

Guest Preacher- Mr Scott Macleod

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Preacher: Mr Scott Macleod

[0 : 00] And turn now back to the passage that we read together in Luke chapter 23. And our text this evening will be taken from verse 33.

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 we'll look in this passage after at the conversation that takes place between the criminals and Jesus.

We'll give our minds focus to that words, one on his right and one on his left. Now, in business, the man in the middle is often seen as a person who passes on information or items between two parties in order to make himself a little bit of money.

And often he is seen by many as someone who gets in the way. You'll hear that phrase, the middle man. He's someone that gets in the way. And the business that ruthlessly tries to increase profits will often try to eradicate this middle man.

[1 : 27] And they'll often try to miss out the middle man. He gets in the way of making my business more successful. He gets in the way of me making more money.

And if he was not there, I could do things the way that I wanted to do it. The middle man causes a problem for the man who selfishly runs his business.

And in part, this is kind of what's going on here in this passage. Jesus has been eradicated. Jesus is being missed out and being pushed out because he's getting in the way.

He is not what the majority of people want. He's getting in the way.

He's one who stands between ourselves and God. But he is also a middle man that stands between men. You see, Jesus Christ is the man that causes the greatest union with ourselves and God.

[3 : 08] But he is also the greatest middle man that causes great division between men, between ourselves. One man is glad to eradicate and have no dealings with his middle man.

But the other side will say that the middle man is essential. And I require this man in my life.

This is the divide we have in our text today. Between the man on the left and the man on the right. Jesus Christ is in the centre, in the middle.

All three condemned to be crucified. And between them we have this recorded dialogue in the middle of the passage that we read. And it is kind of a poignant moment.

That these three men, certainly two men, who are about to die. And their last words to this middle man.

[4 : 14] Now this account is only recorded in the Gospel of Luke. But what you'll notice when you go to the other Gospels. Is that they will picture this scene exactly the same way.

All four of them say that Jesus was in the middle. And there was a man crucified on his left. And a man on his right. And they were both criminals.

And these criminals are likely hard men. Men that had committed serious violent crimes.

They were guilty of the death sentence. There was no mistake with these men. They were likely to be highway robbers.

And if they were, they say that there's a good chance that they would have been accomplices to each other. Helping and aiding each other. And that they were crucified together for their joint crimes.

[5 : 17] The world would maybe have called these two criminals worthless. Maybe they would have even used the term to say that they were scum. They were deserving to die for all the pain that they had brought to people.

And their selfish greed and their selfish way of life. And they wanted rid of these criminals. But we have Jesus in the middle.

Now why do you think that was? What makes it so notable that all the Gospels mention this point? They didn't just say that three men were crucified.

Specifically that Jesus was in the middle. It doesn't seem to be a clear cut answer to it. But theologians have said that it is possible that Jesus was put in the centre.

To show that he was the worst of the three. His offence was worse than the two at his side. His crime was the greatest of them all.

[6 : 23] And if this is true, we can say that, well, Christ even had a place of magnitude. In his crucifixion and in his death. Or was he in the middle because he didn't deserve to be crucified?

Jesus was innocent. And there was no charge to him that was worthy of death or crucifixion. As Pilate himself said. It was an unjustified crucifixion.

And the soldiers, the chief priests, the rulers. They all knew that his crucifixion was unjustified. But still, that hostility and hatred towards this man.

Towards this middle man. Meant that they wanted him gone. No matter what. Even if it meant overruling justice to get rid of him.

Now, if you wanted to hide something, what would you do with it? You'd place it somewhere maybe inconspicuous.

[7 : 34] If you had, say, a ring that was worth a lot of money. You didn't want anyone to see it. You'd hide it in a drawer. You'd hide it in a towel. You'd hide it somewhere where no one would look for it.

No. You'd hide it amongst something. You'd hide it amongst something. Don't you? Now, we do this physically with an item. We can hide it. Or we can do it with something maybe that we've done ourselves.

