

TEXT SERMONS – SEVEN SAYINGS OF THE SUFFERING SAVIOR

SAYING #2

“PARADISE TODAY”**Luke 23:43*****“... today you will be with Me in Paradise.”***

The most popular sacred song is said to be “The Old Rugged Cross.” It begins with these words, “On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross...” However, there was not only one cross there, there were three!

*“Three crosses on a lonely hill,
A thief on either side;
And in between the Son of God,
How wide the gulf, how wide!”*

One of the most intriguing conversations ever recorded took place between those three crosses. That was a most unlikely time and place for verbal communication, nevertheless the words spoken there are some of the most important words ever spoken between God and men. Yes, God was there!

The words, *“today you will be with Me in Paradise”* is the second statement that Jesus, the figure on the center cross, spoke. He spoke seven utterances that are history making, dramatic and revealing. The first thing that the Lord Jesus, the figure on the center cross, said, was *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”*

His second utterance was in response to something that one of the co-cruciates said. It is recorded in the following verses:

“Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”
(Luke 23:39-43)

What a comfort Jesus words must have been to the criminal who was dying and what a comfort those words have been to countless needy souls since that long ago day. Of the seven statements Jesus made while on the cross, none is more appealing, satisfying and hope-filled: *“Today you will be with me in Paradise.”*

Let us contemplate two truths that stand out in this exchange between Jesus and the dying man adjacent to him. First, the Prayer of The Sinner and second, the Promise of The Savior.

THE PRAYER OF THE SINNER.

“Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”

This man is a case study of one whose death was imminent, whose life was flashing before his mind’s eye, who was facing eternity without hope and who was not ready to meet his Maker. Look closely at his prayer:

This Was A Personal Prayer.

“Remember me.”

This dying man was making request in behalf of himself. It is possible for us to be self-centered in our prayers and have no thought of others. But we are not prepared to pray for others until we have prayed for ourselves. The one who has prayed, “God be merciful to me a sinner” and has received God’s forgiveness is then ready to pray for others.

This Was A Penitent’s Prayer.

This thief was not like his companion in crime. The other thief had ridiculed Jesus saying, “*If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.*” But this penitent thief “*rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.”*

This thief acknowledged his wrong-doing, making confession that he was receiving “*the due reward of our deeds.*” God always hears such prayers. David said, after confessing his own sin, “*This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him.....*” (Psalm 34:6) So He will do for all who truly are repentant.

This Was A Perceptive Prayer.

What marvelous insight this man had. His request reveals that he knew and believed much about Jesus.

He perceived the sinlessness of Jesus.

He said, “*this Man has done nothing wrong*” Do you remember what Judas, the betrayer of Jesus said about Him? He said, “I have betrayed innocent blood.” Pilate had said, “I find no fault in him.” Pilate’s wife had warned Pilate with these words: “Have nothing to do with this just man.” And now, this thief on the cross senses that he is in the presence of a guiltless person who does not belong, based upon human justice, upon that cross. The more vivid our concept of God and His holiness the more sinful our sense of our own sinfulness.

He perceived the Saviorhood of Jesus.

When he said, “Remember me” he was saying simply “save me.” He believed that Jesus had power beyond death. If Jesus could save a thief upon a cross while dying, He can save one who believes in Him today!

He perceived that Jesus was a King.

The soldiers in their mockery said a king must have a robe so they put a scarlet robe on Him; they said a king should have a scepter so they put a reed in His hand; they said a king must

have a crown so they put a crown of thorns on His holy head; a king, thought Pilate, must be identified so he put a sign over His head which read: "This is Jesus The King of The Jews." But to one man His Kingship was no joke. He believed that Jesus was a King with a Kingdom and therefore prayed, "*Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.*" Of this request by the robber one commentator asks, "Was ever faith like this exhibited upon earth? It looks as if the brightest crown had been reserved for the Savior's head at His darkest moment!" (JFB)

He perceived that Jesus would rise from the dead.

"...remember me when You come into Your kingdom." A dead king would not have a kingdom. He believed that Jesus would rule, after death, in His kingdom, therefore, he believed that Jesus would rise from the dead.

