**Taunts, Testimony and Truth,**

**Good Friday. April 15 2022 Luke 23:33-56**

The account of Jesus crucifixion can become very familiar to us over time. Luke does not dwell on graphic details of Jesus suffering. His emphasis lies more in who Jesus was and what he came to do.

To the first followers of Jesus, the crucifixion of Jesus must have appeared as a catastrophic complication in what they thought God was doing through Jesus. Confusion and disappointment must no doubt have been prominent as they grappled with the impending death of the one who they believed would save them and establish his kingdom.

**Taunts**

As Jesus dies, Luke highlights three groups who taunted him: the leaders who scoffed at him, the soldiers who mocked him, and one of the criminals who derided him. There was a significant similarity in their taunts, “He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen One”[[1]](#footnote-1), “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself”[[2]](#footnote-2) and “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”[[3]](#footnote-3) All of the taunts related to Jesus ability to save.

The taunts highlight the truth. Jesus came to bring salvation. He had declared a message of salvation, he had offered salvation to various individuals, frequently unpopular individuals. He had demonstrated amazing, miraculous power in saving people from the elements, from disease and even death. So why would he not save himself?

Yet from the taunts Jesus takes up another opportunity to offer salvation. One criminal taunted him, but the other humbly asked Jesus to “remember [him] when you come into your kingdom”[[4]](#footnote-4) Effectively both criminals ask for salvation, one in mocking sarcasm, the other in humble acknowledgement of his own guilt, of Jesus integrity and then of his openness to Jesus. He didn’t ask to be rescued from execution, but he reaches out to Jesus, and affirms that Jesus, even in the midst of his own execution, would still bring about his kingdom. An amazing statement from this unnamed man! (We can imagine Jesus commenting on the great faith of this man.) Jesus responds, emphatically and with absolute clarity, assuring the man of his salvation and that indeed, that very day, that he would be with Jesus in paradise, the place of the blessed.

So even as Jesus grapples with death himself, he offers salvation to this man. Even in the midst of taunts about his practical ability to save, Jesus saves this man. Jesus dies amongst the outcasts but even here it is one of the outcasts who truly recognises Jesus, and it is one of the outcasts who receives salvation from Jesus. In this gospel Jesus last words to another human being before his death are to offer forgiveness.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Testimony**

Luke continues to point to who Jesus was and what he had come to do. As the taunts stated he was indeed the Messiah, the Chosen One, the Christ, the King of the Jews. He was coming to instigate a new kingdom and he would rule over this kingdom. Jesus death connects both his life and the redemptive plans of God throughout history.[[6]](#footnote-6)

As Jesus death approaches, even creation joins in testifying to the significance of this event. The darkening of the sun was “a cosmic sign of the significance of Jesus’ death for all the world”.[[7]](#footnote-7) The torn veil in the Temple pointed to the reality that God’s own hand was involved in this process and all could now have access to the presence of God.[[8]](#footnote-8) A new era was dawning even in the midst of that which seemed to be a horrifying catastrophe. God was still moving, working, leading.

After Jesus dies we see three different responses from people observing his death. The Centurion responds to Jesus death by praising God, this was a common response to encountering Jesus. [[9]](#footnote-9) The he stated that Jesus was *diakos* which can mean innocent, righteous or just. He is all these things.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The crowds respond by mourning and self-condemnation, “beating their breasts”.[[11]](#footnote-11) So Jesus identity is affirmed and then the people respond with contrition.

Jesus acquaintances exhibit what appears to be a very passive response, they stood at a distance and watched. It is certainly understandable that they would feel confused and overwhelmed by what had been happening.

The acquaintances have witnessed the taunting and mocking of Jesus by those who have challenged him to save himself and others. They have also witnessed the cosmic darkness and possibly heard Jesus response to the criminal dying beside him.

**Truth**

In the midst of the responses surrounding him we encounter Jesus’ responses. Prior to his arrest, in the garden Jesus had wrestled with God in prayer regarding the path of suffering ahead of him. Here In Luke’s gospel we see Jesus responds firstly by praying for his tormentors, ““Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”[[12]](#footnote-12) He consistently taught his followers about the importance of extending forgiveness to others and here he demonstrates it personally. Jesus prayer again encompasses his affirmation of the amazing grace of God and his desire that even those who were involved in his death may be forgiven, that they may experience the salvation of God. Jesus response points to the truth that God is still bringing about God’s kingdom, salvation is available not just to some people but to all.

Unlike other synoptic gospels Luke does not speak of Jesus uttering the cry of dereliction, rather Jesus approaches his death with a firm commitment to God’s faithful care for him. Immediately before his death, quoting from Psalm 31:5 he prays, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Prayer has always been Jesus primary source of strength, and therefore he has taught his followers about the importance of prayer. At this time of intense vulnerability Jesus turns to prayer confident of the constant faithfulness of God. Even as he faces death starkly and fully, Jesus shows his followers that God can be trusted, that God will never desert them. Lessons that will serve these followers and all who follow Jesus in whatever the future may hold for them.

1. Luke23:35b NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Luke 23:37 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Luke 23:39 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Luke 23:42 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. R. Alan Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck et al. (Ed) *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volume,*(Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995) 458-459 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 456 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 460 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 460 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Luke 2:2; 4:15; 5:25-26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15; 18:43. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 461 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Like the tax collector praying in the temple, Luke 18:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Luke 23:34a NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Luke 23:46b NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-13)