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"The Three Crosses "

Face to face - We've been going through stories of individuals whose lives were forever changed by a personal encounter with Jesus.

Luke 23:32-43 (NIV) Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One." 36 The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." 38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Who the two men represent

Every one of us on earth are represented by one of the men on the two crosses. Romans 3:23

How did these men get to this dark place? When sinful choices are ignored or fostered, hearts become hardened and free will is used for wrong.

- **Out of love, we were given free will.**

Genesis 2:15-17 (NIV) The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

- Because of Adam's choice to not obey and lead, **we are all infected with the disease of sin.**

Romans 5:12 (NIV) Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—

- **Sin separates us from God.**

Genesis 3:23-24 (NIV) So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

- Banished (sent away, cast out) from the blessing of intimate relationship with God.
- The flaming sword represents the *divine justice* of God against sin.

- **Sin creates animosity and hostility towards God.**

Matthew and Mark's account *cite that both criminals* began their time on their crosses by heckling Jesus. Not a discrepancy in scripture, just a more detailed account by Luke.

1st criminal - He was unrepentant, hard hearted, corrupt and more than likely saw himself as a victim.

Luke 23:39 (NIV) "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

- 'If you can't save yourself, you can't save us.'
- Their *mockery* and *cynicism* revealed their *hostility* to the greatness of Jesus' claims.
- They were blinded by their sinful hard hearts and couldn't see beyond the physical to the spiritual.

Second criminal - He repented on the cross

Luke 23:40-42 (NIV) But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

- He knew who God was and had respect for Him - 'Do you not fear God?'
- He knew he was guilty and came to his senses. 'How can I join in the mockery?' 'We are getting what we deserve.'
- He knew Jesus was innocent. 'This man has done nothing wrong.'
- He called out to Jesus as Lord, "Lord will you remember me?" He believed who Jesus said He was. He humbled himself in a cry for mercy, "Remember me".

Jesus in the middle

Mark 10:45 (NIV) For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

- Ransom for what? To liberate us from our sin. Jesus crucified on the Cross is the only way to restored relationship with our Heavenly Father. John 14:6
- God's justice is required for *all* sin, and the wages of sin is death. Romans 6:23

Luke 23:43 (NIV) Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

- Paradise means garden/heaven. The only one who could go under the sword and satisfy God's just penalty for sin was Jesus. Genesis 3:24

The very things we think disqualify us from God's saving grace, love and mercy; are actually the very reasons to come to Him and have a face to face encounter.

Which side of the cross are you on? Have you repented and received God's invitation or are you like the unrepentant criminal? 'I just need Jesus to get me out of a bind' or 'Jesus is for people who can't think for themselves.' Or maybe you just don't think about eternity?

What is Jesus saying to you?

- It's never too late. God is always pursuing, are you listening?
- There is nothing you have done that Jesus' grace and mercy aren't sufficient for.
- If you have strayed, repent - turn to Him.
- Who will you invite to Easter? How will you help someone know what it means to be a follower of Jesus?

Small Group Discussion Questions: Story Luke 23:32-43

1. What were the different motives of the heart between the 2 criminals? What drove each one?
2. What fruit do you see from each criminal?
3. What is the expected outcome for us when we speak and act out of similar motivations as the different criminals?

