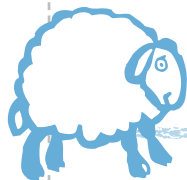




# Lesson Nine

## *A Dying Criminal Turns to Jesus*



### Nourishing Your Heart

#### Scripture

Luke 23:32–43

#### Bible Truth

The dying criminal asked Jesus for mercy and received the gift of salvation.

#### Lesson Aim

To ask God for mercy, to trust Jesus as our Savior, and to tell others about his kindness and love.

Execution on a cross is one of the most painful forms of death ever devised. It was used by many ancient cultures to punish enemies, political dissidents, rebellious slaves, and criminals. But even back then, there was some public outcry about crucifixion as a particularly detestable form of punishment.

To God's people, crucifixion represented a very shameful way to die. Yet the Jews sought Roman authorization to have Jesus put to death in this brutal and dishonorable manner. So Jesus was sentenced to die by crucifixion and nailed to a cross at Calvary, between two criminals.

Indeed, in the center of the scene hung God's Son, from whom all life originates and to whom all must respond. The two men crucified on either side of Jesus represented all of humanity and the two possible responses to the Lord Jesus. One criminal yielded to Jesus in faith and obedience and was saved. The other criminal continued to rebel in disobedience, hurling insults and jeers at the Savior, and was lost.

Turning to Jesus in need and trust, the first criminal confessed his sin and the innocence of Jesus. He knew that he deserved to be punished, but instead he asked Jesus for mercy—crying out for salvation and a place in the heavenly kingdom. Helpless, hopeless, and conscious of his guilt, the man knew that he had no righteousness of his own. He simply cast himself, as every sinner must, upon the mercy of God.

Even the horror of the cross could not stop the love and kindness of Jesus.

In these final hours of agony and exhaustion, Jesus accepted the man's faith and promised him salvation. What a glad moment for him, knowing that he had hope in Christ the King and was now justified instead of condemned.

Only when we see ourselves in the same predicament as the dying criminal will we begin to understand the joy that must have filled his heart as he heard the gracious words of Jesus: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." Even the horror of the cross could not stop the love and kindness of Jesus from flowing forth in mercy and forgiveness.

Pray that your children will see that this gracious act of love, kindness, mercy, and forgiveness was God's gift for them.

#### Memory Verse

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

TITUS 3:4–5a