

Luke 23:35-43

³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ (Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”) They divided his garments by casting lots.

The above is not part of the Sunday reading, but is generally considered within the narrative.

³⁵ The people stood by and watched; the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him and said, “He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God.” ³⁶ Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine ³⁷ they called out, “If you are King of the Jews, save yourself.” ³⁸ Above him there was an inscription that read, “This is the King of the Jews.” ³⁹ Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.” ⁴⁰ The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, “Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? ⁴¹ And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.” ⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³ He replied to him, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Context

Here on the last Sunday of Ordinary Time the Church celebrates Christ the King Sunday. The title is given several places in Scripture: king of ages (1 Timothy 1:17), King of Israel (John 1:49), King of the Jews (Mt. 27:11), King of kings (1 Tim 6:15; Rev. 19:16), King of the nations (Book of Revelation 15:3) and ruler of the kings of the Earth (Rev. 1:5). The solemnity has been celebrated on the Roman calendar since 1925 and was instituted as a culmination of the liturgical year and a reminder that in His suffering and death, Christ ascended to his throne.

Kings and Kingdoms

An oft used phrase in Luke, *he basileia tou theou* (the kingdom of God), is a difficult phrase to understand. How should it be translated?

- *basileia* can refer to the area ruled by a king. So phrases such as “entering the kingdom” (Luke 18:17, 24, 25) may be understood as coming to the region controlled by the king -- or entering the heavenly realm as the “kingdom of God”.
- *basileia* can refer to the power or authority to rule as king. With this understanding, “entering the kingdom of God” might be better understood as “accepting God's rule (over me/us).”

It is clear in Luke that the *basileia* of God refers to the second meaning. It is not something that can be seen (17:20). It is something within us (17:21). It is something proclaimed or preached (4:43; 8:1; 9:2, 60; 16:16). It contains secrets (8:10), but it can be sought (12:31) and given as a gift (12:32) and received (18:17). The kingdom comes near (10:9, 11; 21:31). All of these references make better sense if the kingdom is defined as “God's power to rule over us” rather than “a place where God rules”.

Did Jesus understand himself to be a king? We might assume that he did. The “Palm Sunday” crowds call Jesus king by quoting Psalm 118:26 (Luke 19:38). When Pilate asked: “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus answered: “Yes, it is as you say” (23:3) Usually, when Jesus is called “king” it is by his enemies who are mocking him (23:2, 37, 38). Culpepper (*Luke*, 456) notes this

in his comments on vv. 35-38: “The irony and pathos of Jesus' death are that those who mock him declare his messianic identity and the salvific significance of his death but do not grasp the truth they speak.”

The Crucifixion as a Moment of Discipleship

The gospel reading is from the Crucifixion. Joel Green (*Gospel of Luke*, 744) provides a clear context for the suffering and death of Jesus, couched in the idea of the growing conflict that has been so evident in the Holy Week encounters with the authorities in Jerusalem – a conflict that was indicated even at the earliest stages of Luke's gospel.

Luke's narrative of Jesus' suffering and death is inexorably linked to the earlier chapters of the Third Gospel by the development of numerous motifs, the most pervasive and important of which is the motif of conflict. Conflict, too, has been a primary force driving the narrative plot forward to this point. Jesus, according to Simeon, was to be the cause of division within Israel (2:34); as Luke has narrated it, division has surfaced as the divine purpose has been disclosed, first in the ministry of John (who was subsequently imprisoned [see 3:18-20] and beheaded [see 9:7-9]), then in the ministry of Jesus. The propagation of the “good news” has attracted both allies and opposition, with some persons working to embrace and serve the divine project, others to reject and obstruct it.

Both in anticipation (e.g., 13:31-35) and in reality (19:29-21:38) Jerusalem has been a place of conflict. Jerusalem is the center of the Jewish leadership (Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, et. al.) which has consistently opposed Jesus (e.g., 19:45-48; 20:9-19) and thus has taken a position against the purpose of God.

