

(The Life of Jesus) His Crucifixion

by Earle Maxwell

Earle Maxwell's sermon explores the significance of Jesus' crucifixion, highlighting the transformation of the penitent thief and the fulfillment of prophecy.

Duration: 42:18

Scripture: Psalm 23:4, Matthew 27:39-40, Matthew 27:43, Luke 23:40-41, Luke 23:47

Topics: "The Cross", "Repentance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of receiving a late-night phone call from a distressed woman whose husband was in the intensive care ward. This experience leads the speaker to reflect on the question posed in Luke 23:39, 'Who is he on yonder tree, dies in grief and agony?' The speaker then explores the scene of the two thieves crucified alongside Jesus and highlights the transformative power of God's work in unexpected ways. The sermon emphasizes the importance of choosing to be identified with the repentant thief who found forgiveness through Jesus, rather than dying in sin.

Transcript

Now there you have the question, in that fourth verse before us tonight. Who is he on yonder tree, dies in grief and agony? We'll look through part of Luke chapter 23 and we'll need a little later to just backtrack into St. Matthew's Gospel to pick up one or two further thoughts to help us. But when I was preparing this message and I just thank God for the way in which he gave me a nice little tune-up in my own heart and life as I prepared it.

I find that time spent in preparation in God's Word is always an enriching experience. I wish I had a little more time sometimes. But in this incident, when I looked at the question in the song, I realised that on the day that Jesus Christ was crucified Pilate didn't want anybody to misunderstand who it was on that centre cross.

This is Jesus, the King of the Jews. And Pilate was so adamant that he wanted everybody to understand who it was on the cross that he insisted that this title should appear in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. So Pilate, he said, he is the King of the Jews.

But the crowd around the cross, and the crowd comprised a motley group. In Australia we say a motley mob. There were priests there.

There were scribes there. Rulers were there. Soldiers were there.

The ordinary man was there. And it seems as though they had to get into one concerned chorus. And they turned round and they said to Jesus, We want you to come down from the cross.

And when you come down from the cross, that to us will be the sign that you are the Son of God. They said we will not settle for anything less than that, if you are the Son of God. At first, the two thieves, if you compare the synoptic gospels on this incident, you will find out that the two thieves at first were rather anti-Christ, both of them.

And so they turned around and also chorused in a duet system we might say, If you are the Son of God, if you are, save yourself and us. And so these people around the cross and on the cross, they are reaching out to try and discover who it is, and they are putting conditions before the Son of God, and they say if you fulfil the conditions that we as human beings put before you, then that for us will be the confirmation that you are the Son of God. The centurion a little later, he was a little belated in his response, and he said, truly this was the Son of God.

But you see there is a change beginning to emerge in one of the desperados, as Dr Arthur called them this morning. In one of these thieves, his attitude starts to change, and in a very wonderful way we find that this man became the first trophy of the cross, and the last convert that Jesus had in the flesh. We call him the penitent thief.

Now seven times in scripture, on this occasion on the cross, who is he on the cross? Seven times he speaks. And although time will not allow us to go into each of the sayings tonight, we'll just refer to some of them briefly and we'll ask the question, who is this who on the cross prays for his enemies? Who is this on the cross who was concerned for his mother? Who is this on the cross who felt the physical torture of thirst? Who is this on the cross who granted pardon to a penitent thief? Who is this on the cross who dies with scripture on his lips? He who began his ministry hungering, concludes his ministry on the cross thirsting, and he is Jesus. Well now whilst we don't have time to go into other aspects of the seven sayings of the cross, I felt that if we just asked those questions, who is it? And you and I know, or many of us tonight know, and we can answer with an affirmative and say, I know him, I know him as my saviour, I know him and the power of his resurrection, and I want to know more of the power in my life.

Well tonight we're just looking at this further profile of Jesus as over the space of this week we're going through the life of Christ. Now when you see Jesus on the cross, you immediately have to remember that Jesus was fulfilling prophecy. And when you think of him as being numbered amongst the transgressors, I've just put down three comments here that I'd like you to just receive and you may meditate on them at your own time.

