

Date:

The crucifixion of Jesus

PRAY Father, you know the concerns of my heart today. Please show me what I most need to hear today from your Word.

READ Luke 22:66 – 23:25

REFLECT

Some time ago I had lunch with two close friends who were curious about my faith in Jesus. They asked several good, honest questions and I was encouraged by the direction of our discussion. But after a while the conversation took a turn; my friends were alarmed at the way religion and politics often got mixed up together in public debate. As a result, they had difficulty separating my commitment to following Jesus from a particular political agenda.

That's exactly what's happening in our reading today; political concerns have overwhelmed true religion. Notice the spin the religious leaders put on their accusations of Jesus: 'He's undercutting our national security, he opposes your taxes policy and he's planning a political takeover' (my paraphrase of 23:2). It's all about politics. Thank God there are some political leaders who are attempting to govern today based on their deeply-held spiritual values. But God save us from leaders who use those values for political gain. It's a fine line, and getting it wrong prevents people from hearing the good news.

Our passage also gives us two examples of religion and politics gone awry. *Herod* was interested in Jesus, but only for entertainment (23:8); politicians always want to be near celebrities. Jesus made it clear that he was no celebrity entertainer (23:9); we must accept him as Lord and Saviour or not at all. But perhaps the most famous example came on the watch of *Pilate*, the man who sentenced Jesus to death. Part of him wanted to do the right thing (23:13–17, 20–22) but in the end he didn't believe there was any such thing as truth (John 18:38) and it caused him to reject the ultimate source of Truth. Some say that is an apt analogy of our modern society.

Christians need to be careful not to misuse faith issues in politics or, worse, to politicise the mission of the Church. That's why I am moved every time I sing the Matt Redman song about worship: 'I'm sorry Lord for the thing I've made it, when it's all about you, it's all about you, Jesus.'

APPLY How do your religious beliefs shape your political views?

PRAY Lord, reveal to me any ways that my viewpoint is at odds with your heart and your Word.

Date:

The crucifixion of Jesus

PRAY 'Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD' (Psalm 25:7).

READ Luke 23:26–56

REFLECT

Whenever I read this passage, I have a sense that I'm on holy ground; the crucifixion of Jesus is the most amazing demonstration of sacrificial love the world has ever seen. Over the years, movie-makers have done their best to depict what it must have been like, but no one can ever fully know the extent of the suffering Jesus endured. And yet, for all the physical pain, the worst part for Jesus was that God temporarily abandoned him; the Father turned his back on his beloved Son (Matthew 27:45,46). That's what it took to make a way for you and me and the entire human race to be forgiven our sins and restored to God.

What amazes me now about this account is that even in the midst of his excruciating ordeal, Jesus was more concerned about others than himself. To the women mourning him, Jesus offered a prophetic warning (23:27–31); he wanted them to be prepared for the hard times that would follow his death. To the people, leaders and soldiers who mocked him, Jesus offered forgiveness (23:34), whether they realised they needed it or not. To the angry thief, Jesus offers silence (23:39); he doesn't try to retaliate. And to the repentant thief, Jesus more than offers – he promises – paradise (23:43).

During my 13 years on the staff of Prison Fellowship, I had the opportunity to go into prison many times with Chuck Colson. Often Chuck preached to the inmates from this passage with the message that it's never too late to turn back to Jesus and accept his forgiveness for sin. Many inmates gave their lives to Christ as a result of that simple appeal.

In a very real sense, this passage offers us the defining picture of what the **Essential JESUS** is all about, whether we're behind bars or out in the world. Because of our sin, all of us are condemned to die; we're either one thief or the other. The real question is how we will respond: with insults (23:39) or with a heartfelt 'Remember me' (23:42)?

APPLY Take time to put yourself in this story. What do you think and feel as you imagine yourself at the foot of the cross?

PRAY Spend a few minutes humbly thanking Jesus for what he endured for you on the cross.