The gospel has been a call to discipleship – and thus a time to “take sides.” On the one hand is Jesus together with Jesus' disciples and “the people,” who have responded to the coming of God's reign in the person of Jesus. On the other are the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, as well as the devil. As Green points out (*Gospel of Luke*, 475) Luke's narration has repeatedly established the important place of “the people” as a buffer between Jesus and his opposition (cf. 19:47-48; 20:19) — a barrier that must now be breached if the Jerusalem leadership is to have its way with him. One need not look far for hints that this barrier is penetrable, since those closest to Jesus, the disciples, have been known to falter in their understanding and support of Jesus (e.g., 9:46-50; 18:15-17, 31-34); indeed, we have known for some time that one of them would become a traitor (6:17). Moreover, Jesus had only just predicted with reference to his followers, “*You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death*” (21:16). If this is the destiny of the followers, what of the one whom they follow?

Green (*Gospel of Luke*, 745-76) continues:

In fact, the Lukan account of Jesus' passion and death is in part the story of unholy alliances made and unmade, as this barrier is repeatedly, if only temporarily, breached. Satan and the Jerusalem leadership are allied in their opposition to Jesus (22:53), and it is through diabolic influence that one of the twelve, Judas, sides with the leadership against Jesus (22:3-6, 47-48). Judas is not alone, however. In their anxiety over relative honor and status at the table (22:24), all of the disciples participate in behavior reminiscent of that of the Jewish leadership (e.g., 20:45-21:4). Peter comes dangerously close to siding with Jesus' opponents, and he ends up denying his Lord three times (22:54-60). If Luke narrates the inconstancy of the disciples, though, he also recounts their eventual separation from those who oppose Jesus — first in the case of Peter (22:61-62), then in the case of the others (23:49). The only exception is Judas, whose place among the twelve must be filled by another (Acts 1:15-26).

The crowds (or the people) have by their support of Jesus frustrated the malicious plans of the temple leadership (22:1-6), but their support also wavers. First, “a crowd” interrupts Jesus on the Mount of Olives (22:47); in narrative time, several moments pass before Luke identifies the crowd as consisting of “the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders” (22:52), leaving us to think, however momentarily, that the crowds had not only wavered in their support of Jesus but had actually turned on him. Indeed, this is exactly what they come to do. In 23:4 the chief priests appear with “the crowds” of other Jewish authorities (22:52), then, without advance warning; and in 23:14 the chief priests, the leaders, *and* “the people” are said to have brought Jesus to Pilate for judgment. This alliance of leadership and people continues through the trial of Jesus before Pilate up to Jesus’ execution, when he requests divine forgiveness for all involved in his death (23:13-34). In fact, Luke seems purposely to have left open as a possible reading of his account our identification of the people of Jerusalem, together with their leaders, as persons physically responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus (see the ambiguous “they” in 23:26, 33-34).³ Again, however, Luke also narrates how the people of Jerusalem distance themselves from their leadership — first in 23:27, where a number of Jerusalem’s “daughters” mourn on Jesus’ behalf; then in 23:35, where the people adopt a notably benign posture in comparison with the scornful demeanor of their leaders; and in 23:48, where “all the crowds” respond to Jesus’ death with sorrow. (In Acts 2:22-40; 3:12-26, the people of Jerusalem, held responsible for Jesus’ death, are invited to repent and participate in the salvation available through Jesus.)

Here resides the great irony of the conflict that weaves its way through the Third Gospel and reaches its climax in the Lukan passion narrative: Those who oppose Jesus believe themselves to be serving God, yet unwittingly serve a diabolic aim. Throughout his ministry, Jesus has, from their perspective, departed from the demands of Torah and set himself over against what had become not only unquestioned but also unquestionable practices by which one demonstrates one’s obedience to Yahweh. Again from their perspective, Jesus’ attempt to claim the temple for an alternative agenda was perverse; his teaching had resulted in the dislegitimation of the temple authorities and even the relativizing of the temple itself within the divine plan. The charges on which the Jewish leadership have him arraigned before Pilate essentially involve his identification as a false prophet who, on account of his popular following, poses a threat to Rome (23:1-5). Throughout his ministry, Jesus has been involved in a war of interpretation: Who understands and serves the divine aim, really? Who interprets and embodies the divine word, really? Because both Jerusalem authorities and Jesus see themselves as acting on behalf of the divine will, the actions that unfold in chs. 22-23 are indeed tragic. They are, nonetheless, the fullest manifestation of the competing aims at work in the Gospel narrative. previously seen best in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (4: 1 -13).

