

CHAPTER 23

This chapter carries on and concludes the history of Christ's sufferings and death. We have here,

- I.** His arraignment before Pilate the Roman governor (v. 1-5).
- II.** His examination before Herod, who was tetrarch of Galilee, under the Romans likewise (v. 6-12).
- III.** Pilate's struggle with the people to release Jesus, his repeated testimonies concerning his innocency, but his yielding at length to their importunity and condemning him to be crucified (v. 13-25).
- IV.** An account of what passed as they led him to be crucified, and his discourse to the people that followed (v. 26-31).
- V.** An account of what passed at the place of execution, and the indignities done him there (v. 32-38).
- VI.** The conversion of one of the thieves, as Christ was hanging on the cross (v. 39-43).
- VII.** The death of Christ, and the prodigies that attended it (v. 44-49).
- VIII.** His burial (v. 50-56).

LUKE 23:1-12

CHRIST BEFORE PILATE AND HEROD

Our Lord Jesus was condemned as a blasphemer in the spiritual court, but it was the most *impotent malice* that could be that this court was actuated by; for, when they had *condemned* him, they knew they could not *put him to death*, and therefore took another course.

I. They accused him before Pilate. The *whole multitude of them arose*, when they saw they could go no further with him in their court, and *led him unto Pilate*, though it was no judgment day, no assizes or sessions; and they demanded justice against him, not as a blasphemer (that was no

crime that he took cognizance of), but as one disaffected to the Roman government, which they in their hearts did not look upon as any crime at all, or, if it was one, they themselves were much more chargeable with it than he was; only it would serve the turn and answer the purpose of their malice: and it is observable that that which was the *pretended crime*, for which they employed the Roman powers to destroy Christ, was the *real crime* for which the Roman powers not long after destroyed them.

1. Here is the indictment drawn up against him (v. 2), in which they pretended a zeal for Caesar, only to ingratiate themselves with Pilate, but it was all *malice* against Christ, and nothing else. They misrepresented him,

(1.) As making the people *rebel against Caesar*. It was true, and Pilate knew it, that there was a general uneasiness in the people under the Roman yoke, and they wanted nothing but an opportunity to shake it off; now they would have Pilate believe that this Jesus was active to foment that general discontent, which, if the truth was known, they themselves were the aiders and abettors of: *We have found him perverting the nation*; as if converting them to God's government were *perverting them* from the civil government; whereas nothing tends more to make men good subjects than making them Christ's faithful followers. Christ had particularly taught that they *ought to give tribute to Caesar*, though he knew there were those that would be offended at him for it; and yet he is here falsely accused as *forbidding to give tribute to Caesar*. Innocency is no fence against calumny.

(2.) As making himself a *rival with Caesar*, though the very reason why they rejected him, and would not own him to be the Messiah, was because he did not appear in worldly pomp and power, and did not set up for a temporal prince, nor offer to do any thing against Caesar; yet this is what they charged him with, that he said, *he himself is Christ a king*. He did say that he was *Christ*, and, if so, then *a king*, but not such a king as was ever likely to give disturbance to Caesar. When his followers would have made him a king (~~John~~ John 6:15), he declined it, though by the many miracles he wrought he made it appear that if he would have set up in competition with Caesar he would have been too hard for him.

2. His pleading to the indictment: *Pilate asked him, Art thou the king of the Jews?* v. 3. To which he answered, *Thou sayest it*; that is, "It is as thou sayest, that I am entitled to the government of the Jewish nation; but in

rivalship with the scribes and Pharisees, who tyrannize over them in matters of religion, not in rivalry with Caesar, whose government relates only to their civil interests." Christ's kingdom is wholly spiritual, and will not interfere with Caesar's jurisdiction. Or, "*Thou sayest it; but canst thou prove it? What evidence hast thou for it?*" All that knew him knew the contrary, that he never pretended to be the *king of the Jews*, in opposition to Caesar as supreme, or to the governors that were sent by him, but the contrary.

3. Pilate's declaration of his innocency (v. 4): *He said to the chief priests, and the people that seemed to join with them in the prosecution, "I find no fault in this man. What breaches of your law he may have been guilty of I am not concerned to enquire, but I find nothing proved upon him that makes him obnoxious to our court."*

4. The continued fury and outrage of the prosecutors, v. 5. Instead of being moderated by Pilate's declaration of his innocency, and considering, as they ought to have done, whether they were not bringing the guilt of innocent blood upon themselves, they were the more exasperated, more exceedingly *fierce*. We do not find that they have any particular fact to produce, much less any evidence to prove it; but they resolve to carry it with noise and confidence, and say it, though they cannot prove it: *He stirs up the people to rebel against Caesar, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place. He did stir up the people*, but it was not to any thing factious or seditious, but to every thing that was virtuous and praiseworthy. He did *teach*, but they could not charge him with teaching any doctrine that tended to disturb the public peace, or make the government uneasy or jealous.

II. They accused him before Herod.

1. Pilate removed him and his cause to Herod's court. The accusers mentioned Galilee, the northern part of Canaan. "Why," saith Pilate, "is he of that country? Is he a Galilean?" v. 6. "Yes," said they, "that is his headquarters; there he was spent most of his time." "Let us send him to Herod then," saith Pilate, "for Herod is now in town, and it is but fit he should have cognizance of his cause, since he belongs to Herod's jurisdiction." Pilate was already sick of the cause, and desirous to rid his hands of it, which seems to have been the true reason for sending him to Herod. But God ordered it so for the more evident fulfilling of the scripture, as

appears ~~4005~~ Acts 4:26, 27, where that of David (~~4002~~ Psalm 2:2), *The kings of the earth and the rulers set themselves against the Lord and his Anointed*, is expressly said to be fulfilled in Herod and Pontius Pilate.