We can do it in our own minds or with our own words with one another. Maybe we've done something wrong that we don't want people to find out about. Maybe we've committed this sinful act that we don't want anyone to know about.

And what we do is we divert them around this thing that we've done. We don't want them to find out. We'll throw them on another route.

So what we've done becomes unnoticed. What we've done becomes unknown to them. The truth of the situation is not told.

[8 : 44] And so what's happened is when we point people round and away from the crime or whatever it is that we've committed, that we divert them from the truth of the situation.

In order to protect ourselves. Is this what's going on when they crucify Christ? That they put a violent, two violent criminals either side of him.

And they put Jesus in the middle. And by doing that they're saying, they're diverting people's mind from him being a king. To being an unjustified crucifixion.

To saying, this man is the worst of all three. He's worse than the two evil criminals on either side. Is it a diversion tactic?

By those in charge. By those in charge. Those rulers. Those chief priests to protect themselves. And it reads that the passerby would blaspheme Christ.

[9 : 53] As they walked by. They would approach the first criminal. And they would see Jesus in the middle. He would be the worst offender.

And they would blaspheme him. Because the truth of the situation was not made clear to them. It was misunderstood. If they didn't know Christ. And who he was.

And what he had done. They would perceive that he was the worst of them. There's something that's prominent about Christ's crucifixion.

But they railed at him specifically. In Jude it says. That people blaspheme all that they do not understand.

And isn't that true in this passage here? They could blaspheme Christ on the cross. As they walked past. Because really what's happening is.

[10 : 49] They didn't understand who Christ was. And their misunderstanding of the Son of God. Meant they treated him. Essentially like scum.

They treated him as worthless. A worthless man. And it's a staggering thought when you think about it. That the Son of God let men do this to you.

I always kind of get caught up. When it says that they spat upon. How on earth. Could the Son of God.

Allow any man. To spit upon him. How could he be treated like this? Now if you go to Matthew. And Mark. It will say that the two criminals. That were on either side of him. Joined in with those. Who reviled him.

[11 : 51] Joined in with the passerby. Who blasphemed him. But it says that they specifically. Heaped insults. Upon what the passerby said. It's almost as if.

These two criminals were saying. Well the passerby. Blasphemy is not enough. For this man. We will heap our own insults. Upon him. And there seems to be.

At this time. An overwhelming power of evil. Poured out. At this moment. But we'll see that the surpassing.

Power of God is still at work. And the middle man here. Jesus Christ. Makes a divide. Between these criminals.

These companions. In their last moments. But is it not true that. Well the middle man. Divides all men.

[12 : 50] And it is true for us today. That he divides the men. Of this world. And the question you must ask yourselves. Is what side are we on?

Are you someone. That wants to eradicate. Jesus Christ. Out of your life. Are you someone. That does not want to deal. With this middle man. Or do you realise.

That you cannot do anything else. Without him. There was a change. In one of them criminals. Wasn't there?

A surprising change. A surprise even for himself. He didn't expect Jesus. Have such an impact. On his life.

And maybe some here. Can relate to that. That when they came. Beside Jesus. Or when the word of God. Came beside them. They didn't realise.

[13 : 52] How much of an impact. It would have on their lives. It caught them off guard. It was a surprise. Let us look. Let us look.

At the effect. That we see. In this middle man. The effect that he had. On the man. That had great change. And we'll do that. With four. Brief.

R's. And the first. R. Will be. Recognition. Something happens. To this man. As he is crucified. Beside Jesus.

The man that had the great change. He recognises. Something in Jesus. As others blaspheme him. And it is unclear.

As to what he recognises. Or what he picks up. On this middle man. It doesn't tell us. Anything specific. In scripture. When you look at it.

[14 : 48] Maybe you can only pick out. That it was. Just the nature. Of Christ himself. And his reactions. The reactions. To himself. Blaspheming. The man.

These men. These two. Hardened. Criminals. Would never. Ever. Have seen someone. React so graciously. To someone. Reviling him.

And then. Certainly. One of them. Is watching Jesus. And saying. He. This middle man. Has not shown. One bit of hostility.

