

Luke: Part 3

A Study of Luke 17–24

By Hope A. Blanton and Christine B. Gordon

19Baskets

Study 10

Jesus Breathed His Last

Read Luke 23:26-56

Observation Questions

1. Write down the details of the conversation Jesus had with the two convicted criminals who were crucified with him (verses 32-43).
2. List all the people mentioned that were witnessing or helping with the crucifixion. What were they each doing?
3. What two things happened in verses 44-49 before Jesus gave up his spirit?

Verses 26-31. The terrible day had finally come. Jesus had been making his way toward Jerusalem for months in order to give himself up to the Jews, to the Romans, and to the cross. Pilate had authorized the execution. It may seem strange that we suddenly hear the name of a new person right in the middle of Jesus being led to his death. The beating that usually preceded crucifixion was so extreme that it often caused the death of the prisoner. Jesus had survived the beating but was weak enough that he could no longer carry the crossbeam that condemned persons were required to transport on their back. Therefore, the Roman guards forced a passerby into service. The fact that Simon's two sons are mentioned by name in Mark 15:21 hints that Simon may have become a follower of Jesus through this encounter. He was the first to literally take up his cross and follow the king.

Though the Jewish leadership brought Jesus to trial, the crowds continued to follow him, even as he was led to his death. Luke pointed out the women and their grief in particular, as he does throughout his gospel. Jesus told them to weep not for him but for themselves. He knew that Jerusalem would be judged for what they were doing to him and that these women would have the hardest time in that judgment. While it was considered by all Jews a terrible misfortune not to be able to have children, Jesus was telling them that the destruction of Jerusalem would bring with it the horror of watching their children suffer terribly. Therefore barrenness at that point would be preferred. Then, in verse 31, Jesus asked a terrifying question: If I, the innocent man (the green wood) suffer like this on a cross, how will the guilty men, the Jews who rejected me (the dry wood) suffer?

Verses 32-34. Jesus was crucified with the guilty outside the city on a hill named "The Skull," probably so named because of its shape. "Skull" in Latin is *calvaria*, from which we get the name Calvary. Jesus's death among criminals fulfilled the prophecy of

Isaiah 53:12, "he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors." It is in this moment of hanging between two thieves that he asked his Father to forgive

“them,” probably referring both to the Jews who brought charges against him and the Romans who actually implemented the sentence. As he prayed for them, they did what was customary for executioners— casting lots (like drawing straws) to see who would get his clothes.

It is important at this point to notice what is not in the text. Crucifixion was brutal, slow, and cruel, but neither Luke nor any of the gospel writers elaborate on Jesus’s physical suffering in this process; they simply state that he was crucified. Instead of playing on our emotions, they paint a scene for us full of symbolism, rich with meaning for our faith.

Verses 35–43. The irony of the taunts from the rulers and the soldiers was that if Jesus would have saved himself, he could not have saved anyone else. The inscription posted on the signboard above his head listed the charges against him, as was the custom for all criminals. Jesus’s crime, probably written in three languages, was that he claimed to be king, a political infraction in the eyes of Rome. Again, the irony was that not only was it true —Jesus actually was and is king—but believing and acknowledging that truth could have saved everyone watching the scene. One of the thieves mocked Jesus along with the rulers and soldiers, but the other recognized his kingship, asking Jesus to remember him.

Jesus’s response to the guilty man was astounding. Consider all of the things he could have said. He could have shamed him, rejected him, required certain words, or even scared him. But Jesus is never one to shame or reject anyone who asks for him in faith. Instead he promised him *paradise*, a Persian word used by the Greeks meaning “garden” and used in the Old Testament numerous times including in reference to the Garden of Eden. But the word is also used in Revelation 2:7, where it is the “paradise” or “garden” of God anticipated in the new heavens and new earth. The thief was being welcomed into paradise, while the leaders of the Jews were going to be judged. Once again, the last were first and the first were last.

