

Jesus Crucified with Transgressors

Preached in New Hope Reformed Fellowship Church, Middleville, MI,
on Friday evening, Good Friday, April 15, 2022 by C. VanSteenselen.

Text: Mark 15:27-28
Psalter 363:1-2
Psalter 47:3-4
Psalter 83:1-2
Psalter 196

Congregation,

How many people are now in jail in the United States? This is about 1.22 million prisoners. Why are they placed there? The reason is simple, they have done something against the law. Maybe they have killed someone. It could be a prisoner has abused someone else. Or it might be treason. After a whole court process, they are put in jail. In 2020, 14 have received the death sentence and wait for their capital punishment.

In a sense, we by nature are all in prison. We have received a death sentence. One day it will be executed. But 2000 years ago, Someone was also sentenced. But this person was innocent. Still, He received capital punishment. Yes, He was counted as a transgressor of the law. Who was this? Jesus Christ. He was crucified. And that with transgressors.

Theme: Jesus Crucified with Transgressors

- I. The Persons for Crucifixion
- II. The Place of Crucifixion
- III. The Reason for Crucifixion

I. The Persons for Crucifixion

Background

Before we go into our passage, it is good to review some background information. Let us turn to the first verses of Mark 15. We see that Pilate examines Jesus. He confirms that Jesus is innocent. At the same time, he scourges and delivers Him (Mark 15:1-15). Then the soldiers take Jesus. They make Him a ‘mock king.’ They place a purple mantle over him and ‘worship’ Him (15:16-20). Afterwards, they lead Jesus to Calvary. On the road, they force Simon of Cyrene to bear the crossbeam (15:21-23). At Calvary, at 9am, they crucify Christ. They take his clothes and gamble to have each their portion (14:24-25). His accusation is placed above His head. What is it? “The King of the Jews” (15:26). And then we see in verse 27 and 28 that He is crucified with two thieves. This is the fulfillment of an Old Testament text. These verses we will look at. What does it mean that He is crucified with them?

King Jesus Christ

We read in verse 27, “And with him they crucify.” It begins with “they.” Who do crucify Christ? Yes, the Jews and the Pharisees are involved. But who act? It is the Roman soldiers. We know this from verse 15 and from the Gospel of John, “Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments” (John 19:23). Matthew adds, “the soldiers of the governor” (Matt. 27:27). A centurion ruled over them. This man had the command over about 80-100 soldiers. Such groups were called centuries. Centuries existed of subgroups with 8 men (contubernium), who shared a living quarter and food. One of the centurions we see standing at the foot of the cross (Matt. 15:39). But what were soldiers? And how did they look like? They had a sword of 2 feet, a rectangular shield, and a helmet. Also, they were the “engineers” in the society. They had to build roads, bridges, and forts. They had to dig canals. No, it was not legal for them to marry. And their age? Normally between 18 and 45 years old, although the early 20ths were preferred. Their length was usually around the 5’7”. Oh yes, they had to march long distances. Sometimes 20-30 miles a day with full complement gear. And these soldiers crucify someone. Who? We read, “Him.” Who is this? It is Jesus. Yes, but more. It is the *King* of the Jews. We read in John, “Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, ‘Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews’” (John 19:19). The King! Can you imagine what that is? Is He then a King? Certainly. Revelation says about Him,

“He hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords” (Rev. 19:16). He rules! The armies of heaven follow Him. A sword goes forth out of His mouth, “And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (Rev. 19:15). Yes, all angels, authorities, and powers are subject unto Him (1 Pet. 3:22). But He is not just a King. No, also a sinless King. He is the lamb “without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19), Peter says. Why was He then crucified? Because He was made sin so that the elect could become righteous before God (2 Cor. 5:21).

