

The Thief On the Cross

Sermon delivered on March 29th, 2015

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Text: *Luke 23:35-43*

Last week, I spoke with you about the first of the seven sayings of our Lord from the cross. We saw that after a long silence our Lord finally opened His mouth and the first words that He uttered from the cross were words of forgiveness. The first word that Jesus uttered from the Cross was a prayer for His enemies, but here today, we find that the second word spoken by our Lord from the cross was an answer to a prayer. It was a response to the request of the dying thief.

43: And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

First I want us to look at the thief on the cross.

I – The Condition of the Thief

There were two men crucified on that day, one on the left side and the other on His right side. Do not think that this is an accident or coincidence that our Lord was crucified between two thieves. When Pilate gave orders that the Lord Jesus should be crucified between the two malefactors, he was completely unaware that he was fulfilling God's word. Seven hundred forty five years before Pilate gave his command, God had declared through Isaiah that His Son should be ...

Isaiah 53:12 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.

He was counted or treated like a common criminal. Crucified between two thieves.

Psalm 119:89 For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.

Matthew 5:18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Both thieves insulted Christ

These two men were criminals. They were guilty. They deserved to die. They were outcasts of society. They both reviled our Lord. For the longest time, I thought that the thief on the left was really the bad guy and the one on the right was the good guy. But not according to the record. The thief on the right joined others in reviling, mocking and insulting Christ.

Matthew 27:38 Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. 39: And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, 40: And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. 41: Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, 42: He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel,

let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. 43: He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. 44: **The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth** (ridiculed Him in the same way).

Mark 15:32 Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. **And they that were crucified with him reviled him.**

They were both insulting Him with the same words.

II – A Sudden Change of Heart

But something happened to this thief. Everything changed as he cried to the Lamb of God.

He had a change of mind and heart ...

1. A changed of mind and heart towards his sin

Luke 23:40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation (in the same sentence of death)? 41: **And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds:** but this man hath done nothing amiss.

He humbled himself acknowledging he had done wrong and deserves nothing but condemnation.

2. A changed of mind and heart towards Christ

Luke 23:41 **And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.** 42: And he said unto Jesus, **Lord**, remember me when thou comest into **thy kingdom**.

He realized that Christ is **innocent and blameless**. He realized something in Christ that is unusual and he realized that this Christ that he reviled is **LORD**. He turned to Christ and cried out to Him to remember him when He comes into **His kingdom**. He called Christ to save him. What a sudden turn of event!

What a prayer of faith this was!

42: **And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.**

I have heard and seen people who have exercised great faith, but to me, this thief showed great faith that is unsurpassed. In my humble opinion, greater than Abraham, Moses, Joseph, David, Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Daniel, Paul, etc. See how strong this man's FAITH was.

He openly confessed Christ and acknowledged Him Lord. He believed that He is able to give him eternal and called on Him!

And when did all this happen?

It happened when Christ was hanging upon a cross! It happened when our Lord was in agony, and in weakness, in suffering and in pain.

The thief exercised faith after the soldiers had done everything possible to make Christ not even look like a man.

Isaiah 52:14 As many were astonished (horrified) at thee; his visage (face, appearance) was so marred (disfigured) more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:

Those that saw Him on the cross were horrified. His face, his appearance was so disfigured that He no longer looked like a man. But this thief could see that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God and he believed, and looked forward to Christ's kingdom.

What happened to this thief?

What came over him? What led him to cry to the Lord? I am not sure what really happened, but I can only speculate...

Could it be that he heard our Lord uttered His first word from the cross, "Father forgive them, for they not what they do." This is no ordinary man, who is able to forgive those who seek to kill you.

Could it be that he saw and read the superscription over Christ ...

Luke 23:38 And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

John 19:20 **This title then read many of the Jews:** for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in **Hebrew**, and **Greek**, and **Latin**. 21: Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, **Write not**, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. 22: Pilate answered, **What I have written I have written.**

The religious leaders when they saw the sign, complained that instead of writing "The King of the Jews", write "I am King of the Jews." But Pilate refused to change it - "**What I have written I have written.**"

Pilate did not believe that Christ was the King of the Jews. He had placed it there in derision to the Jews. But it was still the truth, Jesus is the King of the Jews!

