

## [Luke 23:32-33, 39-43](#)

### The Cross of Jesus: Death Defeated, Life Victorious

#### **Introduction**

Three - that's the number of men that died that day on a cross at Golgotha, called the Place of the Skull. One man was dying because of sin; one man was dying to be rid of sin; one Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, was dying to be the victor over sin. Yes, Jesus was dying in agony, suffering and sorrow just like the other two criminals on either side of Him.

As a result of Jesus' death, mercy triumphed over judgment. Grace abounded more than sin. That's the gospel, the Word of the cross. So the cross isn't just pieces of wood. It's the good news message that Christ died to be the victor over sin – sin and death defeated, life victorious.

#### **One man was dying because of sin**

On one side of Jesus, there was a man dying because of sin. In fact, he railed at the Lord Jesus in agony, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" ([Luke 23:39](#)) This man looked to Jesus with an unrepentant, hard, stone-cold heart.

This man was dead in his sins. He had no merit, no favor, no reason that God would save him. He was under a sentence of condemnation. He was hell-bound and separated by his sin from God. He was being punished not only by man, but by God Himself. In fact, Scripture states that anyone hanged on a tree is under God's curse ([Deuteronomy 21:23](#)).

All of us can relate to that man, whether it be in the past or the present. I certainly can. Before God saved me, I *was* dead because of my sin and *was dead* to Christ. A criminal guilty of my crimes and a follower of Satan. A child of wrath like the rest of mankind ([Ephesians 2:1-3](#)). Sin was unforgiven. And if there is no forgiveness of sin, eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth awaits in hell where there will be conscious torment forever ([Matthew 13:50](#)).

That's what it means to be dead in sin. That's who I was before Christ. That was the man on one side of Jesus who was dying because of sin.

#### **One man was dying to be rid of sin**

On the other side of Jesus, there was also a man dying a painful death on a cross. This man was also dead in his sins. He had no merit, no favor, no reason that God would save him. In fact, if we look closely at Scripture, it states that *both* of the criminals crucified with Jesus reviled Him, as did the chief priests, scribes and elders. Here's [Mark 15:32](#).

"Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

[Mark 15:32 \(ESV\)](#)

Had he not railed at the Christ with an unrepentant, stone-cold heart? Was he not guilty of his crimes? Wasn't this man also under God's curse? Wasn't he also under a death sentence of condemnation and punishment? Yes, to all of those. So what's the difference-maker?

The difference-maker is God Himself. Only God, in the work of the Holy Spirit, changes a stone-cold heart to a heart of flesh. Only by God's grace and mercy was there an awakening of this man to who Jesus is and an acknowledgment of his sin ([Luke 23:40-42](#)). Mercy triumphed over judgment. Grace abounded more than sin.

Can you relate to that man? I certainly can and I'm sure many of you can too. I *am now* dying to be rid of sin and *am now* alive in Christ. I'm now a *former* criminal. My crimes were forgiven because Jesus exchanged His righteousness for my unrighteousness. A child of God only by His grace and mercy. Sin cleansed by Jesus' precious blood through faith alone in Him. Here's [Ephesians 2:4-5](#).

<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved—  
[Eph 2:4-5](#) (ESV)

That's what it means to be alive in Christ. That's who I am now in Christ. That was the man on one side of Jesus who was dying to be rid of sin.

### **One Man was dying to be the victor over sin**

One Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, was dying on the cross to be the victor over sin. Jesus, the Son of God, sinless and perfect in every way. Yet, He was hanged on a cross. He became a criminal and a curse for us ([Galatians 3:13](#)). He willingly received punishment for our sin, as appointed by God ([Isaiah 53:4-10](#)). His humility and obedience were evident in His suffering to the point of death, even death on a cross ([Philippians 2:8](#)).

According to an ancient Near East custom, a nail driven through a record of debt acknowledged full payment of the debt. Jesus willingly paid in full an insurmountable sin debt owed to God when He was nailed to the cross. Death and sin were defeated, arrested, stopped. Life and hope were victorious, new, redeemed. That's the good news message, the gospel, the Word of the cross.

Isn't it a wonderful mystery that Jesus, the Man that died to be the victor over sins, would condescend to rebels and outlaws like us? Yes, us. None of us may be a murderer or a robber. However, we're more like the two criminals crucified on either side of Jesus than we'd like to admit. We're all sinners. We're all in need of the Savior, Jesus, who died to be the victor over sin. And sin is deadly. The coronavirus, COVID-19, is a lot like sin. If met with complacency or left untreated, a catastrophe is certain.

Consider the turmoil, chaos and despair that COVID-19 has caused throughout the world. How would the three men on the cross have reacted to COVID-19? How have you and I reacted? Has it been with fear and panic or with faith and hope?

When fear and panic paralyze us, we need to turn to the only Hope; we need to turn our eyes upon Jesus. Remember the man who was dying to be rid of sin? He turned to Jesus in faith and hope. And even though the man died, Jesus promised "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" ([John 11:25-26](#)).

Have you turned the eye of faith toward Jesus? Have you received the good news of God's grace and mercy in Christ as the only cure for sin? If not, you can do that now. There's no guarantee you'll be on this earth the rest of today, much less tomorrow. Perhaps today, God will awaken you to His grace and mercy in Christ. Perhaps today you will be another *former* criminal that's dying to be rid of sin and made alive in Christ. Would that be you?

And if that is you, be amazed, astonished and joyful. What a privilege, a blessing and an assurance it is to know Jesus as the One we can turn to. In Him, there is comfort knowing that He will never leave us. Through Him, there is peace with God. By Him, there is security knowing that He bears all of our sins and sorrows.

Listen to the gracious and merciful words of Jesus spoken on the cross, which must have been good news to the man who was dying to be rid of sin. Here's [Luke 23:43](#).

And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."  
[Luke 23:43](#) (ESV)

### **Conclusion**

On that day at Golgotha, God gave His everything for our nothing. Mercy triumphed over judgment. Grace abounded more than sin. The cross of Jesus – sin and death defeated, life victorious. Here's [1 Corinthians 15:54-57](#). Let this good news of God's Word, the Word of the cross, be a prayer of thanksgiving, a song of praise, and the foundation of a life that's been set free from the debt of sin and the penalty of death.

<sup>54</sup> ..."Death is swallowed up in victory." <sup>55</sup> "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" <sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
[1 Cor 15:54-57](#) (ESV)