

Title: Grace, Is it Enough? (Part #1)
Subtitle: Managing our Expectations with God
Big Idea: If you don't watch out you will lose the mash potatoes in the gravy.
Goal: To learn to be content with Christ alone.
Text: Luke 23:39-43

Introduction:

*Our family loves home made mashed potatoes. We don't eat them all that much, typically around Thanksgiving. I am convinced that two ingredients make mash potatoes a delicacy - lots of butter and **gravy**. Now my son, Matthew, figured out many years ago that if you make a volcano with the mash potatoes, you can put the gravy in the middle crater. The problem is that he loves gravy so much he often has it overflow the outside the mash potatoes to the cranberry, turkey, green beans and jello salad. After seeing gravy soup on Matthew's plate, I warn him the next year that when he is pouring the graving in his volcano mash potatoes **that if he doesn't watch out he will lose the mash potatoes the gravy.***

I believe that picture is what is happening to many Christ-followers today. **We get caught up in all the benefits of Jesus (the gravy) that we often lose focus of Jesus Himself (the mash potatoes).** We lose the mash potatoes in the gravy. Still foggy? Let me explain.

In today's world, when we accept employment at a company, one of the first items the Human Resources department discusses with us is our benefits package. Usually, we receive a stack of papers (most of it we don't read) about medical, life, retirement, vacation, flex hours and other benefits in addition to our salary. If our salary can be equated with salvation in Jesus Christ, then our benefits are those aspects of the Christian life that are by-products of our relationship with Jesus. Examples include (but

are not limited to): **GIFTS, TALENTS, VISIONS, HEALTH, NEARNESS OF GOD, FAVOR, MUSIC, EACH OTHER, WEALTH, CHILDREN, SPOUSE, ETC.**

In the early stages of our faith journey, all we want is Jesus. Our emotions, our will and our hearts are pure. Our soul is unstained. Over time, we discover God gives us gifts, talents and visions in our lives and subtly our focus can drift from Jesus to these graces of God in our lives. Because we maintain our footing in the Kingdom arena, we often don't discover this subtle transfer of our allegiance and our identity "from the Giftgiver" to "the gifts".

Because of this, I find God sovereignly allows seasons in life where our gifts, our visions and our assignments are benched. For instance, when my children fight over a toy, I take the toy away and give it a "time out". It is my observation that "the gift" of my children inhibits the flow of godly character and fruit of the Spirit in their lives. When my kids get back in alignment, I give the gift back. In the same way, I find God blesses us or benches us depending on whether or not the gifts hold us in way that is detrimental and unhealthy. Just some thoughts to ponder.

That is what happened to my friend Sylvester (Jacob Marley) and his job (DVD).

I think all of us have situations like this before. **Business partnership or investments options that in the end only disappointed us. Marriages that started out with much anticipation and fanfare, seem to end with regret and shame. Children that were so cute and innocent, end up taking a turn in life that crushes our heart. We dreamed that life would turn out one way, but it ended up on another.**

As disheartening as all this is, what makes it all the more agonizing is **WHEN OUR EXPECTATION OF GOD IS IN THE MIX.** I call these "silent cries" because I don't believe many of us feel safe to verbalize dissent or disappointment of God to others.

This morning, I want us to talk mostly about how we should view “the mash potatoes” (our relationship with God) and how we should view “the gravy” (God’s benefits to us because we are His children). It is my observation that if we are not careful, we can lose our mash potatoes in the gravy.

Today we begin a five-week Lent series on Easter. I believe in celebrating seasons not just a single day. With Easter five weeks away, I believe it is time we focus on the message of the cross. No just retell the story, but reapply to our lives and situations today.

This morning, I want us to talk about two people from the Easter story that **had two different expectations from Jesus. Two men, two views, two very different requests that shows two different perspectives of expectations of Jesus.** One of them focused on the mashed potatoes. The other the gravy. It is a story very familiar to many of us here, but this angle I believe may be quite new to many and **speaks to how we view God ourselves.**

1. Look at these two views together and their corresponding expectations
2. Talk about what expectations we have of God today
3. Ask what is Biblical, faithful and reasonable expectation of God.

I must warn you, this message will mess with your mind and your view of God. Some of you will be enlightened. Some disturbed. You may not agree with everything that I say today, but I ask you prayerfully consider it.

Turn with me to Luke 23.

Text:

This conversation here is unique to Luke's account.

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

Luke 23:40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?"

Luke 23:41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

Luke 23:42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

What do we know about these two men:

1. THEY WERE THIEVES.

Luke uses the word "criminals". Matthew and Mark use the word "robbers". The word used here (**ληστής**) means one who robs by force and violence – 'robber, highwayman.' "rebel guerrillas". We might call them "terrorists." It is the same one Jesus used to describe those who assaulted the man who walked down from Jerusalem to Jericho in the story of the Good Samaritan.

2. THEY WERE CRUCIFIED.

The Romans didn't invent crucifixion, but they certainly PERFECTED it. More generally among the Romans, crucifixion was A PENALTY RESERVED FOR THOSE OF LOWER STATUS-namely, dangerous criminals, slaves and the populace of foreign provinces. Among these peoples crucifixion served as a means of asserting Roman authority and maintaining law and order.

In the Roman world, crucifixion included a FLOGGING beforehand, and victims often CARRIED THE CROSSBEAM TO THE PLACE OF CRUCIFIXION, where they were nailed or bound to the cross with arms extended, raised up, and perhaps seated on a sedicula, or small wooden peg.

The act itself DAMAGED NO VITAL ORGANS, nor did it result in excessive bleeding. Hence, DEATH CAME SLOWLY, sometimes after several days, THROUGH SHOCK OR A PAINFUL PROCESS OF ASPHYXIATION AS THE MUSCLES USED IN BREATHING SUFFERED INCREASING FATIGUE. Often, as a further disgrace, THE PERSON WAS DENIED BURIAL AND THE BODY WAS LEFT ON THE CROSS TO SERVE AS CARRION FOR THE BIRDS OR TO ROT.

