

Don't Miss Jesus Because . . .

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Scripture: Luke 23:32-33,39

³² There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. ³³ And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. ³⁹ Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."

Introduction

Two criminals were hung on crosses next to Jesus. One came to a saving faith in Him before he died:

- Luke 23:40-43 - *But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?" ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said ^[k]to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." ⁴³ And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."*

The other criminal, however, did not have this same conversion experience. In fact, He blasphemed (GRK – spoke evil of) Jesus. Two men, one Savior, but two totally different conclusions were reached. How is that, even though they were both right next to Jesus, they ended up with completely opposite eternal destinations? Obviously, one of these men totally missed Who it was hanging right next to him. Many today face the same thing, especially in this country.

- 22% increase in Bible sales as of October 2024 from the previous year
- Over 450 English translations available
- The Bible is available on multiple platforms and apps

Despite having the Gospel readily available, people are still missing Jesus, the One right in front of them.

Point 1 – Don't Miss Jesus Because You Fail to See the Truth

"If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."

The criminal's question was, are you really God?

What did Jesus say about Himself? Who did He say that He was?

- John 10:30-33 - *I and My Father are one.”³¹ Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him.³² Jesus answered them, “Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?”³³ The Jews answered Him, saying, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.”*
- John 14:6-7,10-11 - *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”⁷ “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.”¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.¹¹ Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.*

The real question is, who do you say Jesus is?

- Matthew 16:13-16 - *When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”¹⁴ So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”¹⁶ Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*
- Is this Who Jesus is to you?

Jesus also leaves no doubt that He expected the Jewish people to know Who He was.

- Luke 19:41-42 - *Now as He drew near [Jerusalem], He saw the city and wept over it,⁴² saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.*
- The prophecy of the Messiah found in Daniel 9 pointed to the exact time that Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He is saying that the Jewish people should have known that He was the Messiah by fulfilling this prophecy. The point is this, if you know the Word of God, you will know that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior.
- John 8:31-32 - *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*

Jesus and the Apostle Paul also warned against counterfeits.

- Matthew 24:4-5 - *And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you.⁵ For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.*

- 1 Timothy 4:1-2 - *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.*

Another question is, do you want the real Jesus? Are you really looking for Him?

- John 18:37-38 - *Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." ³⁸ Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all.*
- Pilate had the embodiment of Truth right in front of him, but He didn't wait long enough to find that out. He sure didn't have the courage to stand up against the mob.

The question of Jesus is actually more a matter of the heart than the head. Paul was a member of the religious elite, a leader of the Jews well-versed in the law of Moses, but his head knowledge gained him nothing towards eternal life.

- Philippians 3:4b-8 - *If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. ⁷ But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.*
- Paul discovered that the Damascus Road (see Acts 9) is actually only 18 inches (the distance from the head to the heart). He would rather be an open-hearted fool for Christ, than a hard-headed, and lost, "smart" person.

C.S. Lewis from the book "Mere Christianity"

- *"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him [that is, Christ]: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.... You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him*

Lord and God.” But let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

- 1 Corinthians 1:18 - *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* Unfortunately for the unrepentant criminal, he never got the message nor the power.

Point 2 – Don’t Miss Jesus Because You’re Waiting For A Show

*“If You are the Christ, **save Yourself** and us.”*

In a nutshell, this criminal was basically saying, "Come down off of your cross, then I'll believe." This is the same line of insults that those standing by, and the religious leaders, were hurling at Him.

- Matthew 27:39-43 - *And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, “You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” ⁴¹ Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, ⁴² “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. ⁴³ He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’*

Jesus had already answered this line of thinking by confronting it during His ministry. He had already shown Himself to be equal with God, to fit the mold of the promised Messiah, through the signs and wonders He had performed and the forgiving of sins, but He saw through to their hearts.