2. Herod was very willing to have the examining of him (v. 8): *When he saw Jesus he was exceedingly glad*, and perhaps the more glad because he saw him a prisoner, saw him in bonds. He had *heard many things of him* in Galilee, where his miracles had for a great while been all the talk of the country; and he *longed to see him*, not for any affection he had for him or his doctrine, but purely out of curiosity; and it was only to gratify this that he *hoped to have seen some miracle done by him*, which would serve him to talk of as long as he lived. In order to this, he *questioned with him in many things*, that at length he might bring him to something in which he might show his power. Perhaps he pumped him concerning things *secret*, or things *to come*, or concerning his curing diseases. But Jesus *answered him nothing*; nor would he gratify him so much as with the performance of one miracle. The poorest beggar, that asked a miracle for the relief of his necessity, was *never denied*; but this proud prince, that asked a miracle merely for the gratifying of his curiosity, is denied. He might have seen Christ and his wondrous works many a time in Galilee, and *would not*, and therefore it is justly said, Now he would see them, and *shall not*; they are hidden from his eyes, because he knew not the day of his visitation. Herod thought, now that he had him in bonds, he might *command* a miracle, but miracles must not be made cheap, nor Omnipotence be at the beck of the greatest potentate.

3. His prosecutors appeared against him before Herod, for they were restless in the prosecution: *They stood, and vehemently accused him* (v. 10), *impudently* and *boldly*, so the word signifies. They would make Herod believe that he had poisoned Galilee too with his seditious notions. Note, It is no new thing for good men and good ministers, that are real and useful friends to the civil government, to be falsely accused as factious and seditious, and enemies to government.

4. Herod was very *abusive* to him: He, with *his men of war*, his attendants, and officers, and great men, *set him at nought*. They *made nothing* of him; so the word is. Horrid wickedness! To *make nothing* of him who *made all things*. They laughed at him as *a fool*; for they knew he had wrought many miracles to befriend others, and why would he not now work one to befriend himself? Or, they laughed at him as one that had lost his power,

and was become weak as other men. Herod, who had been acquainted with John Baptist, and had more knowledge of Christ too than Pilate had, was more *abusive* to Christ than Pilate was; for knowledge without grace does but make men the more *ingeniously* wicked. Herod arrayed Christ in a *gorgeous robe*, some gaudy painted clothes, as a mock-king; and so he taught Pilate's soldiers afterwards to do him the same indignity. He was ringleader in that abuse.

5. Herod sent him back to Pilate, and it proved an occasion of the making of them friends, they having been for some time before at variance. Herod could not get sight of a miracle, but would not condemn him neither as a malefactor, and therefore *sent him again to Pilate* (v. 11), and so returned Pilate's civility and respect in sending the prisoner to him; and this mutual obligation, with the messages that passed between them on this occasion, brought them to a better understanding one of another than there had been of late between them, v. 12. They had been *at enmity between themselves*, probably upon Pilate's killing of the Galileans, who were Herod's subjects (~~421~~ Luke 13:1), or some other such matter of controversy as usually occurs among princes and great men. Observe how those that quarrelled with one another yet could unite against Christ; as Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek, though divided among themselves, were confederate against the *Israel of God*, ~~430~~ Psalm 83:7. Christ is the great peace-maker; both Pilate and Herod owned his innocency, and their agreeing in this cured their disagreeing in other things.

~~423~~ LUKE 23:13-25

BARABBAS PREFERRED TO CHRIST

We have here the blessed Jesus run down by the mob, and hurried to the cross in the storm of a popular noise and tumult, raised by the malice and artifice of the *chief priests*, as agents for the prince of the power of the air.

I. Pilate solemnly protests that he believes he has done nothing worthy of death or of bonds. And, if he did believe so, he ought immediately to have *discharged* him, and not only so, but to have *protected* him from the fury of the priests and rabble, and to have bound his prosecutors to their good behaviour for their insolent conduct. But, being himself a bad man, he had no kindness for Christ, and, having made himself otherwise obnoxious,

was afraid of displeasing either the emperor or the people; and therefore, for want of integrity, he *called together the chief priests, and rulers, and people* (whom he should have dispersed, as a *riotous and seditious assembly*, and forbid them to come near him), and will hear what they have to say, to whom he should have turned a deaf ear, for he plainly saw what spirit actuated them (v. 14): “*You have brought,*” saith he, “*this man to me*, and, because I have a respect for you, *I have examined him before you*, and have heard all you have to allege against him, and I can make nothing of it: *I find no fault in him*; you cannot prove the things whereof you accuse him.”

II. He appeals to Herod concerning him (v. 15): “*I sent you to him*, who is supposed to have known more of him than I have done, and he has *sent him back*, not convicted of any thing, nor under any mark of his displeasure; in his opinion, his crimes are not capital. He has laughed at him as a weak man, but has not stigmatized him as a dangerous man.” He thought Bedlam a fitter place for him than Tyburn.

III. He proposes to release him, if they will but consent to it. He ought to have done it without asking leave of them, *Fiat justitia, ruat coelum* — *Let justice have its course, though the heavens should be desolated*. But the fear of man brings many into this snare, that, whereas justice should take place, though heaven and earth come together, they will do an unjust thing, against their consciences, rather than pull an old house about their ears. Pilate declares him innocent, and therefore has a mind to release him; yet, to please the people,

1. He will release him under the notion of a malefactor, because of *necessity he must release one* (v. 17); so that whereas he ought to have been released by an *act of justice*, and thanks to nobody, he would have him released by an *act of grace*, and not be beholden to the people for it.

2. He will *chastise* him, and release him. If *no fault* be to be *found in him*, why should he be chastised? There is as much injustice in scourging as in crucifying an innocent man; nor would it be justified by pretending that this would satisfy the clamours of the people, and make *him* the object of their pity who was not to be the object of their envy. We must not do evil that good may come.

IV. The people choose rather to have Barabbas released, a wretched fellow, that had nothing to recommend him to their favour but the

daringness of his crimes. He was imprisoned for a *sedition made in the city*, and for *murder* (of all crimes among men the least pardonable), yet this was the criminal that was preferred before Christ: *Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas*, v. 18, 19. And no wonder that such a man is the favourite and darling of such a *mob*, he that was really seditious, rather than he that was really loyal and falsely accused of sedition.

V. When Pilate urged the second time that Christ should be released, they cried out, *Crucify him, crucify him*, v. 20, 21. They not only will have him die, but will have him die so great a death; nothing less will serve but he must be crucified: *Crucify him, crucify him*.

