

Suffering Unto Death

Key Verse: *“When Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the spirit.”*
—Luke 23:46

Selected Scripture:
Luke 23:32-46

OUR LESSON TODAY CENTERS around the crucifixion of Jesus. The account in Luke 23:32,33 states that Jesus was crucified between two “malefactors,” one on each side of him. Perhaps the enemies of Jesus wanted to distract from the injustice of their own course and throw a measure of justice into the proceedings as a whole, or they may have simply wanted to demean Jesus by making him a companion of outlaws. Whatever their reasons may have been, the Scriptures tell us that this was all overruled by God to show symbolically how Jesus’ death was truly to take the place of Adam, who had sinned and was a ‘malefactor’ in God’s sight. Prophetically speaking of Jesus, Isaiah says, “He was numbered with the transgressors.”—Isa. 53:12

Those who nailed Jesus to the cross were not satisfied in merely doing this alone. They also desired to publicly humiliate him as much as possible. First, they stripped him of his garments and cast lots to see who would gain possession of them. Little did they realize that they were once again doing that which had been foretold. The psalmist had said, “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”

(Ps. 22:18) Then they proceeded to verbally mock him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.” (Luke 23:35-38) Jesus, of course, was unfazed by this humiliation. He indeed knew that if it was his Father’s will, his mighty power could be used to stop the proceedings, but because the hour of his suffering and death had come, Jesus humbly and obediently acquiesced to the experiences as they came. He was “brought as a lamb to the slaughter.”—Isa. 53:7

The two malefactors were evidently aware of who Jesus was. One of them railed against him, saying, “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.” (Luke 23:39) It was evidently his selfish desire that Jesus use his power (which he had undoubtedly witnessed before) to save himself, but most importantly, to save ‘us’. The other malefactor, however, was of the opposite disposition and character, and rebuked him, saying, “Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”—Luke 23:40-42

The second malefactor’s request to be remembered when Jesus came into his kingdom did not go unnoticed by the Master. Jesus promised that he would indeed remember this individual, criminal though he was, when his kingdom was set up on earth in the future. He stated, “Verily, I say unto thee this day: With me, shalt thou be in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43, *Rotherham Translation*) Thus, having fulfilled all things, our Key Verse says that Jesus’ human life ended, and his ‘spirit,’ or breath of life, returned to God who had given it. ■