

Luke 23:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.

Analysis

And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. The term "malefactors" (kakourgoi, κακοῦργοι) means "evil-doers" or "criminals," likely bandits or insurrectionists. The word appears only here and in Luke 23:33, 39, emphasizing their genuine guilt in contrast to Jesus' innocence. Their crucifixion with Christ fulfilled Isaiah 53:12: "He was numbered with the transgressors" (kai meta anomōn elogisthē, καὶ μετὰ ἀνόμων ἐλογίσθη).

The phrase "led with him" (syn auto, σὺν αὐτῷ) indicates physical proximity and shared fate, yet eternal distinction. All three bore crosses to Golgotha, all three were crucified, all three suffered Roman execution. But one criminal repented and heard, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (v. 43), while the other died in his sins. Physical proximity to Christ guarantees nothing; only faith in Him saves. Judas walked with Jesus for three years yet perished; the repentant thief spent hours with Him and entered paradise.

This scene demonstrates the gospel's offensive scandal—the sinless Son of God executed among common criminals, sharing their shame and agony. Yet this very scandal reveals grace's accessibility. Christ descended to the lowest place—numbered with transgressors, condemned among the condemned—so that even the worst sinners might find salvation. The cross levels all humanity: guilty criminals and the innocent Christ crucified together, yet only faith distinguishes their eternal destiny.

Historical Context

Roman crucifixion typically punished slaves, violent criminals, and insurrectionists—the lowest elements of society. Cicero called it "the most cruel and disgusting penalty" (crudelissimum taeterrimumque supplicium), forbidden for Roman citizens. Mass crucifixions were common—Josephus records that during the siege of Jerusalem, Romans crucified up to 500 Jews daily, running out of wood for crosses.

The practice of crucifying multiple criminals simultaneously served both practical efficiency and psychological impact. Displaying numerous executions along major roads maximized deterrent effect. That Jesus was crucified between two criminals suggests Roman authorities grouped Him with insurrectionists, possibly because the charge against Him was claiming to be "King of the Jews"—perceived political sedition. This detail, recorded by all four Gospels, emphasizes both the historical reality of Christ's degradation and the prophetic fulfillment of Isaiah 53.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus being "numbered with the transgressors" demonstrate the depths of humiliation He endured for our redemption?
2. What does the contrasting eternal destiny of the two criminals teach about proximity to Christ versus faith in Christ?
3. How should knowing that Jesus descended to share the fate of condemned criminals encourage those who feel too sinful for God's grace?

Interlinear Text

Ἄγοντο δὲ καὶ ἔτεροι δύο κακοῦργοι σὺν αὐτῷ
led And there were also other two malefactors with him
G71 G1161 G2532 G2087 G1417 G2557 G4862 G846
ἀναιρεθῆναι
to be put to death
G337

Additional Cross-References

Mark 15:27 (Parallel theme): And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left.

Matthew 27:38 (Parallel theme): Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

Isaiah 53:12 (Parallel theme): Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

John 19:18 (Parallel theme): Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.

Luke 22:37 (Parallel theme): For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end.