Application

Hearers, who crucified Jesus Christ? Yes, it were the Jews and the Pharisees. We could say religious people and their leaders. Also, the Roman soldiers did it, the gentiles. Such people had common jobs. They were farmers, carpenters, professors, and engineers. Do they not much look like us? We could speak about common church people, the consistory and wordy people. We also have many common jobs. But who crucified Christ? The Jews and Romans? Yes, they literally. But, we as well. But then in a spiritual way. How did the Jews do this? They urged for His crucifixion, their leaders condemned Him, and the Roman soldiers acted. What a picture of us! How do we crucify Him? We despise Him. We live worldly lives. Or we say, maybe even in a pious way, “God need to convert me. I cannot believe by myself.” But deep down, we are unwilling. We do not want to give up. No, we love our comfortable lives. We make friends with the world. We gossip. We try to maintain our pride. We justify ourselves. Maybe even in a religious manner. We could listen to many sermons. We study many theological books. We have a ‘prayer’ life. And we even thank God for X and Y. But all that is done to maintain myself and my sin. And every sin is a nail in the hands of Christ and a thorn of the crown on His head.

Are there those that understand who we have crucified? Yes, He is the Almighty King! He is the Ruler of heaven and earth. He is the Creator and sinless Lamb. What a crime. Every transgression is a drop in the cup of God’s wrath. And all that is poured out upon Him for His people. Every sin is a stab with the spear in His side! And most horrible is that we desire to do it. We love it! But, He is risen! He will rule all nations. Each one of us will know Him in one of two ways. Either as the King-Savior, or as the King-Judge. Who will we meet? But in our passage we see that Christ is crucified. But who else are?

Two Robbers

We will find this in verse 27, “With him they crucify two thieves.” How many are crucified with Him? We read “two.” What is the meaning of this number? Twofold. On the one hand it means union. Being united in the same. Think of a man and a woman in marriage. Think of the Old and New Testament. These are two testaments with one message. But what a picture here. Christ is crucified with two others. Two that are united in their crime. On the other hand, the number two means division, difference, and separation. On the day of judgment, we read, “Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left” (Luke 7:41). Likewise, we see the division with the temple veil, “The veil of the temple was rent in *twain* [two]” (Mark 16:12). But why are there two men? Why not three? Where is the third one? Most likely, this was Barabbas, “And there was *one* named Barabbas, *which* lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him” (Mark 15:7). Barnes says about Barabbas that he was “their companion and leader.” But what were these two men? We read, “two thieves.” No, they had not just stolen something. But the word means actually robbers and plunderers. They had taken things by force and violence. Think of the parable of the good Samaritan. For the thieves there, the same word is used, “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among *thieves*, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead” (Luke 10:30). Often, as you can see in this verse, such men tried to kill someone or truly done it. That is most likely also the case in our verse. Gill says, “They would not judge two in one day, unless they committed the same crime and died the same death.” And in regard to Christ, Gill says, “Their death was the same, but not their crime.” Another commentator mentions that they were condemned already for some time but they were now crucified.

Application

Congregation, what a picture is drawn of each one of us! Yes, we are thieves. We are robbers! You ask, why? Well, God ‘traveled’ down the road of paradise. But we tried to strip Him of His garment. We tried to wound Him. Then we departed. What did we try to take? The ‘bag’ of God’s power, the ‘jewels’ of His honor, and the ‘papers’ of His Kingship.

Ah, yes, we used violence! After that, we departed. And now? Our relationship with God is broken! We are separated from Him. We never want to go back. Unless! Yes, unless God unites. Yes, such robbers are indeed condemned to the cursed death. Each one of us is. Yes, it will be like these robbers in our text. They were condemned to death and had to wait for the day of execution. That will also happen to us. One day, the day of judgment, the heavenly Judge will sentence. That will either be to our eternal well or eternal woe. Yes, those that have committed the same crime will be executed with the same death.