But if you go back to the birth of Jesus as we did in our first Bible study, you will realise that Jesus was born for the transgressor. Matthew 1.21. If you go through the scriptures, and particularly let's take a verse, say Matthew 20.28, you'll find that Jesus lived for the transgressor. And then in Isaiah 53.12, he died with the transgressor.

Jesus. And if for a moment you look at those three crosses, you'll find that the three men who died on the cross, three crosses there in Calvary, every cross represents a different confrontation with eternity. On one cross we have rebellion.

On the other side we have repentance. And in the centre cross, praise God, we have redemption, for we are redeemed through his blood. It has been put to me in these terms that one of those men died in sin, one died to sin, and one and one only died for sin.

Now as we proceed then to ask ourselves, who is this? And although we know in our own minds and hearts who it is, it was Jesus. Let us learn from the details of this incident, how living and real the Son of God became to one man, who in desperation and yet in an experience obviously of repentance and faith, reached out and found for himself the saviourhood of Jesus Christ. I just want to say tonight that when I look at the incident of Calvary, I realise that there's some conflict that went on during that memorable day.

And first of all, when I look at the two thieves, one on either side of Jesus, I realise that from their point of view, first of all, the most important thing at that moment was physical survival. That's why they turned around initially and one, perhaps speaking for two, said, save yourself and us. Their interest wasn't in spiritual things.

To them the supreme matter was physical survival. And I want to tell you that one of the great tragedies of our age in which we live, is that people are more concerned with physical survival than they are with matters to do with their own spirits. You've only got to go out onto the highways early in the morning or late in the afternoon and see people jogging away.

They want to keep fit because their great concern is physical survival. And you know, it reminded me of an experience that happened when we were Corps officers. The telephone rang at about 1am in the morning.

Not an ideal time to get a phone call, especially if your hand isn't quite on the beam to reach out and the telephone falls down in the process. One o'clock in the morning and I heard a very agitated lady's voice and she said, Captain, my husband is in hospital in the intensive care ward. She said, would you come immediately? And she said, when you come I want you to do something really special.

And I said, I'll come now, I'll just dress up and I'll be there in no time. She said, when you come I want you to say a double prayer. I said, I beg your pardon? She said, I want you to say a double prayer.

I've never been asked in my life to say a double prayer. But when I got into that hospital ward, the intensive care at that early morning hour and I saw the condition of her husband and I saw her agitation, I realised that what she was saying, I want you to pray by God's grace in a way that my husband will be restored. And so she felt she would encourage me.

And she said, you know, Captain, if my husband recovers after your prayer, we're going to come to the Salvation Army every Sunday. We'll want to come to church, we'll want to give thanks to God. And I said, you're very welcome, but let's just spend some time in prayer.

And you know, that man recovered from his serious heart attack. And I looked for him the next Sunday after he had been discharged from hospital and I couldn't find him in the congregation. And I looked again and again and again, but they never came back to thank God for the touch of healing on his life.

There's a little four-liner which says, God and the doctor men adore only in sickness and not before. When health returns and all is righted, God is forgotten, the doctor's physical survival. And so on the cross these two men, one on either side of Jesus, at first their great concern was physical survival.

But not only did they have a word to say, but so also did the crowd around the cross. And if you look at this, this is what Bishop Fulton Sheen said, on that day it wasn't democracy, it was mobocracy. So I'd like you just for a moment with me to go into Matthew chapter 27 please, Matthew 27.

And I want to find with you how the crowd responded to Jesus on the cross. We've heard the initial comment from these two thieves, now listen to what Jesus has to respond and take in from the crowd around the cross. Matthew 27 and verse 40.

Well let's take 39. And they that pass by reviled him, wagging their heads and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

And so straight away the crowd was flinging into the ears of Jesus the assertion that they doubted his divinity. If you are the Son of God, come down. You talk, as Captain dealt with doubt in his message to us, you talk about doubt, one of the great words that the devil uses to get his first foot in through the door is to use that little word, if.

And you remember in the temptation when Satan came and challenged our Lord in the wilderness, what did he say? If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread, if. You see, one of the great weapons of the devil is to get you and I to doubt the almightiness of God. It's as old as the first pages of scripture.

