

THIEVES IN THE DARKNESS

I. Luke 23:32-43

A. This past Sunday we celebrated Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. As palm branches waved, He rode in on a donkey with His disciples, close friends, folks He'd healed, and people who hoped He'd overthrow the Romans. Many cheered. Jewish leaders sneered. Then everything changed. Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. He was arrested and stood trial before the high priest, Jewish leaders, King Herod, and Pontius Pilate. Pilate found Him guilty of nothing yet turned Him over to be crucified. They whipped Him with a cat-o-nine tails, crowned Him with thorns, mocked Him and spit on Him. Then they paraded Him to Golgotha to be crucified between two thieves. Luke picks up the narrative.

B. Luke 23:32-33 (ESV) 32 Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with Him. **33** And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, (*Kranion, Golgotha, Calvary*) there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on His right and one on His left. (**Matthew 27:38-44** writes: "Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. And those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked Him, saying, 'He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him. For He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" And the robbers who were crucified with Him also reviled Him in the same way.")

C. The Scriptures tell us they nailed Jesus to a xulon, a cross, a tree. Crucifixion was invented by the Persians but cruelly perfected by the Romans. Through hours of excruciating pain, people would die slowly from blood loss and suffocation. So there were three crosses on Skull Hill. Two thieves hung beside Him. As everyone mocks, Jesus dies for our sins. Around noon that day an erie darkness falls on Jerusalem. The earth quakes, rocks split open, and our sin is imputed to Him. He absorbs His Father's wrath against our sin. Luke continues.

D. Luke 23:34-43 (ESV) 34 And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide His garments. **35** And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He is the Christ of God, His Chosen One!" **36** The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up and offering Him sour wine **37** and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" **38** There was also an inscription over Him, "This is the King of the Jews." **39** One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" **40** But the other rebuked him, saying, (**Remember he began the day mocking!**) "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? **41** And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." **42** And he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." **43** And He said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

E. Right before Christmas 2012, someone stole the Baby Jesus from our Nativity Scene. I decided to write *The Beacon* and here's an excerpt: Dear Editor, Saturday night we discovered that someone stole the Baby Jesus from our outdoor Nativity scene. It was disheartening and frustrating all at the same time... As I've pondered this theft the past couple days, it dawned on me that we are all thieves of some sort. As children we may have stolen apples from a neighbor's tree or candy from the local drug store. Some steal answers off a fellow student's test while others steal ideas from more creative coworkers. Some break in houses and steal purses, jewelry, and even the medications of the elderly. Some steal another person's spouse. Plagiarism is a form of theft. Lying is theft of the truth. Downloading music not intended to be free is theft. Withholding an employee's wages is theft. Bullying, gossiping, posting slanderous remarks on Facebook--all are forms of theft, stealing away respect and dignity from someone else. Armed robbery and Wall Street ponzi schemes are both wretched forms of thievery. A dark and troubled soul walked into a Connecticut school building a few days ago and stole the lives of 20 beautiful little children. Sadly, we are all guilty of thievery of some sort. Through selfishness and pride, we have all robbed God of glory and honor that were intended just for Him. While it may have begun by stealing forbidden fruit off a tree where everything else was free for the taking, we are all creatures who dwell in a world where thorns infest the ground, where thieves break in and steal, where we feel entitled to the things that belong to others, where a finders-keepers-losers-weepers notion prevails in the hearts of so many, but alas there is hope.

F. The Hope I wrote about is what makes a very bad Friday, Good Friday. Remember, the thieves were getting what they deserved. But not Jesus. God the Son was paying the price for our sins, suffering in our place, absorbing God's wrath meant for us. God's justice demanded that sin be punished and Jesus was the answer. Likewise God's love and mercy could not be denied and Jesus was the answer. Jesus went to the cross to die for His Father and die for us! Jesus' suffering and sacrifice made the most horrible of Fridays, Good!

G. Evidently the thieves who stole our Baby Jesus were *Beacon* readers. Several days later, they returned Him. So I wrote the paper a followup letter: "Dear Editor, Two weeks ago I wrote a letter to *The Beacon* to share the frustrating news that the Baby Jesus from our outdoor Nativity scene had been stolen. A few days after the letter was printed, those who took it evidently had a change of heart, because the Baby Jesus was returned. We found the Christ Child hanging in our little Buckeye tree in front of our house, heaved there in haste no doubt so the kidnappers could maintain their anonymity. Some of our friends expressed disdain as to how He was returned but I assured them that even as the real

Messiah Babe was laid in a Bethlehem feeding trough, He was destined to be found hanging on a tree; and did that for us. The Apostle Peter wrote, *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth. When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."* (1 Peter 2:22-25, NIV)

H. The question before we take the Bread & Cup is this: Which of the two thieves are you? The one who dies mocking and rejecting Jesus or the one who mocked at first but then saw Eternal Hope in Jesus dying beside Him on the cross?

