

# Mid-Course Corrections

## *“Never Too Late”*

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Today we have put palms in the sanctuary to commemorate the eventful day we call Palm Sunday. This day is recorded in all 4 of the gospels but today I am going to be looking at the book of Luke – chapter 19 to be exact.

This is the day that the King of Israel – Jesus - is riding into the capital city of Jerusalem. A giant crowd of Jesus’ followers are lining the way, waving palm branches and laying their cloaks in the road. They are singing and shouting. Look at your sermon notes and you will see that they are shouting words from Psalm 118:

*“Bless the King who comes in the name of the Lord!”* Luke 19:38a

Say that with me – no I mean shout that with me as if Jesus himself were riding up the center of our church aisle here this morning.

Jesus was coming and the crowds were excited. You see they would have heard about this Jesus and his miracles.

In fact, they were hoping he was the messiah who would soon sound the trumpets, call the men to arms and lead the Jewish nation to victory over Rome and the world.

*Hosanna! “Bless the King who comes in the name of the Lord!”* Luke 19:38a

And then just a few short days later – those shouts would do a complete mid-course reversal. Oh not the kind of mid-course correction Dan has been talking about these last few weeks. No it would be a mid-course reversal in the opposite direction.

Just a few days later and few chapters over in Luke chapter 23 – we find Jesus standing before Pilate and a crowd of people once again. Only this time the people are shouting: *“Crucify him! Crucify him!”* Luke 23:21

They are now calling for Jesus, for their hoped for Messiah to be crucified. And so he will be.

There is a phrase from a hymn that captures this moment. It says:

*“Under an eastern sky, amid a rabble’s cry, a man went forth to die...”*

But he will not die alone, he will not be crucified alone.

**Look with me at Luke 23:32 pg \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_**

*“Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. Finally they came to a place called The Skull. All three were crucified there – Jesus on the center cross, and the two criminals on either side.”*

Calvary, the place of the three crosses. To us, 2,000 years removed from that awful day, **one cross stands out**, but it wouldn't have looked like that to the casual spectator on that first Good Friday. There wasn't just one but three crosses on that ugly skyline.

Crucifixion was the Roman form of execution. It was meant to be a public spectacle, to serve as a deterrent to other lawbreakers. It was a horrible death, with the broken bodies of the victims sagging on pierced hands and feet, the raging thirst that tortured them in the dust and heat, under the gaze of those walking by, mocking and insulting them. The Romans were certainly trying to encourage other lawbreakers to make a mid-course correction weren't they? Do the crime – pay the ultimate price.

But have you ever wondered why Jesus was crucified with two companions? Maybe it was because it was less work for the soldiers if they could execute several convicts at once.

Perhaps the Romans just felt that it was a very public way to humiliate Jesus and his followers. The priests and rulers wanted Jesus crucified on the middle cross because in their minds He was the greatest criminal of the three.

They wanted to stage a theatrical event in order to maximize the humiliation of Jesus in front of the crowds by placing Him between two robbers.

In Jesus' reverse order world, however, where the first will be last and the last first, it was also an honor - because this is the way Jesus led His life.

*Luke 19:10 says, "For the Son of man came to seek and save what was lost."*

**What a great picture –**

**even in His death, Jesus was surrounded by lost people.**

By crucifying him with others it also fulfilled the prophecy of **Isaiah 53:12**: *"...because He poured out His life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors..."*

No, Jesus didn't die alone – He had two companions with Him. There were three crosses on the hill of Calvary. The crosses were the same, the methods were the same, and yet the three men were very different from each other.

It is hard to believe isn't it, that even hanging on a cross a mid-course correction could still be made?

So let's take a closer look at these 3 crosses today.

3 crosses - a cross of Rebellion, a cross of Repentance and a cross of Redemption. The same 3 crosses we encounter on our journeys today. Jesus was crucified between two thieves, both of whom had **equal access** to the Savior. Let's look at each of them in turn.

### First the Cross of Rebellion

*Look with me at Luke 23: 39- "One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, 'So you are the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself – and us too, while you're at it.'"*

This criminal blasphemes Christ, mocking his claim to be the Son of God. He is about to die and even still he refuses to see his need to surrender his life to Jesus – to correct his course if you will.

But before you are too hard on this criminal ask yourself, "Is he really that different from how our world today blasphemes and mocks Jesus?"

You have seen the news, heard the reports and heard people say: **Jesus, the Son of God. I don't think so. If he is why doesn't he prove it?**

People today mock the idea of Jesus being the Savior of the world, just like that criminal hanging next to Jesus did over 2000 years ago.

But it isn't just **other** people –you and I have more in common with this criminal than we would like to admit.

All of us have led lives of disobedience and rebellion against God.

**"Do things this way," God says.** And **we answer, "No, I'll do things my way instead."**

We live lives that violate God's will, over and over again.

Perhaps we have even blasphemed our Lord.

Think about it: when things don't go the way you want or hoped do you doubt that Jesus is the Savior, doubt that he is the Son of God.

We cry out at least inside ourselves – **"Prove it, Prove it!" "Show me you are really the son of God." "Change this situation or person or fix this - whatever it might be and then I will believe."** Sound familiar

If we are honest with ourselves - this is blasphemy – on the same level as that thief on the cross.

And sadly I confess that I have had these thoughts before.

When my youngest daughter was born and would end up needing 10 surgeries before she was 6 years old- I cried out to God, "You are supposed to be God, you could fix this, nothing is supposed to be impossible for you. So fix it. Show me – show the doctors."

I was angry and scared and I wanted proof. – proof that God was God.

God did show me that he was God but not like I was demanding.