On the other hand, even in the Roman world the procedure was subject to variation, depending on the whims of the executioners. For example, in his eyewitness account of the Roman siege of Jerusalem, Josephus observes how hundreds of Jewish prisoners were "scourged and subjected to torture of every description ..., and then crucified opposite the city walls." Hoping that the gruesome sight might induce the

Jews to surrender the city, Titus, the Roman commander, gave his soldiers freedom to continue the crucifixions as they pleased. “The soldiers out of rage and hatred amused themselves by nailing their prisoners in different positions. ...” (Josephus, *J.W.* 5.11.1 §§ 449-451).

3. THEY BOTH INSULTED JESUS.

Crucifixion was quintessentially a public affair. Naked and affixed to a stake, cross or tree, the victim was subjected to savage ridicule by frequent passers-by, while the general populace was given a grim reminder of the fate of those who assert themselves against the authority of the state.

In Matthew 27:44 and Mark 15:32 both criminals insult Jesus.

Matt. 27:38 Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

Matt. 27:44 In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Mark 15:27 They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.

Mark 15:32 Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

4. TWO DIFFERENT REQUESTS THAT SHOW TWO DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS OF GOD.

Two Different Requests That Show Two Different Expectations

Two requests that show two different expectations.

One robber requests **“Save yourself and us!”** The other asks, **“Remember me when you come into your kingdom.”**

Behind one request is the idea **THAT GOD OWES ME SOMETHING.** Behind the other, **GOD OWES ME NOTHING.**

Behind one request is the idea **THAT GOD SHOULD MAKE MY LIFE BETTER.** Behind the other is the concept **THAT MY LIFE IS A MESS AND THE ONLY REQUEST I REALLY NEED FROM GOD IS SALVATION.**

Behind one is the idea **THAT I TELL GOD WHAT TO DO HE SHOULD DO IT.** Behind the other is the idea, **THAT I DON'T TELL GOD WHAT TO DO IN THIS WORLD AS MUCH AS SIMPLY REMEMBERING ME IN THE NEXT WORLD.**

Behind one is an accusing tone, **“If you are a good God, then you should do...”** Behind the other is belief that **“You are showing me by this cross just how good you are.”**

Two requests that show two very different expectations.

I want to pause here and talk about these expectations because they affect the way we view God.

View of God:

I must give you a warning before we precede any further. This message will mess with your head and with **YOUR VIEW OF GOD**. When I in seminary in my hermeneutics class, I was forewarned by Dr. Greg Beale that this class was going to mess with the most sacred part of a person's faith, that is **person's view of God**. All of us have a view of God that is based on: 1) **experience**, 2) **personality** and 3) **understanding of what the Bible says**. Concerning **EXPERIENCE**, there may be situations where we come to the faith and believe situations that God's doesn't heal or if He does it is only for other people. Concerning **PERSONALITY**, a large of the Christian journey is a self-discovery on how God made us and how our design affects how we view the world. Personally, I believe that the "efficiency" should be a fruit of the Spirit. Why? My personality craves for efficiency. **UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLE**. One teacher told me "*that the Bible is shallow enough for children to play in its wakes, but deep enough that the most skilled diver will never reach its depth.*" It is reasonable to see that our understanding of God evolves over time. This even happened with Job.

Job 42:5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.

What I am proposing to you this morning that is our view of God changes over time and often needs to. *During my first year at Lockheed, they offered many employees an opportunity to tour the Hubble Space Telescope before they launched it in space. Many of you know the story of the Hubble where the launch but the space shuttle was successful but the lens had a flaw in it. As soon as this defect was discovered, a second shuttle launch was scheduled to put a corrective lens on the telescope. In the same way, our view of God should mature as we walk with God.*

Two different views of God:

In order to explain this, let me give you **two types of Christians with different views of God**. These are generalities.

When it comes to God's benefits, two predominant views shape our theology. The first is "the superhero" one. His view is one of "activity". People of this perspective often use Paul as the "supermodel" of a superhero. This is the understanding that all the benefits of God are mine to command and grasp once I have been touched by God through His Spirit. Prayer is not as much petition, but command. Earthly and spiritual forces are mine to shape and influence. Once we are empowered by God, our desires are aligned with His. Thus, the bounty of this world is ours for the taking. Often, it is the physical tangibles of the world that are emphasized. Anything that gets in the way of the bounty of God is seen as an opposing spiritual force. Those who "understand" this perspective walk in victory while those who are "ignorant" of these facts walk in ongoing defeat or frustration. Thus (by inference) God grants victory to those who are cognizant of His promises and power and permits defeat for those children who are unlearned and untrained. Life then is defined as a spiritual "treasure hunt". Interesting enough, this perspective is more dominant in western culture than the eastern mindset.

On the opposite side of the spectrum is the fatalistic view that what is set in life is predetermined and fixed. I call this view "the supermartyr" one. His view is one of "passivity". People of this perspective love the person of Job. The promises of God are more for the next life than for this one. Therefore suffering is something you endure rather than confront. Life for them is one big trial. The intangible promises of God (hope, peace, joy, patience, etc) are often sought rather than the physical tangibles of this life (health, wealth, family, vocation). In this perspective, spiritual forces of

wickedness are marginalized because the real battle is within us, not without. Because of the physical realities of life (war, poverty, famine, unemployment), eastern mentality often favors some aspects of this vantage point. Both views have lots of verses to support their definition of reality.

I find that in both perspectives, God's influence can be minimized. In the former, one presumes God's power and authority and may, or may not, sustain a vibrant relationship with God. Often (in their language and life) the benefits of God are emphasized over God himself. In the latter view, life is to be endured rather than enjoyed. Since difficult situations are meant to be accepted, God is not sought to change them. Like all things in life, both have strong elements of truth and abuse. How you define what is a truth and what is an abuse is one way to determine your own personal theology on life and on God.

My point here is that our "view of God" should change and we grow in greater understanding: 1) of ourselves, 2) of the world we live in, 3) of the cosmic battle we find ourselves thrust into and 4) of who God Himself. If our view of God doesn't change we may find ourselves in a situation where our expectation of God has not been met and thus we question His character and goodness and some regrettably leave the faith altogether because of this.

So how do we avoid this? Let's look again at the second thief and glean from him what expectations we should have from Jesus.