Verses 44–49. Jesus continued to hang between the two thieves as the hours wore on. Between noon and three in the afternoon, a darkness covered the hill and the surrounding area, surely symbolizing the impending death of the king. The curtain that ripped in the temple was the curtain between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, where only the high priest was allowed to go once per year to atone for the sins of the people. With his death, Jesus eliminated any barricade between himself and his people. The curtain was no longer needed. The sin that kept Israel and all of us apart from a holy God had been paid for by the punishment of the sinless man. Through Jesus there is now access to God.

Jesus had been in control of every moment of his walk toward Jerusalem, his ministry there, his betrayal, and his trial. He was not tricked into Roman custody but allowed himself to be taken, even stopping his disciples from fighting off his captors. He was not surprised by the trial but carefully chose what to say and when. The Bible affirms clearly that Jesus did truly die (1 Corinthians 15:3). Still, the Bible also emphasizes that Jesus’s death was not like ours, since Jesus maintained total control over his own life and death (John 10:18). At least partially to emphasize Jesus’s control over his death, none of the gospel writers even use the words “Jesus died.” Luke writes, “He breathed his last.” The

Greek word used is not the normal word used for dying but is, instead, literally “he breathed out.” Even in the moment of his death, Jesus chose. Jesus determined. Jesus purposed. As Robert H. Stein writes, “He was not killed. He did not die. Rather he voluntarily gave up his life to death. Jesus was Master even in his death.”

After Jesus breathed his last, the centurion declared Jesus’s innocence as Pilate and Herod had earlier. The crowds, many of whom had probably come for the entertainment of an execution, instead found themselves saddened by the death of this apparently innocent man. The fact that they were beating their breasts signifies grief and even the recognition of their own guilt. Many would say this was what prepared their hearts for repentance in the same city on the day of Pentecost. Notice the different reactions of those watching Jesus die. Some mocked him. Others belittled or taunted. Some mourned or felt guilty, while at least one confessed Jesus’s true identity. All must respond to the life, death, and resurrection of this king. What will your response be?

Verses 50-56. At least one member of the Sanhedrin had not agreed with the rest of the council in Jesus’s condemnation. From Luke’s description we can assume Joseph was a follower of Jesus. Because of his position on the council of Jewish leaders, he would have had more access to Pilate, giving him the ability to secure Jesus’s body. He personally took the body off the cross, as according to Jewish law a body could not remain hanging after sundown. Since the Sabbath was about to begin, the body was wrapped, hurriedly prepared, then placed in what we learn elsewhere was Joseph’s personal tomb. When the women saw how his body was placed, they apparently deemed it inadequate and returned home to prepare spices and perfumes to use on his body when the Sabbath was over. These spices were what they would be carrying in their hands Sunday morning when they walked to his tomb.

Imagine the disciples lying on their beds trying to go to sleep that night. For the better part of three years they had been with Jesus, listening to his words, his tone, his cadence, watching him heal, deliver, and love. They followed him through the villages, eagerly anticipated his actions and words in Jerusalem, and then on what must have felt like the most tragic day, watched him die between criminals. He had surprised them before, producing bread for thousands from a few loaves, sending demons from a tortured man into a herd of pigs. But this, this was surely the end of their hope. This is so often where we find ourselves, if we’re honest. We have walked with Jesus and have seen his power. But a new loss or a new bout of suffering leaves us in a place that seems to have exhausted all possibility of hope. Wait, dear one. For we know what his disciples did not on that awful night. Even in the already-not yet of the kingdom while we wait in this broken world, we know hope. Resurrection hope. The resurrection is coming.

