

Christ the King Sunday

OUR SERVANT KING

Luke 23:33-43

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Analysis by Bruce T. Martin

33When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. 34Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. 35And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" 36The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, 37and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 38There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." 39One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" 40But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." 42Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

DIAGNOSIS: We Know Not What We Are Doing, Nor What

God Is Doing

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Crucify Him!*

According to the “inscription over him” (the Titulus Crucis), Jesus of Nazareth was charged with being, or claiming to be, “King of the Jews” (v. 38). For this he was crucified (“with the criminals,” v. 33). Pilate could not tolerate any threat to the Pax Romana. Nor could the Sanhedrin tolerate any threat to their own mediation of sacred tradition. As for the people, failure was not an option. Therefore Jesus had to go.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Not My King, Not My Messiah!*

Jesus himself demurred (22:66-71; 23:3, 9). Not from being a king or a messiah, but from every expectation of a king or a messiah (9:18-36; 22:24-30). Neither Romans nor Jews could comprehend Jesus’ servant kingship or his forgiving messiahship. Such a king and such a messiah was simply unbelievable because political and spiritual leaders were chasing after their own self-serving imaginations. And Jesus resisted them all. They could not know that their criminality with each other was rooted in sin before God. How, then, could they trust that a failed king or a failed messiah could be their savior?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Condemned!*

They crucified God’s chosen One; and thus they remained without a Savior. Although we, too, find ourselves with many kings and perhaps even a few messiahs, we find ourselves trapped in a circle of self trust; and thus unable to trust in God’s chosen One. Entrapped in sin, we are condemned to our own sin-begotten choices—the end of which is death.

PROGNOSIS: Now We See What God Is Doing, and Know What to Do

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *God’s Messiah*

From the perspective of Jesus' resurrection, his death interprets and fulfills his life. Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, put aside all self-serving kings and messiahs for the sake of our far deeper need: release from our entrapment in sin. As God's Messiah, Jesus demonstrates through his death that only trust in God has any future (23:44-46). For, in Jesus, all of God's promises are concluded (24:25-26, 44-49), with the result that we now have "peace" (24:36) with God.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Our Savior*

Consequently, trust in ourselves proves to be a dead-end. Everything we once knew about God and ourselves has been overturned and re-evaluated in the light of Jesus' resurrection. By the power of God (24:49) our ultimate trust is now in Jesus; and thus also in the One who raised him from the dead. Over against sin and its temporal powers, our future in Paradise has been secured (23:43). Faith in Christ is God's power to bring his promises to bear on the present.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Servanthood in the Kingdom of God*

That Jesus Christ (the Messiah), "King of the Jews," was crucified "with the criminals" (v. 33), even asking his Father to "forgive" his killers (v. 34), indicates his freedom to love us as our servant king. Like Jesus, we are free to love our enemies based on the security we have in our Father's love. That is, our freedom in Christ is a work of faith, not merely to bypass worldly justice (which is our due), but to bring Christ's own love (which is his kingly service) into the lives of our worldly enemies. In this way, the kingdom of God stakes its claim upon the world.