And if you go into Genesis chapter 3, you'll find that in the Garden of Eden when Satan came and presented his plan to Adam and Eve and he spoke to Eve and he said, Have God said that you shall surely die? In other words, he wanted them to doubt the word of God. And not only that, he appealed to their ego and he said, Oh, but if you do what I want you to do, you shall be as gods. My word, the devil paints an attractive picture when he puts his brush to that spiritual canvas.

But I want to tell you it's a false facade. I want to tell you that you've got to look behind it. And when Jesus was on the cross and had to submit to the crowd as they voiced their angry words directed him, first of all, they doubted his divinity.

But as we look at it further in verse 42, they also depreciated his ministry. Forty-two. He saved others.

Himself he cannot save. They depreciated his ministry. Now they couldn't doubt that Jesus had done some wonderful things, wonderful miracles.

In fact, did you notice in Dr. Arthur's reading this morning, or was it yesterday, concerning Lazarus? In John 11. That those who are watching what was happening, it says there, I think it was verse 37, those who are watching what was happening and perhaps scratching their heads say, this is a little problem. You know, this man, we've seen so many of his miracles.

Why didn't he intervene and stop this man from dying? That's John 11.37. And so here on the cross, Jesus has to respond to the taunting crowd. Not only that they doubt his divinity, but they're depreciating his ministry. They're writing him off.

But they're giving him an escape route. And the third point is, they say to him, Jesus, we'll dictate the terms. We'll dictate the terms in verse 42.

If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross and we will believe him. Oh, man's way is always wanting things to be lowered. But Jesus said, if I be lifted up.

You see the difference? And here they were taunting Jesus and saying, we'll give you an escape route, but it will be on our terms if you come down. William Booth said, we believe because God stayed up on the cross. And praise God, that's my Saviour, Jesus Christ.

But now let's go back to the scene of the two thieves. Something is stirring in one of them. You must never be surprised at the way God works.

And sometimes one of the most beautiful experiences in ministry is to come across something and see how that God has ordained a set of circumstances. As I said earlier in this series, I've learned to realise that God's, what I have used to call coincidence, I've learned to call providence. Let me just illustrate.

When we were appointed to the Philippines, 1986, I got a little letter and the territorial commander called me up and said, Earl, I've got a blue envelope from London. Now I wasn't sure what a blue envelope from London meant in those days. And so he said, do you want to read it now? And I said, don't tell me it's farewell orders.

Yes, he said, it's farewell orders. So I hurriedly opened the envelope and it just simply said, God bless you, you're off to the Philippines. Not the Philistines, the Philippines.

We've been with David and Goliath and it was a little bit like David and Goliath. And do you know that I went home and for a day or two I knew that all I could do was go, my wife and I knew that we have to go God's way. We salute and say, OK.

And I woke up a night or two later, I was having a restless night. That's how I should describe it. I was having a restless night.

And I eventually got up out of bed and went out into the kitchen and got my Bible open because at that time I was meandering through the Proverbs. Not the easiest book to make your way through at any hour, let alone at two or three o'clock in the morning. But some wonderful truths.

And at that very moment I happened to look again at Proverbs 3, 5 and 6. And straight away God gave me a sense of peace. I didn't have any more anxiety about going to the Philippines. It was another month or two before the details were made public and then we were on our way.

But do you know, we hadn't been in the Philippines any more than four or five days when we had to go and get measured up for our white uniforms. For there they wear the white all the time. And do you know that when we went to this little tailor shop which was a very small room on the other side of Manila, it was almost a Sabbath day's journey to get there.

And the chief secretary took us in and introduced us to the tailor. And all of a sudden I was overcome by a remarkable experience. Do you know that in that tailor shop in the Philippines as I looked on one of the walls, perhaps six feet by eight, nothing more than that.

Do you know what was on the wall? Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy path. Coincidence? Not in your life.

It was providence. And that's my God. And your God.

And our Jesus. And so tonight as we look just for the closing moments at the stirring that was beginning to take place and we'll go back to Luke and just pick up the doctor's words on how things happen. In verse 40 of Luke 23, suddenly something is happening to this man and he begins to express himself not to Jesus but first of all he sends his words directly across in front of Jesus to the other thief on the other side.