VI. When Pilate the third time reasoned with them, to show them the unreasonableness and injustice of it, they were the more peremptory and outrageous (v. 22): “*Why? What evil hath he done? Name his crime. I have found no cause of death*, and you cannot say what cause of death you have found in him; and therefore, if you will but speak the word, *I will chastise him and let him go*.” But popular fury, the more it is complimented, the more furious it grows; they were *instant with loud voices*, with great noises or outcries, not requesting, but *requiring, that he might be crucified*; as if they had as much right, at the feast, to demand the crucifying of one that was innocent as the release of one that was guilty.

VII. Pilate's yielding, at length, to their importunity. The voice of the people and of the *chief priests prevailed*, and were too hard for Pilate, and overruled him to go contrary to his convictions and inclinations. He had not courage to go against so strong a stream, but *gave sentence that it should be as they required*, v. 24. Here is judgment *turned away backward*, and *justice standing afar off*, for fear of popular fury. *Truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter*, ²⁸³⁴Isaiah 59:14. Judgment was looked for, *but behold oppression; righteousness, but behold a cry*, ²⁸³⁵Isaiah 5:7. This is repeated in v. 25, with the aggravating circumstance of the release of Barabbas: *He released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison*, who hereby would be hardened in his wickedness, and do the more mischief, because *him they had desired*, being altogether such a one as themselves; but he *delivered Jesus to their will*, and he could not deal more barbarously with him than to deliver him to *their will*, who *hated him with a perfect hatred*, and whose *tender mercies were cruelty*.

LUKE 23:26-31

THE CRUCIFIXION

We have here the blessed Jesus, the Lamb of God, led as *a lamb to the slaughter*, to the sacrifice. It is strange with what expedition they went through his trial; how they could do so much work in such a little time, though they had so many great men to deal with, attendance on whom is usually a work of time. He was brought before the chief priests at break of day (Luke 22:66), after that to Pilate, then to Herod, then to Pilate again; and there seems to have been a long struggle between Pilate and the people about him. He was scourged, and crowned with thorns and contumeliously used, and all this was done in four or five hours' time, or six at most, for he was crucified between nine o'clock and twelve. Christ's persecutors resolve to lose no time, for fear lest his friends at the other end of the town should get notice of what they were doing, and should rise to rescue him. Never any one was so *chased out of the world* as Christ was, but so he himself said, *Yet a little while and ye shall not see me*; a very little while indeed. Now as they led him away to death we find,

I. One that was a *bearer*, that carried his cross, *Simon* by name, a *Cyrenian*, who probably was a friend of Christ, and was known to be so, and this was done to put a reproach upon him; they laid Christ's cross upon him, that he might *bear it after Jesus* (v. 26), lest Jesus should faint under it and die away, and so prevent the further instances of malice they designed. It was pity, but a *cruel pity*, that gave him this ease.

II. Many that were *mourners*, true mourners, who followed him, *bewailing* and *lamenting* him. These were not only his friends and well-wishers, but the common people, that were not his enemies, and were moved with compassion towards him, because they had heard the fame of him, and what an excellent useful man he was, and had reason to think he suffered unjustly. This drew a great crowd after him, as is usual at executions, especially of those that have been persons of distinction: *A great company of people followed him*, especially of women (v. 27), some led by pity, others by curiosity, but they *also* (as well as those that were his particular friends and acquaintance) *bewailed and lamented him*. Though there were many that reproached and reviled him, yet there were some that valued him, and pitied him, and were sorry for him, and were partakers

with him in his sufferings. The dying of the Lord Jesus may perhaps move natural affections in many that are strangers to devout affections; many bewail Christ that do not believe in him, and lament him that do not love him above all. Now here we are told what Christ said to these mourners. Though one would think he should be wholly taken up with his own concern, yet he found time and heart to take cognizance of their tears. Christ *died lamented*, and has a bottle for the tears of those that lamented him. He *turned to them*, though they were strangers to him, and bade them *not weep for him, but for themselves*. He diverts their lamentation into another channel, v. 28.

1. He gives them a general direction concerning their lamentations: *Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me*. Not that they were to be blamed for weeping for him, but rather commended; those hearts were hard indeed that were not affected with such sufferings of such a person; but they must not weep for him only (those were profitless tears that they shed for him), but rather let them *weep for themselves and for their children*, with an eye to the destruction that was coming upon Jerusalem, which some of them might live to see and share in the calamities of, or, at least, their children would, for whom they ought to be solicitous. Note, When with an eye of faith we behold Christ crucified we ought to weep, not for him, but for ourselves. We must not be affected with the death of Christ as with the death of a common person whose calamity we pity, or of a common friend whom we are likely to part with. The death of Christ was a thing peculiar; it was his victory and triumph over his enemies; it was our deliverance, and the purchase of eternal life for us. And therefore let us weep, not for him, but for our own sins, and the sins of our children, that were the cause of his death; and weep for fear (such were the tears here prescribed) of the miseries we shall bring upon ourselves, if we slight his love, and reject his grace, as the Jewish nation did, which brought upon them the ruin here foretold. When our dear relations and friends die in Christ, we have no reason to weep for them, who have put off the burden of the flesh, are made perfect in holiness, and have entered into perfect rest and joy, but for ourselves and our children, who are left behind in a world of sins, and sorrows, and snares.

2. He gives them a particular reason why they should *weep for themselves and for their children*: “*Fore behold sad times are coming upon your city; it will be destroyed, and you will be involved in the common destruction.*” When Christ's own disciples sorrowed after a *godly sort* for his leaving

them, he wiped away their tears with the promise that he would *see them again*, and they should *rejoice*, ^{<4162>}John 16:22. But, when these daughters of *Jerusalem bewailed him* only with a *worldly* sorrow, he turned their tears into another channel, and told them that they should have something given them to cry for. Let them *be afflicted, and mourn, and weep*, ^{<3049>}James 4:9. He had lately wept over Jerusalem himself, and now he bids them weep over it. Christ's tears should set us a weeping. Let the daughters of Zion, that own Christ for their king, rejoice in him, for he comes to save them; but let the daughters of Jerusalem, that only weep for him, but do not take him for their king, weep and tremble to think of his coming to judge them. Now the destruction of Jerusalem is here foretold by two proverbial sayings, that might then fitly be used, which both bespeak it very terrible, that what people commonly dread they would then desire, to be *written childless* and to be *buried alive*.