Child of the LORD, how does it stand with the knowledge of the first Adam? What do we mean? Well, that we have sinned from the beginning. Were you not taught that you were born with a sinful nature? Have you not learned that you walked around with stolen jewels, bags and papers? Ah, what did that become a burden. Then you began to think about God’s honor. How have I violated it! How can I ever return it? I cannot. Why? Because there is a gulf of separation between God and my soul. What a guilt! You thought it was very little. But later on you learned that it was more and more. No, not only that you robbed God. But that you were a robber by nature. Then you were impressed, I have tried to kill God! When you realized that, it was worse than ever. Maybe you asked, is there hope for such a rebel? Then you went over the earth without any hope. You were on your way to the moment of execution. No, it was not a question if that would happen, but when. Then you cried, “LORD, I have to die, and I cannot die!” Yes, on your way to the place of execution. But what place was Jesus and two robbers going to? That is what we will hear in our second thought.

II. The Place of Crucifixion

When we think of the place of crucifixion, we not only think of the location itself but also the place where each person hung. What about Christ?

Jesus in the Midst

Verse 22 says, “They bring him unto the place *Golgotha*.” This comes from the Aramaic and means “Place of a skull.” Why did the place have this name? One commentator says, this name was given “according to early church fathers...due to the shape of the hill that apparently reminded people of a human skull.” But what did they do there? Well, they crucify Him. How would that happen? First, they fixed Christ on the crossbeam. Then the Roman soldiers drove large nails into His hands and nailed him to the cross. Then they took all His clothes away. The soldiers gambled for them. What a shame! Then they raised the stake just a bit above the ground. No, He will no longer able to support His weight by standing on His feet. And while hanging, many come by to mock and scorn Him. Also, those two on His sides do. But who is hanging here? Verse 15 makes clear that it is Jesus. Read careful. The writer uses His personal name. The name means, Jehovah saves. But how can this be? If Yahweh saves, why is He then crucified? Well, it was not meant to save Himself (Matt. 27:42). No, He came to save sinners from eternal destruction. But where did He hang? On one of the sides? No. We have to go to the Gospel of John to know this, “They crucified him...on either side one, and Jesus in the *midst*” (John 19:18). That means, He hung between the two other robbers. He was among them. But why there? We could mention three things. First, it shows that He made a division between the two. Second, He was counted with them. Third, this was the place of ‘honor.’ When we think of that division, what does it remind of? Yes, of the mother promise. God promised enmity, division, between the Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). But more, Jesus was also counted with them. Gill says, “They crucify him between two such persons: but the grand reason why it was so ordered, was, that though Christ was no transgressor, he was accounted one.” And lastly, this was the place of ‘honor.’ Think of Paul when he “stood in the midst of Mars’ hill” (Acts 17:22). From there, Paul could proclaim the gospel. In our text it shows that Christ is the ‘worse’ of these criminals. He is as it were the King among them.

Application

Congregation, have we seen Jesus Christ and Him crucified? You say, how? By eye faith. Those that know of it, what did you see? Was it not the agony on His face. When He looked you in the eyes, what a pain did you see. Why? These eyes wanted to say, you nailed Me here. You mocked Me! You took My clothes and brought Me shame. But when you looked better. What did you see? Blood everywhere. It dripped from His head, hands, and feet. Such precious blood! Yes, His life flows out of Him! Every drop of that blood has such a value! Yes, when you saw that, it touched your heart! But you also saw His eyes. They were full of mercy. They said as it were, this blood is all for you. And then you heard His voice. What

a tender voice! It was full of love. What did He say? “Father, forgive him, for he does not know what he does!” Ah, when you heard that voice, it melted your heart! Then you could no longer sin. Then there was such a desire to embrace Him. Then His blood covered you fully. It washed and cleansed you. Then there was such a desire, such a love for Him. But then after that moment you began to realize that you failed day after day. What a tragic. And that is the reason you have to go back to that cross every day.

But my unconverted friend, what hope is there for you? Is there hope? Yes! Maybe you have had a horrible past. Maybe you have lived in sin. You even enjoyed it! It can even be that you robbed or killed others. Is there then for such ones forgiveness? Yes, that is surely the case. Ah, look then to Christ? Where did He hang? Was it on one of the sides? No, in the midst. Why? That sinners like you could be saved. Yes, even the greatest of sinners. But what is the problem? Is it not that you are too good for Christ? If that is the case, you will not come. No, you can never be too bad. Ah, come then to Him. Come then with all your sin. Look upon Him. See Him hanging there. Maybe you feel indeed like one of those robbers. Where did those robbers hang? Well on the right and on the left of this Savior.

