

LESSON ELEVEN

CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last.

LUKE 23:45-46 NKJV



REFLECTION

A sacrifice should be just that—a sacrifice. Sacrifices may be inconvenient and are costly. By definition, a sacrifice almost always involves some kind of death or loss. Think of a time when you gave something up for a friend. In what way did your sacrifice help that person?

SITUATION

Shortly after Jesus drove out the merchants in the temple, the religious leaders convinced Judas, one of Jesus' own disciples, to betray him. Sham trials followed, a guilty verdict was passed, and soon the Roman soldiers were forcing Jesus to make his way to the place of execution. The details Luke goes on to relate in his account—a passerby recruited to help carry the cross, women watching and weeping, two other death-row criminals almost forgotten in the crowd, a mocking sign—all create a haunting scene of sacrifice.

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 23:26–49 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

²⁶ As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. ²⁸ Jesus turned and

said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ ³⁰ Then

“they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’
and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’”

³¹ For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar³⁷ and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

⁴³ Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the

curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

⁴⁷ The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." ⁴⁸ When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. ⁴⁹ But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

²⁶ Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus.

²⁷ And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. ²⁸ But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." ²⁹ For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' ³⁰ Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"' ³¹ For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"

³² There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. ³³ And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. ³⁴ Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

And they divided His garments and cast lots. ³⁵ And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God."

³⁶ The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, ³⁷ and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself."

³⁸ And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew:

THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁹ Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."

⁴⁰ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

⁴³ And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

⁴⁴ Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. ⁴⁵ Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'" Having said this, He breathed His last.

⁴⁷ So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "Certainly this was a righteous Man!"

⁴⁸ And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned. ⁴⁹ But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

EXPLORATION

1. What character traits did Jesus exhibit during the hours before his death?

2. How did Jesus show mercy to the people who were executing him? To the criminal who asked Jesus to remember him when he entered into his kingdom?

3. In what ways should believers try to imitate Christ's attitude of forgiveness?

4. What was the significance at the time of Christ's death of the torn curtain in the temple leading into the Holy of Holies?

5. Why did Jesus submit to God's plan of salvation for the world?

6. Why was Jesus' sacrifice necessary to restore the relationship between God and humans?

INSPIRATION

The King looked at the Prince of Light. "The darkness will be great." He passed his hand over the spotless face of his Son. "The pain will be awful." Then he paused and looked at his darkened dominion. When he looked up, his eyes were moist. "But there is no other way."

The Son looked into the stars as he heard the answer. "Then, let it be done." Slowly the words that would kill the Son began to come from the lips of the Father.

"Hour of death, moment of sacrifice, it is your moment. Rehearsed a million times on false altars with false lambs; the moment of truth has come. . . .

"Soldiers, you think you lead him? Ropes, you think you bind him? Men, you think you sentence him? He heeds not your commands. He winces not at your lashes. It is my voice he obeys. It is my condemnation he dreads. And it is your souls he saves.

"Oh, my Son, my Child. Look up into the heavens and see my face before I turn it. Hear my voice before I silence it. Would that I could save you and them. But they don't see and they don't hear.

"The living must die so that the dying can live. The time has come to kill the Lamb." . . .

God must have wept as he performed his task. Every lie, every lure, every act done in shadows was in that cup. Slowly, hideously they were absorbed into the body of the Son. The final act of incarnation. . . .

The throne room is dark and cavernous. The eyes of the King are closed. He is resting.

In his dream he is again in the Garden. The cool of the evening floats across the river as the three walk. They speak of the Garden—of how it is, of how it will be.

"Father . . ." the Son begins. The King replays the word again. *Father. Father.* The word was a flower, petal-delicate, yet so easily crushed. Oh, how he longed for his children to call him Father again.

A noise snaps him from his dream. He opens his eyes and sees a transcendent figure gleaming in the doorway. "It is finished, Father. I have come home." (From *Six Hours One Friday* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. How would you explain the significance of Jesus' death on the cross?

8. Why is it important to accept Christ's sacrifice on your behalf?

9. For what reasons do people refuse God's gift of salvation?

10. How would your life be different if Jesus had never died and risen again?

11. How do you feel when you think about the pain and anguish Jesus endured for you?

12. Who is one person you can tell about Christ's work on the cross?

LIFE LESSONS

The Gospel accounts make it clear that Jesus went to the cross *willingly*. He did not die because others were stronger than him or because he deserved the treatment he received. He had a reason for surrendering his life beyond the immediate circumstances. His prayer from the cross for his executioners to be forgiven should to pluck a chord in us—for as sinners, we share in the cause of his death. His promise of paradise to the repentant criminal ought to cause our hearts to leap and our lips to whisper, "Me too, Lord!" Does it? Personally owning Christ's death is the most valuable life lesson we could ever learn. Not only is it priceless . . . it is also eternal.

DEVOTION

Lord, you were willing to suffer pain, ridicule, and even death for us. How can we ever thank you? All we can offer you is our hearts and lives. Help us to love and obey you until we meet face-to-face in heaven. And while we wait for that day, use us to bring others into a right relationship with you.