Towards those. Who revile him. He's not shown. Any anger. He's not reviled. Back. Nor blasphemed them. And he did not spit.

Upon anyone. And he's been mostly silent. For the time. Of this crucifixion. But when he has spoken.

[15 : 47] His words have been kind. And loving. Forgive them. Forgive them. Forgive them. For they do not. What they do. Do not know. What they do. See the more.

They watch this man. Or certainly. One of them. Is watching this man. The more time. He spends. Beside. Jesus. You see. He's getting a clearer.

Understanding. And recognizing. Something. Something about this man. That is different. To anyone else. But as he looks at Jesus.

He recognizes. That his own blasphemy. Upon Jesus. Was completely untoward. Maybe it was because.

Death was staring him. In the face. He was unable. To run away from it. He was literally. Pinned. To the cross. Forced to consider.

[16 : 46] This middle. Man. Beside him. In these moments. When death. Comes to us. Or the possibility.

Of death. We're forced. To consider. The importance. Of Jesus Christ. And in these last few moments.

Of his life. The man on the cross. He recognizes God. In him. And he recognizes. His own position. Before God. Maybe he didn't know. Who Jesus was. Exactly. But he must have known. He was a man from God. Maybe that's what it takes.

That we are set. With death. Before us. Before we actually. Consider. Who Christ is. Before we actually.

[17:44] Look to him. Before we actually. Turn to him. And see. The importance. Of this middle man. Maybe we have to be.

Forced into a position. To do this. Now what are you going to do? Are you going to revile him? Or are you going to look at him?

And say that you need him? What will we do? His first hour was recognition. Recognize something. About this man. Maybe not sure. Who he was.

Or what he meant to him. But he recognized. Something. Second hour is. Rebuke. What are the first recorded words.

We have. From this man. Who was converted. In the last minute. Look there. At verse 40. It says. The other rebuked him. Saying.

[18:42] Do you. Not. Fear. God. Since you are under. The same. Condemnation. And we. Indeed. Justly. For we are receiving. The due. Reward.

Of our deeds. But this man. Has done nothing wrong. The first thing he says is. Do you. Not. Fear. God. This comment.

Must have been. Completely. Out of the blue. For those. Who were there. That day. The man. Who was joined. In reviling. Jesus Christ. Now. Seems to be. Standing up. For him.

And this gives us. Good reason. To think. That he didn't. Know. Anything. About Jesus. Before. Certainly. Whatever he had heard. People say.

Was not true. Maybe. He had been. Put down. This diversion. Tactic. Of making Jesus. Look bad. Himself. So that he would. Revive him. But actually.

[19:37] When he was set. Before the truth. Of the man. He saw. That there was. Certainly. A difference. But it was.

Certainly. True. That he did not. Understand. Everything. About Jesus. That's. Why he could. Blaspheme him. So easily. When he came.

To the cross. But the fear. Of God. Is the beginning. Of wisdom. Proverbs 9. Verse 10. This man. Had a fear. Of God. Instilled. In his heart. And asked. His companions. Who was. Reviling. Do you. Not. Fear.

God. And his. Rebuke. To his friend. Is as valid. Today. As it was. Then. And what he says. Was more weighty.

[20:31] I think. Than he ever. Realized. He says. To his friend. Do you not. Fear God. And that's. What we say.

To those. Who are here. Tonight. Ask yourself. Do you not. Fear. God. Maybe.

You've been. Someone. Who has turned. Your back. Against this. Middle man. You wanted. This middle man. Out of your life. Maybe. You've taken. His name. In vain. Many a times.

How can you. Do you not. Fear. God. God. Because we are all. Under the same. Condemnation. Everyone here.

Will. Face. Death. Physically. But in the sight of God. We are full of sin. And before God. We are worthy. Of death.

[21:28] We are all. Under. The same. Condemnation. In God's eyes. Criminal. Or not. These men. Were no worse off.

Than us. Or. Ourselves. In our natural state. We may think they are. But really. In God's eyes. We are all the same. Without.