One on the Right Hand

We read of the first in verse 27, “the one on his right hand.” Yes it is “the one.” The phrase “the one...the other” is more often found in Scripture. For example, “Two men shall be in the field; the *one* shall be taken, and the *other* left” (Luke 7:41). What a picture of separation! The same is applicable in our text. One will be saved, the other not. But who is the man of our text? We heard before that he was a robber and murderer. He deserved death! He deserved hell! His name as mentioned in the Gospel of Nicodemus is “Dismas.” But the Itala copy calls him “Zoathon.” Can we trust these writings? That is the question. But in the end it does not matter what his name is. What does he do? He mocks Jesus. He heard from the leaders, and now he does the same. We read, “And they that were crucified with him *reviled* him” (Mark 15:32). That means, this man reproached Christ. But what does he hear? “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:32). What does happen then? When he then hears his fellow mocking, he says, “Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? We indeed *justly*; for we receive the due reward of our deeds” (Luke 23:39-40). At that very moment he is convicted of his sin. He has a deep sorrow. Oh, yes, it is the last moment of his life, but it is real. Even this one was one of the elect and would not be taken out of the hands of Christ. But where does he go with his guilt? To Christ. He prays, “Lord, remember me” (Luke 23:42). And Jesus hears him. He says, “Today, thou wilt be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). What a joy in heaven! Yes, we read, “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over *one* sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10). At this very moment, the angels rejoice. But on what side hung this man? We read, “on [his] right hand.” It is not fully sure which one is saved. But it seems to be the one on the right hand. Why? This was often the place of salvation and honor. We read, “He [Jesus Christ] shall set the sheep on his *right hand*, but the goats on the left” (Matt. 25:33). In that verse it is clear that those on the right side will be saved. They will enter heaven. Think about this example. Most of us are right-handed. We write with it. We throw with it. It is the dominant and stronger hand. It is the fastest hand. So, we could say, with the right hand, you are better off. The same is true for the day of judgment.

Application

What a picture we find of God’s child. What a hope is revealed. No, at the beginning both were the same. The one was not better than the other. Both are in their wicked state, in the same condition. The same is true for all the children of God. They are not different than any in the world. They are as wicked. But that the moment of conviction came. Then the arrow was driven in my heart. It slew me. I began to feel, “I indeed justly! I will receive the due reward!” Ah, then there came a burden that was unbearable. It was so heavy. Yes, every sin became a burden. Then I began to cry, “LORD, remember me. Think of me!” Ah, such sighs are pleasant in God’s ears! Why? It is His own work. Yes, a needy crier and a humble heart is pleasing in His ear. But why did you then cry? Because you saw the mercy of God in Christ. He prayed for the salvation of such ones.

Unconverted hearer, what was the difference between the man on the left and on the right? At the beginning, nothing. Maybe you think, what is the purpose of this question? Well, it means that you can be saved. This robber had killed and robbed. Yes, he had even blasphemed Christ! But! At the last moment, the Holy Spirit regenerates him. Friend, may we tell you? It is never too late in this life to be saved. No, you are not worse off than this man. And even if that is the case, you can still be saved. Ask God to remember you. He can do it. But He wants honest cries. Is your greatest issue not your

unwillingness? Are you not unwilling to give up sin? Ah, that wicked sin! Yes, if you try to save your life, you will lose it. Friend, give up all you have. Otherwise, you are like the man on the left. What happened to him?