The making and unmaking of unholy alliances are symptomatic of how, in the face of hostility, people can be tested in their commitments. This is particularly true on account of the evidence Luke provides for the presence of Satan behind and through those who oppose the redemptive aim of God. One is immediately reminded of Jesus’ eschatological discourse, just delivered (21:5-36), with its admonitions to prayer and faithful vigilance. Luke’s readers are thus encouraged to find in Jesus an exemplar of proper response in the face of trial and persecution. He is the model for disciples to follow.

Here on Golgotha, where the fullness of God’s glory is revealed, we are people among the crowd who are called to choose a side – and to live out the consequences of our choice.

Commentary

In verses just prior to our gospel reading, Jesus addresses the women as representative of the nation: “daughters of Jerusalem” (Is 37:22; Mic 1:8; Zeph 3:14; Zech 9:9). Jesus notes that they weep for the wrong thing: “weep for yourselves and for your children.” This is because Jesus’ rejection means judgment for the nation (Luke 13:34; 19:41-44; 21:20-21). The tragedy, Jesus says, is not his death but the nation’s failure to choose deliverance, life and forgiveness.

Golgotha

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus and two criminals are delivered to their earthly fate.

From the gospels, the location is clearly defined with reference to the city of Jerusalem: (1) the site was known by its Hebrew name, *gwlgwlt.*, transliterated into Greek as *golgotha*, which was translated *Kraniou Topon* (“Place of the Skull”) and *Calvariae locum* in the Vulgate (John 19:17–18; Luke 23:33; Mark 15:22; Matt 27:33); (2) the site was outside one of the city gates, but not far from it (Heb 12:12); the Fourth Gospel stresses that many Jews read the inscription on the cross “because the place was near the city” (John 19:20); (3) at the site of Golgotha there was a garden containing a new tomb (cf. John 19:41; 20:15, which implies the existence of a garden with the mention of a gardener); (4) the owner of the new tomb was Joseph of Arimathea (Matt 27:59–60); (5) the tomb was cut into the rock and the entrance closed with a large stone in the shape of a millstone (Matt 27:59–60; Mark 16:3–5; Luke 23:53; 24:2).

The Crucifixion

Very simply Luke tells of the crucifixion of Jesus, the supreme sacrifice for the salvation of sinners. In this form of execution a person was fastened by ropes or nails to a cross (which might be shaped like our conventional cross or like a T, an X, a Y, or even an I). Jesus’ hands were nailed (John 20:25), and probably his feet also (cf. 24:39), though none of the Evangelists says so in set terms. There was a horn-like projection which the crucified straddled, which took most of the weight and stopped the flesh from tearing from the nails. The discovery of the bones of a man crucified at about the same time as Jesus raises the possibility that the legs may have been bent and twisted, then fastened to the cross by a single nail through the heels. Such a contortion of the body would have added to the agony. Crucifixion was a slow and painful death, but it is noteworthy that none of the Evangelists dwells on the torment Jesus endured.

“Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

Based solely on ancient manuscript evidence, these words are missing in a number of early and diverse writings. Some scholars conclude that these words were probably a later addition. Yet, the internal evidence of Luke’s writings would support this forgiving prayer of Jesus. As Culpepper (*Luke*, 455) notes:

The prayer is consistent with both Luke’s characterization of Jesus and Luke’s style. Jesus has prayed to God as “Father” repeatedly in Luke (10:21; 11:2; 22:42; 23:46), and Jesus has taught his followers to forgive (5:20-24; 6:27-29; 7:47-49; 17:3-4). Indeed, Jesus’ prayer here echoes the petition for forgiveness in the model prayer (11:4). It is more likely that Jesus died a model death, praying for those who were killing him -- and this motif was repeated in the death of Stephen (Acts 7:60), the first Christian martyr -- than that a scribe later composed the prayer for Jesus imitating Luke’s style and theme.