(1.) They would wish to be *written childless*. Whereas commonly those that have no children envy those that have, as Rachel envied Leah, then those that have children will find them such a burden in attempting to escape, and such a grief when they see them either *fainting* for famine or *falling* by the sword, that they will envy those that have none, and say, *Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare*, that have no children to be *given up* to the murderer, or to be *snatched* out of his hands. It would not only go ill with those who at that time were *with child*, or *giving suck*, as Christ had said (^{<4219>}Matthew 24:19), but it would be terrible to those who had had children, and suckled them, and had them now alive. See ^{<3911>}Hosea 9:11-14. See the vanity of the creature and the uncertainty of its comforts; for such may be the changes of Providence concerning us that those very things may become the greatest burdens, cares, and griefs to us, which we have delighted in as the greatest blessings.

(2.) They would wish to be *buried alive*: *They shall begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, Cover us*, v. 30. This also refers to a passage in the same prophecy with the former, ^{<3108>}Hosea 10:8. They shall wish to be hid in the darkest caves, that they may be out of the noise of these calamities. They will be willing to be sheltered upon any terms, though with the hazard of being crushed to pieces. This would be the language especially of the great and mighty men, ^{<4166>}Revelation 6:16. They that would not flee to Christ for refuge, and put themselves under his protection, will in vain call to *hills* and *mountains* to shelter them from his wrath.

2. He shows how natural it was for them to infer this desolation from his sufferings. *If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* v. 31. Some think that this is borrowed from <sup>^{Ezekiel} Ezekiel 20:47: *The fire shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree.* These words may be applied,

(1.) More particularly to the destruction of Jerusalem, which Christ here foretold, and which the Jews by putting him to death brought upon themselves: *“If they (the Jews, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem) do these things upon the green tree, if they do thus abuse an innocent and excellent person for his good works, how may they expect God to deal with them for their so doing, who have made themselves a dry tree, a corrupt and wicked generation, and good for nothing? If this be their sin, what do you think will be their punishment?”* Or take it thus: *“If they (the Romans, their judges, and their soldiers) abuse me thus, who have given them no provocation, who am to them as a green tree, which you seem to be as much enraged at, what will they do by Jerusalem and the Jewish nation, who will be so very provoking to them, and make themselves as a dry tree, as fuel to the fire of their resentments? If God suffer those things to be done to me, what will he appoint to be done to those barren trees of whom it had been often said that they should be hewn down and cast into the fire?”* <sup>^{Matthew} Matthew 3:10; 7:19.

(2.) They may be applied more generally to all the revelations of God's wrath against sin and sinners: *“If God deliver me up to such sufferings as these because I am made a sacrifice for sin, what will he do with sinners themselves?”* Christ was a *green tree*, fruitful and flourishing; now, if such things were done to him, we may thence infer what would have been done to the whole race of mankind if he had not *interposed*, and what shall be done to those that continue dry trees, notwithstanding all that is done to make them fruitful. If God did this to the Son of his love, when he found sin but imputed to him, what shall he do to the generation of his wrath, when he finds sin reigning in them? If the Father was pleased in doing these things to the green tree, why should he be loth to do it to the dry? Note, The consideration of the bitter sufferings of our Lord Jesus should engage us to stand in awe of the justice of God, and to tremble before him. The best saints, compared with Christ, are *dry tree*; if he suffer, why may not they expect so suffer? And what then shall the damnation of sinners be?

THE CRUCIFIXION

In these verses we have,

I. Divers passages which we had before in Matthew and Mark concerning Christ's sufferings.

1. That there were *two others, malefactors, led with him* to the place of execution, who, it is probable, had been for some time under sentence of death, and were designed to be executed on this day, which was probably the pretence for making such haste in the prosecution of Christ, that he and these two malefactors might be executed together, and one solemnity might serve.

2. That he was crucified at a place called *Calvary, Kranion*, the Greek name for *Golgotha — the place of a skull*: an ignominious place, to add to the reproach of his sufferings, but significant, for there he triumphed over death as it were upon his own dunghill. He was *crucified*. His hands and feet were nailed to the cross as it lay upon the ground, and it was then *lifted up*, and fastened into the earth, or into some socket made to receive it. This was a painful and shameful death above any other.

3. That he was crucified *in the midst between two thieves*, as if he had been the worst of the three. Thus he was not only treated as a transgressor, but *numbered with them*, the worst of them.

4. That the soldiers who were employed in the execution seized his garments as their fee, and divided them among themselves *by lot*: *They parted his raiment, and cast lots*; it was worth so little that, if divided, it would come to next to nothing, and therefore they cast lots for it.

5. That he was reviled and reproached, and treated with all the scorn and contempt imaginable, when he was *lifted up* upon the cross. It was strange that so much barbarity should be found in the human nature: *The people stood beholding*, not at all concerned, but rather pleasing themselves with the spectacle; and *the rulers*, whom from their office one would take to be men of sense and men of honour, stood among the rabble, *and derided him*, to set those on that were about them to do so too; and they said, *He saved others, let him save himself*. Thus was he upbraided for the good

works he had done, as if it were indeed *for these* that they *crucified* him. They triumphed over him as if they had conquered him, whereas he was himself then more than a conqueror; they challenged him to save himself from the cross, when he was saving others by the cross: *If he be the Christ, the chosen of God*, let him save himself. They knew that *the Christ was the chosen of God*, designed by him, and dear to him. “If he, as the Christ, would deliver our nation from the Romans (and they could not form any other idea than that of the Messiah), let him deliver himself from the Romans that have him now in their hands.” Thus the Jewish *rulers* jeered him as subdued by the Romans, instead of subduing them. The *Roman soldiers* jeered him as *the King of the Jews*: “A people good enough for such a prince, and a prince good enough for such a people.” They *mocked him* (v. 36, 37); they made sport with him, and made a jest of his sufferings; and when they were drinking sharp sour wine themselves, such as was generally allotted them, they triumphantly asked him if he would pledge them, or drink with them. And they said, *If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself*; for, as the Jews prosecuted him under the notion of a pretended Messiah, so the Romans under the notion of a pretended king.

