

Bi123 The Gospels 2

Lesson Bi123-23 On the Cross

In the middle of the pain and suffering of the cross, Jesus interacted with two very different kinds of individuals. They each represented groups who were precious to him. First he provided a new son for his mother. John would care for her after Jesus was gone. This act represented his concern for his earthly family and the family of God. Then Jesus responded to a sinner who asked for his help. In both cases Jesus reacted out of love to meet the needs of others.

Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. The sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews.' Write that this man claimed to be king of the Jews."

Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written" (John 19:19-22). It was common practice to write the charge on a wooden board that was carried before the victim as he walked to his execution. Then the board was fastened to the cross above his head. This sign announced in three languages the 'crime' of Jesus. Though Pilate didn't realize it, God used him to proclaim this important truth about Jesus to all who passed by. Over their objections Pilate determined that he would at least control what the sign said. This was Pilate's way of mocking the Jewish leaders, as well as announcing what Jesus had been accused of. All the Gospels agree that Jesus was crucified for claiming to be the king of the Jews.

An important truth here is that even in his death, Jesus was with sinners. A criminal hung on each side, with Christ on the middle cross. One of the condemned men who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:39-43).

Jesus loved all sinners, including those on the two other crosses next to him. They both knew about his claim to be the Messiah. The first one only wanted deliverance from death; he was still thinking only of himself. The second one saw the contrast between them and Jesus. Perhaps this faith had come through hearing a testimony of someone who had encountered Jesus. We cannot be sure. He asked only to be remembered. Jesus promised him entry into paradise based on his faith alone. He would do no good works to earn paradise. When he got to paradise, Jesus would be waiting for him there.

Near the cross stood his mother and other women. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple John standing nearby, he said to her, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the

disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home (John 19:25-27).

It seems that Joseph had died some time earlier, though the Bible does not tell us. In Jewish culture, the oldest son had the responsibility to provide for his mother and siblings after the father died. To do this, he received a double amount of the inheritance. Jesus had nothing material to give, so he gave his mother’s care to John. He knew that this disciple understood what true love was all about.

At noon the bright light of the sun stopped shining and darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Three hours of darkness dramatized what happened to Jesus on the cross. As he bore the sins of the ages, his eternal fellowship with the Father was suspended. At the end of this time Jesus cried out, “My God.” His normal address to God used the more personal words, “My Father.” Some mistook what they heard as a call to Elijah, the greatest Old Testament prophet. Since these people, with poor knowledge of Aramaic and theology misunderstood the words of Jesus, we are given the correct meaning. We get just a glimpse of the great agony Jesus suffered while he felt separated from fellowship with his Father.

One of those near the cross ran and got a sponge soaked with vinegar. He put it on a staff and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him” (Matt 27:45-49).

Then Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last. The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” It seems clear that the Gospel writers saw in his declaration a vindication of Jesus. Since the centurion was the Roman official in charge of the crucifixion, his testimony was viewed as significant.

When the crowd who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. In Jewish culture this beating of one’s breast was a sign of anguish, grief, or a contrite heart. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things (Luke 23:47-49).

This story is **important** because it shows that Jesus continued to love people, even as he suffered on the cross for human sin. He provided for the needs of those he loved, his mother and a murderer who needed salvation.

The **main truth** of this story is that while Jesus was on the cross suffering for human sin and feeling separated from the presence and fellowship of his Father, he still cared about others.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. Who ordered a sign to be placed on the cross of Jesus, informing all who passed by of his true identity?

- A. [Pause] If you said, “Pilate the governor,” you are answered correctly.
2. What did the second thief ask of Jesus while they were both dying on crosses?
A. [Pause] If you answered that the second thief said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom,” you are right.
3. What did Jesus say when he felt God’s presence leaving him as he died for the sins of all?
A. [Pause] If you answered that Jesus said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story so you can tell it from memory. Gather a group together and ask them to imagine that they were one of the persons at the cross—John, Mary, the first criminal, the second criminal, a person Christ had healed, the centurion, another soldier, or a curious bystander who happened to walk by. Ask them to try to explain what they were feeling at the moment Jesus died. These who witnessed the crucifixion reflect the many ways persons can respond to Jesus. They also represent the ways each one of us can respond to Jesus at different times in our lives. Pray with members of the group about how they are responding to Christ in their present situation: anger, grief, indifference, helplessness, praise, demanding that he “save” your situation, or just casually observing?