LUKE 23

The Innocent One Crucified

a governor who found no guilt, a murderer set free, a thief welcomed into Paradise, and a borrowed tomb

> *"But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves."*
> LUKE 23:34

A SMITH FOR CHRIST STUDY · FOUR VOICES: GUZIK · SPROUL · SPURGEON · HENRY

Where we are in Luke

1. Luke 22 ended at daybreak with the Council of elders, chief priests and scribes asking Jesus, “Are You the Son of God, then?”

2. Luke is the Gospel of the careful historian (1:1–4), and here he shows his case like a lawyer.

3. The day is Passover Friday, “the preparation day” before the Sabbath (v. 54).

I Find No Guilt in This Man

False charges before Pilate, silence before Herod, and two enemies made friends

LUKE 23:2

And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."

DAVID GUZIK

Rome alone could execute; Herod's interest was insincere; enemies united only against Jesus.

R.C. SPROUL

"That was not true" — the charges were empty; Herod wanted a magic show.

MATTHEW HENRY

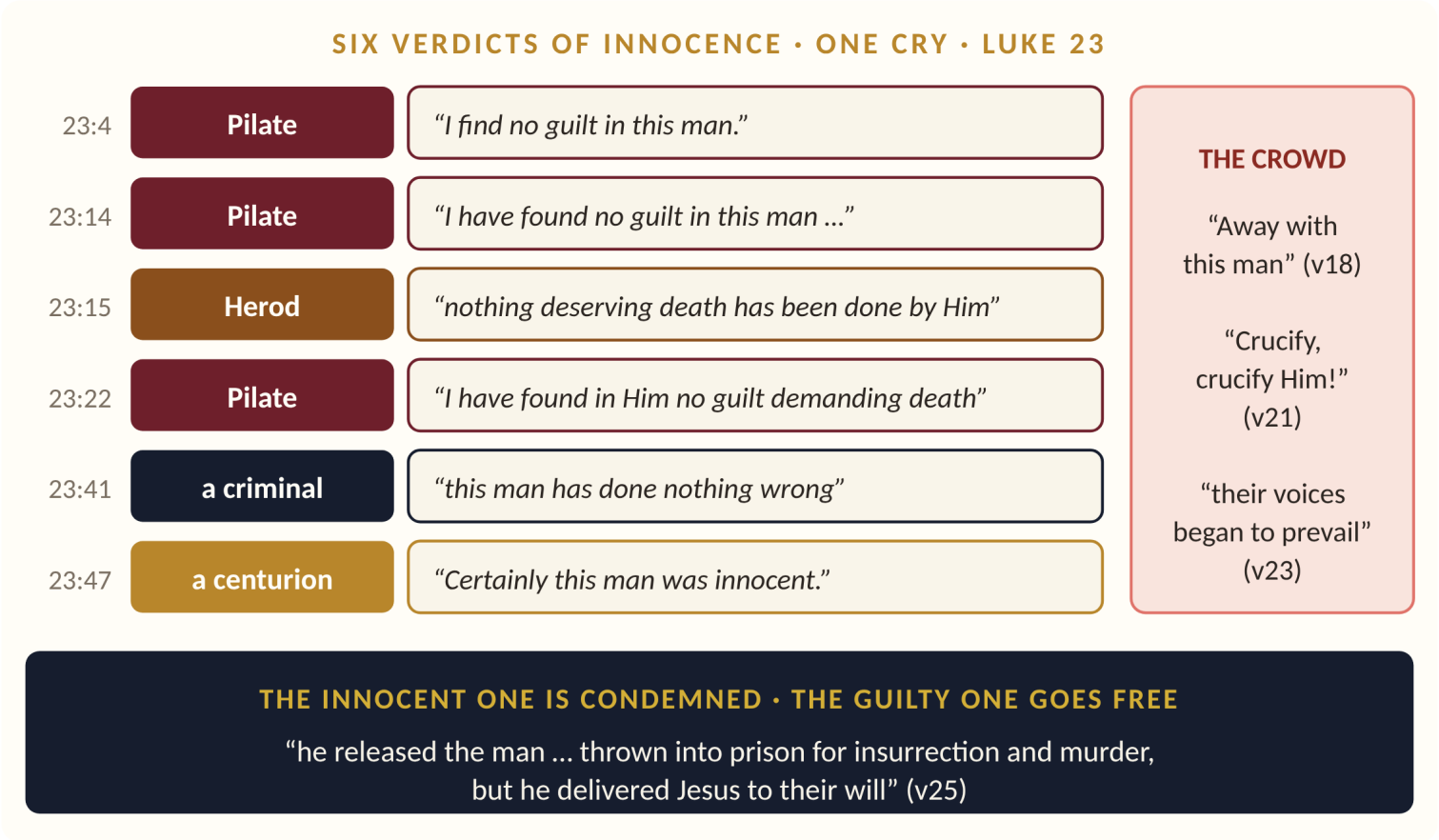
Pilate sick of the cause; Herod ringleader in abuse; both owned His innocence.