When Christ carried the cross through Jerusalem and out to the place of crucifixion that sign with the superscription had been carried in front of Him. Many of the Jews saw it and the thief had read it. Perhaps God used that small superscription over Christ's head and opened the eyes of the thief's understanding to see that it was the truth.

This thief knew enough about Christ to call on Him and cried, "Lord, remember me."

III – Our Lord's Response

43: And Jesus said unto him, **Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.**

I must point out that this man was not looking to be taken down off his cross, nor was he asking for a glorious position in the Kingdom. He was not requesting that he be able to sit at the right hand of Christ in glory. **He just wanted to be remembered.**

Verily I say unto thee ...

What I am going to say is true and it is for you!

It was addressed to a single individual. Christ spoke to this man as if he were the only person in the world. And what a glorious, satisfying answer He gave! What comfort this word must have brought. And what comfort it has brought to needy, sin sick souls since that day.

To day – this very day

Today – now, before this day is over, Christ knew that, that day the thief will draw his last breath, and He said to the thief, today, shalt thou be with me in paradise.

Shalt – our ‘shalls’ our weak and unstable but Christ ‘shalls’ are powerful and sure.

Thou – you, who have been a criminal, who have been a thief, who have been wicked, ungodly, who have reviled me, ‘Thou will be with me in Paradise.’

In Paradise – A place of complete rest, perfect happiness, no more suffering and pain, sorrow, death, crying, pain, cancer, heart diseases, failing memory, back aches, migraine, headaches, heart aches, high cholesterol, colds, stuffy nose. It is a place where righteousness dwelleth, no more sin, thief, criminals, terrorists, and wicked people. It will be Paradise.

Be with Me – To be in Paradise is a great and wonderful promise but Paradise is not enough. Christ said ‘Thou will be with me in Paradise.’

Paradise is enough to make the thief leap for joy, but Christ added, you will be with me in Paradise.

This dying thief only asked to be remembered but he got much more than what he asked for.

1 Corinthians 2:9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 10: But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

Did he deserve to be with Christ in Paradise?

He was a thief, a criminal, a wicked man. He even mocked Christ. But Christ forgave him and promised to take him to be with Him in Paradise.

Closing Thoughts

Now these things are written for our warning. There is **warning**, as well as **comfort** in these verses — and that is a very solemn warning, too.

1. No one is too sinful to be saved

John 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and **him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.**

Hebrews 7:25 Wherefore **he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him**, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

As long as the person is breathing there is still hope

2. Salvation comes to those who repent and believe

Remember that there were two thieves in this story. One went to Paradise and the other did not. They both were thieves. They both were receiving the just punishment for their crime. They both hung by the side of our Lord Jesus Christ. They both heard Him pray for His murderers. They both saw and read the superscription over the cross. But one received a full assurance of salvation and Paradise but one remained in his sin.

One humbled himself and believed but the other in his pride continue in his sin and did not believe.

Pride will keep many from entering Heaven. They would not acknowledge the Bible's declaration that men are sinful and deserves to be punished. They would not acknowledge that regardless of their religiosity, the amount of their good works, their education, or wealth, or position in society.

Christ has the power to save

Still many will not enter Heaven, not because of pride, not because of lack of belief in God, or even lack of belief that Christ exists, but because they turn to the wrong Person or institution for salvation. To go their ministers and ask what they can do for them, they trust their church or religion; they trust their religious accomplishment to take them to Heaven, when the Bible clearly teaches that; not of works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.

Do you want to be with Christ in Paradise when you pass on from this life? Not just to be delivered from suffering and pain, not just to be live forever in paradise, but to live forever with Christ?

Do what the thief on the cross did. He acknowledged his sinfulness and helplessness and he turned to the right Person. With a repentant heart He turned to Christ for forgiveness and salvation.

You have believed so much about Christ but why don't you go all the way. Tell Him "Lord into Thy hands I commend my spirit."