

## Luke 23:35-43

Christ the King, Nov. 20, 2022  
Pastor Sam Rodebaugh

*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!"<sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine<sup>37</sup> and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"<sup>38</sup> There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"<sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"<sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."<sup>42</sup> And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."<sup>43</sup> And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."*

All the studies prove it: appearance matters. Beautiful people have a distinct advantage in life. One study I read said that for a man, every inch of height (up to a certain point) results in a 1.8% increase in salary. Another study indicated that taller men are far more likely to marry and have children—the tall guy gets the girls. Other studies have shown that the better-looking executives make more money and better-looking candidates generally poll better during elections.

So, appearance matters, but the old adage is also true: looks can be deceiving. That can be true of people, and that can be true of events too. Today, if you visit Valley Forge, PA, you will find a beautiful national park with 30 miles of scenic trails. But, if you visited Valley Forge some 244 years ago, it would not have looked beautiful at all. You might know that Valley Forge was the battle site where George Washington held his army together through a bitter winter to go on and defeat the British. And if you were to witness the site all those years ago, you would have seen bloody footprints in the snow from men who didn't have shoes. You would have witnessed sickness and fever and starvation, many men dying. While the national park now serves to commemorate a great moment in US History, at the time it looked anything but glorious.

And isn't the same true this Sunday morning? To you and me, when we gather here weekly in these pews, we look to the front and see the cross, and it is glorious. It's the instrument upon which our Savior won our salvation. But our text this morning reminds us that it would have been hard to see the glory if you were actually there on that original Good Friday. So the theme we'll consider today is:

### **Can You See the Glory Here?**

- I. It's hidden in Jesus' sufferings
- II. It's revealed through Jesus-clinging faith

I'm not sure that we can really appreciate how gruesome the Roman practice of crucifixion really was. After all, we see crosses all the time, especially when we go to church. By my count, there are some 260 crosses in the sanctuary this morning. For Christians, seeing the cross is so commonplace that we might lose sight of what a crucifixion on a cross was really like. If we stood there on Calvary 2000 years ago, we would have seen Jesus covered in blood, filthy from head to toe, being dragged onto that rough cross and nailed through. It was a gruesome sight, and looking at Him there, He would not have looked very kingly, much less glorious.

But the Bible never dwells on the gore of it or even on the pain. Instead, the Bible dwells on the shame of the cross. Every step of the way on that road to Calvary, Jesus was mocked and ridiculed.

Luke tells us that mockery continued after Jesus was nailed to the cross; the leaders of the Jews sneering, ***“He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He is the Christ of God, His Chosen One!”*** The soldiers joined in on the fun, ***“If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!”*** Even the men dying together with him got in on the mockery, ***“Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!”***

The eyes of everyone present that day told them that this was not a King; this was not the Christ; this was not one whom God cared about at all. If He was a King, His people would not have crucified Him like a criminal! If He was God, He would not have allowed this to happen! And if God cared for Him, He would have stopped this whole thing long before this point! That’s what people must have thought anyways. And so, with their eyes giving them all the proof they needed, they made light of this gruesome scene. But as we know, looks can be deceiving.

Consider that thief that hung there on the cross, mocking Jesus as the life slowly drained out of him as well. What a strange idea, to be in the same exact situation and yet use your last breaths to make fun of the one hanging next to you. But look at his words, they do contain a taunt and mockery, but they also contain a challenge. ***“Are you not the Christ, save yourself and us!”***

It's hard not to see myself doing the same thing as that taunting thief. Notice, he’s saying, ***“If you’re really God, then stop this pain for me already!”*** And don’t we sometimes say the same thing to God? When we start to doubt whether God really cares for us, and we ask the question, ***“How could a loving God allow this to happen in my life?”***—aren’t we saying the same thing? ***“If you’re really God, then stop this pain for me already!”*** When we look at the evidence that our eyes give us, it all points to Jesus not being the type of God that we think He should be. It’s as if we’re saying, ***“God, you don’t know how to be God as well as I know how to be God.”*** We are saying to a Savior with His arms outstretched on a wooden cross for us, ***“You don’t love me the way you should.”***

Meanwhile, the life is slowly draining out of us, since, after all, God proclaims, ***“The wages of sin is death.”*** (Romans 6:23) And we’re even more like that thief when we consider the other man’s words: ***“You are under the same sentence of condemnation! And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds.”*** And as the life drains out of us as the result of our sin, we recognize that we are guilty, that we deserve this condemnation. For we also have crucified the Lord of Glory. When we use our hands for evil—balling them up in a fist of rage, when we strike, when we use our hands for hatred—it’s as if our hands are grasping the hammer that is pounding the nails into Christ’s hands. When we use our mouths to talk without love about people behind their back, to gossip, to slander, to make fun of people, to raise our voices in anger, to tear others down in order to make ourselves feel better about ourselves—then our voices are joining in with the mockers that day, blaspheming against our God. Yes, our judgment is coming, we are all hanging on crosses of our own creation, and far too easily we fail to realize it.

So, the appearance of things that day made it seem like Jesus wasn’t accomplishing much of anything at all. As He hung there dying, the focus of so much mockery—His death seemed like just the punchline of a cruel joke. He didn’t look like a general leading a charge and winning the battle but dying in the process. He didn’t look like a hero throwing Himself on a grenade to save His fellow soldiers. He didn’t look like the soldiers at Valley Forge, persevering through a bitter winter so they could take the field in spring. He simply looked like a criminal getting what He deserved.

