

Three Men On Three Crosses

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Preacher: Rev. George Macaskill

[0 : 0 0] Well, let's turn now to examine the passage of scripture which we read while we'll refer to it, match this in it, I'll just read again verse 33. That's the Gospel of Luke chapter 23 and we'll read verse 33 again. 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. When they came to the place that's called the star, there they crucified him and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. In an office in New York there is a charcoal sketch on one of the walls and that charcoal sketch is of a pile of human skulls, all different sizes, different shapes, a heap of human skulls. The artist put a one word caption underneath the sketch, the word equality.

And his purpose in drawing that sketch with that title equality was to try and convey the message because all men die, therefore all men are equal. Well, here we have three men dying. Now I don't think anyone can come from any other planet and look at planet Earth, look at the way we're living, look at what's happening in Earth and not say, hey, this world is broken. What's the cause? Why is there a curse in this world? Why do all men die? Christianity has its answer. Three letters, sin, because of sin all men die. Now I have entitled this sermon three men on a cross or three men on three crosses to be more accurate. Why are they dying? The three of them I want to look at are dying because of sin and yet, yet there are all the difference in the world between the three of them. They're all dying because of sin, but they're all different because one died in sin, one died to sin, and the one in the middle died for sin. Let's look at these three people dying on that cross. First, the one in sin who died in sin. I like, we all know, I think Jesus is in the middle. I would like to think that unrepentant thief is on his left because that's where the goats are and the righteous, the saved people are on the right. Let's look at the one anyway, whether he was on his left or not, the Bible doesn't tell us, but he's the one who died in sin.

What do we learn about him? What do we know from him? First, he was born in sin. He did not fall into sin. He was born in sin just like you and just like me.

We do not fall into sin. Adam fell into sin. Adam, the first man was made perfect. He fell into sin there after. Men and women, boys and girls are born in sin. Born sinful. We start off sinful.

We start off with an inbuilt bias, an inbuilt prejudice towards ourselves and against God.

[5 : 2 5] We don't need to work at it. It comes naturally. That's the way we're born ever since Adam took that forbidden fruit, which you always think of as an apple. According to those who really study the horticulture of that day, they do think it was some sort of apricot, which of course is the eastern apple. It doesn't matter what it was, it was forbidden. The moment he took it, from then on, a human race born in sin, a prejudice against God in favour of ourselves. That's just the way we're made. By nature, we don't see it that way. By nature, we'll actually deny it. But that's the way we are.

We're born in sin. This man was born in sin. And secondly, he lived in sin.

He lived in sin because he was born in sin. Like you, like me. It just came naturally. He just do what comes naturally. We're born in sin, therefore, we live in sin.

It just started off as a kid by living selfishly. We're the only person in this world. We're the only person that matters. Number one is me. That's us all. We can't point the finger at anyone.

That's how it started with him, just selfishness as a child, but it grew up and it led him to a life of crime and violence. The original word means that he curled to steal.

[7 : 37] So, to the extent that civilised society said regarding him, we're better rid of such kind.

So they crucified him. Born in sin, lived in sin, third layer, died in sin. He died in sin because he lived in sin. What is it to die in sin?

Well, at one level, we could just say, well, you don't need to do anything. It just happens. Born in sin, lived in sin, died in sin. It just happens. You don't need to work at it.

It happens. To die in sin is to die without your sin being forgiven. You cannot die without sin, but you can die with your sin forgiven.

But not this man, not this criminal. Dying in sin is dying without forgiveness, without repenting, without a change of heart, without a change of mind. That is a change of heart and mind regarding God, regarding sin, regarding life, regarding why are we here?

[9 : 23] What's it all about? Why was I made? So that's the man that was born in sin, lived in sin, died in sin, without his sin being forgiven, without repenting of it, without a change of mind regarding it. So we'll look at the second criminal now.

Two crosses along. Whether it was the left or the right, it's two crosses along. He died not in sin, but to sin. The Bible speaks about how shall we who died to sin? The Bible speaks about dying to sin. Well, let's have a look at them. The man who died to sin was born in sin also.

Exactly the same as the other criminal. Exactly the same as you and me. Born in sin. No difference whatsoever by birth. No difference whatsoever. As our Bible tells us elsewhere, we are all children of wrath, even as others. That's what we are by nature, without a change coming over us, we're under the wrath and the curse of God. He just naturally left God out of his life.

Naturally, like his colleague, two crosses away, he had his own agenda for life. He did his own thing. What you're comfortable with, as we say today, just do what you're comfortable with. Comes naturally. We're all the same because we're all born in sin. And then he lived in sin.

And as we said earlier about his colleague, he lived in sin because he was born in sin. It just comes naturally. But his sin also led him into a life of debauchery, a life of violence, until for him also, society said, better rid of that kind. We weren't rid of them. And so they crucified him as well. He lived in sin like his colleague, two crosses away.