6. That the superscription over his head, setting forth his crime, was, *This is the King of the Jews*, v. 38. He is put to death for pretending to be the king of the Jews; so they meant it; but God intended it to be a declaration of what he really was, notwithstanding his present disgrace: he is *the king of the Jews*, the king of the church, and his cross is the way to his crown. This was written in those that were called the three learned languages, *Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew*, for those are best learned that have learned Christ. It was written in these three languages that it might be known and read of all men; but God designed by it to signify that the gospel of Christ should be preached to all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem*, and be read in all languages. The Gentile philosophy made the Greek tongue famous, the Roman laws and government made the Latin tongue so, and the Hebrew excelled them all for the sake of the Old Testament. In these three languages is Jesus Christ *proclaimed king*. Young scholars, that are taking pains at school to make themselves masters of these three languages, should aim at this, that in the use of them they may increase their acquaintance with Christ.

II. Here are two passages which we had not before, and they are very remarkable ones.

1. Christ's prayer for his enemies (v. 34): *Father, forgive them.* Seven remarkable words Christ spoke after he was nailed to the cross, and before he died, and this is the first. One reason why he died the death of the cross was that he might have liberty of speech to the last, and so might glorify his Father and edify those about him. As soon as ever he was fastened to the cross, or while they were nailing him, he prayed this prayer, in which observe,

(1.) The petition: *Father, forgive them.* One would think that he should have prayed, "Father, consume them; the Lord look upon it, and requite it." The sin they were now guilty of might justly have been made unpardonable, and justly might they have been excepted by name out of the act of indemnity. No, these are particularly *prayed for*. Now he made intercession for transgressors, as was foretold (²⁵⁰²Isaiah 53:12), and it is to be added to his prayer (John 17), to complete the specimen he gave of his intercession within the veil: that for saints, this for sinners. Now the sayings of Christ upon the cross as well as his sufferings had a further intention than they seemed to have. This was a mediatorial word, and explicatory of the intent and meaning of his death: "*Father, forgive them, not only these, but all that shall repent, and believe the gospel;*" and he did not intend that these should be forgiven upon any other terms. "Father, that which I am now suffering and dying for is in order to this, that poor sinners may be pardoned." Note,

[1.] The great thing which Christ died to purchase and procure for us is the forgiveness of sin.

[2.] This is that for which Christ intercedes for all that repent and believe in the virtue of his satisfaction; his blood speaks this: *Father, forgive them.*

[3.] The greatest sinners may, through Christ, upon their repentance, hope to find mercy. Though they were his persecutors and murderers, he prayed, *Father, forgive them.*

(2.) The plea: *For they know not what they do; for, if they had known, they would not have crucified him,* ⁴⁰¹⁸1 Corinthians 2:8. There was a veil upon his glory and upon their understandings; and how could they see through two veils? They wished his blood on them and their children: but, had they known what they did, they would have unwished it again. Note,

[1.] The crucifiers of Christ *know not what they do*. They that speak ill or religion speak ill of that which they know not, and it is because they will not know it.

[2.] There is a kind of ignorance that does in part excuse sin: ignorance through want of the means of knowledge or of a capacity to receive instruction, through the infelicities of education, or inadvertency. The crucifiers of Christ were kept in ignorance by their rulers, and had prejudices against him instilled into them, so that in what they did against Christ and his doctrine they thought they did God service, ^{<491>}John 16:2. Such as to be pitied and prayed for. This prayer of Christ was answered not long after, when many of those that had a hand in his death were converted by Peter's preaching. This is written also for example to us. *First*, We must in prayer call God *Father*, and come to him with reverence and confidence, as children to a father. *Secondly*, The great thing we must beg of God, both for ourselves and others, is the forgiveness of sins. *Thirdly*, We must pray for *our enemies*, and those that hate and persecute us, must extenuate their offences, and not aggravate them as we must our own (*They know not what they do; peradventure it was an oversight*); and we must be earnest with God in prayer for the forgiveness of their sins, their sins against us. This is Christ's example to his own rule (^{<494>}Matthew 5:44, 45, *Love your enemies*); and it very much strengthens the rule, for, if Christ loved and prayed for such enemies, what enemies can we have that we are not obliged to *love and pray for*?

2. The conversion of the thief upon the cross, which is an illustrious instance of Christ's triumphing over principalities and powers even when he seemed to be triumphed over by them. Christ was crucified between two thieves, and in them were represented the different effects which the cross of Christ would have upon the children of men, to whom it would be *brought near* in the preaching of the gospel. They were all malefactors, all guilty before God. Now the cross of Christ is to some a *savour of life unto life*, to others of *death unto death*. To them that perish it is foolishness, but to them that are saved it is the wisdom of God and the power of God.

(1.) Here was one of these malefactors that was *hardened to the last*. Near to the cross of Christ, he *railed on him*, as others did (v. 39): he said, *If thou be the Christ, as they say thou art, save thyself and us*. Though he was now in pain and agony, and in the valley of the shadow of death, yet this did not humble his proud spirit, nor teach him to give good language,

no, not to his fellow-sufferer. *Though thou bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.* No troubles will of themselves work a change in a wicked heart, but sometimes they *irritate* the corruption which one would think they should *mortify*. He challenges Christ to *save both himself and them*. Note, There are some that have the impudence to rail at Christ, and yet the confidence to expect to be saved by him; nay, and to conclude that, if he do not save them, he is not to be looked upon as the Saviour.

(2.) Here was the other of them that was *softened at the last*. It as said in Matthew and Mark that the *thieves*, even *they that were crucified with him, reviled him*, which some think is by a figure put for *one* of them, but others think that they both *reviled* him at first, till the heart of one of them was wonderfully changed, and with it his language on a sudden. This malefactor, when just ready to fall into the hands of Satan, was snatched as a brand out of the burning, and made a monument of divine mercy and grace, and Satan was left to roar as a lion disappointed of his prey. This gives no encouragement to any to put off their repentance to their death-bed, or to hope that then they shall find mercy; for, though it is certain that true repentance is never too late, it is as certain that late repentance is seldom true. None can be sure that they shall have time to repent at death, but every man may be sure that he cannot have the advantages that this penitent thief had, whose case was altogether extraordinary. He never had any offer of Christ, nor day of grace, before how: he was designed to be made a singular instance of the power of Christ's grace now at a time when he was *crucified in weakness*. Christ, having conquered Satan in the destruction of Judas and the preservation of Peter, erects this further trophy of his victory over him in the conversion of this malefactor, as a specimen of what he would do. We shall see the case to be extraordinary if we observe,

[1.] The extraordinary operations of God's grace upon him, which appeared in what he said. Here were so many evidences given in a short time of a blessed change wrought in him that more could not have been given in so little a compass.