The middle man. Without. Jesus Christ. But the condemnation. Of God. Is. Spiritual death. And eternal death. Does that not.

Cause. Give you reason. To fear. God. His rebuke. Is built. Upon. His recognition. And he realizes. That his punishment.

Is just. His own punishment. Is completely. Just. And he deserves. To be on that cross. And he can definitely. Say without.

[22 : 25] Any maybes. Or doubts. Or mights. About himself. That he deserves. To be there. But it's so. Equally confident.

And he's so. Equally confident. As this hardened. Criminal. And he looks at this. Middle man. He says. There is nothing. In this man. That deserves.

Crucifixion. This man. This man. Has done nothing. Wrong. Is what he said. He could identify. Evil. He knew.

What a criminal was. And he's watching this man. And he's saying. He's done nothing wrong. What is he doing here? And you know.

We look at this passage. And we think. Well this is just. For the unconverted. A call to the unconverted. To come to Christ. Before it is too late.

[23 : 24] But it's more than that. There's a lesson. For us all in this. There's a lesson. To the Christian. What are our attitudes. And reactions. When people.

Challenge us. When people. Revile us. When people. Ridicule us. How do we react? How do we speak? And you know.

When we see this. Passage here. There's no recorded. Words. Between Jesus. And the man. Beforehand. It is all.

By what he sees. In Christ. And how important. Is our witness. As Christians. To the world. Who watches us. We may not speak.

A word. To them. But even the most. Unsuspecting. People. May be watching us. People.

[24 : 21] May be guilty. Of saying. That they are worthless. In our own hearts. If we're honest. Although we should never. Have that thought. Of anyone.

Because we are all. Equal. In God's eyes. We all face. We're all under.

The same. Sentence. Of condemnation. Without the middle man. Without Christ. But you know. What each of us gains. When we come beside.

This middle man. Is that we gain. A greater understanding. Of who he is. And what he means. To us. And how much we must. And how much we need him.

And yet. There are many. Who blaspheme his name. And we hear them. Blaspheme his name. It's because. They don't understand. That's why.

[25 : 21] They can so easily. Do it. They don't fear God. What can we do. As Christians. To help them. To understand. Maybe it's not.

What we say. Maybe it's. The way we act. Maybe it's. What we do. As they watch us. Maybe unknowingly. We are ambassadors.

For Christ. Let us. Be faithful ambassadors. In all that we say. And in all that we do. So we have the recognition.

He recognized something. We have his rebuke. To his friend. And then. We see. That there is a request. That he makes. To Jesus. And we'll see that. In verse Mark 42.

And he said to Jesus. Remember me. When you come in. To his. When you come in. To your kingdom. This is. First time.

[26 : 19] That he has spoken. Politely. But. Certainly. In a way. That is not derogatory. Towards Jesus. Whatever understanding. He had gained. In this short few moments.

By watching this man. He's grasped. That Jesus has a kingdom. And it's a possibility. That what is written.

Above his head. That this man. Is actually a king. He is the king. Of the Jews. I don't think he grasped. Everything that was going on.

I don't think he knew. For certain. Who this man. Was. But he saw. That he was a man of God. And he made a request.

To him. Calling him. By name. Him. There's a personal element to that. That he found some. Knowledge of him.

[27 : 17] That he knew him in some way. To say. Jesus. Remember me. He speaks to Jesus.

And this is his prayer. Remember. Remember me. And you might ask yourself. Well why does he not. Ask Jesus. To save me. Like his companion.

Well. I think it's because. He realized in himself. That he didn't deserve. To be saved. He's only a few hours. From dying. And he realizes.

As he looks back. Over his entire life. That there's been a life. Full. Lived. Full. Of selfish. Greed. And his own desire. With no concern.

For anyone else. Maybe he even had anger. Towards God. Whatever he is. Or whatever he thinks. Of himself. He sees that there is no reason.

[28 : 19] For him to be saved. From this cross. And from death. And that he would be remembered. In some fashion. Would maybe.

