

## **April 2, 2023 (Palm Sunday) *Crucified with the Outlaws***

Scripture: Luke 23:32-34a, 39-43 (CEB)

They also led two other criminals to be executed with Jesus. When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his right and the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.” ...One of the criminals hanging next to Jesus insulted him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!” Responding, the other criminal spoke harshly to him, “Don’t you fear God, seeing that you’ve also been sentenced to die? We are rightly condemned, for we are receiving the appropriate sentence for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus replied, “I assure you that today you will be with me in paradise.”

### **MONDAY 3.27.23 Actively encourage someone**

#### **A series of carefully plotted traps for Jesus Luke 20:1-40**

Shielding their high status, Jerusalem’s religious leaders plotted Jesus’ death. They tried hard to build a case for his execution. Maybe they could get him to refuse to pay Roman taxes, or to admit that belief in “resurrection” was absurd. But neither their trick questions nor their show of outward piety fooled Jesus. They fumed (verse 19) when he told a story exposing the murder in their hearts.

- Jesus’ vineyard story drew on a beloved Scripture (*Isaiah 5:1-7*), which called Israel God’s vineyard. But he exposed the hate around him during that fateful week (*Luke 19:47, 20:19*). We, like the Jerusalem leaders, can have blind spots. Is there anything God’s spirit is nudging you to face honestly in your life? Do you have the courage to face it in the light of Jesus’ “good news”?
- The Sadducee “party” didn’t believe in resurrection, so their hypothetical story (verses 27-33) tried to make the idea sound absurd. Why was it crucially important for Jesus to absolutely trust that death was not the end, that “the worst thing is never the last thing”? Do you share his confidence? If so, in what ways does it shape your day-to-day life for the better?

**Prayer:** King Jesus, your piercing insight made some powerful people very angry. But your purpose was always to redeem. Give me a measure of your insight, and a large dose of your redemptive heart. Amen.

### **TUESDAY 3.28.23 Set aside the scary future; stay in the present When the world falls apart, redemption is near Luke 20:41 – 21:28**

**Note:** Resurrection has planned a range of Easter worship experiences, in-person, online and on local television. For full details, visit [www.cor.org/easter](http://www.cor.org/easter).

For Jesus, true worth lay in people like the humble widow, whose tiny gift only he saw. And worse lay ahead—the end of the Temple, where devout Jews met God. Great

hardship and suffering would follow. It all happened—Rome destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D. Despite this world's sad state, Jesus urged his listeners to keep faith whatever came. He told them, "Don't be alarmed...raise your heads, because your redemption is near" (21:9, 28).

- The Covid-19 pandemic did more harm than most of us could have dreamed. To Jesus' hearers, the Temple's destruction sounded just that incredible. Jesus told his people to hold to faith even when that happened because their "redemption was near" (verse 28). How can trusting that God is near help you not to "faint from fear," but hold your head up even in times of pandemic or war?
- Life in a broken world gets tough. Scholar N. T. Wright said, "This is what it's about: not an exciting battle, with adrenaline flowing and banners flying, but the steady tread, of prayer and hope and scripture and sacrament and witness, day by day and week by week." \* In what ways can you sustain the "steady tread" of your faith journey even through personal or world crises? What models of patient, steady faith can you draw on?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I want to trust you even when life gets hard. Give me the strength and patience I need to deal with life's struggles, the ones I am facing now and any others in the future. Amen.

\* N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 260.

### **WEDNESDAY 3.29.23 Use a poem to prepare for Easter Amid betrayal and contention, Jesus remained confident Luke 21:29 – 22:30**

The annual weeklong Festival of Unleavened Bread, with the Passover meal, reminded Hebrews of their defining story: God rescuing them from Egypt (cf. [Exodus 12:1-18](#)). Jesus shared the Passover meal with his disciples. With the cross just ahead, Jesus said for them the bread and wine would point to his even greater act of giving himself to rescue us from sin and death.

- Jesus said, "The kings of the Gentiles rule over their subjects, and those in authority over them are called 'friends of the people.'" But in God's kingdom, Jesus said, "That's not the way it will be with you....the greatest among you must become...like a servant." Where do you have power (parent, boss, teacher, pastor, public office, etc.)? How can you use your power to serve others?
- Jesus' shift of Passover into the Lord's Supper didn't just look back, but also pointed forward. Scholar Richard Vinson noted that "until it is fulfilled" (verse 16) "is a promise to Luke's readers that the kingdom truly will come." \* Do you trust that God's promises offer a future you can count on? How can taking part in Communion (even online) reinforce your trust and hope?

**Prayer:** Living Lord, I rejoice in your saving acts in the past. But even more, I eagerly look forward to

the day when you fully establish your kingdom. Keep me faithfully on track until that day. Amen. \* Richard B. Vinson, study note on Luke 22:16 in *The CEB Study Bible*:

### **THURSDAY 3.30.23 Stop hiding something** **The final storm broke; Peter wilted Luke 22:31-62**

**Note:** We're near the end of this "40 Days of Personal Transformation" Lenten season. Join us in worshipping the crucified and risen Jesus at Resurrection's pre-Easter and Easter worship times, in- person, online or on local television. For full details, visit [www.cor.org/easter](http://www.cor.org/easter).