Fact - Feeling - Faith Convergence

How should we respond when the facts of faith and the facts of life collide?

What expectations is reasonable? Let's look at the positive thief for some tips.

1. Face the Facts

I often tell people "facts are your friends." That is why I am constantly mulling over data and making charts. There is a truth here, even if it is a tough one, that I must face in order to grow, mature and fulfill what God has for me.

Denying of the realities of a situation are never helpful. Some Christians I see, in order to project "faith" reject the realities of the situation they are facing. "I am not sick." "My house is not foreclosing." "My job will be there." Positive confession turns to into denial of the facts of the ground. No where in the Bible is denial a virtue. The thief on the cross-faced his situation. Look at verse 41.

Luke 23:41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

He owns his decision that got him there and the consequences of it. Sometimes, we have to face the consequences of other's decision either way face it. Redefining the facts is never helpful. Facts are your friends.

2. Allow Feelings to Surface

Facts turn to feelings that must surface. (Ball in a pool) This happened to both thieves.

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

Luke 23:40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?"

Feeling - allow them to surface. 1) To turn off feelings is to deny the divine dna implanted in all us. If God is grieving over the situation, why would we act inconsistent

with that. 2) **Facing the feelings also dignifies the wound.** To not allow grief, anger or hurt to surface is to tell yourself that that incident, that injustice, that horrible situation was “no big deal”. 3) **Let the emotions be raw.** Don’t pretty them up. Most of the Psalmist are “sanctified whiners”. If God cannot withstand the honest emotions and anguish of life, He is not worth following.

3. **Fight for a Faith perspective**

The one thief had to fight a different perspective, and with that a different expectation of God, to find the faith one.

Luke 23:39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

Luke 23:40 But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence?

Luke 23:41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Luke 23:42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Just this week I was with a parent who struggling with the regret of decisions her children had made in life. She raised them in a Christian home. Sent them to Christian schools. Brought them to church. Yet, now in life, they have turned to God. She asked me, “What did I do wrong?” I told her, “Perhaps nothing.” Now all parents live with some form of regret. Our decisions don’t save our kids. They must make their own choice. That being said, her words and tone had failure, despair and regret in them. I told her I could not answer definitively exactly what is happening to her children, but that she must fight through the facts and feelings to find a faith perspective that has hope. The enemy wants to tell her she is a failure and her children are lost. We serve a God of hope and power. I sat with her and told her let’s pray from that angle.

For one thief, facts and feeling turn to accusation. For the other, facts and feelings, turn to fear of God.

Notice the formula here to facing expectations.

Luke 23:41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. **But** this man has done nothing wrong.”

The single conjunction “**but**” serves as a fact to faith bridge. The fact is we deserve this. The faith is this man is not only good, but God.

We serve a God who is powerful, generous, caring, merciful, and longing more than us to see people set free. We need to pray from this perspective and not from accusation, despair or defeat.

Conclusion:

*A few years ago I was invited to travel to the Holy Land on a church tour that covered by Israel and Palestine. The person I traveled with was a Christian Palestinian whose calling in life was to reconcile Jew and Arab through the gospel and plant churches where both could worship Jesus side by side. Since Palestine was not welcoming to Americans, especially with the onset of the Iraq war, my wife Janae suggested that I write letters to each of my children just in case something dreadful happened. Many of the cities were travelling had Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups who were known to capture Americans. I shrugged it off at first, but then realized she had a good point. I then sat down at my computer and wrote what I saw in each child, described their unique personalities and callings in life, expressed to them how much joy they had brought me, and how I truly have become a better person for their presence in my life. I then found myself ending each letter with this line. **“No matter what happens to Dad, allows believe God is good, because of what Jesus did on the cross.” “The good of God is forever decreed and cannot be altered because this event.”***

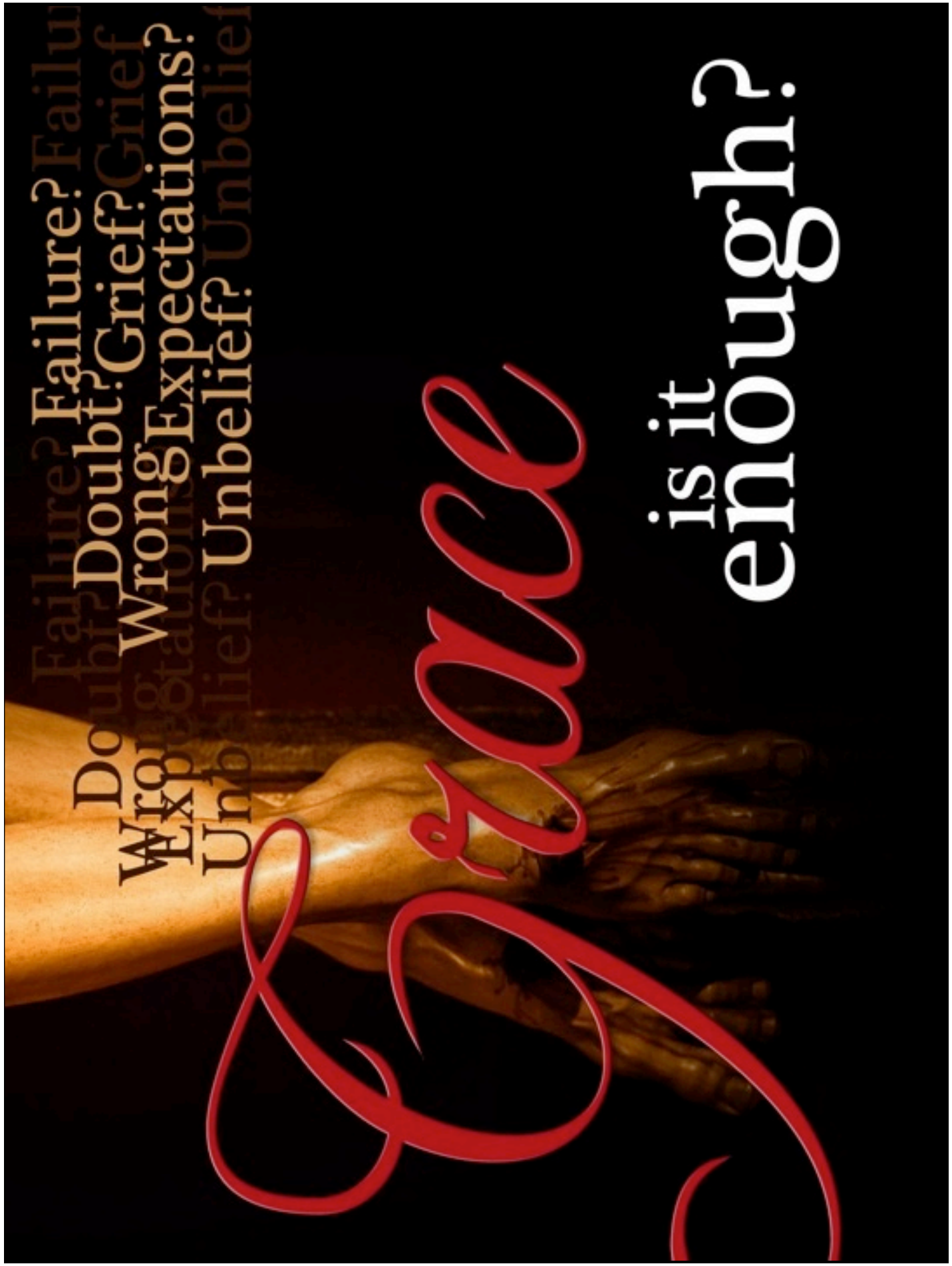
What I was concerned is that my kids may connect “the goodness of God” to a specific situation in life. My friends, that is where the enemy grabs us. God’s goodness is not connected to whether we lose our job, our home, our marriage, our health, our ministry or our dreams. His goodness is forever decreed throughout eternity because of what Jesus did on the cross. That can never be altered. That is the mash potatoes.

