans massacred Jews in 985 towns in the land of Israel. The ones they didn't kill, they scattered, as the prophecy said.

This the Romans did as the instruments of God's judgment. Weep for yourselves. He doesn't thank them for their sympathetic thoughts toward them, He rebukes it as misdirected and redirects them to the real tragedy that is looming over their heads, their own destruction by God as an apostate and damned nation. These are such clear words. There is no escaping the fact that on the way to His cross, Jesus did not give a final invitation to the people who were along the way, He rather pronounced a final doom on them. Their perspective is totally skewed. They don't get it. They need to shed tears not for Him, but tears of terror and tears of fear, and tears of remorse, and tears of repentance for themselves in the light of the coming judgment.

And so, it is as if the hours of grace have faded away. There is no more invitation, but only judgment. It was in John's gospel that Jesus said, “Whoever believes not in Me is condemned already because he does not believe.”

I think in the words of Jesus there's a measure of pity because He wept when He came into the city. Because He also said in chapter 13 verses 34 and 35, “Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I would have gathered you but you would not. Behold, your house is left to you desolate.”

And in verse 29, specifically He says, “Behold, the days are coming when they will say, the days of coming are the days of judgment, the days when Jerusalem is surrounded, the days of the destruction of that city, the days when the angered owner of the vineyard comes back to get his retribution from the people who killed His servants and killed His Son. And the days are coming when they will say, they meaning the people alive at that time, “Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.”

That is a strange beatitude that is the opposite of all Jewish hope. The worst thing that could happen to a Jewish woman was to be barren. This was like a divine curse in their culture. If you had no children, you bore the worst stigma possible.

Luke 1, Elizabeth, she was an old lady and never had a child. Elizabeth, his wife, became pregnant, the wife of Zacharias. She kept herself in seclusion for five months saying, "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked in favor upon me." Listen to this. "To take away my disgrace." To be barren was viewed as disgrace. But there will be in that day such horrible killing, such massacring that they will say, "Blessed...blessed are the barren because they don't have to watch their children being massacred. Blessed are the wombs that never bore because they don't have to watch their little ones being mutilated. Blessed are the breasts that never nursed because they don't have to see their babies ripped out of their arms and killed." It's going to be that kind of time.

That's why in chapter 21:23 He said, "When it happens you're not pregnant," or "you're not nursing." Better if you never have children than that you see your children slaughtered. Wow, what words Jesus says on the road to the cross. Stop weeping for Me and weep for yourselves and your children.

When the death in judgment falls, the destruction will be so vicious that those who have no children will have the least suffering. It will get so bad, verse 30, "Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us.' And to the hills, 'Cover us.'" That is taken from Hosea 10:8. Hosea, the prophet Hosea, prophesied to the Northern Kingdom. You remember, after Solomon the Kingdom is divided. The Southern Kingdom called Judah, the Northern Kingdom called Israel. The Southern Kingdom made up of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. The Northern Kingdom made up of the other ten.

The Northern Kingdom had no good kings. After Solomon, every single king in the Northern Kingdom was evil, every single one of them. They became idolatrous, adulterous, apostate. And so, God pronounced judgment on the Northern Kingdom. It was in 722 B.C. that the Assyrians came as the instruments of divine judgment and they literally slaughtered the people in the Northern Kingdom. They attacked the capital city of the north which was Samaria. They took the people of the Northern Kingdom captive from which they never returned.

Hosea prophesied to the Northern Kingdom at the time of the destruction of Samaria, when the Assyrian conquerors had come in with their power and were massacring the Jews in the north. And Hosea said, "When that happens, you would wish the mountains would fall on you and the hills would cover you." In other words, you would want to die rather than suffer what you're suffering, it's going to be so bad. It's going to be so bad, your children are going to be slaughtered before you, death is going to be all around you. You will wish you never had children and you will wish that you were dead. And certainly they did when the Assyrians came, it was a horrible holocaust. And they did when the Romans came in 70 A.D. It was an even more horrible holocaust.

That same text is also repeated in Revelation 6. In the future, the world is going, to borrow Hosea's words, when the Lord breaks the sixth seal, the next to the last seal in the time of the Tribulation just before the return of Christ, the judgments of God have been unfolding in the world in the future and

there is in the sixth seal when it is opened, symbolizing near the end of the judgments of God on the whole world. There's a great earthquake, the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair. The whole moon became like blood. The stars of the sky fell to the earth as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. And the sky is split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up. Every mountain and island are moved out of their places. Literally it's the collapse of the universe as we know it. And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, everybody from top to bottom on the social ladder, all of them are hiding themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains and saying to the mountains and the rocks, and here they borrow the language of Hosea, "Fall on us and hide us." In this case, "From the presence of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb for the great day of their wrath has come and who is able to stand?"