What perceptive faith this man must have had. Perhaps he had heard Jesus speak during His three years of ministry or had witnessed some miracle; maybe he had heard some disciple witnessing about Jesus or he had heard the enemies of Christ denouncing Him for claiming to be the Christ, that is, the Messiah. Whatever the source of his knowledge of Christ, the Spirit of God opened his eyes to see the true nature of Jesus and his "death bed" confession and request was genuine, as Jesus' response to him indicates.

THE PROMISE OF THE SAVIOR.

What was Jesus' response to this sinner's request? He said, "*Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.*"

Our Lord gave to this dying criminal the verbal assurance that was as precious to him as the assurance of salvation through the written Word of God is to us today. What assurances did Jesus give the man? There were several:

He Was Assured That There Is Life After Death.

He said to the condemned man, "*Today you shall be*" – that is, "you shall continue to be; after you die on that cross you will continue to be; you will continue to live." Jesus, in that statement assured him and us that there is life after death.

He Was Assured That He Would Be With Jesus.

"Today you shall be with me." "With me!" Where was he to be? Paul wrote, "*To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.*" (II Cor.5:8) Again, Paul wrote to the Philippians, "*To depart and to be with Christ is better.*" (1:23)

Death to the believer means immediately to be in the presence of the Lord and "*So shall we ever be with the Lord.*" (I Thess.4:17) Together, then, we will go on being "with the Lord" throughout all eternity! If you will turn to Him today, believingly, you will be with Him today and forever!

He Was Assured That His Salvation Would Be Immediate.

Jesus said, "*Today you shall be with me.*" We do not have to wait for pardon, forgiveness, acceptance by God at some indefinite time in the future. Salvation can be ours "today!" Jesus

did not say, In a week, month or year but “today!” Jesus received this sinner immediately thereby showing that salvation is sudden, immediate and permanent.

If salvation were a lengthened process there would have been no hope for this dying man. “Today” – not after baptism; “today” – not after church membership; “today” – not after you have done some good works. When a repentant sinner comes to Christ he is forgiven at once. Jesus said to Zaccheus, *“This day is salvation come to this house.”* (Luke 19:9) There is no probation period for a believing sinner.

A Christian was witnessing to a lady and encouraging her to receive the Lord Jesus as her Savior immediately. The lady replied, “It can’t be that quick. I have to get myself ready for Jesus to save me. It will take time.” The friend, who was witnessing to her, said, “Did you know that God has set a definite time for you to make your decision?” The lady said, “No, I did not know that.” The Christian then turned in the Bible to II Corinthians chapter six and read, *“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”* (v.2) The lady said, “Well, I did not know that. Then I am ready right now!”

CONCLUSION

This story pictures what is going on every day in lives all over the world. Not that people are being crucified but persons are making decisions about Jesus Christ just like the two men did on either side of the Savior on Mt. Calvary. On one side of Jesus is a man rejecting Him, on the other side a man receiving Him.

These two men were equally near Jesus, both were sinners, both were suffering, both dying, both needed salvation and both had the same opportunity. Yet one man belligerently refused Christ, the other believingly received Christ.

The same thing is going on all over the world every day where the Gospel message is given out. Some are moved to repentance, some are unmoved; some listen attentively, some listen indifferently; some hearts are melted, some hardened. Why is that the case? For a definitive answer, please read Romans chapter nine at your leisure, but for now, I will conclude by saying that salvation is by the grace of a sovereign God!

There are no accidents in a world governed by the sovereign God. When any sinner is saved it is because of the grace of God alone: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* (Eph.2:8,9) The two thieves crucified alongside Jesus are representative men. One died in guilt, one died in grace. In which group are you?

POINTS FOR REFLECTION:

1. There are no degrees of sinners with God. “All have sinned...” (Rom 3:23)
2. Salvation is not the result of deeds we do; the thief was nailed to the cross and could do nothing.
3. There is only one death-bed conversion recorded in the New Testament; only one lest we presume, only one lest we despair.

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