First, See what he said to the other malefactor, v. 40, 41.

1. He reproved him for railing at Christ, as destitute of the *fear of God*, and having no sense at all of religion: *Dost not thou fear God?* This implies that it was the fear of God which restrained him from

following the multitude to do this evil. “I fear God, and therefore dare not do it; and dost not thou?” All that have their eyes opened see this to be at the bottom of the wickedness of the wicked, that they have not the fear of God before their eyes. “If thou hadst any humanity in thee, thou wouldest not insult over one that is thy fellow-sufferer; *thou art in the same condition*; thou art a *dying man* too, and therefore, whatever these wicked people do, it ill becomes thee to abuse a dying man.”

2. He owns that he deserves what was done to him: *We indeed justly*. It is probable that they both suffered for one and the same crime, and therefore he spoke with the more assurance, *We received the due reward of our deeds*. This magnifies divine grace, as acting in a distinguishing way. These two have been comrades in sin and suffering, and yet one is *saved* and the other *perishes*; two that had gone together all along hitherto, and yet now *one taken and the other left*. He does not say, *Thou* indeed justly, but *We*. Note, True penitents acknowledge the justice of God in all the punishments of their sin. God has *done right*, but *we have done wickedly*.

3. He believes Christ to have suffered *wrongfully*. Though he was condemned in two courts, and run upon as if he had been the worst of malefactors, yet this penitent thief is convinced, by his conduct in his sufferings, that *he has done nothing amiss, ouden atopon* — *nothing absurd, or unbecoming his character*. The chief priests would have him crucified *between* the malefactors, as *one of them*; but this thief has more sense than they, and owns he is *not one of them*. Whether he had before heard of Christ and of his wonderous works does not appear, but the Spirit of grace enlightened him with this knowledge, and enabled him to say, This man has *done nothing amiss*.

Secondly, See what he said to our Lord Jesus: *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom*, v. 42. This is the prayer of a *dying sinner* to a *dying Saviour*. It was the honour of Christ to be *thus prayed to*, though he was upon the cross reproached and reviled. It was the happiness of the thief *thus to pray*; perhaps he never prayed before, and yet now was heard, and saved at the last gasp. While there is life there is hope, and while there is hope there is room for prayer.

1. Observe his *faith* in this prayer. In his confession of sin (v. 41) he discovered *repentance towards God*. In this petition he discovered

faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. He owns him to be *Lord*, and to have a *kingdom*, and that he was going to that kingdom, that he should have authority in that kingdom, and that those should be happy whom he favoured; and to *believe* and *confess* all this was a *great thing* at this time of day. Christ was now in the depth of disgrace, deserted by his own disciples, reviled by his own nation, suffering as a pretender, and not delivered by his Father. He made this profession before those prodigies happened which put honour upon his sufferings, and which startled the centurion; yet *verily we have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.* He believed *another life* after this, and desired to be happy in *that* life, not as the other thief, to be *saved from the cross*, but to be well provided for when the cross had done its worst.

2. Observe his humility in this prayer. All his request is, *Lord, remember me.* He does not pray, *Lord, prefer me* (as they did, ^{412B}Matthew 20:21), though, having the honour as none of the disciples had to drink of Christ's cup and to be baptized with his baptism either on his *right hand* or on *his left* in his sufferings when his own disciples had deserted him he might have had some colour to ask as they did to sit on his right hand and on his left in his kingdom. Acquaintance in sufferings has sometimes gained such a point, ^{253B}Jeremiah 52:31, 32. But he is far from the thought of it. All he begs is, *Lord, remember me*, referring himself to Christ in what way to remember him. It is a request like that of *Joseph to the chief butler, Think on me* (^{414A}Genesis 40:14), and it sped better; the chief butler *forgot Joseph*, but Christ remembered this thief.

3. There is an air of importunity and fervency in this prayer. He does, as it were, breathe out his soul in it: "*Lord, remember me, and I have enough; I desire no more; into thy hands I commit my case.*" Note, To be remembered by Christ, now that he is in his kingdom, is what we should earnestly desire and pray for, and it will be enough to secure our welfare living and dying. Christ is *in his kingdom*, interceding. "*Lord, remember me, and intercede for me.*" He is there ruling. "*Lord, remember me, and rule in me by thy Spirit.*" He is there preparing places for those that are his. "*Lord, remember me, and prepare a place for me; remember me at death, remember me in the resurrection.*" See ^{843B}Job 14:13.

[2.] The extraordinary grants of Christ's favour to him: *Jesus said unto him*, in answer to his prayer, “*Verily I say unto thee, I the Amen, the faithful Witness, I say Amen to this prayer, put my fiat to it: nay, thou shalt have more than thou didst ask, This day thou shalt be with me in paradise,*” v. 43. Observe,

First, To whom this was spoken: to the penitent thief, to him, and not to his companion. Christ upon the cross is like Christ upon the throne; for *now is the judgment of this world*: one departs with a curse, the other with a blessing. Though Christ himself was now in the greatest struggle and agony, yet he had a word of comfort to speak to a poor penitent that committed himself to him. Note, Even great sinners, if they be true penitents, shall, through Christ, obtain not only the pardon of their sins, but a place in the paradise of God, ~~395~~ Hebrews 9:15. This magnifies the riches of free grace, that rebels and traitors shall not only be pardoned, but preferred, thus preferred.

Secondly, By whom this was spoken. This was another mediatorial word which Christ spoke, though upon a particular occasion, yet with a general intention to explain the true intent and meaning of his sufferings; as he died to purchase the *forgiveness of sins* for us (v. 34), so also to purchase *eternal life* for us. By this word we are given to understand that Jesus Christ died to *open the kingdom of heaven to all penitent obedient believers*.

1. Christ here lets us know that he was going to paradise himself, to *hades — the invisible world*. His human soul was removing to the place of separate souls; not to the place of the damned, but to paradise, the place of the blessed. By this he assures us that his satisfaction was accepted, and the Father was well pleased in him, else he had not gone to paradise; that was the beginning of the joy set before him, with the prospect of which he comforted himself. He went by the cross to the crown, and we must not think of going any other way, or of being perfected but by sufferings.