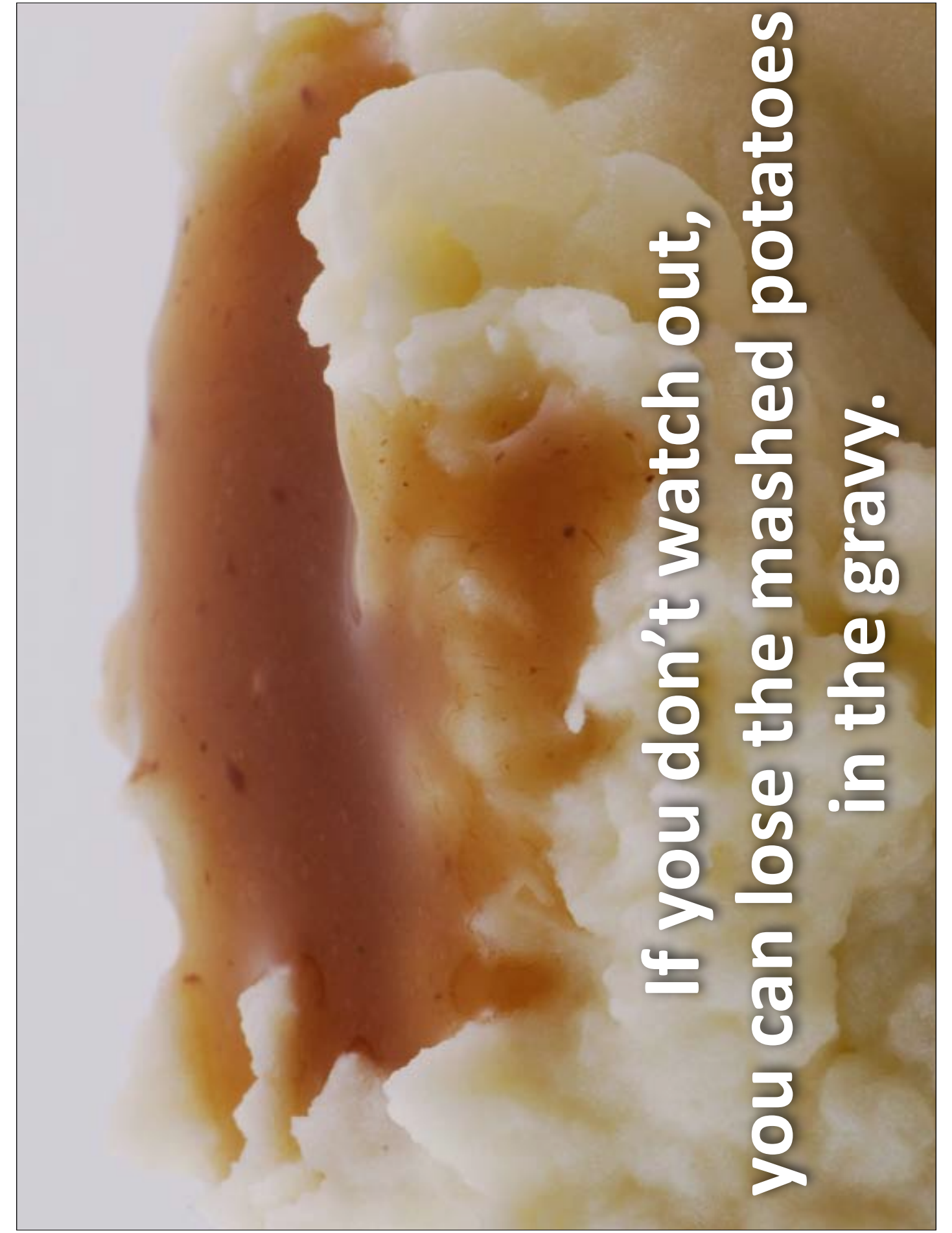
The enemy wants us to question God’s goodness and therefore question His character, His word, His promises and the gospel itself. I stand before you today saying that “gravy” elements in life will come and go. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Failure? Doubt? Wrong Expectations?
Grief? Unbelief? Unbelief?

Grace

is it
enough?