After a detailed study of this verse, Raymond Brown (*The Death of the Messiah*, 971-981) concludes:

Overall, after surveying the pros and cons, I would deem it easier to posit that the passage was written by Luke and excised for theological reasons by a later copyist than that it was added to Luke by such a copyist who took the trouble to cast it in Lucan style and thought. (980)

The arguments for taking “forgiveness” out of the passage may have been based on several possible factors, for instance:

- the destruction of the temple might have convinced Gentile Christians that God had not forgiven the Jews who were involved with Jesus’ crucifixion.
- ongoing conflict between the post-70 AD Jewish leadership and the Christian community
- later Christian scribes could have the presumption of innocence morally unjustified
- as the Romans were persecuting and killing the Christians, it’s understandable why a copyist might want to delete forgiveness for the Romans who crucified Jesus.
- It could also be quite understandable why Luke would include such forgiveness for the Romans if “Most Excellent Theophilus,” to whom this writing is addressed (1:3) were a Roman official.

Even at this, there is still the question of who Jesus was praying for: the Jewish leaders, the Romans or both? The immediate context points to the Roman soldiers acting as executioners – they meet the intention of ignorance about their actions. Throughout Luke’s gospel there has been an emphasis on the Jewish leadership (22:1-6,52,66;23:4,10,13) and in the end the people are swayed to join in calling for Jesus’ death (23:18). If we look ahead to Acts of the Apostles (3:17, 13:27) Luke maintains that they also acted out of ignorance. Thus the answer is that the prayer is intended to ask forgiveness for all involved in Jesus’ death.

Still the soldiers go about their business, unaware of the larger eschatological consequences, and divide Jesus’ clothes among them.

Those Who Mocked

The people stood by and watched; the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him and said, “He saved others, let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God.” Luke pictures the majority of the people (*laos*) don’t mock Jesus (contrary to Mark’s description); they are simply watching. Executions were popular functions and doubtless many attended this one. But it was *the rulers*, not the people, who mocked (cf. Ps. 22:6–8). The leaders sneer (v. 35; lit. “look down their noses” or “thumbed their noses”) and the soldiers mock (v. 36) and one criminal blasphemes (v. 39). They all say the same thing: “Save yourself” – essentially the same temptations of the devil in Luke 4 – avoid the pain and suffering of the cross. Culpepper notes that “The irony here is that Luke underscores both Jesus’ real identity and the true meaning of his death. Jesus was hailed as the Savior at his birth (2:11); as the Son of Man, he had come to seek and save the lost (19:10). But just as he had taught that those who lost their lives for his sake would save them (9:24), so now he must lose his life so that they might be saved.

Among the rulers, they addressed one another, not Jesus, as they spoke of his saving activities they used two epithets: *the Christ of God* and *his Chosen One*. Clearly they intended to mock the words as signs of God’s special favor as they contrasted words the actual plight of Jesus, there on the cross. Yet unknowingly they invoke terms already in use in Luke’s gospel. Jesus has been acknowledged as Christ (or Messiah) by Simeon (2:26), the people (3:15), demons (4:41), and Peter (9:20). Jesus is God’s chosen one (9:35, Transfiguration). These very names ironically use, but nonetheless true, also become the charge of treason.

The Charge of Treason

Above him there was an inscription that read, “This is the King of the Jews.” All four Evangelists mention the inscription on the cross. Such a placard would announce the crime for

which the condemned man was being executed. The inscription over Jesus' head is differently reported in all four Gospels, but as the inscription itself was in three languages (John 19:20) this is not unusual. What is clear is that Pilate was proclaiming that Jesus died as King of the Jews. He was taking a grim revenge on the Jewish leaders who had forced him into this position. But he was also unknowingly proclaiming Jesus' royalty, a theme significant to Luke.