And confession is beginning to be made. And first of all he says he feared God. That's the first thing in verse 40.

Dost not thou fear God? He says to the other thief. And then in verse 41 he begins to confess his own guilt and then he says we received justly for we received the due reward of our deeds. In other words he says the court's decision was the right one.

I am a sinner. And then he makes another interesting statement. He confesses that Jesus Christ is innocent.

He says to the other thief, this man hath done nothing amiss. And then in verse 42, isn't this remarkable? He believed in life after death. And he said unto Jesus, Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom.

How did he come to this conclusion and this state of mind and heart? How did this man come to a moment that he would evoke from Jesus the only answer that Jesus gave to anybody on Calvary? Jesus spoke seven times but he did not answer any question except to this man who said Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom. How did he come to this state of mind and heart? Is it possible that he might have been moved by the prayer of Jesus? Because the first words that Jesus said on the cross were Father forgive them. You know when we talk of the ministry of prayer we're talking about one of the most exciting aspects of ministry that God has allowed you and I to embrace in our own Christian pilgrimage.

When I was a young officer I heard Mrs. Commissioner Grinstead no no I'm sorry it was Mrs. General Kitching they are related but I better give the credit to the right person. Mrs. General Kitching told a story in Australia in a meeting about someone in Finland and I was greatly moved when I heard the story and it seemed so remarkable that I never used it. I just kept it to myself and I thought I'd like if I could meet someone from Finland I'd like to just make sure that this isn't a pulpit illustration.

Now there is a difference because a Baptist minister said to me in Australia Earl do you have pulpit illustrations in the Salvation Army? I said what's a pulpit illustration you tell me. Well he said there are three types of illustrations. There's a true illustration, there's a false illustration and in the middle there's a pulpit illustration.

So I thought I'd better go careful. Well you know last year we were in Spain for the opening of a new core building and I knew that the officer commanding's wife came from Finland and I said to her listen to this story and see if it sounds right. There was a Salvation Army lady in Finland who had a husband and six sons.

The husband became a communist and the six sons also in time followed their father's example. What an example fathers have to shed upon their children. I say to parents you only have one opportunity to raise your children.

You don't have an opportunity for a rerun. Make sure you set an example that speaks to them of God. And so this lady prayed that her husband might get converted but he was deeply ingrained into communism.

He didn't want anything to do with Christianity, not at all and neither did the young lads, the six of them. But he was a carpenter and it so happened that eventually the property board passed some improvements to the hall. Long overdue.

And they subcontracted some of the details and this lady's husband put in for some of the contracts. And part of his job was to build a new mercy seat. And he said to his wife, what is a mercy seat? What is this you have in the Salvation Army called a mercy seat? And she explained it, he said, rubbish.

You want to be real and live in the real world instead of that experience. But on the day that the hall improvements were to be opened he came with his six sons because out of acknowledgement that he had a part in the achievement and also to please his wife who asked that he might get. She'd been praying for 20 years for them.

And do you know that at the end of that service Do you know who was first to the mercy seat? The husband. And do you know who were the next six to the mercy seat? The six sons. And do you know that those six sons all became Salvation Army officers.

Because one woman had prayed and said I will not give up because I believe God answers prayer. And then when I told the story to Mrs. Connolly-Learson she said you've got your details right. Oh I said I'll be able to use it now as an illustration.

She said that was my grandfather in Finland. And I now also am a Salvation Army officer because my father was one of those six sons. You see it could be that the thief on the cross was greatly influenced by the prayer life of Jesus who in the agony of his experience the first words that he uttered from the cross were Father forgive them.

Could it be that he'd noticed the mother of Jesus nearby and he saw her weeping. And suddenly this man may have thought of his own upbringing because every Jewish boy was trained by his mother that he never retired at night to enjoy his sleep without first saying this quotation from the Psalms into thy hands I commend my spirit. It could have been.

It could have been a look from Christ because you know that when Jesus saw Matthew and looked at him there at the receipt of custom he then spoke to him and immediately Matthew got up and left everything behind except his pen and ink to follow Jesus. Or the rich young ruler. Jesus it says loved him, beholding him, loved him, looked.