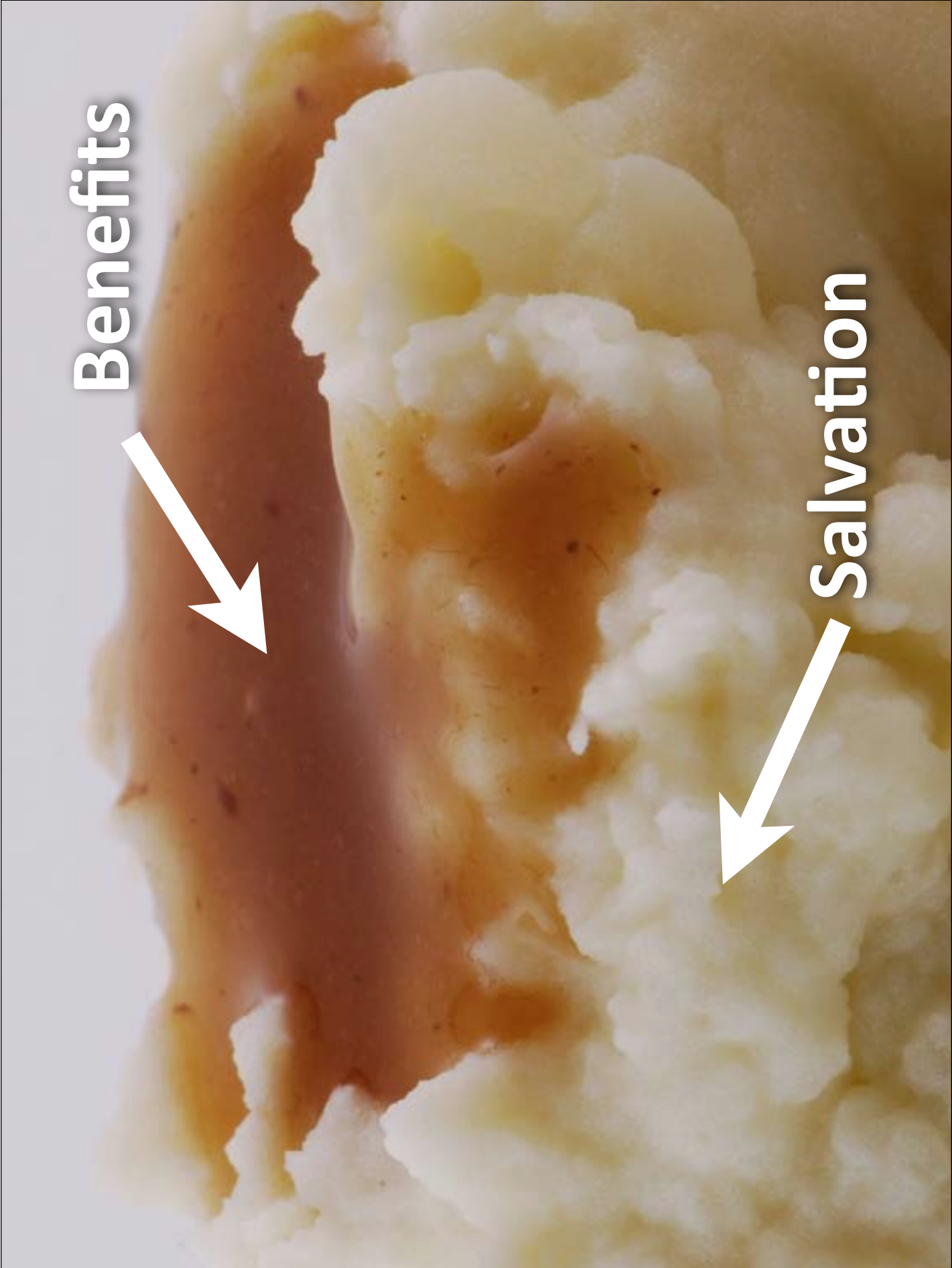


**If you don't watch out,
you can lose the mashed potatoes
in the gravy.**

Benefits



Salvation



Talents

Health

Gifts

Visions

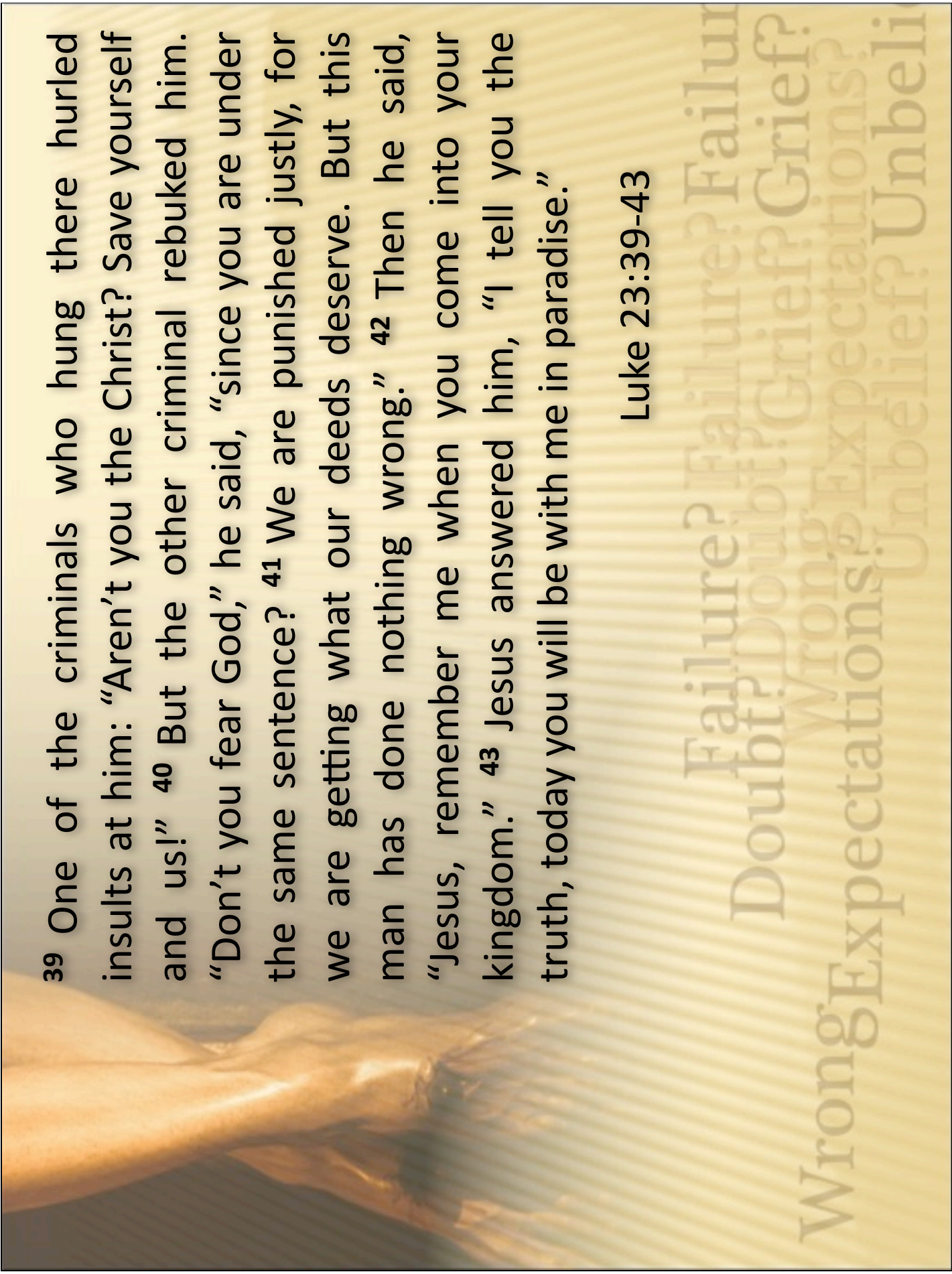
Relationships

Wealth

Nearness to God

Salvation



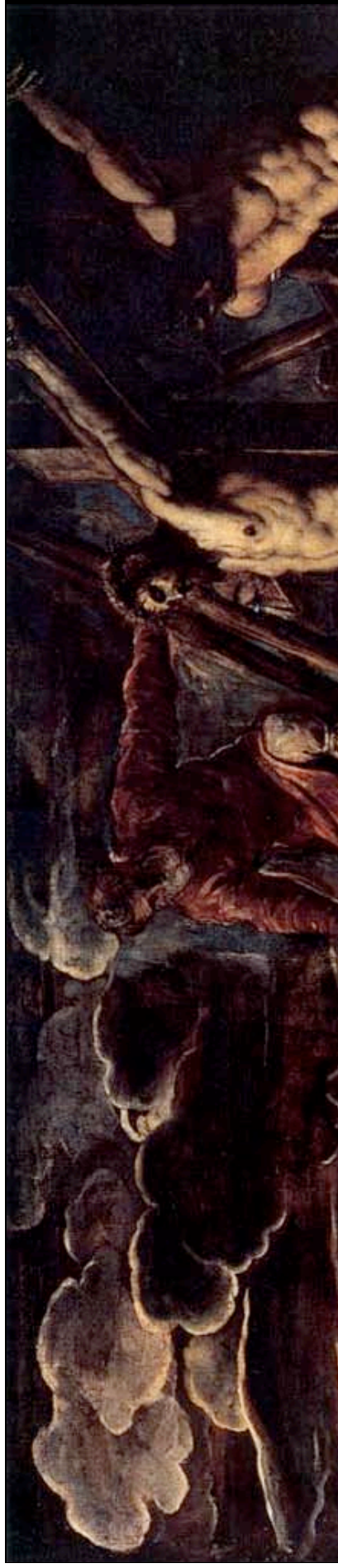


