

AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

When you read about the crucifixion, you'll discover that several different groups were present at the foot of the cross, and each of these groups related to Jesus differently. In this article, I want to challenge you to consider which of these groups you would have been associated with based on your current spiritual standing.

The first group we encounter at the foot of the cross is the crowd "who passed by" and "derided" Jesus (Matthew 27:39). This group is antagonistic, volatile, and angry. They verbally attacked and harassed the Son of God. Would you have been a part of this group? I'm certain that most of you would quickly deny any affiliation with this group because there's no way you would knowingly and intentionally mistreat the Son of God. However, before you assume you would never be in this group, consider their fickleness. They welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with a grand celebration just days earlier (John 12:12-18). But then Jesus cleansed the temple (Mark 11:15-18), and, in the process, He confronted the people's sinful practices and challenged their preconceptions of the Messiah. After this, the attitude of the people toward Jesus began to change. In other words, as soon as Jesus did something that made people uncomfortable, they turned on Him. Have you been spiritually fickle like them? If so, then you might have been a part of this group at the foot of the cross.

A second group consisted of the soldiers who "crucified" Jesus (John 19:23-24). When we think about the soldiers, we tend to focus on how they mocked and abused Jesus. But it's also worth pointing out how they ignored Jesus. After they attached Him to the cross, they sat down and gambled for his clothes. These guys were so busy trying to profit from Jesus' death that they ignored Him. In other words, they were so focused on their concerns, interests, and desires that they failed to see that there was something different about this guy on the cross. Have you been too busy for Jesus? Have you neglected your spiritual responsibilities because you don't have time? Have you been so focused on your concerns, interests, and desires that you've failed to focus on your Savior? If so, then you might have been a part of this group at the foot of the cross.

Another group present at the foot of the cross was the disciples who "stood at a distance" (Luke 23:49). Since this group consisted of disciples, we tend to think this is the group with which we should be associated. However, upon closer examination, we discover that their location at the cross is less than ideal because they kept their distance from Him. The disciples, those who were closest to Jesus during His ministry, are farthest from Him at His death. Maybe they, like Peter at Jesus' trial, kept their distance because they were afraid to be associated with Him (Matthew 26:69-74). In other words, it may be that they were standing at a distance because following Jesus got too difficult. Maybe they kept their distance because they were ashamed of the fact that they deserted Him in the garden (Mark 14:50). Perhaps they were concerned that if they got any closer to Jesus, then they, like Peter, might have to look Him in the eye and be confronted with their guilt (Luke 22:61-62). Have you distanced yourself from Jesus because following Him became too hard or because you aren't ready to deal with some sin in your life? If so, then you might have been a part of this group at the foot of the cross.

In contrast to the groups mentioned above, there is the criminal on the cross. I'm not talking about the one who "hurled insults at him" but the one who said, "this man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:39-41). It was this criminal who defended Jesus at the foot of the cross (Luke 23:40). It was this criminal who acknowledged his own sinfulness at the foot of the cross (Luke 23:41). It was this criminal who sought mercy at the foot of the cross (Luke 23:42). Are you willing to boldly defend Jesus? Are you willing to soberly acknowledge your sin? Are you willing to humbly pursue mercy on His terms? If so, then you might have been numbered with this

criminal at the foot of the cross. And he's the one you want to be numbered with because he's the one who heard Jesus say, "Today you will be with me in paradise" at the foot of the cross (Luke 23:43).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. With which of the 4 groups mentioned in this article would you and/or your family be associated based on your current relationship with Christ? Why?
2. If you and/or your family are spiritually fickle, distracted, or distant from Christ, then what are some practical steps you can take to draw closer to Him?
3. In Luke 23:34, Jesus uttered His first words from the cross which were, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." To whom was He speaking and what impact should those words have on us today?