But all the same that Jesus felt there that day, that was His glory. Because He didn't deserve any of it. We deserve the cross, all the shame, the death, the suffering in hell. And yet Jesus fell on the grenade. He suffered through hours of hell on earth, and that was enough to count for you, so what you deserve is not what you'll get. Jesus weathered the storm as He felt the wintery blast of His Father forsaking Him, but He held on and won the war, so that Father does not reject *you*. Jesus died and won, which means that all of those statements made by those mockers and those scoffers actually turned out to be proclamations of divine truth. He *was* the King of the Jews, He *was* the Christ, He *was* the Chosen One of God, and He *did* save us.

So, **Can You See the Glory Here?** It is hidden in Jesus' sufferings, but the glory is there. And it's revealed to you through Jesus-clinging faith.

It was possible to see the glory on that day as well. Even seeing this man looking like a criminal on death row, it was possible to perceive even then that He really was the King. That's the amazing part of this account. If you had faith, even *then* you could see what we recognize today: You could see who Jesus was and what He was doing. There were some there who *could* see the glory, and we know that because of the other thief hanging on Jesus' other side. After the first thief mocked Jesus, the other said, ***"Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."***

Now, we know that even this criminal had been mocking Jesus along with everyone else. In the parallel account from Matthew, we're told that ***both "the robbers . . . who had been crucified with Him were casting the same insult at Him."*** (Matthew 27:44) So even this one had joined in on the fun—but then something changed. He looked at Jesus and had a change of heart and repented. He *rebuked* the other thief for his mocking words, he confessed his sins, and then he prayed to the King on the cross next to him, saying, ***"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."***

By this, he was showing that he knew exactly what kind of salvation he needed. He didn't need Jesus to take him down from the cross, to spare him from the physical pain. He needed to be delivered through Jesus' cross from death to life eternal. By his confession, he was declaring what kind of Savior he needed, the very Savior who was crucified next to Him. One who had done nothing wrong; One who could have come down from the cross at any moment but did not. By faith, this man confessed his sins, by faith he saw beyond the gory humiliation and saw the glory behind it. By faith, he saw beyond the cross and the grave to the life waiting beyond. By faith, He saw exactly what kind of King Jesus was.

By faith, he was encouraged to pray, faith perhaps which was created through the Words of Jesus as He hung there next to him and sighed, ***"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*** (Luke 23:34) And by faith, he received what he prayed for. For Jesus turned to him and said, ***"Today you will be with Me in paradise."*** With *Me*, Jesus said!

Just as we have so much in common with that first thief, we have much greater things in common with this one. In fact, he *represents* us. In the verses just before our text, we have the note, ***"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."*** (Luke 23:33) That detail of being on the right and left of Jesus reminded me of Jesus' words from our sermon a few weeks ago. That was from Matthew 25, where Jesus was

describing Judgment Day, saying that all people would be gathered before Him, some on His right and some on His left. To those that reject Him, gathered on His left, He will say, ***“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”*** (v. 41)

But to those on His right—those who have acknowledged their sin before God and through faith look to their Savior for mercy, both you and me—Jesus will look at us just as He did the thief next to Him. He will gather you together and say to you, ***“Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”*** (v. 34) Which is another way of saying, ***“Today, you will be with me in paradise!”*** Receive the Kingdom which I have won for you, come be *with Me*, Jesus says! This is what it means to be on Jesus’ right side!

But have you ever been on someone’s wrong side? You know, you did something wrong and landed yourself in the doghouse? Maybe you don’t even know what you did wrong, but you get the feeling that you did something because that certain person won’t even look you in the eyes. Well, how do we know that it won’t be like that for us with Jesus? How do we know we’ll be on Jesus’ right side and that we’re not actually on His wrong side? It’s because of the verse I referenced just a few minutes ago, from the verse right before our text. ***“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*** He wasn’t saying, *“Hey, they’re ignorant of what they’re really doing, so you can’t really hold it against them.”* No, ignorance is not an excuse, nor is it a reason to be forgiven. Jesus was actually saying, ***“Father, because they are ignorant, they need to be forgiven.”*** And so He hung there, offering up His own life, His own mercy, His own sacrifice as the basis for *why* we should be forgiven.

And the thief clung to that. He knew that of all the people there that day, he was among the worst. After all, he was being put to death for his sins. The rest of society had decided it would be better for him to die than to live. But now he held on to the one thing most dear, the only thing he had left: that this Jesus could forgive him all he’d ever done wrong. He saw through the gore and saw the glory of Christ that was hidden in the crucifixion, and you can too! For you have been given the eyes of faith to recognize that Christ hung there that day for you. And because of that, you don’t have to wonder if you will be on Christ’s right side or His wrong side. You already know the answer! *“I am on Christ’s right, because He died for me. Because He says to me through the prophet Isaiah, ***‘Fear not, I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine.’*** (Isaiah 43:1) Because He assures me through the Apostle Paul, ***‘God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.’*** (2 Corinthians 5:21)”* Because of what Christ went through that day as your King on the cross, be assured, you will be with Him in paradise.

The legendary former basketball coach John Wooden once said, *“The true test of a man’s character is what he does when no one is watching.”* For Jesus, the true test came when *everyone* was watching. And when the world rose up to mock and slander Him and pile shame upon His head, Jesus’ true character shined—the glory of the King of salvation who endured to the end so that you might be saved. Others might still look and miss this glory in all the gore and the shame. But thanks be to God who has given us the eyes of faith so that in this scene we can see our King. Our King crucified and then risen again, and what’s more, our King who promises to return for you and me. Thanks be to God in Jesus’ name. Amen. ***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.