³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!” ⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³ Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23:39-43

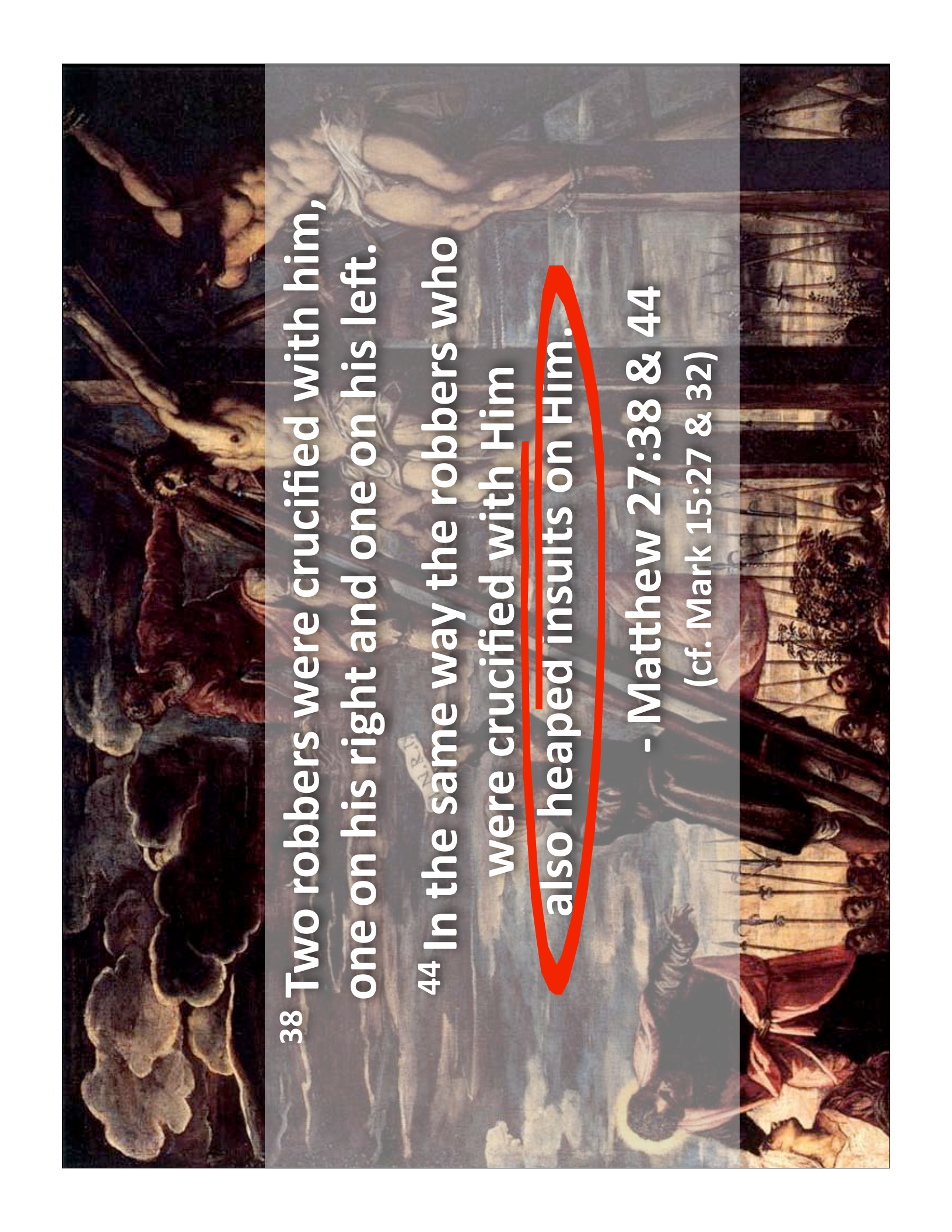
Failure? Failure? Failure?
Doubt? Doubt? Doubt?
Wrong Expectations? Wrong Expectations?
Unbelief? Unbelief?





