

**THIEF WHO GOES INTO HELL**  
**Sermon Series: "The Offence of the Cross"**  
**March 18, 2018 8:30 & 943 --Luke 23: 32-43**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

A man who happened to be a college professor in a former church long ago, came up to me after my Easter Sunday message, based on John 14: 1-6, where Jesus says: *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me."* (John 14: 6) He came up to me and said: "I hate that sermon and that is my least favorite piece of scripture in the Bible." So other than that, how was your Easter? But he was offended by the idea that there is only one way to God. Didn't like it God's will and God's way. We come to the Father through Jesus the Son; we come to Jesus the Son through His cross at Calvary. That's where new life and eternal life comes from. Period. Our modern world is offended by that. Sorry.

There were three crosses prepared to crucify people on that first Good Friday. Jesus was the interloper. The three crosses prepared were for three people the Romans deemed "criminals" but who may have well been Zealots who were beginning an uprising against the hated Roman occupation of the Holy Land. But at the last second Barabbas is spared and Jesus hangs on his cross in his place. The two criminals to the either side of Jesus were likely the friends of Barabbas, colleagues in crime and mayhem, you might say. Barabbas is spared and Jesus takes his place. This, by the way, is the perfect illustration of a theological concept referred to as "The substitutionary blood atonement". Jesus dies a death He does not deserve for us who deserve to die. Jesus pays a price in His own blood for us who owe a debt we could never hope to repay. If Barabbas came to the foot of the cross that Good Friday he must have thought –"I should have been hanging there; not Jesus." Exactly. That's what every Christian should think as they observe Jesus' substitutionary death for us on the cross. That should have been me.

The second thief to the one side of Jesus is the one who rejects Him at the last second. The other thief receives Jesus and is in paradise that very day. One thief goes to heaven; one thief goes to hell. Another thief, perhaps Barabbas, is standing at the foot of the cross and all eternity is in the balance for him. As he looks at the cross he has a choice. As we look at the cross we have a choice as well. So why does the one thief go to hell that very day? Because he wanted it his way, not Jesus' way. He shouts out at Jesus: **"Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (Luke 23: 39)** He's saying to Jesus –IF you are the Son of God, THEN you should certainly be able to save yourself and THEN you can come and save me and take me down from my cross. That's my plan, Jesus. That's what you need to do today. Except that wasn't God's plan; God's plan was the cross. The rulers who had manipulated Jesus to die that day, hurled at him –"If you are the Christ of God" THEN save yourself. The Romans mocked Him and said: *"If you are the King of the Jews, then save yourself!"* (v. 37) Where have we heard all this before? We have heard it when Jesus is tempted by the evil one in the desert at the very beginning of His ministry. The devil taunts –"IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD TURN THESE STONES INTO BREAD. IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD THEN THROW YOURSELF OFF THE TEMPLE AND THE ANGELS WILL RESCUE YOU." Same temptation for Jesus. Tempted with doing it another way at the very beginning of His ministry; tempted to do it another way even

as He hangs on the cross. Jesus, do it another way; don't go to the cross; you don't really have to do this. But Jesus knew that His Father's plan was for Him to go to the cross and to suffer and die; He had to do this. He is the way. He is the truth. His way and His truth alone leads to the life. No one comes to the Father but by the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. We come to the Father through Jesus the Son; and we come to the Son through His cross. And don't think for a moment that the Son of God couldn't have snapped His fingers and had a thousand angels come and gently take Him from the cross. There's no ifs, ands or buts, no "IF you are the Son of God"; No, beloved, He IS the Son of God and He willingly, in love takes the cross for us.

Our world is so offended by this exclusive truth claim and by this exclusive way of coming to the Father. We want to cobble together our own way. A little bit of this and that, not that part of the Bible because I don't like that part of the Bible, add in a little bit of what I want and we have our religious smorgasboard from which to pick and choose our beliefs. Like the thief, we say, Jesus, you don't have to go to the cross, IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD, you can come down from the cross, you can do it my way, and you can save me. No, HE is the WAY. And He is the TRUTH above every truth. And this is the TRUTH –HE is the ONLY WAY to come to life and to come to eternal life. No one comes to the Father but by the cross of Jesus Christ.

How to come to the cross...We have to turn and we have to repent. We have to acknowledge our own sin at the foot of the cross. We have to understand that Jesus went to the cross as a substitute for us. Our heart needs to break. Our heart needs to be cut to the quick by what He has done for us. Our own selfishness and ego, our wanting what we want, our even telling Jesus how He has to save us, all of this has to be crucified with Christ on the cross. *"I am crucified with Christ. It is I, yet not I who live, but Christ who lives in me."* (Galatians 2: 20) That cross I see you hanging on, Jesus, by every right is my cross, and I deserve to hang there; but you, Jesus, do not. That's why the one thief was in paradise that day and other was not...

Allow me this flight of fantasy as I close out our series on "The Offence of the Cross." Barabbas, now a free man, finds his way to the foot of the cross on Golgotha that dark day. To be sure, he could have been celebrating his remarkable good luck by having been set free; he could be getting drunk in a tavern; he could have rushed back to rejoin his fellow thieves and insurrectionists in the hills. But maybe, just maybe, he heard all the buzz, and he was drawn to the spectacle of the crucifixion, and he also came to watch his two friends die on either side of Jesus. If he were there and if he gazed up at the man Jesus who took his place on the cross, might he have been deeply moved by what he saw? Might he have heard Jesus forgive the Romans whom he hated so. Might he have heard his friend being told by Jesus, "Today, you will be with me in paradise." Might the Master have melted his heart and opened him to a new way, truth and life? Jesus, who has taken my place, and died for me...perhaps I can now LIVE for you. And Barabbas came to Jesus, through His cross, and Barabbas came to the Father by what Jesus had done for him. Beloved, you are Barabbas today at the foot of the cross. What will you do with this Jesus? Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA*

IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!