II. Communion

*** As we prepare to take the Bread & Cup, I want to read the lyrics of a song by Sidewalk Prophets, titled, "Lay Down My Life." This song inspired Suzi Nye's painting on our back wall. It's written from the perspective of Jesus as He walked up Skull Hill to die for our sins. This is the heart of Jesus for us.**

*** Pray & Serve Communion...**

Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff

Luke 23:32-43 (ESV)

32 Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with Him. **33** And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on His right and one on His left. **34** And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide His garments. **35** And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He is the Christ of God, His Chosen One!" **36** The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up and offering Him sour wine **37** and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" **38** There was also an inscription over Him, "This is the King of the Jews." **39** One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" **40** But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" **41** And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." **42** And he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." **43** And He said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

1 Peter 2:22-25 (NIV)

22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth." **23** When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. **24** "He Himself bore our sins" in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by His wounds you have been healed." **25** For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Lay Down My Life

Sidewalk Prophets

All your pain, will be made Mine, all your troubles, the tears you cry.
Give it up, all that binds, I will place it on My shoulders and up this hill I'll climb.

Father, give Me strength, I know there is no other way.
So I lay down My life for you, this is the moment when all will be made new.
I know that you don't understand, but this is part of a greater plan,
I lay down My life for you.

This is love, that had to bleed, to bring you mercy, to set you free.
You are Mine, I am yours, and I will wear your burdens just like this crown of thorns.
I will take your place, I know there is no other way.

And I lay down My life for you.
This is the moment when all will be made new,
I know that you don't understand, but this is part of a greater plan,
And I lay down My life for you.

Give Me all your pride, give Me all your fears,
Give Me all your secrets, and all your tears!

Give Me all you doubts, give Me all your shame,
Watch them wash away! Watch them wash away!
Give Me all your pride, give Me all your fears,
Give Me all your secrets, and all your tears!
Give Me all you doubts, give Me all your shame,
Watch them wash away, in Jesus' name!

I lay down My life for you!
This is the moment when all will be made new!
I know that you don't understand, but this is part of a greater plan,
And I lay down My life for you! Lay down My life for you!
Though I know that you don't understand, these scars are part of a greater plan,
And I lay down My life for you.

Arms stretched out, upon this tree, to show true love, to set you free!

- Behind the Song: "'Lay Down My Life' is written from the perspective of Christ, and set in the time period right before He carries the cross up the hill of Calvary to be crucified. Christ knew there was no other way, but suffered immeasurable pain, all for us. *"You are mine, I am yours, and I will wear your burdens just like this crown of thorns."* I have always thought of the cross as the most beautiful tragedy in the history of time. That a perfect innocent man would be so savagely destroyed for us, and yet He loved us enough to set us free from the burden of sin." - Sidewalk Prophets

Film Clips & Other Links

"Lay Down My Life" - Sidewalk Prophets
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdbBPpOs-7c>

"Jesus Paid it All" - Kristian Stanfill
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38EVco7eba0>

For Us - John Piper Sermon Jam (Powerful!)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wl9WeHb7u9s>

Bonus Stuff

Matthew 27:32-54 (ESV)

32 As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry His cross. **33** And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), **34** they offered Him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when He tasted it, He would not drink it. **35** And when they had crucified Him, they divided His garments among them by casting lots. **36** Then they sat down and kept watch over Him there. **37** And over His head they put the charge against Him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." **38** Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left. **39** And those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads **40** and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." **41** So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked Him, saying, **42** "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. **43** He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him. For He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" **44** And the robbers who were crucified with Him also reviled Him in the same way. **45** Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. **46** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" **47** And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." **48** And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to Him to drink. **49** But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him." **50** And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit. **51** And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. **52** The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, **53** and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. **54** When the centurion and those who were with Him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

When I Survey The Wondrous Cross

Lyrics by Isaac Watts - 1707, Music by Lowell Mason - 1824

Based upon Galatians 6:14 which says: *"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."* (NIV)

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died;
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.