

Bible Study Guide: Week of 11-14-2022

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Luke 23:33-43

³³When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.” ³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴²Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

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The identification of the place of crucifixion as the place called The Skull probably refers to the shape of the hill on which the crucifixion was carried out, although it is possible that there is an intended double meaning also describing the gruesome nature of the place of execution. Luke alone uses the term “criminals” or literally “evil-doers” to describe the people put to death with Jesus. The referent of “them” in v. 34 is not clear. “Them” could refer to the leaders of and/or the Jewish people present at the crucifixion or the soldiers who cast lots to divide his clothing. Ostensibly it refers to both; perhaps even to all people. Many ancient manuscripts contain v. 34, but many do not. Therefore, it is likely that it is a later addition to the text or, perhaps, that some scribes removed this verse for some reason. We can certainly say that v. 34 is in keeping with the overall theme of reconciliation and forgiveness present in the rest of the gospel of Luke and that it reflects the love and compassion of Jesus in a wonderful way. In terms of the casting of lots for Jesus’ clothing, that seems to reference Psalm 22. This is one of many Old Testament references in this passage, showing that early Christians noticed strong parallels between Jesus’ death and the promises of the Old Testament.

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The people watching and scoffing as well as the offering of sour wine are all Old Testament references, as well. The taunts of the leaders and soldiers call to mind the tests of Satan when Jesus was in the wilderness in Luke 4. The word used to describe the behavior of the leaders (scoffing) might be translated, “they thumbed their noses at him” or “looked down their noses at him.” The behavior of the soldiers (mocking) carries a connotation of juvenile or immature behavior—perhaps we would say they “acted like boys.” There is a distinct lack of reverence and

gleefulness to their cruelty. The soldiers' mocking address "King of the Jews" and the similar inscription over Jesus was intended not just to humiliate Jesus, but also to discourage any further Jewish uprising against Caesar, the Roman king. The message sent to all who saw Jesus hanging there would be, "Watch out. This is what Rome does to those who claim to be king." Lastly, the criminal who "derided Jesus" piles on the insults from right next to Jesus. His derision is literally "blasphemy" in Greek. He "blasphemed" Jesus, meaning he spoke in an insulting and impious manner to him. Just as Satan tried to call into question what it meant for Jesus to be the Son of God, here those who question and mock Jesus call into question what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah. They presume it means he should act to save himself and them, but Jesus is faithful to God's mission just as he was in Luke 4.

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The main distinctive feature of Luke's crucifixion account is the repentance of the second criminal. Somehow, he knows Jesus to be innocent and asks for Jesus to remember him—a common request in the Old Testament by those who were perishing or otherwise in trouble. It is not unlike one prisoner saying to another, "Hey, if you get out of here first, don't forget me." Jesus' promise exceeds the man's request: he promises that the man would that very day share in Jesus' relief from suffering and in a place of peace, rest, and blessing.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. How do you think the exchange between Jesus and the repentant criminal enhances our understanding of Jesus' death and resurrection?**
- 2. How did Jesus' understanding of being the Messiah differ from the ideas of those who mocked him?**
- 3. Why do you think this is our assigned text for Christ the King Sunday?**