

## THE THREE CROSSES

“And there were also two other, malefactors, led with Him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted His raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided Him, saying, He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming to Him, and offering Him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save Thyself. And a superscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If thou be Christ, save Thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:32-43).



1. Three crosses stood on Calvary the day Jesus was crucified, and since two thieves were crucified with Him, His enemies counted Him as a common criminal along with them. But all this was in harmony with the prophecies regarding the Messiah (Isaiah 53:9, 1-8).
2. There were three men crucified on Calvary that day facing the same fate – death - and each had a different frame of mind with different perspectives: one thought mainly of others (Luke 23:34), one thought mainly of himself (Luke 23:39), and one thought of his fellow victim hanging on the center cross (Luke 23:41).
3. Another approach is to consider *how* and *why* each one met his death, especially as it relates to sin and eternity: one died IN sin, one died TO sin, and one died FOR sin.

### I. ONE DIED IN HIS SIN

Of all sinners who have ever died in sin, this one is the most ironic; he is hanging right next to the One who could have saved him! Regarding God, Paul said, “He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27).

1. This is the worse possible state in which to die because all that lies ahead is a fearful expectation of judgment (Hebrews 9:27; 10:26-27; 30-31).
2. The obstinance of this man well symbolizes humanity's rebellion throughout history (Hosea 7:13-16).

“Woe to them, because they have strayed from Me! Destruction to them, because they have rebelled against Me! I long to redeem them but they speak about Me falsely. They do not cry out to Me from their hearts but wail on their beds. They slash themselves, appealing to their gods for grain and new wine, but they turn away from Me. I trained them and strengthened their arms, but they plot evil against Me. They do not turn to the Most High; they are like a faulty bow. Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent words. For this they will be ridiculed in the land of Egypt” (Hosea 7:13-16).
3. Despite God’s appeals, warnings and judgments people often refuse to repent (Ezekiel 33:11; Jeremiah 7:22-24; 11:7-8; Revelation 9:1-21).

### II. ONE DIED TO HIS SIN

Obviously, this man had been deeply effected by several things (Luke 23:40-42). He had an awakened respect for God; the realization that the end was approaching; that he was a sinner getting what he deserved; that Jesus was innocent; and he displays a familiarity with Jesus as Messiah or King, and asks to be remembered when He came into His kingdom.

1. Jesus' answer would certainly comfort this man (Luke 23:43). Jesus was the ONLY one on earth who could offer hope even in death! Later, when this man dies, his final thoughts are going to be quite different from those of the other thief! Not terror, or emptiness, but hope and anticipation (Psalms 32:5-6; Isaiah 55:6-7)!

2. “Death to sin” or “repentance” is required to be pleasing to God; in that generation as well as this (**Acts 2:38, 40; 3:19; 17:30; James. 4:8-10; see also discussion of “dead to sins” in Romans 6:1-2, 5-7; 11:23**).
3. A good illustration of repentance and reward is found in the parable of the prodigal son (**Luke 15:17-20: repentance and reception; vss. 21-24: reward and joy; cp. Acts 26:18**).

### III. ONE DIED FOR THE SINS OF OTHERS

While many have died *in* sins and *to* sins, the circumstances of the one on the middle cross was unique! He had no sins to die *in* or *to*! Indeed, He chose to die FOR the sins of the world!

1. Jesus hung in the middle of these two criminals... the one died *in* his sins, the other die *to* his sins, but Jesus died *for* the sins of the whole world.

“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; By His stripes you have been healed” (**1 Peter 2:24**).

2. It is also important to realize that Jesus *willingly* submitted to the will of His Father and *gave* His life for us.

“O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done” (**Matthew 26:42**).

“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father” (**John 10:17-18**).

“When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost” (**John 19:30**).

3. The sacrifice of Himself demonstrated His and the Father’s great love for the world.

“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (**Romans 5:6-8**).

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (**John 3:16**).

### Conclusion

1. There were three men that hung on crosses on the hill of Calvary: one died *in* his sins, one died *to* his sins, and one, the Son of God, died *for* the sins of the whole world.
2. There was no other except the Son of God who qualified to die for the sins of others, and so none can choose to pay for his own sins or redeem another. We do, however, have a choice regarding our own sins – we die *in* our sins or we die *to* our sins.
3. If you have heard and believe the gospel, then you must repent and be baptised for the remission of your sins (**Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38**), and thereafter live a life constantly putting off the old man and putting on the new man (**Ephesians 4:20-24**).

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve” (**1 Corinthians 15:1-5**).

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