αἴτιον

AITION · "GUILT, CAUSE"

A legal word: the ground or cause for a charge — the neuter of aitios, "responsible" (Strong's lists the noun as G158; biblehub tags these verses G159).

Six verdicts of innocence



Read down the left: governor, king, criminal and soldier all say Jesus is innocent — and on the right, the only voice that prevails is the crowd's.

Release for Us Barabbas

Three verdicts of innocence, a crowd that prevails, and a murderer set free

LUKE 23:25

And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will.

DAVID GUZIK

No light punishment; the Passover custom failed; Pilate lacked courage.

R.C. SPROUL

Barabbas means “son of the father”; Pilate’s supreme act of cowardice.

MATTHEW HENRY

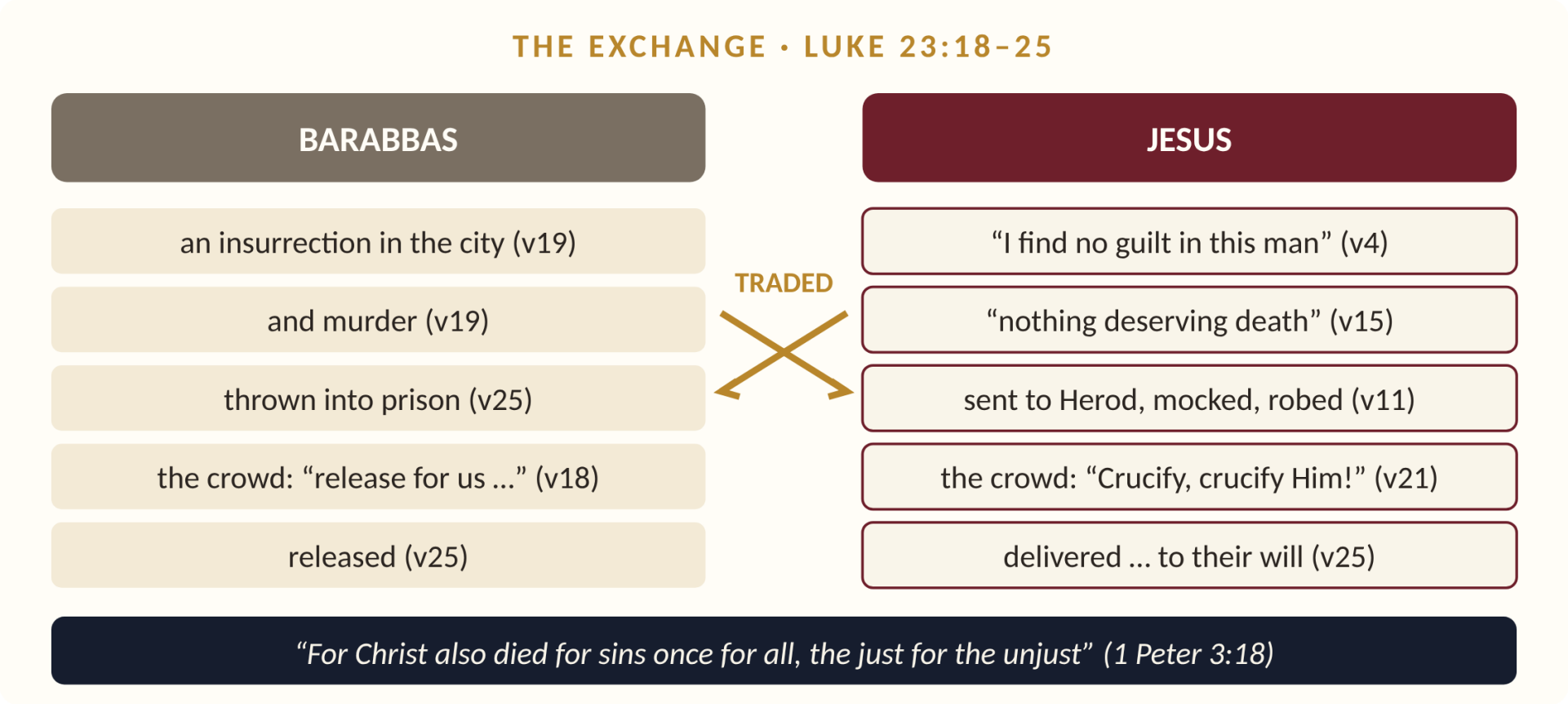
Pilate protests His innocence, offers a flogging, then yields to the crowd.