1. They were thieves.
2. They were crucified.
3. They both mocked Jesus.



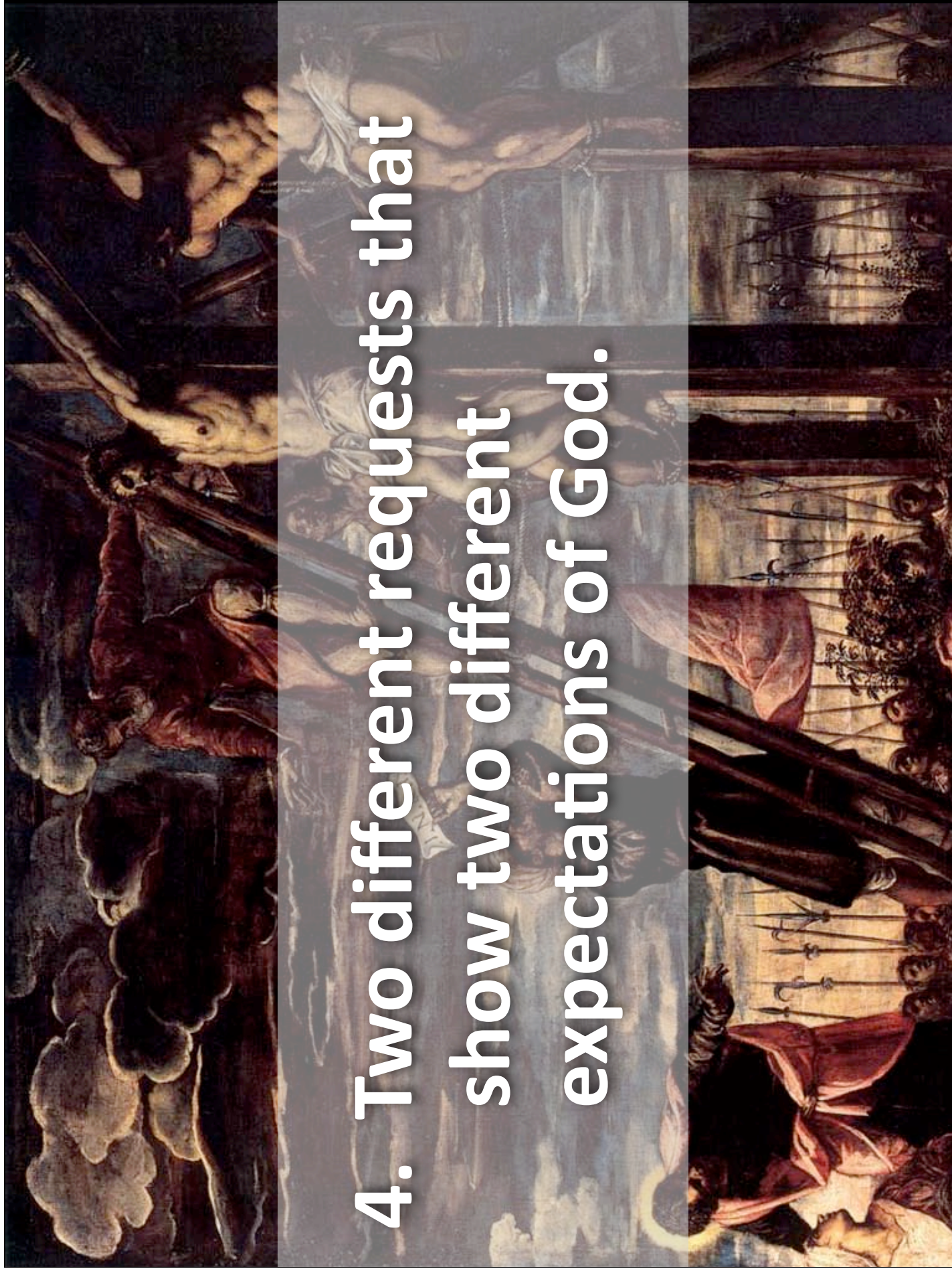


³⁸ Two robbers were crucified with him,
one on his right and one on his left.

⁴⁴ In the same way the robbers who
were crucified with Him
also heaped insults on Him.