One on the Left Hand

We read in verse 27, “the other on his left.” Here it is about the “other.” Literally the sentence reads, “The one on his right hand and the one on his left hand.” This man is under the same condemnation as his fellow. He is crucified for murder. What is his name? The Gospel of Nicodemus says, “Gestas,” and a copy of Itala “Chammatha.” Yes, we know that we have to be careful to trust these writings. At least it is interesting to know this information. But what does this man say? It is exactly the same as the leaders of the people, “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us” (Luke 23:39). Did this man then want salvation? Did he see that he needed help? In such cases, we use the same expression. When Peter sank, he cried, “Lord, save me” (Matt. 14:30). Is that true for this thief? No! He does not care. He says it out of mockery. We read, “One of the malefactors which were hanged *railed* on him” (Luke 23:39). Literally, he blasphemed Him. How does he dare to? Even his fellow tells him, “Dost thou not fear God? Thou art in the same condemnation” (Luke 23:39). No, we do not read of any repentance. That means he made his condemnation only heavier. Yes, he had already an incredible pain on the cross. Later his legs will be broken (John 19:32) and he died. Currently, he undergoes an eternal torture of his body and soul in hell. But on which side of the Savior was this man? We read, “on his left.” Literally, it says one of a good name or omen. For the pagan Greeks, this was the place of luck, though others would say it was not. The Bible gives a different picture than the Greeks. The left is often not the place of blessing. It is a negative place and the place of those that are not saved. In Ecclesiastes, we read, “Wisdom is on the right hand, but foolishness on left (Ecc. 10:2). In the day of judgment, those left will go into eternal judgment (Matt. 25:33,41). Matthew says, “Then shall he say also unto them on the *left* hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire” (Matt. 25:41). What horrible for this person.

Application

My unconverted friend, this man on the left side is a picture of you. Yes, both now and in eternity. You play with hellish fire! Why? You keep sinning. You enjoy it! Oh, what heavy payment will that be! Every curse you ever said. Each disobedient act against the law. Every improper thought. All of those are written down. God keeps record. But the worse is that you have blasphemed Christ. You ask, how? Christ gave His blood. But you value the world much more. He gave His life. But you do not care about it. Do you know what it does to Him? It pierces Him in the heart! What horrible. If you do not repent, you will end like this robber! All your bones will be broken! Then you will stand before judgment seat. Then this Judge will say, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire” (Matt. 25:41). It will be the same as the man on the left. But next to him hangs one in the midst. Jesus is in the midst of these transgressors. Why was that? Well, this was the fulfillment of Scripture. Our third thought.

III. The Reason for Crucifixion

There are two main reasons for Christ's crucifixion. The first is that it is a fulfillment of Scripture, and second, that He needs to be counted as transgressor instead of His people.

Fulfillment of Scripture

The fulfillment of an Old Testament passage is seen in verse 28, “And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith.” It points to the Scripture. What does that mean? Well, the word literally means, a writing or a thing written. Does it then point to an unknown writing? No. Is it maybe a document that Mark had that we are not aware of? No. But it points here to the Bible. Specifically the Old Testament. This word Scripture can be used to refer to a whole book or simply a section of the Bible. Here, it refers to a portion in Isaiah. Which portion? Chapter 53, about the suffering Servant. This chapter shows that there was no beauty or comeliness that man should desire Him. Also, we read that His Father desired to crush Him. Ah, and then He had to die. We read, “He hath poured out His soul unto death” (Isa. 53:12). That is so true. And remember, this is the inspired word. A Divine book. Paul says, “All *scripture* is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). Notice that in our text the word is singular, Scripture, and not plural, Scriptures. But what is said about this Scripture? It “was fulfilled.” Does it mean that it was covered with water? Was it then filled? That is what we might think. Maybe you think of a bucket that you fill with water. At a certain moment it is full. But that is not the case with the Bible. No. What then? We find an example of fulfilling in Matthew 5. Jesus said, “I am [not] come to destroy the law, or the prophets...but to *fulfill*”

(Matt. 5:17). It means to execute or carry out the Word of God. Thus, what is written will happen. God had promised things in the Old Testament. We call them prophesies. In our text, God brings them to pass. And it happens exactly as God had told hundreds of years before. Oh, yes, Jesus quite often referred to the fact that the Scripture must be fulfilled, or to be fulfill that which was spoken by the prophet (Luke 4:21, Matt. 8:17). But why is the fulfillment of the promises so sure? Well, God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). That would be against God’s character.