Βαραββᾶς

BARABBAS · “SON OF THE FATHER”

An Aramaic name: bar, “son,” and abba, “father.”

The exchange



Follow the crossed arrows: the guilty rebel walks out of prison, and the innocent Jesus takes the cross that was waiting for him.

Weep for Yourselves

Simon of Cyrene, the daughters of Jerusalem, and the green tree and the dry

LUKE 23:26

When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus.

DAVID GUZIK

Jesus too weak to carry it; Simon had no choice; the women rightly mourned.

R.C. SPROUL

God chose Simon, but no merit earned; Jesus the green wood, we the dry.

C.H. SPURGEON

Carry the light end of the cross — Christ bore the heavier end.

MATTHEW HENRY

Weep not for Him but for yourselves; the vanity of earthly comforts.

ὄπισθεν

OPISTHEN · "BEHIND"

Simon carried the cross "behind Jesus" (v. 26) — opisthen, "after, at the back of."

Today You Shall Be with Me in Paradise

Crucified between criminals, praying for His killers, and opening Paradise to a thief

LUKE 23:35

And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One."

DAVID GUZIK

Not a victim; love, not nails, held Him there.

R.C. SPROUL

A priest interceding; He would not save Himself; Paradise "this very day."

C.H. SPURGEON

Silent to men, not to God; the robber dined with Christ.

MATTHEW HENRY

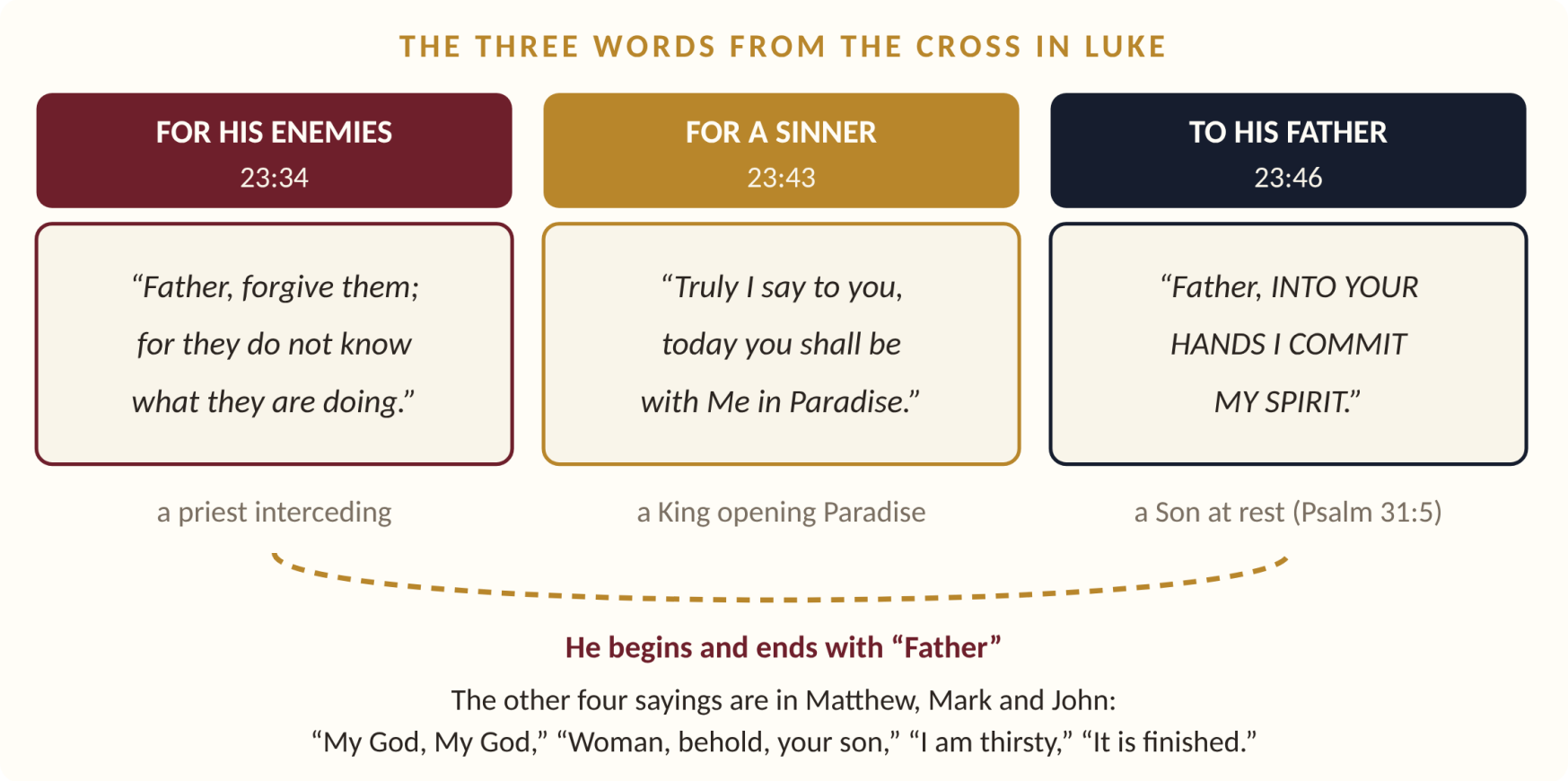
He died to purchase forgiveness; room for prayer — but don't delay repentance.

