

Village Guide

Current Series: Outcasts

Texts: Luke 23.32-43

Core Value Focus: Peacemaking, Inclusion

Big Ideas from the Message:

- Crucifixion was reserved for the worst of the worst by Roman standards. For a Jewish messiah to be executed in this way was an oxymoron: you can't be a crucified messiah. Yet, that is who Jesus was/is.
- We all long for paradise. It is the experience of paradise that brings hope when we are experiencing our own metaphorical "crucifixion" moments.
- In identifying with one executed criminal, Jesus identifies with all executed criminals.
 - (For those interested in a Christian view of the death penalty, check out Shane Claiborne's *Executing Grace*.)
- In identifying with a criminal, Jesus reveals that none of us are 'too far gone.'
- In identifying with a criminal, Jesus absorbs the full wrath of evil—conquering it all for us.
 - Insofar that Jesus took on the full wrath of the evil powers of this world, the demonic forces and their manifestations in dehumanizing systems like the Roman Empire, he did so as our substitute. He conquered them through enduring their violence and by rising from the dead. Jesus shows us that no matter what the world, as it is currently, throws at us, we can find hope in God's paradise and eventual resurrection.
 - Jesus is not getting in the way of God's wrath on the cross. God identifies with humanity, even the most obvious outcasts such as the thief on the cross.
- In identifying with a criminal, Jesus points to a God who wills rest from toil and pain.
- Paradise begins now. Let the grass be "greener" here.
- A meditative reading of Psalm 23 closed this sermon and led to a time of silent reflection.

CONNECT (5 min)

- Question chosen for open group discussion or someone pre-invited to share their story.

HEAR (5 min)

- Spend some time in your group sharing what you recall from Sunday's message. Give a loose theme or subject of the sermon to jumpstart everyone's thoughts and recollections. (Example: "On Sunday, Kurt concluded our series, Outcasts. Who was there on Sunday? Could you recap the content for us?" What struck you, and what questions did it leave you with?)
- Read Luke 23.32-43. What did Kurt say that this passage reveals about God? About us? Do you see anything differently or that wasn't mentioned in this particular sermon?

TALK (20 min)

*Note: This format is intentionally less linear in an effort to generate discussion. It is not meant to be followed left-to-right, nor do all the questions need to be asked. As a facilitator, stewarding good discussion means modeling **true listening**, which also means a conversation without an agenda. Use your discernment to see what your group needs to talk about.*

Conceptual	Practical Implications	Spiritual Formation
Outcasts in Scripture	Outcasts and regular life	Outcasts and Transformation
<p>What do you remember about the significance of crucifixion in the first century? Who was it reserved for? How was it discussed? Why was it so upsetting that Jesus was killed this way?</p> <p>In the Biblical/Jewish tradition, “Paradise” refers to a restful place of comfort and nourishment for God’s people after death, but before the final renewal of creation (when Jesus returns to judge evil, heal creation, resurrect humanity, and finish setting up the Kingdom of heaven on the earth). How have you heard Paradise in this passage discussed in the past?</p> <p>Jesus was executed at the hands of the Romans in the cruelest way possible. This punishment was reserved for rebellious slaves and political insurrectionists, most often. Is it important that Jesus died in such an “outcast” fashion, or would the same goal been accomplished had he died in a more “humane” manner?</p>	<p>Talk about the death penalty? What do you believe is a Christian posture towards state-sanctioned killing?</p> <p>If you were to examine your own life, have there been seasons where you faced your own emotional crucifixions? Did you struggle with feelings of abandonment? Loneliness? Perhaps like you were an outcast of sorts? What might it mean to have Jesus “identify” with you in this area?</p> <p>So many of us lose hope in the midst of a world dominated by evil. Jesus, in the wake of the worst of evil says that he will remember a criminal in Paradise. How have you experienced the reality of God’s Paradise, a garden-like space of rest with Jesus, in your life?</p>	<p>Take a few minutes of silence to think of what your current experience of life these past couple weeks have been like. (Give a few minutes for reflection before asking the question). As you look inward, how might Jesus’ invitation to the thief on the cross be an invitation to you, in your current circumstances?</p> <p>In this moment of Jesus’ life, he identifies with executed criminals. They likely had done wrong, possibly killing innocent people, etc. Yet Jesus offers love. Who are the hardest people for you to love? What does Jesus’ inclusiveness in this story provoke in you, regarding these people that come to mind?</p> <p>What is one step you might take this week to encounter God’s invitation to rest and refreshment with Jesus? Can you imagine taking time to engage in spiritual conversation with Jesus about whatever is tiresome or a struggle in your life?</p>

(Space for your own questions or notes)

LIVE (20 min)

- How might this conversation impact you this next week? What are you taking with you?
- How might we pray for each other based on this conversation and other highs/lows in life?