

The background is a solid orange color, decorated with numerous small, irregular blue shapes that resemble confetti or paper scraps, scattered across the entire surface.

THE BIBLE'S EASTER READING GUIDE

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JESUS' WORDS FROM THE CROSS

Arthur C Clarke once wrote, "Death focuses the mind on the things that really matter". If that's true, what words came to Jesus' lips as he was crucified on a cross outside the city of Jerusalem back in 33 AD? What did he think really mattered?

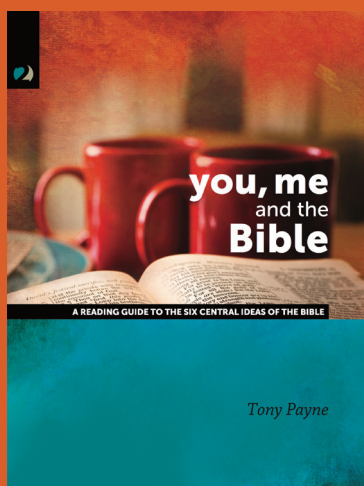
Each of the four biblical accounts of Jesus' life (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) record his death and the words that he uttered from the cross. As you would expect of historical accounts, there are both similarities and differences in those four accounts.

We will read some of Luke's account, and then some of Mark's.

? Good questions	Luke chapter 23 verses 32 to 43 (ESV*)	! Worth noting
<p>Who was Jesus asking God to forgive? In what sense didn't they know what they were doing?</p> <p>Could Jesus have saved himself? Why didn't he?</p> <p>Did the second criminal think he was deserving of crucifixion? Did he think Jesus was?</p> <p>What sort of "kingdom" does this criminal think Jesus is coming into?</p> <p>What does Jesus promise the second criminal? What has the criminal done to deserve this?</p>	<p>Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him [Jesus]. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."</p> <p>One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."</p>	<p>"The Skull": In Aramaic the name was 'Golgotha' (or 'Calvary' in Latin).</p> <p>Jesus quotes Psalm 22 from the cross, a psalm that was written centuries beforehand. That psalm also says: "they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots". Psalm 22 is also part of Mark's account, which we will read next.</p>

? Good questions	Mark chapter 15 verses 33 to 39 (ESV)	! Worth noting
<p>Jesus quotes from Psalm 22 verse 1, and in so doing identifies with the psalm writer's sense of abandonment. In light of the unusual darkness, why do you think Jesus feels "forsaken" by God?</p> <p>Why does the temple curtain tear from top to bottom at the moment of Jesus' death?</p>	<p>And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"</p>	<p>The sixth hour was noon. Darkness is frequently a symbol of mourning in the Bible, generally as a result of God's punishment.</p> <p>"Eloi, Eloi...": These words are Aramaic, a language of Jesus' time.</p> <p>The curtain separated the Jewish worshippers from an area of the temple known as the "holy of holies", which was symbolically where God was present.</p>

There is, of course, more to the story. Jesus doesn't stay dead. The historical accounts record that Jesus' body was buried in a tomb—and then on the third day he came back to life, appeared to many witnesses, and even explained what the Scriptures said about him. In other words, after his resurrection, Jesus interpreted the meaning of all that had happened to him to his followers. If you'd like to better understand that meaning for yourself and the big Bible story that Jesus' crucifixion fits into, we recommend *You, Me and the Bible*. This six-session course will help you do much the same as you've done today: open a section of the Bible, read it, and think and talk together about its meaning and implications.



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SOME THOUGHTS ON THE QUESTIONS...

Q: Who was Jesus asking God to forgive? In what sense didn't they know what they were doing?

Presumably it is the same "they" that crucified him: the Roman soldiers who carried out the actual execution. As non-Jews, they had less information about who Jesus really was, and so didn't really know what they were doing. But it's also possible that Jesus meant all those who played a part in the process even before the crucifixion, including the religious leaders and Pilate—although their culpability does seem greater than that of the soldiers, since they had more chance to understand Jesus' identity.

Q: Could Jesus have saved himself? Why didn't he?

Based on all the displays of his power through the earlier parts of Luke's account of Jesus' life, the obvious answer is that of course Jesus could save himself. In fact, in Matthew's account, as Jesus is arrested he says that if he wanted to resist he could "appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions [many thousands] of angels?" The key point is that he is not resisting; he is not saving himself. Why? Because, as we see particularly in the Mark account, he is fulfilling the plan to save others by taking their punishment for them. There is a deep irony in the mocking of the rulers and soldiers: Jesus is becoming the true king through his own suffering to save others.

Q: Did the second criminal think he was deserving of crucifixion? Did he think Jesus was?

Yes, the criminal seems to understand that he and the first criminal are getting what they deserve. But he can see that Jesus hasn't done anything wrong. There seems to be a deep meaning to this declaration by the criminal of Jesus' innocence—a meaning perhaps the criminal himself was not aware of as he said it. Jesus can only take the punishment for others if he himself is not deserving of God's punishment; he must be an innocent sacrifice.

Q: What sort of "kingdom" does this criminal think Jesus is coming into?

A kingdom that belongs to Jesus ("your kingdom"); this criminal believes Jesus is indeed becoming a king. But he can also see that Jesus is about to die, so he obviously does not think that death will put an end to Jesus' rule.

Q: What does Jesus promise the second criminal? What has the criminal done to deserve this?

Jesus promises that he will today be in Paradise with Jesus, that Jesus will somehow facilitate the criminal's entry into the perfect new heavenly kingdom that Jesus is establishing. Jesus' use of the word "Paradise" is probably meant to point us to something like the original and perfect Garden of Eden portrayed in the opening chapters of the Bible. Does the criminal deserve that? It would not seem so. By his own admission his deeds are deserving of something as horrible as crucifixion. The only basis for him being given this privilege seems to be that he asked Jesus for help, and because it was the very purpose of Jesus' crucifixion, Jesus had no hesitation in promising that help.

Q: In light of the unusual darkness, why do you think Jesus feels "forsaken" by God?

Darkness is a symbol in the Bible of an act of punishment from God being put into effect; God in a sense abandoning his people due to their sinful ways. Quoting Psalm 22 is an indication that Jesus is feeling that same sense of abandonment as on the cross he takes on the punishment that all mankind deserves.

Q: Why does the temple curtain tear from top to bottom at the moment of Jesus' death?

This was not just any curtain. It's the curtain in the Jewish temple that kept men and women (who were tainted with sin) from coming into the presence of the pure and holy God. As Jesus dies, he takes on the sin of the world and bears the punishment for it. This allows men and women to be cleansed and acquitted and made acceptable for a close relationship with God. That new ability to come into God's holy presence is symbolized in the tearing of the curtain from top to bottom—there is no longer a barrier. It is this divine 'transaction' (Jesus paying for our sins) that means the criminal on the cross and others like him (us!) can be promised free entry into the Paradise of Jesus' new kingdom; entry not on the basis of anything we do, but on the basis of what Jesus has done.