The "Penitent Thief"

While one of the criminals, already crucified, began to revile "*Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us."* The word "revile" is *eblasphēmei*, literally "blaspheme." It is then we hear the words from the one we know as "the penitent thief." Luke does not describe the criminal in such terms. His crime is never described and his penitence is conveyed only by his acknowledgement of his guilt and Jesus' innocence, and his request that Jesus remember him.

The other criminal reprimanded the other, saying "*Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? ⁴¹ And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.*" The criminal adds his own proclamation of innocence to those of Pilate, Herod and later the centurion at the foot of the cross. He also fulfills Jesus' instructions in 17:3 – "*If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.*"

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. The petition echoes the plaintive cries of the those in need and those dying in ages past. "Remember me..." is the petition of Joseph to his fellow prisoner who would be set free (Gen 40:14). Hannah prayed to God "Remember me" (1 Sam 1:11), as did Nehemiah (5:19, 13:31), Job (14:13), the psalmist (25:7, 106:4), and Jeremiah (15:15). The criminal's request echoes all those who have gone before him that hope for a relief from suffering in this world.

The thief's request is perhaps the greatest act of faith in all of scriptures. Jesus is dying on the cross. The apparent reality is that this king and his kingdom and his power will come to an end. That was the purpose of the execution. Jesus is dying, yet the criminal has the faith to see and believe that Jesus can remember him. He has the faith to see and believe that Jesus is the one who will rule as king. Perhaps there is no better illustration of the theology of the cross than the criminal's request. God's power to rule the universe is seen as Jesus is dying on a cross. Yet he sees something more than the obvious: this dying Jesus will rule as king.

"*Amen, I say to you*" is the sixth time Luke has used this phrase and the only one addressed to one person. It is also the last of the emphatic "today" pronouncements. Like the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame in Jesus' parable of the great banquet (14:21), the thief would feast with Jesus that day in paradise. Like Lazarus who died at the rich man's fate (16:19-31), the thief would experience the blessing of God's mercy.

St Paul wrote:

For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead came also through a human being. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life (1 Cor 15:16-22)

In Luke's own way, the promise to the penitent thief reflects this same idea. Others taunted Jesus, mocking him with challenges to save himself, so with fitting irony his last words to another human being are an assurance of salvation. Jesus' ministry has been focused on the widow, the tax collector, the outcast, the foreigner, the poor and destitute, and any number of monikers for those people on the margins of life. Jesus began the ministry proclaiming "*good news to the poor*" and "*the release of captives*" (4:18) – and he ends the ministry by extending an assurance of blessing to one of the wretched.

...today you will be with me in Paradise

The promise is that the criminal would be "with Jesus" in paradise. Jesus' close association with sinners and tax collectors that was part of his life, is also part of his death and his life beyond death. The word "paradise" (originally from Persia) meant "garden," "park" or "forest". The Greek *paradeisos* was used in the LXX for the "garden" in Eden, the idyllic place in the beginning where the humans walked and talked with God. Isaiah presents the "garden/paradise" of Eden as part of the future salvation (53:3). Later, some groups within Judaism considered paradise to be the place where the righteous went after death. Paul considered paradise to be in the "third heaven" (2Cor 12:4). Revelation has the tree of life in the "paradise of God" (2:7). In later chapters the tree of life seems to be located in the new Jerusalem that has come down from heaven (22:2,14,19). Perhaps as with *basileia*, we should think of *paradeisos* as something other than just a place – perhaps as a restored relationship with God.

Notes

Luke 23:33 *kakoúrgos*: The *kakoúrgos* is "one who does wrong," "malefactor," "villain." The Greek term describing the other offenders, *kakoúrgos*, is a generic one for "lawbreaker" (Prov 21:15). The NT uses the word for the two thieves crucified with Jesus (Lk. 23:32–33, 39). Mark 15:27 and Matthew 27:38 describe the men with the term *lestes*, which can mean "bandit" or "revolutionary." This is the word Jesus used to question his arrest in Luke 22:52.