ἄφες

APHES · "FORGIVE"

The imperative of aphiēmi, to send away, release, let go — the verb of the Lord's Prayer, "forgive us our sins" (11:4), and of Jesus' teaching to forgive "seven times a day" (17:4).

Three words from the cross



Luke records three of Jesus' seven sayings on the cross — one for His enemies, one for a sinner, one to His Father — and two of them begin with "Father."

Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit

Darkness at noon, a torn veil, a loud cry, and a centurion's verdict

LUKE 23:44

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour,

DAVID GUZIK

Creation in agony; a conqueror to admire, not a victim to pity.

R.C. SPROUL

God turned out the lights; He tore down the "no admittance" sign.

C.H. SPURGEON

Full of Scripture as Gideon's fleece of dew; dying is going home.

MATTHEW HENRY

The veil ends the ceremonial law; a Gentile's confession.

καταπέτασμα

KATAPETASMA · "VEIL"

From kata, "down," and petannymi, "to spread": a curtain hung down.

Laid in a Tomb Cut into the Rock

Joseph of Arimathea, a borrowed grave, and women who rested on the Sabbath

LUKE 23:51

(he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God;

DAVID GUZIK

Joseph served as no one else could; Jesus used the tomb only a few days.

R.C. SPROUL

Exaltation begins at the burial; a secret disciple, lavish spices.

MATTHEW HENRY

Unconsented evil is not our act; weeping must not hinder sowing.

προσεδέχετο

PROSEDECHETO · "WAS WAITING FOR"

To receive, to look for, to wait expectantly.

What to carry from this chapter

1

Six witnesses say “innocent.”

Pilate three times (vv4, 14, 22), Herod (v15), a dying criminal (v41) and a Roman centurion (v47).

2

The charge sheet is empty.

Aition (vv4, 14, 22) is a legal word — the ground for a charge.

3

Enemies make friends over Jesus.

Guzik: “They found no common ground except their opposition to Jesus.”

4

A son of the father goes free.

Bar-abbas means “son of the father.”

More to carry

5

Cowardice is a choice.

Sproul: “Pilate, in the supreme act of cowardice, acquiesced to the cries of the people.”

6

The light end of the cross.

Spurgeon on Simon: “you do but carry the light end of the cross, Christ bore the heavier end.”

7

Love kept Him there.

Guzik: “love kept Jesus on the cross, not nails.”

8

He prayed for the men driving the nails.

“Father, forgive them” (v34) — Spurgeon: “The Lamb of God was silent to men, but he was not silent to God.”

Talk it through

1. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent and still gave in to the crowd. Where do I know what is right but go along with the loudest voices around me?

2. Barabbas walked out free because Jesus took his place. What would change in me this week if I really saw myself as Barabbas?

3. Simon was forced to carry a cross he did not choose. What burden am I carrying that I can carry “behind Jesus”?

4. Jesus prayed “Father, forgive them” for men who were not sorry. Who is the person I most need to pray that prayer for?

5. The thief had no time to clean up his life — only to fear God, own his guilt and ask. What keeps me from coming to Jesus that simply?

CLOSING

Luke 23 puts the whole world on trial and finds only one innocent man in it. Pilate hands Him over to the crowd's will, the crowd trades Him for a murderer, and He dies praying for them all. If you have ever felt like Barabbas or the thief, this chapter is for you: the Innocent One took your place, and Paradise opened for a dying criminal who simply asked to be remembered.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

Full Deep Dive, O·I·A study and reflection journal: see the Luke study page.