What happened in 70 A.D. to the Jews was only a preview of what will happen to the world in the future. Jesus is saying, "Don't weep for Me, weep for yourselves and your children." And if He was here today, He would say it again to us. There is not a prophesied destruction of the United States of America but there is a prophesied destruction of the world to come, as I read you in the book of Revelation. God will require retribution from all of those who have rejected His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Weep for yourself if you're not ready for that judgment.

And then, our Lord's final words as He walks to the cross, a proverb in verse 31. "For if they do these things in the green tree, what will happen in the dry?" And He moves back to the coming Roman assault in 70 A.D. If they, meaning the Romans, do these things in the green tree, what will happen in the dry?

It is attested as a common proverb. It was a way of saying if everything goes bad when all is well, what's going to happen when it's not. In other words, the green tree symbolizes life, flourishing, fruitfulness, blessing, goodness, happiness, all that's good and rich and well. And if this is what happens in the case of what is full of life, and flourishing, what's going to happen in the day of the dry and the dead. A way to interpret that is simply this, if this is what the Romans do to the green tree, meaning Christ, what are they going to do to the dry, meaning Israel? If this is what's happening to the one who is full of life, full of flourishing fruitfulness, if they did this to Him, not only the Romans but the leaders of Israel, what in the world is going to happen to the dry dead nation? You better weep and you better weep for yourself, not Me. There's no self-pity with Jesus. But there is immense pity on those who rejected Him.

There are those who hate Him, the mixed murderers. There are those who are simply curious and somewhat indifferent. There are those who like the weeping women have certain sympathies and compassion toward Jesus. He doesn't want your sympathy anymore than He wants your hatred. Those who are merely sympathetic toward Christ are no better than the curious crowd who are no better off than those who crucified Him.

And that is illustrated to us in the final two characters that we meet, the companion criminals, we'll call them, verse 32. And two others, also, who were criminals, or it could read, "And two others, who were also criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him." He is accompanied by two criminals who had committed such massive crimes against Rome that they were being crucified, as well.

We're going to find out a little more about them when we get down to verse 39. Suffice it to say at this point, that one of them...one of them becomes a believer in Jesus Christ. And his life is forever altered instantaneously. He said to Jesus in verse 42, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your Kingdom. And Jesus knowing his heart was a heart of true faith said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in paradise.'"

These two thieves really illustrate the two options. You're either with Me or against Me. You're either going to be with Me in paradise, or you're going to be away from Me in hell. Oh the other thief...the other thief said, verse 39, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us." He said it as a hurled abuse, mocking Him.

Only two possibilities, folks. You either confess Jesus as Lord and enter into paradise. Or if you do not confess Him as Lord, it matters little whether you are an abusing criminal, whether you are part of the weeping sympathetic women, whether you're a part of the indifferent and curious fickle crowd, or whether you're an actual hater of Christ, you're going to end up in the same place. Anything short of complete commitment to Christ will place you in hell. That's what Scripture says. Hostility, curiosity, sympathy, they're not going to do it, only a real and true repentance and confession of Jesus as Lord.

An African stranger, a criminal brought to salvation. The few while the many went on the broad road to destruction. And which group do you belong to? Which is your group? The answer to that question is determined by whether or not you confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. Let's bow in prayer.

The message again is simple and clear, the age-old timeless message of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone. We know You're not looking for sympathy, it's no improvement on curiosity which is no improvement on hostility. Might as well hate You as merely sympathize with You. Indifference gains you no ground, even sympathy gains you no ground. The sinner is not helped by having nice thoughts about Jesus. There's only one way to be in the paradise of God, forever with Christ, and that is to confess Jesus as Lord, turning from sin and acknowledging Him as Savior and Redeemer.

Father, I pray that mighty, mighty transformation would take place in hearts right here, right now, as sinners abandon their sin and their unbelief, as sinners are convicted about the meaningless superficiality of sympathy and good thoughts about Jesus and come to the place of real total commitment to Him.

Father, now we who know You and love You thank You Lord again. Thank You that You are going to that cross to bear our sins and that while some need to weep, we need to rejoice and we do rejoice. We thank You that You've plucked us out of the crowd like Simon, that You opened up our hearts like the thief that we might be with You forever in paradise. Somewhere in Your infinite glorious heaven, You have a place prepared for us and we will escape all doubts and fears, all sins and enter into eternal bliss. This is Your gift to us. We thank You, Lord, for that and we have worshiped You today because You are a God of such grace and eternal generosity to us who are so undeserving. Work Your work in all our hearts as we would desire You to do for Your own glory, and we'll thank You in the name of Christ. Amen.

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