[12 : 31] Matthew chapter 27 verse 44 tells us basically that he lived in sin up until that last morning of his life on earth. Sin controlled his life until the last hours of his life, the last hours of his life. Born in sin, left in sin. And then something happened.

Then something happened and he changed. Before he died in the flesh, he died to sin.

Let's look at what happened. Let's look at it happening on the cross, right with pain. Sin, how did he die to sin? Well, let me just mention three or four of the processes, the stages.

It's true for all who come to Christ, all who become Christian, all who run their way to heaven, all who are forgiven. He saw sin in its true light. Isn't it amazing? On the cross, racked with pain, he can speak to the man on two crosses away and rebuke him and say, do you not fear God?

We read it. It's amazing. Racked with pain, life ebbing out of his soul. And he can rebuke the man on two crosses away saying, do you not fear God? He doesn't say, do you not fear death?

[14 : 40] He doesn't say, do you not fear pain? He says, do you not fear God? God has come into his life. That's what's important. That's what must happen. What is sin? Sin isn't what the government define as wrong. Sin isn't what society decides. No, no, no, we've got to change that. Sin is something is something against God. In fact, it's anything against God. Anything against God is sin. Some have heard a definition of sin. It's saying no to God. Saying no to God.

Well, this man can connect God and sin together. And on the cross, racked with pain, he can rebuke the thief two crosses along.

He saw sin in its true light. But he also secondly saw himself in his true light.

And I find it amazing what he says of himself. The Roman, apparently the Roman authorities, the Roman society, the Roman Empire, or the most invented, the most cruel way of dying, crucifixion.

And here he is being crucified, the most cruel way to die that was known. And he can say, verse 41, we indeed justly, we are receiving the due reward of our deeds. Isn't that something?

[16 : 53] All this agony I'm going through, I deserve it. That's something. He said that. This is not unfair.

I have sinned against God. It's not just that there's this awful thing in the world called sinness against God. He's prepared to implicate himself. I'm a sinner. I'm guilty. I'm responsible before God. And I deserve what I'm getting. That's something. Do you know what it is? It's dying to sin.

But then most unfortunately, you see, he saw sin in its true light. He saw himself in his true light.

Thoroughly, he saw Christ in his true light. I think that's amazing. Again, wracked with pain on a cross. You can see the man on the next cross is different.

He says, this man has done nothing wrong. Man, what a discovery. On a cross, wracked with pain, he's done nothing wrong. You see, I'm persuaded. You see, apparently when they crucified you, they crucified you on the ground before the hoisted you up, they'll pray obviously.

[18 : 44] But I think the Savior, I think he was speaking to them. I think he was. Certainly there was a sign above the Savior's cross, the King of the Jews.

But he prays, remember me when you come into the kingdom. Hey, isn't that amazing? The man on the next cross is a king and he's got a kingdom.

He knows if I have two crosses, I'll always a criminal like himself, but some way it's been revealed to him, this man on the middle cross, he's got kingdom. He's a king.

He's done nothing wrong. That wonderful. Isn't that amazing? On a cross. The man on the next cross has a kingdom and the man on the next cross is perfect.

But I think he saw fourth thing as he dies to sin. He saw sin in its true light, saw himself in his true light, saw the Savior in his true light, but he also saw the gospel in its true light. He did not despair. Although fully convinced that his crucifixion is what he deserved, he still had hope. He didn't despair.

[20 : 17] And he can say, remember me. You see, there are people who have spoken to that and it's a little issue. They're prepared to confess their sins. They're prepared to say, oh, I know there's no other saving Jesus, but you know, they can't bring the two things together.

The man on this cross can bring the two things together. I am a sinner, blood, red and guilt, and I deserve every pain I'm enduring. But this man's got a gospel.

This man means there's hope. And he turns to him and he says, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Remember me. Is that hard? Is that a long prayer? Christ heard. And today he says, you'll be with me in paradise, up to the last hours of his criminal life.

Can you believe? You know God's holy. I don't need to tell any of you. I'm sure I don't know lots of you, but I sure I don't need to try and tell you God's holy. But tell me, can you match that the man who's holy, the Lord Jesus Christ, has power to forgive you in one moment? Just say, remember me. Remember me when you come into your kingdom.

You must, we must grasp that, well, it's time to change the subject to the man in the middle, which is all about, and which I intended speaking most of the time about, but there we go.

[22 : 24] We looked at the man who died in sin, and we looked at the man who died to sin, now the most important man, the man in the middle. He died for sin. And that's what the man who died to sin recognized and made use of. Jesus died for sin. Well, how about him? Let's examine him like we examine the other two. Born without sin. The only human being that was not born in sin. Born without sin, quite different from the very beginning. Jesus was different from day one, as you say. You see, we all exist before we were born, like we all know that we exist in our mother womb. Christ existed before he was conceived in the womb. Christ existed before he was conceived in the womb. So he was born, holy, harmless, undefiled, innocent, unstained by sin, quite separate from sin. From day one, Christ sin less. Has to be. Must be. Otherwise he's sacrificed from the tone for no one else. Can't atone for others if he's not sinless, because you see sin equals death. Because we sinned, because there's sin in us, we must die.