"Lord," Peter said defiantly, "I'm ready to go with you, both to prison and to death!" Little did he know that he wasn't at all "ready" for that. Jesus knew him better than he knew himself. After Jesus' arrest, Peter heatedly denied three times having been with Jesus. Then a rooster crowed, Jesus looked at him, and Peter "went out and cried uncontrollably."

- Of the disciples, only Peter walked on water ([Matthew 14:28-29](#)). He was first to flatly call Jesus the Messiah ([Luke 9:18-20](#)). He was no villain—just a man subject to fear and pressure. Have you ever felt pressure to hide your loyalty to Jesus? Jesus told those who seized him, "This is your time, when darkness rules." What might Peter have done to keep the darkness at bay (cf. 22:46)?
- Pastor Hamilton noted that all four gospels tell of Peter's humiliating failure. Yet when Luke and the others wrote, Peter had been a brave church leader Rome martyred around 64-65 A.D. Peter probably openly told about his failure, and the forgiveness and hope he found in its wake. \* When have you grown through facing a failure openly and learning from it by God's grace?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, like Peter, I keep finding a need to grow even in areas I thought I was done with. Thank you for your ongoing grace, for urging me to grow even when I'm comfortable. Amen.

\* Hamilton, Adam. *24 Hours That Changed the World* - (p. 58). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

### **FRIDAY 3.31.23 Pray for the justice system** **Jesus' judges behaved in ways that condemned them Luke 22:63 – 23:31**

Jesus' enemies had dogged his footsteps through most of his public ministry. They claimed he was a false teacher, even demonic (cf. [Luke 11:14-16](#)). But when they had him in their power, the contrast was striking. The leaders, sure of their "righteousness," behaved in frenzied, unfair, cruel, hate-filled ways. Jesus remained calm and in control of himself.

- Luke said Jesus' guards taunted and beat him BEFORE his trial (Luke 26:62, 66). This "trial" was like *Alice in Wonderland*— "verdict first, evidence later." Even Pontius Pilate, a cynical Roman politician, saw through their charges, saying, "I find no legal basis for action against this man" (23:4). Has anyone ever treated

you unfairly? How can you grow toward having the spirit with which Jesus met this unfair trial?

- The religious leaders loathed tax collectors for working with Rome. They easily forgot that “principle” to insist that the Roman procurator help kill Jesus. From God’s point of view, who was really on trial—Jesus, or Pilate and the religious leaders unwilling to even consider that Jesus might be who he claimed? When have you seen the use of bad means disgrace a desired goal?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I wasn’t part of that awful “kangaroo court” trial. But fear or prejudice can blind me, too. Forgive me, cleanse me, give me a clearer vision of how my actions heal or harm. Amen.

### **SATURDAY 4.1.23 Watch the sun set on Holy Saturday Seeing the light on the darkest day Luke 23:32-56**

Events came to their awful ending. Even as God in Jesus absorbed the worst that evil and hate could do (cf. [2 Corinthians 5:14-19](#)), he stayed focused on forgiving others (verses 34, 42). The Roman centurion who oversaw the crucifixion “praised God, saying, ‘It’s really true: this man was righteous.’” That testimony likely meant a lot to a “most honorable” Gentile like Theophilus (cf. [Luke 1:1-4](#)). Joseph of Arimathea, a council member who’d stayed silent at Jesus’ mock trial, at least gave the body a decent burial. And Saturday came. “So far as we know, there has only been one day in the last two thousand years when literally not one person in the world believed Jesus was alive.”

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• Scholar N. T. Wright summed up: “It really happened. It wasn’t a mistake. We didn’t get it wrong. It’s true. You can rely on it. This is the main point of Luke’s account of Jesus’ death and burial. He began his book telling Theophilus he could rely on these facts, and now that the most vital one is before us, he presents his witnesses one by one. The centurion saw....The crowds standing by saw....Jesus’ followers, not least the women, stood at some distance, but they too saw....Then the burial: again, the women saw what happened....Evidence. Eyewitnesses. This is what Luke promised, and this is what he’s now giving us.” \*\* It was fact—Jesus had really died and been laid in a tomb. Joseph’s act unwittingly made Jesus’ unexpected resurrection more undeniable. Due to Joseph’s gift, Jesus’ friends knew exactly where his body had been laid. That all made Easter a one-of-a-kind event. How different would Jesus’ impact on your life be if he didn’t really die, or if he stayed in that tomb?

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, you walked into the most awful prison: the prison of death. But you went there to break those dark doors wide open. Thank you for bringing light into darkness, life out of death. Amen.

\* Ortberg, John. Chapter “Saturday” in *Who Is This Man?: The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

