

Jesus went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of the Skull. (John 19:17)

Forgiving God, your mercy never ceases when we come to you with contrite hearts. We give thanks that you hear our prayers for forgiveness and you restore us to a right relationship with you through your Son. Pour out your Spirit upon us that we might be humble and meek, always seeking your will for our lives. We pray this in the precious name of Jesus. Amen..

Introduction

When Jesus was put to death on the cross, two criminals were crucified alongside him. One cursed Jesus like all the others, but one of the criminals had a change of heart. He spoke up for Jesus, and asked Jesus to remember him. Jesus promised they would be in paradise together.

Read: Luke 23:32-43

On reading these verses, what are some of your initial impressions and questions? What stands out to you?

The Biblical Context

The religious authorities brought Jesus to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, for trial. Pilate gave in to the angry shouts of the crowd and sentenced the innocent Jesus to be crucified. At Golgotha ("the Place of the Skull"), Jesus gave his life for the sins of the world. Jesus took upon himself the penalty for our sins and sacrificed his own life so that we would have life. This divine atonement reconciled us to God.

Each of the Gospels provides us with different details on the scene. In today's lesson, we witness what happened to Jesus and the others who were crucified with him. We hear Jesus' words of forgiveness to those who put him to death, as well as his promise to the repentant thief at his side. Jesus' showed his divine grace and mercy, even to the end.

Discussion Questions

1. Who was the authority figure who sentenced Jesus to death? Who were those who actually carried out the sentence? (See Luke 23:13, 24-25.)
2. As he was being crucified, what did Jesus pray to be done to his persecutors? How was he able to do this?
3. What did the sign say that was hanging over Jesus' head? Do you think this was meant seriously by the Romans or not? Ironically, how was this true?
4. What was the attitude of the criminals that were put to death along with Jesus? Did they both feel bad about their sins?
5. What did the second criminal confess about his own punishment? In what way did he know that Jesus was different? Are we ever so far gone in sin that we cannot be redeemed?
6. In Isaiah 53:3-6, how does the prophet describe what Jesus accomplished for us in this? In what way does the crucifixion show us the depth of God's grace and mercy towards us?
7. The Persian word "paradise" referred to an enclosed garden or park that was found near the palace of a king. Is it significant that Jesus used this word instead of the word "heaven"? Explain.
8. As Christians, does our hope in death rest in a place or a person? Why is the "with me" in Jesus' promise the key to our faith now *and* in the life to come?