Application

What does it mean for us that God fulfills all His Word? That means it will in every promise and each threatening. Ah, this is such an encouragement to those that are regenerated. Why? If it comes from God it will never fail. Oh, yes, if it was up to them, it would often fail. But not God. No! His child is written in the palm of His hand. When trials come, they are taught to rely upon His Word. If God has spoken, He shall do it. Ah, then this promise came with much power! But afterwards, they can doubt so much, was it truly from God? Then it makes them wrestle at the throne of grace. It keeps them low. But one thing is sure. One day, they will receive the fulfillment. Oh, yes, it can be years later. But it will surely happen.

And to those that do not care? We can say this. Not only the promises will be executed. No, also all the threatenings. God still warns, if you do not repent, you will likewise perish. You need to be born again! Without that, you cannot enter into the kingdom God. Ah, beg the LORD then, “Show me the reality of thy Word.” When we look to our passage, what prophesy is then fulfilled? That the suffering Servant is counted as transgressor.

Counted as Transgressor

How do we know that Christ was counted as transgressor? Verse 28 says, “And he was numbered with the transgressors.” Also, Isaiah 53:12 says, “He was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many” (Isa. 53:12). Yes, Christ was “numbered.” What does that mean? Was Christ simply number one or two? No. That is not meant here. The word in the original actually means to count or reckon something. Let us give an example. Let’s say that you had a dinner at the restaurant. After the meal you realize that your forgot your wallet. Now, you cannot pay. But the man at the table next to you says, I will pay for you. He pays and you can go home without guilt. What happened? The payment of that other person is reckoned unto you. This also in our text. It is reckoned. Yes, this word is often used for “imputation of the righteousness of Christ to a sinner.” One example is Abraham. We read, “Abraham believed God, and it was *counted* unto him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3). When God saw Abraham, He saw him as without sin. God reckoned him righteous. Was Abraham then righteous in and of himself? No. But the righteousness of Christ was transferred to Abraham. But why do we find exactly this word in our text? Well, imputation needs payment. In our passage, Christ is “reckoned” as sinner. It is as if He has transgressed the law of God. It means that God needs to punish Him. How was Christ then reckoned? We read, “with the transgressors.” By hanging with other criminals on the cross, He looked like a transgressor of the law. And when God looked, He saw a ‘sinner’ on cross. No, not that Jesus was a transgressor Himself. But He took the place of them. He was regarded as one of them. Let us give an example. A child comes home from school. He changes his clothing to dirty ones. When mother looks at him, it seems as if he has played outside in the mud. Not that he has actually done it, but it looks like that. The outside looks dirty even when the inside can be clean. Now, Jesus was counted as transgressor. But what is a transgressor? Someone that does not keep the law. He violates it. But had Jesus ever done that? No. He had perfectly kept it. But at this very moment, He received all the sins of the elect. That is why He is reckoned as transgressor.

Application

What a blessing for those that know something of it. Ah, yes, they are of themselves found in filthy rags. They are leprous from head to toe with their sins. But when they came at that moment to stand before God, their dirty rags were replaced with the spotless garment of Christ. Then they were shining as the sun. There was so much joy and happiness. They were no longer guilty. What did they see? That their filthy rags were placed on Christ. They were imputed to Him. With those rags, He was nailed to the cross. Yes, that innocent Lamb was slain. And that for me.

Those that are unknown with this. If there is no repentance, you will also be counted as transgressors! Yes, all those will be gathered in one place. All will be executed. Therefore, we urge you, repent. You must be born again.

Conclusion

Congregation, a crucified Christ has been proclaimed! We saw His beauty. He was crucified with the worst criminals. Why? That He might save His people. All this was because God fulfilled His Word. What a blessing that is.

But how do we go home? Are we amazed about such work? Or do we simply return to our daily tasks? May LORD give an impression on our hearts. Only then His name will be glorified. Amen.