That doesn't apply to Jesus, because he didn't sin. So why must he die? In one sense, Jesus must die. Because you know why? He promised his father before the world began, I'll die for them.

I love my people. I'll become a human being so that I can die. And I will die. And I will die the horrific death of crucifixion, because I love my people. I commit myself to that. That's the only way in which he had to die. He promised to die. He promised his father he would die for them.

Born from the very beginning, before he existed even in the womb, born without sin. Lived without sin. No, he lived without sin. How they try to prove otherwise. Remember, they try to trump up two false witnesses. Even then they can't do it. They failed.

They have to change the charge. He was charged with that false trial. Changed the accusation halfway through. They just failed miserably to convict him of sin.

[25 : 58] He was tempted 40 days and 40 nights by Satan the devil in a waste, howling wilderness, starving with hunger. He was subjected to that to prove that here is a savior. He will not fail, like Adam failed. Adam blew it on behalf of you and me initially. God said, I'll send my son.

I can depend on him to save you. He will not be tempted to sin by Christ. Sorry, he will not succumb to the temptation of Satan, like Adam did. So for 40 days and 40 nights, this spirit leads him into a wilderness, starving with hunger to be tempted for 40 days and 40 nights, yet without sin.

And he dies without sin. Born without sin, lived without sin, died without sin.

No guile found in his mouth at any time. He went forward to meet his captors when the hour came.

Before the hour had come, he dodged his captors because his hour had not yet come. He knew he had to do certain things before he'd leave his world. So he escaped his captors until the hour came. He goes forward. The hour has come. He prays. He prays for the people who crucify him.

[27 : 59] He prays for them. Isn't it astonishing? Isn't it amazing? His love prying for the soldiers, Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do. He died for sin. His death actually atoned for sin. He was his substitute. God punished him for the sins, all the sins of everyone who'll be in heaven. All the sins of everyone who have no hope of reaching heaven unless Jesus takes them there.

Is that you? Do you think you'll make it on your own? Do you think you're good enough? You don't know God's standards. No one is good enough. Except Jesus. The children have it right.

There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the gates of heaven and let us in. How do we know for sure that he paid for sin? How do we know for sure?

The answer is the resurrection. You see, as we've pointed, as we've been speaking about, there was three people who crucified that Friday afternoon. Only Christ rose from the dead.

And you see, we did read it there. The centurion, verse 47, when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God saying, certainly, this man was innocent. You see, that centurion, no doubt, was the centurion in charge of crucifixions. Possibly Friday was crucifixion day. Just another Friday, crucifixion day. There was three that Friday. And he was watching them, the centurion.

[30 : 13] Probably nobody saw more people being crucified than him. And they looked at him. I don't know, crucified men don't die like that normally. They're shouting with a loud voice, hey, crucified men don't speak. If they do, it's a whopper. It's all they can master, a whopper.

But Christ shouts out with a loud voice, it is finished. And this centurion who saw more crucifixions than anyone else said, that man's different. That man's not normal. He praised God. That man's innocent.

His death is different. And of course, when he rose from the dead, and you know, apparently, all the books have read about it, there's no more event of history, more attested, more try to be proven than the crucifixion. And you can safely say this, if someone doesn't believe Jesus rose from the dead, you have no right whatsoever to believe there ever lived such a person as Napoleon. What's the evidence that Napoleon lived? There's a hundred more times that Christ rose from the dead. Whatever you use as your basis of evidence, there's far, far more that Christ rose from the dead. That's the evidence, the cross in the middle. The man in the middle is a perfect human being. But he's not just a human being. He's God manifest in the flesh.

A full hundred percent human being and a hundred percent God. God's a serial. We don't save ourselves, but we must believe on Christ, who is God and is the Savior. Just in conclusion, there's no, because Christ died, no sinner is secure in Satan's hands. You know, if you put your soul, your life, your future, your eternity in Christ's hands, no one, even God the Father, no one can take you out of his hands. You're secure in Christ's hands. Not even God the Father can take you out of Christ's hands. But see, if you're not a Christian, you're in Satan's hands. But you know this, you're not secure there. Christ can take you out of Satan's hands in an hour, in a moment.

He did it for the thief on the cross. If you're not a Christian, turn to Christ, depend on Christ, love Christ, follow Christ, believe in Christ, whatever you do, look at the man on the center cross and see their hope, see their safety, see their salvation, see their heaven.

[33 : 54] Then keep looking at Christ. May God the Holy Spirit make his word effectual saving to every one of us. Let's bow our heads. Our Father in heaven, please take the things of Christ and make an hour. Today, here, now, for your own glory, for Jesus' sake, we pray all these things. Amen.