- Matthew 27:38 & 44


(cf. Mark 15:27 & 32)



4. Two different requests that
show two different
expectations of God.



Our view of God

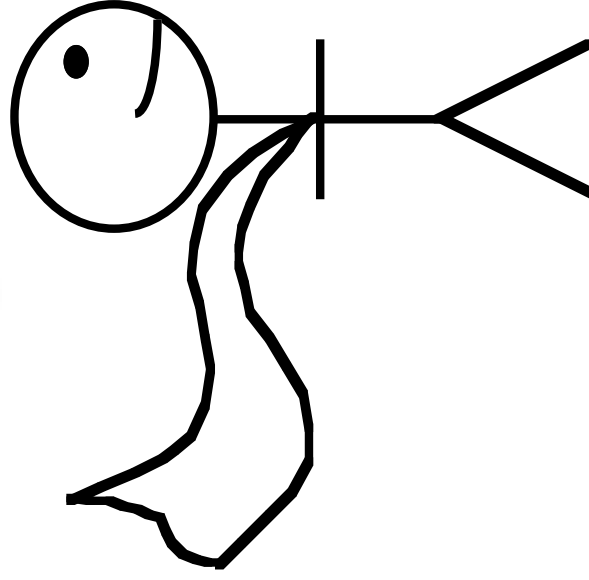
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- A pair of hands is shown holding a pair of black-rimmed glasses. The glasses are held over a blurred background that appears to be a sign with the word "EXPERIENCE" written on it. The sign is out of focus, but the letters are visible. The overall scene is set against a warm, orange-toned background.
1. Our experiences.
 2. Our personality.
 3. Our understanding of Scripture.

Our view of God

Two different

Activity

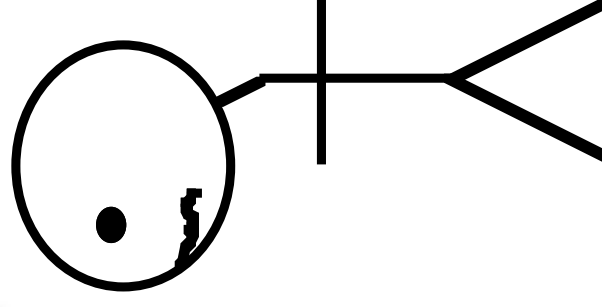
Super hero



views of God

Passivity

Super martyr

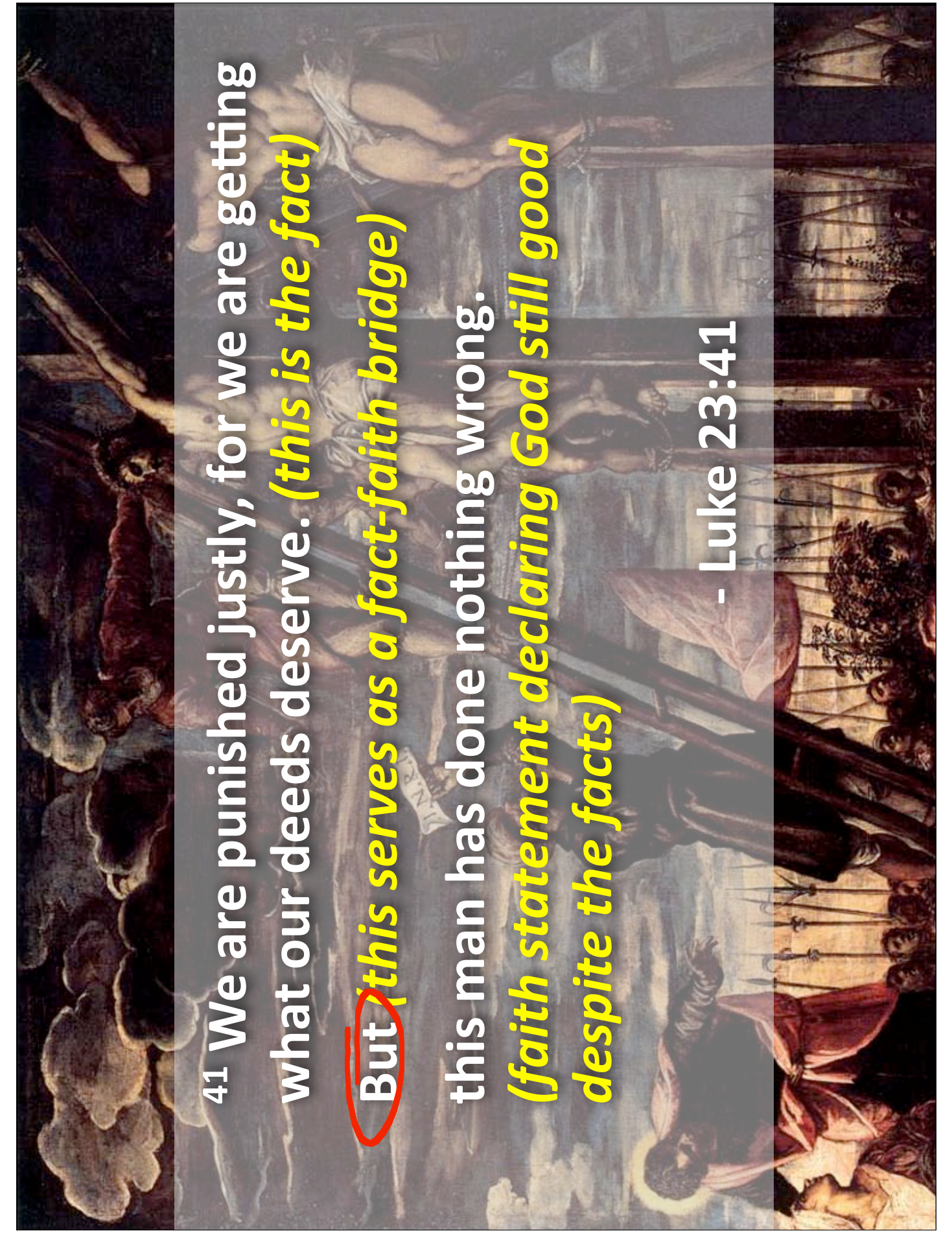


Fact-Feeling-Faith Convergence

1. Face the Facts.
2. Allow Feelings to Surface.
3. Fight for a Faith perspective.

Failure? Failure? Failure?
Doubt? Doubt? Grief? Grief?
Wrong Expectations? Wrong Expectations?
Unbelief? Unbelief

Grace is it
enough?



⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting
what our deeds deserve. *(this is the fact)*

But *(this serves as a fact-faith bridge)*
this man has done nothing wrong.
*(faith statement declaring God still good
despite the facts)*

- Luke 23:41



By faith, I believe God's
Grace is sufficient for:

it is
enough.

Failure? Doubt? Wrong Expectations?
Grief? Unbelief? Unbelief?

Grace

is it
enough?