That isn't how God works is it.

He helped me instead find my way to the second cross:

### The Cross of Repentance

If you look in the books of Matthew and Mark, you will see that they record that both of these criminals started out mocking and insulting Jesus.

#### **But something happened to the one criminal.**

A change of heart takes place.

It seems like the most unlikely of places doesn't it – on a cross – but here is where this man has his mid-course correction.

Here is where he opens his eyes, his ears and his heart.

#### **Here is where this man makes the decision to do the following:**

**Respect God** – *Verse 40 says: “But the other criminal protested, ‘Don’t you fear God even when you are dying?’”*

He realized his need to revere God as holy and all-powerful.

**Admit Guilt** – *He continues by saying: “We deserve to die for our evil deed...”*

He knew his deeds had been evil and that he deserved his punishment.

**Confess Christ** – He recognized that Jesus was sinless and righteous – Jesus had done nothing wrong at all and that Jesus was able to ultimately save him from eternal punishment. “...*but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.*” *So the criminal:*

**Ask for salvation** – *Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.’”*

As this criminal is dying, belief rose in his soul. WE don't know why – perhaps he had heard about Jesus before today, perhaps he watched how Jesus was loving the crowd even as they were crucifying him. Whatever the reason the fact remains that the other criminal has a change of heart.

He goes beyond respecting God, admitting his guilt, and confessing his sins and recognizing Jesus as sinless. He reaches out in faith believing and asks Jesus to remember him.

Now if you are like me -

We in our humanness want to stop right here and wonder if the criminal was really sincere don't we?

I mean one minute he mocks Jesus and the next he asks for forgiveness.

What a hypocrite, right!

#### **Now there is a term I am sure you have all heard before.**

But notice Jesus' response – which is immediate: *And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*

Jesus doesn't turn a deaf ear to him, lecture him or grill him with a hundred questions. Instead He promises him forgiveness and so much more.

The man just asked to be remembered, but Jesus promises him paradise that very day.

**A man deemed not fit to live on earth, God made fit to live in heaven.**

Our humanness makes this hard to understand doesn't it.

This criminal does nothing more than accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and Jesus saves him. He doesn't do good deeds, go out and preach the gospel, he doesn't do anything – he doesn't have time does he – he is dying.

He simply believes and is saved.

[Because here is the truth about the cross of repentance:](#)

**Salvation is simple.** All that is necessary are repentance and faith.

**The very worst can be saved.** No one is beyond Jesus' love and forgiveness. Not the criminal, not me and not you.

**It is never too late to come to Christ!** That criminal on the cross had one final chance to make a mid-course correction and he took it. Your final chance might be right now. We never know what tomorrow may bring or even the next moment for that matter.

Oh you can wait til your last breath to accept Christ - but let me encourage you to not wait to accept the unconditional love and forgiveness of Christ.

When I finally asked God to forgive my arrogance and my fear, and I turned my daughter over to him completely – no matter what that would mean. God healed her so she never needed another surgery again. I didn't ask him to do that. I simply respected God, admitted my guilt, confessed my sin and acknowledged that she was his child and he loved her more than I did so I knew he would be with her. And he has. She has loved the Lord all her life. And God forgave me and filled me in ways I never dreamed possible with his saving grace. My rebellion gave way to my repentance much as the other criminal's did.

The cross of Repentance gave me assurance and hope.

Hope that is only possible because of that third cross:

[The Cross of Redemption](#)

Here we find ourselves on holy ground.

An innocent, sinless man took on our guilt and sin so that we might know forgiveness and eternal life.

The criminal hanging beside Jesus recognized his innocence and stated it.

Jesus was brought before Herod and found innocent.

Twice He was brought before Pilate and found innocent both times.

3 times Pilate asks the religious leaders and the crowds of what sin is Jesus guilty and 3 times there is no answer because Jesus was innocent.

Skeptics throughout history have tried to determine what he was guilty of with no flaws found.

### **So why was Jesus crucified?**

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians: *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself ... God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.”*

Three crosses were the same, the methods were the same, and yet the three men were very different from each other.

Two died without any choice in the matter. Their lives were taken from them. But Jesus gave up his life. He told his disciples in *John 10:17: “I lay down my life that I may take it again.”*

Jesus’ death was inevitable only because he willed it so.

His death was a voluntary sacrifice – **the just for the unjust, the sinless for the sin-filled.**

The Romans put Jesus on the middle cross so he would stand out and he did – but not for the reasons they thought.

*From the human standpoint, Calvary is history’s darkest atrocity, but to be understood, it has to be seen as the climax of God’s glorious plan of redemption.*

So let me ask you today – Which cross are you on?

I have been the criminal on the cross of rebellion.

I have walked my own path, made my own decisions, doubted God and questioned his love. And I was wrong – dead wrong.

And I have been the other criminal on the cross of repentance.

Walking a course that needed correction.

Correction that included:

Respecting a holy and all powerful God,  
admitting that I am a sinner in need of a Savior,

Confessing that only Jesus can be that Savior because he is without sin  
and I have asked for salvation which God freely and unconditionally gave.

The cross of Redemption requires me to choose which cross I am on. It requires you to chose.

Either the cross of Rebellion which teaches us that no one should put off a decision to follow Jesus. Or the Cross of Repentance that teaches us no one need despair.

Because on the Cross of Redemption is Jesus with his arms outstretched waiting to grant forgiveness, to accept you no matter what, to take your burdens that are too heavy for you to carry, to offer love and grace to all who come in repentance and faith.

***Under an eastern sky, amid a rabble’s cry, a man went forth to die FOR ME! Say that with me.***