Luke 23:34 *Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do"*: this portion of Luke 23:34 does not occur in the oldest papyrus manuscript of Luke and in other early Greek manuscripts and ancient versions of wide geographical distribution. As well the prayer seems to interrupt the flow of the writing. Still there is the fact that other very good MSS do attest it. Luke Timothy Johnson notes that based on the prayer's theme there are very good reasons to admit to its origin with Jesus: (a) it matches Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer (11:4), (b) it fits within the prophetic schema wherein the people reject the prophet because of their ignorance (Acts 3:17; 7:25; 12:37); and it (c) roots in the practice and example of Jesus the apostolic mission to proclaim repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Some scholars detect an echo of Isa. 53:12 (others deny). Even though there are no strong verbal parallels, because of the conceptual links both Jesus and the early church seems to have understood Jesus' prayer on the cross as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (*TDNT* 5:713) with Jesus cast as the Suffering Servant of 2nd Isaiah (Chs. 40-55)

***divided his garments by casting lots*:** The reference to Jesus' garments being divided in 23:34b, is an allusion to Ps. 22:18 (21:19 LXX). Psalm 22 consists of lament (vv. 1–21) and thanksgiving (vv. 22–32). This psalm narrates the experience of an individual who endures physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering as the public suffering of a righteous person. The image of the sufferer's enemies casting lots and distributing his clothes anticipates his death and underlines

the hopelessness of his situation. The fact that the psalm ends with an expectant declaration of the universal rule of Yahweh points to a messianic interpretation of Ps. 22.

Luke 23:35 *The people stood by and watched; the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him:* Luke's formulation of the Jewish leaders' mockery of Jesus in 23:35 is an allusion to Ps. 22:7–8 (21:8–9 LXX). It is unclear whether these allusions to Ps. 22 are meant to point to the second part of the psalm, which emphasizes Yahweh's universal salvation, implying that the allusion shows the scriptural and thus divine necessity of the pattern of messianic suffering and glory (Larkin [1974: 526] does not find such a connection). But perhaps no allusions to the second half of Ps. 22 are needed for readers of Luke's Gospel to understand the situation that he portrays: the Jewish leaders refer to Jesus correctly as "the Messiah of God, his chosen one," but they think that Jesus has to save himself in order to prove the genuineness of his claims and of his message, without recognizing the fact that "the psalm on which their behavior is modeled recognizes God as the one who delivers" (Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 821).

sneer: *ekmyktērízō* literally translates as to "turn up one's nose", or to "look down one's nose" with a sense of mocking or to "thumb one's nose at."

let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God: While mocking Jesus in 23:35, the Jewish leaders refer to Jesus, as (lit.) "the Messiah of God, the chosen one" (*ho christos tou theou ho eklektos*). The title "the chosen one" (*ho eklektos*) echoes Isa. 42:1 LXX, where the expression is used to describe the Servant of Yahweh. The rabbis understood this passage as referring to the Messiah. Thus ironically, the Jewish leaders taunt Jesus, effectively saying, "you are no Messiah, you can't even save yourself" as the echo the Messianic passage from Isaiah. Yet in doing so they do not seem to notice that "language [of Isaiah] leaves the door open for the identification of a Messiah who suffers" (Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 821). Luke includes the allusion to Isa. 42:1 to emphasize that Jesus is the Messiah chosen by God in view of his suffering.

Luke 23:36 offer him wine: The offer of "sour wine" (*oxos*, a sour wine, cf. Num 6:3) in 23:36 is reminiscent of Ps. 69:21 (68:22 LXX), where the gift of "sour wine" or "vinegar" is an act of mockery and insult. The soldiers join the mockery of Jesus by offering him the cheap wine that was popular among the lower ranks of society, insulting the "king" whom they have crucified (Green 1997: 821). The allusion explains another detail of Jesus' crucifixion against the background of another psalm that describes the treatment of a righteous sufferer by his enemies, highlighting both Jesus' suffering in being mocked and the fulfillment of Scripture in what Jesus had to endure at the cross.

Luke 23:37 *If you are King of the Jews, save yourself:* This echoes the mocking of the Jewish leaders. This is the second of three slurs involving "saving" (cf. vv.35, 36, 39). The reader knows the truth of the statement, "he saved others" (7:50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42) and that he is "Savior" (2:11, Acts 5:31; 13:23), but also that those he saved were saved by faith, as is Jesus in these last moments.