- Matthew 16:1-4 - *Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. ² He answered and said to them, “When it is evening you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’; ³ and in the morning, ‘It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening. ‘Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. ⁴ A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” And He left them and departed.*
- Jesus was telling the religious leaders that they couldn’t see the signs in front of them, the only sign He would give them now would be His own resurrection after being in the grave for three days (in reference to Jonah being in the belly of great fish for three days).

Are we missing Jesus because we’re looking for a “shock and awe” campaign? Are we looking for shiny worship services, soft messages, and easy answers? Do we want the miracles and the deliverance, without the cost of being a disciple?

- Luke 9:23-24 - *Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.*

Following Jesus is impossible, however, without following true, Biblical doctrine. Doctrine is vital. Scripture context is vital. The question here is, are we following Jesus or our traditions?

- 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 - *And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. ² For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. ³ I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. ⁴ And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*
- 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 - *Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.*
- 2 Peter 1:16 - *For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.*
- Because he wanted Jesus only on his terms, the lost criminal would never experience this majesty. Are we willing to accept Jesus only on our terms, expecting Him to fit nicely into a box of our own design? He will fit in our hearts, but never a box.

Point 3 – Don't Miss Jesus Because It's All About You

*"If You are the Christ, save Yourself **and us**."*

This is the mindset that says, "save me from hell, but let me keep control over my life." The question here is, are you seeking His face (His presence), or just His hands (His power and what it can do for you)? Are you seeking just a Savior and not a Lord? That's not an option He gave us.

- Romans 10:9 NIV - *If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
- Philippians 2:9-11 - *Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

- Lord – GRK (Strong's G2962) = kyrios (from the word Kyros); supremacy; supreme in authority
- Are we making Jesus the supreme authority in our lives?

Are we making the message only about us, about what we want to hear?

- 2 Timothy 4:3-4 – *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴ and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*

What constitutes fables that satisfy itching ears? It's a message that re-defines the truth of the Gospel. It's a message that diminishes the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins. It avoids the hard Scriptures, those with the blood, the death, the resurrection, concepts like redemption, forgiveness, and holiness, and includes only those we deem "acceptable." It's the "He gets us" philosophy, and "I don't need or want to change." Jesus' teachings were hard, which caused many to turn away.

- John 6:53-54,60,66 - *Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁶⁰ Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" ⁶⁶ From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.*
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 - *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.* Note that it says "all Scripture," not just some.

Never underestimate Satan's ability to get you to listen to and accept a watered-down theology. What was Satan's first recorded words, his first recorded lie? Genesis 3:1 - *"Has God indeed said . . . ?"* Just because it has the label "Christian" on it doesn't mean we don't need to be discerning. We must always stop and think, does it line up with Scripture?

Don't allow feelings or opinions to get in the way of what the Word of God is truly saying. Don't allow "self" to get in the way. Satan wants you to worship yourself. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is, at its core, dying to self.

- Galatians 2:20 - *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

- Romans 6:5-11 - *For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Don't get caught up in "bandwagon Christianity," which basically asks, "What have you done for me lately?" Unfortunately for this criminal, he made it all about himself.

Conclusion – Don't Miss Jesus Because You Haven't Been Born Again

"Born once, die twice. Born twice, die once." Have you been born twice? Just like this criminal, we are all going to die, but will it be twice?

- John 3:3-7 - *Jesus answered and said to [Nicodemus], "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'*
 - Born – GRK (Strong's G1080) = gennaō; to regenerate, be delivered of
 - Point being, you must be "delivered of" the Spirit.
- John 3:16-18 - *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. ¹⁸ "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*
- John 5:24 - *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*
- John 6:40 - *And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*

Is your belief all-encompassing? Is it a belief that saves?

- Genesis 15:6 - *And [Abraham] believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*
- John 11:25-26 - *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"*

One thief believed, one didn't.

1 Peter 5:5 states that, *"God resists the proud, but gives grace to humble."* This thief held onto his pride to the bitter end and missed out on God's grace. Don't you miss out!