Just be enough for him. And I don't know your life. But maybe you're sitting here. Or you're listening to this. And you're thinking.

My life has been loved against God. I've spent my life reviling him. Rejecting him. Being selfish. Whatever it is.

You may not be a criminal. But you may have rejected this middle man. Not to have any dealings with him. Maybe you're saying to yourself. I am not worthy.

To be saved. Why on earth would God save someone like me? I believe this is. What the thief was saying to himself. As he hung there. Beside Jesus.

[29 : 17] But the unbelievable thing. Is that he does. And the unbelievable thing. Is that. We don't do anything to deserve it. Maybe we think we're better than others.

But we are under the same condemnation. In the eyes of God. We have done nothing. To deserve. His grace. And salvation. His saving grace.

Is given to us. Regardless of what we have been. Even this man who reviled him. And blasphemed him.

A couple of minutes ago. How much do you believe this? Do you believe that Jesus.

Can't forget all that. But he does. And he will. For the one. That approaches him. And sincerely.

[30 : 20] Acknowledges who Christ is. As a king. Sincerely acknowledges who he is. In his own person. That he is not worthy to be saved. He will.

And he received a great reward. We had. Recognition. We have. His request. We had.

His rebuke. And now we have. His reward. And that is given. From Jesus' own words. In verse 43. Truly I say to you.

Today. He will be with me. In paradise. His truly. Is an assured. Guarantee. For the man. That it will be certain.

This will happen. Christ. Will not just remember him. But welcome him. You will go into. My kingdom.

[31 : 20] With me. And my kingdom. Is a paradise. Paradise. The word here. Speaks of a garden. Of pleasure. And immediately.

Turns our minds. Back. To the garden. Of Eden. Being restored. Now Jesus. Did far more. Than remember him. The first thing.

He did. I think. Was to forget. Who. He had been. There's no mention. Here. Of who he was. Or what he should do.

To prepare himself. All these sins. And all these. Recent. Blasphemies. Against God. As he became. As he came.

To understand. Who Jesus was. And saw who he was. In the light. And the presence. Of God. Asked him. To remember him.

[32 : 19] And. And Christ. Forgot. All these sins. Just as if. They never happened. What a contrast.

For the man. That day. What did he. Expected. That day. As he went. To that cross. He would have been crucified.

And tossed. Into the burning. Rubbish tip. That's what they did. With the bodies. But now. He had an assured word. To be in paradise. The man.

In the middle. Changed his future. And turned his world. Upside down. And he gave. A dying man. Eternal hope. When he went.

To that cross. In his head. He was thinking. Of hell. But after. Speaking to Christ. In his head.

[33 : 16] He could only think. Of paradise. It was heaven. For this man. And it was an assured word. From Christ. And you know.

He would have been. Full of questions. How. Is this possible? Why. Has he shown this. Love. Towards me. And doing this. For me. The darkness.

Engulfed the land. On the ground. Shook. And everyone. Who stood there. Realized. When he died. That this man. Was the son.

Of God. And then there was no time. For any conversation. When Jesus took his last breath. And died. Can you imagine.

These two criminals. And the both. Having the response. That they had. Seeing this middle man. Lifeless. And looking at each other.

[34 : 13] And looking at each other. They didn't have the energy. To speak with each other. The words that we have. Recorded. Are short.

And brief. Because it would have taken all their energy. To talk. I cannot imagine. The look. The look. The look. The look. The look. The look. The look. The look. The look. Between each other.

The divide. The divide. The man in the middle. Made between them. Time. Was short.

Opportunity. Had passed. For one. Do you not fear God? But notice what happened also.

After Jesus died. In verse 48. It says that the. Crowds that were there. Departed. Nobody was there.

[35 : 11] To see these two men. Nobody was there. To remember them. They were all forgotten. Them two were forgotten.

They were worthless. To everyone else. They were not worth thinking about. But there was one there. That knew that he was remembered. And remembered by the most important person. That could ever remember him. The middle man. Remembered him. He depended. On the middle man.

And he knew he needed. That middle man. In his life. Now we said at the beginning. That one. Would seek.