Luke 23:38 an inscription that read, "This is the King of the Jews": The inscription was used to describe the crime of the accused. The inscription differs with slightly different words in each of the four gospels. John's form is fullest and gives the equivalent of the Latin INRI (*Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum*) that appears on Catholic crucifixes. IRNI is Latin for "Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Jews" (John 19:19). Latin uses the letter "I" instead of the English "J",

and “V” instead of “U.” The Johannine passage notes that the inscription was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek.

Luke 23:39-43 – the story of the “two thieves”: This episode is recounted only in this gospel. The penitent sinner receives salvation through the crucified Jesus. Jesus’ words to the penitent thief reveal Luke’s understanding that the destiny of the Christian is “to be with Jesus.”

Luke 23:39 reviled Jesus: *eblasphēmei*, lit. “blasphemed” In the LXX, the root word *blasphēmia* always has reference to God, e.g., disputing his power (2 Kgs. 19:4), desecrating his name (Is. 52:5), violating his glory (Ezek. 35:12), wicked speech (Is. 66:3), or human arrogance (Lev. 24:11). In the NT blasphemy is violation of God’s power and majesty. It may be directly against God (Rev. 13:6), his name (Rom. 2:24), the word (Tit. 2:5), Moses (Acts 6:11), or angelic beings (Jude 8–10; 2 Pet. 2:10–12). For Christians blasphemy includes doubting the claim of Jesus or deriding him (cf. Lk. 22:64–65; Mk. 15:29; Lk. 23:39). **“Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us”:** This is the third mocking connected with “saving.”

Luke 23:40 rebuking him: *epitimáō*. This word appears 12 times in Luke and it is usually Jesus who is doing rebuking. **Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation?:** The word *krima* can mean “judgment” or “sentence.” This verse can be read at two levels. (a) All three are suffering under the same secular sentence of death or (b) all three are under God’s judgment as they faith death. “*fear of God*” is thus appropriate. **has done nothing criminal:** This is the fourth declaration of Jesus’ innocence (cf. 23:13-23), proclaimed by a *kakourgos* (v.33) who can contrast his own deeds for which the death penalty is deserved and the lack of wrong-doing (*ouden atopon* – lit. nothing out of place)

Luke 23:42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”: the penitent criminal’s request echoes texts such as Ps. 115:12; Judg. 16:28; 1 Sam. 1:11, 19, where Yahweh’s “remembrance” is a source of divine blessing in keeping with his covenant (Green *Gospel of Luke*, 822). The MSS are divided as to whether we should read ‘in your kingdom,’ or ‘into your kingdom.’ The former would more naturally refer to the return of the Messiah to the earth in triumph, the latter to his going through death to a kingdom in the next world. Both are well supported in the MSS, but perhaps there is a little more to be said for ‘into your kingdom’. It presumes too much to introduce the second coming at this point in Luke’s narrative and more likely that the “repentant thief” realized at least that death would not be the end of everything for him and that beyond death was the kingdom. Jesus’ words of reassurance gave him more than he had asked for. Not only would he have a place in the kingdom, whenever that would be established, but that very day he would enter Paradise.

Luke 23:43 He replied to him, “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise”: Jesus’ reply promises fellowship with him “in paradise” (*en tō paradeisō*), a term that the LXX uses to translate the Hebrew *gan*, “garden.” The term “paradise” also echoes texts such as Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 28:13; 31:8–9 in which *paradeisos* is understood as an eschatological image of new creation, a place of expected bliss, the abode of the righteous after death (see *TDNT* 5:765–73; see also 2 Cor. 12:3; Rev. 2:7). In other words, Jesus asserts that he has the key to paradise—a reality implied in his statements that the kingdom of God is present in him (11:20; 19:9) and that he will pour out God’s Spirit on his followers (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5; cf. Acts 2:16–21). Jesus’ remark to the criminal on the cross can thus be understood as a pronouncement by Jesus in the role of Judge of the living and the dead. In this way Jesus is described as the “new Adam,” who inaugurates a new period of salvation.

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