2. He lets all penitent believers know that when they die they shall go to be with him there. He was now, as a priest, purchasing this happiness for them, and is ready, as a king, to confer it upon them when they are prepared and made ready for it. See here how the happiness of heaven is set forth to us.

(1.) It is *paradise*, a garden of pleasure, the *paradise of God* (~~4117~~ Revelation 2:7), alluding to the garden of Eden, in which our first parents were placed when they were innocent. In the second Adam we are restored to all we lost in the first Adam, and more, to a heavenly paradise instead of an earthly one.

(2.) It is being *with Christ* there. That is the happiness of heaven, to see Christ, and sit with him, and share in his glory, ~~4172~~ John 17:24.

(3.) It is immediate upon death: *This day shalt thou be with me*, tonight, before to-morrow. *Thou souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, immediately are in joy and felicity*; the spirits of just men are immediately *made perfect*. Lazarus departs, and is immediately *comforted*; Paul departs, and is immediately with Christ, ~~4123~~ Philippians 1:23.

~~4234~~ LUKE 23:44-49

THE CRUCIFIXION

In these verses we have three things: —

I. Christ's dying *magnified* by the *prodigies* that attended it: only two are here mentioned, which we had an account of before.

1. The *darkening of the sun at noon-day*. It was now about the *sixth hour*, that is, according to our computation, twelve o'clock at noon; and there was a *darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour*. The sun was eclipsed and the air exceedingly clouded at the same time, both which concurred to this thick darkness, which continued *three hours*, not *three days*, as that of Egypt did.

2. The *rending of the veil of the temple*. The former prodigy was in the *heavens*, this in the *temple*; for both these are the houses of God, and, when the Son of God was thus abused, they could not but feel the indignity, and thus signify their resentment of it. By this rending of the veil was signified the taking away of the ceremonial law, which was a wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, and of all other difficulties and discouragements in our approaches to God, so that now we may *come boldly to the throne of grace*.

II. Christ's dying *explained* (v. 46) by the words with which he breathed out his soul. Jesus *had cried* with a loud voice when he said, *Why hast thou forsaken me?* So we are told in Matthew and Mark, and, it should seem, it was with a *loud voice* that he said this too, to show his earnestness, and that all the people might take notice of it: and this he said, *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*

1. He borrowed these words from his father David (^{<4905>}Psalm 31:5); not that he needed to have words put into his mouth, but he chose to make use of David's words to show that it was the Spirit of Christ that testified in the Old-Testament prophets, and that he came to fulfil the scripture. Christ died with scripture in his mouth. Thus he directs us to make use of scripture language in our addresses to God.

2. In this address to God he calls him *Father*. When he complained of being forsaken, he cried, *Eli, Eli, My God, my God;* but, to show that dreadful agony of his soul was now over, he here calls God *Father*. When he was giving up his life and soul for us, he did for us call God *Father*, that we through him might receive the adoption of sons.

3. Christ made use of these words in a sense peculiar to himself as Mediator. He was now to *make his soul an offering for our sin* (^{<2530>}Isaiah 53:10), to *give his life a ransom for many* (^{<4113>}Matthew 20:28), *by the eternal Spirit to offer himself,* ^{<3094>}Hebrews 9:14. He was himself both the priest and the sacrifice; our souls were forfeited, and his must go to redeem the forfeiture. The price must be paid *into the hands* of God, the party offended by sin; to him he had undertaken to make full satisfaction. Now by these words he *offered up the sacrifice*, did, as it were, lay his hand upon the head of it, and surrender it; *tithemi* — “I *deposit* it, I pay it down into thy hands. Father, accept of my life and soul instead of the lives and souls of the sinners I die for.” The *animus offerentis* — *the good will of the offerer*, was requisite to the acceptance of the offering. Now Christ here expresses his cheerful willingness to offer himself, as he had done when it was first proposed to him (^{<3109>}Hebrews 10:9, 10), *Lo, I come to do thy will, by which will we are sanctified.*

4. Christ hereby signifies his dependence upon his Father for his resurrection, by the re-union of his soul and body. He commends his spirit into his Father's hand, to be *received* into paradise, and *returned* the third day. By this it appears that our Lord Jesus, as he had a *true body*, so he had

a reasonable soul, which existed in a state of separation from the body, and thus he was made like unto his brethren; this soul he lodged in his Father's hand, committed it to his custody, resting in hope that it should not be left in *hades*, in its *state of separation* from the body, no, not so long as that the body might see corruption.

5. Christ has hereby left us an example, has fitted those words of David to the purpose of dying saints, and hath, as it were, sanctified them for their use. In death our great care should be about our souls, and we cannot more effectually provide for their welfare than by committing them now into the hands of God, as a Father, to be sanctified and governed by his Spirit and grace, and at death committing them into his hands to be made perfect in holiness and happiness. We must show that we are freely willing to die, that we firmly believe in another life after this, and are desirous of it, by saying, *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*

III. Christ's dying improved by the impressions it made upon those that attended him.

1. The centurion that had command of the guard was much affected with what he saw, v. 47. He was a Roman, a Gentile, a stranger to the consolations of Israel; and yet he *glorified God*. He never saw such amazing instances of divine power, and therefore took occasion thence to adore God as the *Almighty*. And he bore a testimony to the patient sufferer: "*Certainly this was a righteous man, and was unjustly put to death.*" God's manifesting his power so much to do him honour was a plain evidence of his innocency. His testimony in Matthew and Mark goes further: *Truly this was the Son of God*. But in his case this amounts to the same; for, if he was *a righteous man*, he said very truly when he said that *he was the Son of God*; and therefore that testimony of his concerning himself must be admitted, for, if it were false, he was not a *righteous man*.