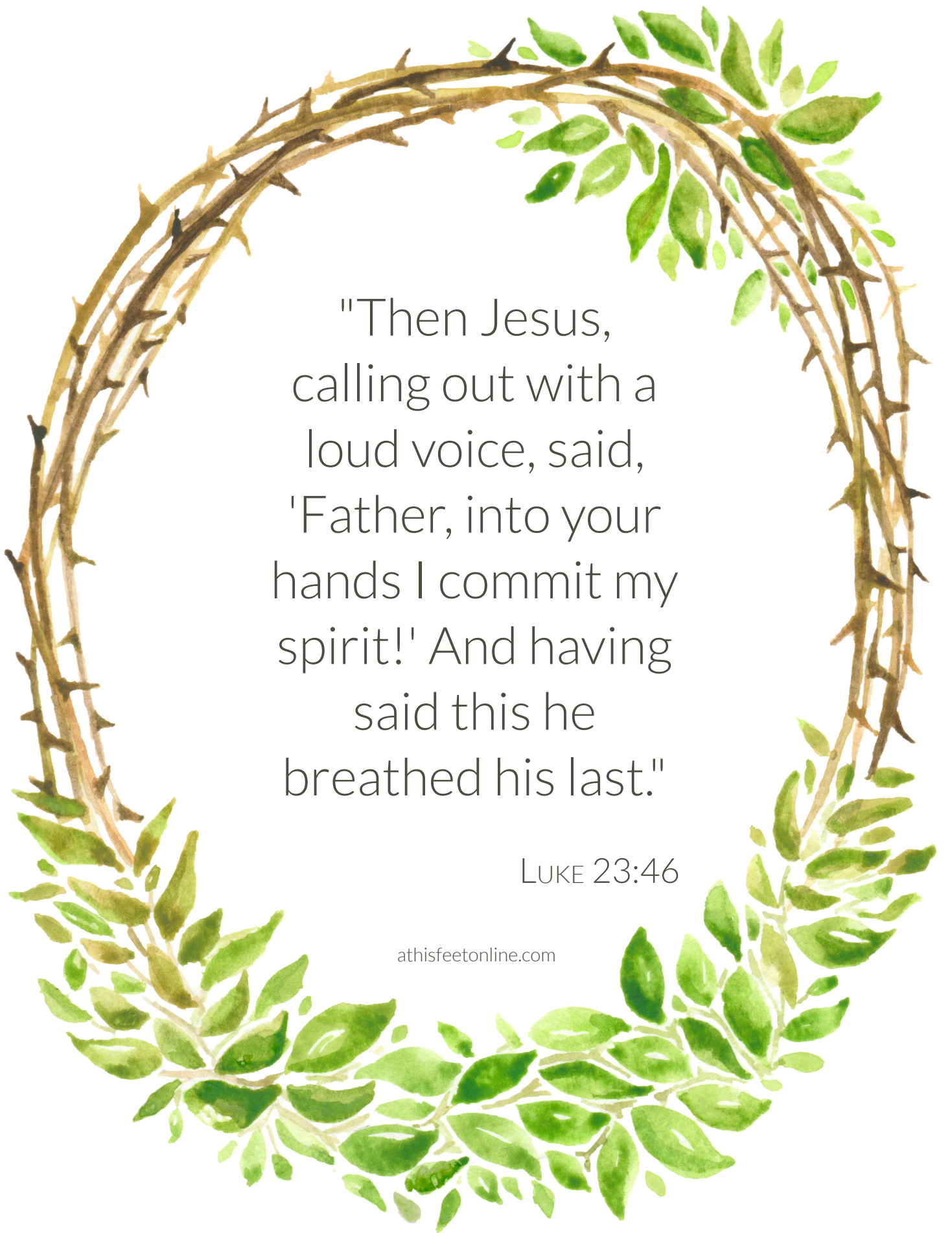
Reflection Questions

4. As the women following Jesus were mourning him, he told them that he was mourning for what was to come for them despite the agony he was about to face. What does this demonstrate to us about how Jesus loves and serves us?

5. As Jesus hung on the cross he said to God, “Forgive them for they know not what they do,” pardoning the very men responsible for his death. What is your reaction to this level of grace?
6. On the cross Jesus answers the thief who asks to be saved that he will be with him that day in paradise. What does this show us about the character of God? What does it teach us about life after death?
7. Jesus wasn’t killed; he “breathed his last,” willingly submitting to the Father and choosing to die. God is in control, even in this moment. Did you have that understanding of the crucifixion before this? Why or why not?
8. What do you think the disciples thought about that night as they laid in bed thinking Jesus was dead and all hope was lost?

Focus verse: *Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last.* Luke 23:46

Reflections, curiosities, frustrations:



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LUKE 23:46

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