To eradicate. The middle man. And one. Would. So. Would see. And know. That he required him. But you know. What's true of them both.

[36 : 09] I don't think they realized. Just. How much. They were needed. The middle man. How essential. This man was.

To the man who received him. And to the man who rejected. And I don't think. They would ever realize it. Until they went into eternity.

The importance. Of the middle man. But by then it was too late. And the middle man. Comes to us.

Through his word. And promises. To be with us. And to intercede. For us. Before God.

He takes our petitions. Before him. He is our great. Middle man. Do you recognize him? This man recognized him.

[37 : 11] This man. Had a loving. Rebuke. To his friend. He had a request. Before. Jesus. And he gained.

A great reward. For trusting in him. He expected to die. But he ended up living. He is the middle man.

Between men. That causes a great divide. He is the middle man. Between ourselves and God. For the one who trusts in him.

Do not pass by. The middle man. Do not disregard. This middle man. He is the most important. Middle man.

In this world. All I can say is. That you need him. We all need. This middle man. Next week.

[38 : 12] God willing. You will stop. And remember. What this middle man. Has done for you. And you will remember. This scene.

Where he died on the cross. You will remember. His body. And you will remember. His blood. That was poured out. For you. Who did not.

Deserve. His love. But as we do this. And we come into his presence. And commune.

Beside him. That we would have a greater understanding. Of who he is. Just like this man did.

When he was beside Christ.

He understood. Who he was. We remember him. But he remembers us. And even in that.

[39 : 11] Moments. When we remember him. And do. What he told us to do. There's still a divide. Isn't there? What side are we on?

We must ask ourselves. Where is our hope? Beyond death. Do we have the hope? Of the. Man. Who put his trust in Christ.

Time is short. Opportunity is short. We don't know. If we will be here next week. What side are we on? What side are we on?

Do you not fear God? Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.

Let us pray. Open our eyes to understand who you are. Open our eyes to understand ourselves.

And who we are before you in your presence. You are the everlasting God.

[40 : 13] Lord. You are the one who ordains all things. You are the one who gives us every breath. And numbers our days.

Help us to number our days that we may gain wisdom. Lord we pray. Pray that you'd be with this congregation in the days ahead. And the weeks ahead. Bless your word preached to them we pray. And as they sit and commune with you. Bless them. With your presence. Amen. We'll conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 91.

Of the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 91 Scottish Psalter. You'll find that on page 352 of the Blue Book. I'm singing from verse 13 down to verse Mark 16. Psalm 91.

[41 : 18] From verse 13 down to verse Mark 16. Upon the adder thou shalt tread. And on the lion's strong. Thy feet on dragon's trample shall.

And on the lion's young. Because on me he set his love. I'll save and set him free. Because my great name he has known.

I will him set on high. He'll call on me. I'll answer him. I will be with him still. In trouble to deliver him. And honour him I will.

With length of days and to his mind. I will him satisfy. I also my salvation. Will cause his eyes to see. A psalm of divine protection. To the one who trusts in God. We'll stand and we'll sing. These verses. Upon the adder thou shalt tread.

[42 : 17] Upon thee, lader thou shalt tread.

And on her lion's wrong. My theme of my soul.

I've comunoured Prince. In wonderful work. I'llossa on the land. necesisle on earth. Bye■ He calls on me, he settes down, I'll save a secure fee.

He calls my great living a throne, I will have set on high.

He'll call on me, I'll answer him, I will be with him still.

[43 : 46] In trouble to deliver him, and on her day I will.

With a glory smart to his mind, I will live satisfied.

I also my salvation will cause his eyes to see.

Conclude with a short word of prayer. O Lord, as we part, we pray that your Spirit would be over us, guiding us and protecting us. Go before us, we ask in all things, preparing us our way, that we would be people trusting in you, and set with strength, prepared for what lies ahead of us.

Help us to be as little children, with arms outreached to your Heavenly Father, for guidance, comfort and security. Be with us, we pray, and part us with your blessing and safety. Amen.