It could have been the gathering threshold on the threshold of eternity. It could have been pain. It could have been a number of things.

But all I know is that I don't dispute what God uses to bring men and women to himself. All I have learned to do is to give thanks to God that even in this day and age he is winning men and women unto himself. And so here we have this man, this penitent thief and we find finally as we move into our last analysis of this segment of scripture we see that at this moment Christ was visibly doomed and dying.

No one else was asking Jesus for salvation. The priests and the rulers were mocking Christ. The crowd was opposing him and the soldiers were laughing at him.

The other thief mocked him and while passers-by were demanding proof of his divinity this one man did not ask for such proof simply to know the presence of God in a personal way. As I said, Christ answered

no one on the cross except this one man. And so what do we learn then about this man on the cross? Who is he? The man who was taunted by the passers-by to prove his divinity beyond doubt so that according to their terms they would be able to then respond.

I want to tell you I learned one or two things and they really reach my own heart and I share them with you tonight. Only Jesus valued this man at his true worth. Only Jesus.

Everybody else would have looked at this man and written him off but didn't Jesus say I came into the world to save sinners? And you know Paul in writing to Timothy spoke about that saying that is worthy of all that acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. You see, the thief knew he was lost and condemned but he still felt that he had an opportunity to request salvation and God granted him that request. You see, it reminded me of a Salvation Army officer in Sydney who spoke at an advisory board meeting and it was one of those occasions when we always tried to have someone there to give a word of testimony and this captain had been addicted to drugs for some 15 or 20 years before she came to the Salvation Army and in a very wonderful way God transformed her life and then later on she became an auxiliary captain.

But I will never forget this part of her testimony. She told this group of very successful businessmen she said to them when I came to the Salvation Army they saw my possibilities not my past. And isn't that what Jesus does with you and me? Jesus, the Lord, the Saviour he sees possibilities in you and me more so perhaps than we are even capable of giving ourselves any encouragement even to think but blessed be God he sees value in every one of us.

The second thing I want to say to you is this that the answer to this prayer was greater than the prayer itself. All this man said to Jesus was give me a place in your memory Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom and Jesus gave him an answer that was greater than the prayer. Hallelujah.

Have you ever been surprised that God has given you an answer that is greater than your request and you say oh God I am not worthy. The answer is greater than the prayer. And finally I believe that this man gave great consolation to Jesus as his last convert in the flesh.

And knowing your Bible as you do I would think that readily would come to mind Paul's statement in Galatians 2.20 I am crucified with Christ nevertheless I live yet not I but Christ liveth in me. And I believe that that man that penitent thief could say those words in a more personal sense than Paul ever could. Because of that experience I am crucified with Christ.

Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And what did Jesus say? Jesus said to him verily I say unto you today thou shalt be with me in paradise. Did you notice this morning I just thank God for our visiting speakers because I have been blessed in every session God has had something for my heart in every session.

And I would thank God for the ministry of his service. Then this morning as Dr. Arthur was taking us in that beautiful way through Psalm 23 What does it say? And as I was sitting down here this morning and I thought I will fear no evil for thou art with me. Remember? In Psalm 23.

And as I read it suddenly this scripture came to mind again Today thou shalt be with me. You can explain the today as you will we will leave that to the theologians. But all that I want to say tonight the important words to my heart are that those words which say you will be with me and if I am hid in Christ then that is

all that matters I want to be with him and I am sure you do too.

And so I leave you this little summary of what we have been talking about tonight. What certainty What certainty Verily I say unto thee What speed today What a location in paradise What companionship with me Who is he on yonder tree dies in grief and agony You and I can never face the closing moment of life like Jesus did who died for sin but we will be identified with either the unrepentant thief or the thief who found the forgiveness of God granted him through the promise of Jesus We will either die in sin or to sin and I thank God that that man on the cross was none other than Jesus Christ the Son of God who did not need to come down in order to prove that he was the Son of God but he proves to my heart and mind that he is the Son of God who ever liveth to make intercession for me and for you and I want to give thanks tonight that he is mine loving me seeking me finding me keeping me He is

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/12/SID12347.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/earle-maxwell/the-life-of-jesus-his-crucifixion/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net