2. The disinterested spectators could not but be concerned. This is taken notice of only here, v. 48. *All the people that came together to that sight*, as is usual upon such occasions, *beholding the things which were done*, could not but go away very serious for the time, whatever they were when they came home: *They smote their breasts, and returned.*

(1.) They laid the thing very much to heart for the present. They looked upon it as a wicked thing to put him to death, and could not but think that some judgment of God would come upon their nation for it. Probably

these very people were of those that had cried, *Crucify him, crucify him*, and, when he was nailed to the cross, reviled and blasphemed him; but now they were so terrified with the darkness and the earthquake, and the uncommon manner of his expiring, that they had not only their mouths stopped, but their consciences startled, and in remorse for what they had done, as the publican, they *smote upon their breasts*, beat upon their own hearts, as those that had indignation at themselves. Some think that this was a happy step towards that good work which was afterwards wrought upon them, when they were pricked to the heart, ~~<4037>~~ Acts 2:37.

(2.) Yet, it should seem, the impression soon wore off: *They smote their breasts, and returned*. They did not show any further token of respect to Christ, nor enquire more concerning him, but went home; and we have reason to fear that in a little time they quite forgot it. Thus many that see Christ evidently set forth crucified among them in the word and sacraments are a little affected for the present, but it does not continue; they smite their breasts, and return. They see Christ's face in the glass of the ordinances and admire him; but they *go away, and straightway forget what manner of man he is*, and what reason they have to love him.

3. His own friends and followers were obliged to keep their distance, and yet got as near as they could and durst, to see what was done (v. 49): *All his acquaintance*, that knew him and were known of him, *stood afar off*, for fear lest if they had been near him they should have been taken up as favourers of him; this was part of his sufferings, as of Job's (~~<4043>~~ Job 19:13): *He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me*. See ~~<4048>~~ Psalm 88:18. And *the women that followed him together from Galilee were beholding these things*, not knowing what to make of them, nor so ready as they should have been to take them for certain preludes of his resurrection. Now was Christ *set for a sign that should be spoken against*, as Simeon foretold, *that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed*, ~~<4054>~~ Luke 2:34, 35.

LUKE 23:50-56

THE BURIAL OF CHRIST

We have here an account of Christ's burial; for he must be brought not only to death, but to the dust of death (⁽¹²²⁵⁾Psalm 22:15), according to the sentence (⁽¹⁰⁸⁹⁾Genesis 3:19), *To the dust thou shalt return*. Observe,

I. Who buried him. His acquaintance *stood afar off*; they had neither money to bear the *charge* nor courage to bear the *odium* of burying him decently; but God raised up one that had both, a *man named Joseph*, v. 50. His character is that he was *a good man and a just*, a man of unspotted reputation for virtue and piety, not only *just* to all, but good to all that needed him (and care to *bury the dead*, as becomes the hope of the resurrection of the dead, is one instance of goodness and beneficence); he was a person of quality, a counsellor, a senator, a member of the sanhedrim, one of the elders of the Jewish church. Having said this of him, it was necessary to add that, though he was of that body of men who had put Christ to death, yet he *had not consented to their counsel and deed* (v. 51), though it was carried by the majority, yet he entered his protest against it, and followed not the multitude to do evil. Note, That evil counsel or deed to which we have not consented shall not be reckoned our act. Nay, he not only *dissented* openly from those that were enemies to Christ, but he *consented* secretly with those that were his friends: *He himself waited for the kingdom of God*; he believed the Old-Testament prophecies of the Messiah and his kingdom, and expected the accomplishment of them. This was the man that appears upon this occasion to have had a true respect for the Lord Jesus. Note, There are many who are hearty in Christ's interests, how, though they do not make any show in their outward profession of it, yet will be more ready to do him a piece of real service, when there is occasion, than others who make a greater figure and noise.

II. What he did towards the burying of him.

1. He *went to Pilate*, the judge that condemned him, and *begged the body of Jesus*, for it was at his disposal; and, though he might have raised a party sufficient to have carried off the body by violence, yet he would take the regular course, and do it peaceably.

2. He *took it down*, it should seem, with his own hands, and *wrapped it in linen*. They tell us that it was the manner of the Jews to *roll* the bodies of the dead, as we do little children in their *swaddling-clothes*, and that the word here used signifies as much; so that the piece of fine linen, which he bought whole, he cut into many pieces for this purpose. It is said of Lazarus, *He was bound hand and foot*, ^{<B14>}John 11:44. *Grave-clothes* are to the saints as *swaddling-clothes*, which they shall out-grow and put off, when they *come to the perfect man*.

III. Where he was buried. *In a sepulchre that was hewn in stone*, that the prison of the grave might be made strong, as the church, when she was brought into darkness, had her way *enclosed with hewn stone*, ^{<B14>}Lamentations 3:2, 9. But it was *a sepulchre in which never man before was laid*, for he was buried on such an account as never any one before him was buried, only in order to his rising again the third day by his own power; and he was to triumph over the grave as never any man did.

IV. When he was buried. *On the day of the preparation, when the sabbath drew on*, v. 54. This is given as a reason why they made such haste with the funeral, because the *sabbath drew on*, which required their attendance to other work, preparing for the sabbath, and going forth to welcome it. Note, Weeping must not hinder sowing. Though they were in tears for the death of Christ, yet they must apply themselves to the sanctifying of the sabbath; and, when the sabbath draws on, there must be *preparation*. Our worldly affairs must be so ordered that they may not hinder us from our sabbath work, and our holy affections must be so excited that they may carry us on in it.

V. Who attended the funeral; not any of the disciples, but only *the women that came with him from Galilee* (v. 55), who, as they staid by him while he hung on the cross, so they *followed* him, all in tears no doubt, and *beheld the sepulchre* where it was, which was the way to it, and *how his body was laid in it*. They were led to this, not by their curiosity, but by their affection to the Lord Jesus, which was *strong as death* and which *many waters could not quench*. Here was a silent funeral, and not a solemn one, and yet *his rest was glorious*.

VI. What preparation was made for the embalming of his body after he was buried (v. 56): *They returned, and prepared spices and ointments*, which was more an evidence of their love than of their faith; for had they

remembered and believed what he had so often told them, that he should *rise again the third day*, they would have spared their *cost and pains* herein, as knowing that in a short time there would be a greater honour put upon his body, by the glory of his resurrection, than they could put upon it with their most *precious ointments*; but, busy as they were in this preparation, they *rested on the sabbath day*, and did none of this servile work thereon, not only according to the custom of their nation, but *according to the commandments* of their God, which, though the day be altered, is still in full force: *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.*