

Remember me - radio

(Luke 23:34-43)

The scripture for our sermon today is Luke 23:34-43. Let's read it together.

*“34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. 35 And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. 36 And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, 37 And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. 38 And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.** 39 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him (blasphemed Him), saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. 40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, [Don't you] Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? 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. 43 And Jesus said unto him, **Verily I say***

unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise”
(Luke 23:34-43).

I’ve entitled this message, “**Remember me.**”

The scriptural account of Christ saving the thief on the cross is unparalleled. It is the most endearing account of saving grace in all of scripture. In His dying hour, Christ saved a thief in his dying hour. Scripture records this so that no sinner might despair that his sin is too great for the Lord to save him. It is never too late to flee to Christ and look to Him, to be saved by Him alone! Yet in this same account, the Lord warns proud man. Because the Lord saved only one thief. Because the Lord saved only one thief, no sinner may presume in false hope that God owes him salvation as an entitlement, or that he will escape the due reward of his sins because God is too merciful to punish man for his sins. The unbelieving thief made that mistake. He blasphemed God by telling the Son of God to prove He was Christ by saving him from the judgment he deserved! That thief propagated the devil’s own temptation. When he died in his own proud, hard heart of unbelief, he proved himself to be the devil’s son.

Therefore, in this scripture, we clearly see that **God’s mercy to sinners is His own sovereign prerogative**. God said to Moses, “***I** will have mercy on whom **I** will have mercy, and **I** will have compassion on whom **I** will have compassion. So then it is not of*

him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (Rom. 9:15-16) To this sovereign God, every sinner must bow. And for Christ’s sovereign mercy, every believing sinner will find eternal days too short to praise Him for His saving grace!

There are three lessons taught in this scripture, and I pray that we would all learn them. These are lessons from the cross of Christ.

1. The **first lesson** of the cross, is our own sinfulness and our great need of God’s mercy in Christ!
2. The **second lesson** of the cross is that God saves sinners by His grace alone. By His grace, He saves even the worst of men.
3. And the **third lesson** of the cross is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture says that everything we need to know, we learn from the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:17-31-2:2; Gal. 6:14; John 14:6; Heb. 1:1-3). The apostle Peter said, by “*His divine power (He) hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him (our Lord Jesus Christ)*” (2 Pet. 1:3). Let us therefore consider each of these lessons in turn.

Our sinfulness and our great need of His mercy in Christ

By the first thief, God teaches us our sinfulness, and our great need for God's mercy in Christ.

The scripture in Luke 23 reads, "*One of the malefactors (criminals) which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us*" (Luke 23:39).

He blasphemed God when He spoke against Jesus

The word "*railed*" means blaspheme. You cannot blaspheme a man. To blaspheme means to speak against God. Therefore, when the first thief spoke against Jesus, he spoke against God, he blasphemed God, for Jesus is the Son of God. The Son of God is God over all. In John 10, Jesus asked the unbelieving Jews why they accused Him of blasphemy for saying, "*I am the Son of God*"? Since He did the works of His Father, it should have been clear to them that He was the Son of God (John 10:36). The Jews understood that the Son of God is God and Lord over all, one with the Father and the Spirit. Therefore, the Jews rightly understood that any claim to be the Son of God was a claim to be God. In Titus chapter 3, the Apostle Paul first refers to, "***God our Savior,***" (Titus 3:4). And then in v6 he refers to, "***Jesus Christ our Savior***" (Titus 3:6). He equates these two

as one: God our Savior and Jesus Christ our Savior, because Jesus Christ is our God and Savior. Because Jesus Christ is the Son of God, He is God over all, our Savior! That is why when the second thief believed Christ, he rebuked the first thief, saying, “*Don’t you fear God*” (Luke 23:40)?!

A mirror of ourselves

But in this blaspheming, unbelieving, proud sinner, we see our own sinfulness by nature! This man was not afraid to speak against the Son of God, the very One he would soon face in eternal judgment!

Do you want to understand something of your own heart? Do you want to see your own sinfulness? Then listen and see how this man, with the crowd, treated the Son of God, the Lord of glory! How sinful was this man? How sinful is my own heart by nature? Look at this thief! God holds him up as a mirror to see ourselves, that we might know our frightful condition and go to Christ for mercy!

We are equally sinful as he

By nature, we are as equally sinful as he! God sets this thief before us to rebuke us with him, because in ourselves by nature, we do not fear God (Rom. 3:18). Because we do not fear God, we do not worship Him. We madly rush to our own destruction, even opposing our own salvation. The apostle Paul said men

oppose their own salvation unless God turns them from the hardness of their unbelief to Christ (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Because we do not believe God's record of ourselves and God's record of Christ, we will not call on Christ to save us, even when we face eternal judgment; even if, as this man did, we die on a cross next to the Lamb of God!

He is every man; he is what we are in ourselves. He is you, and he is me.

This thief represents every one of us by nature. He is you and he is me. God's word is not given to us so that we can compare ourselves to others, to find ourselves to be better than they. God's word was not written for that other man; it was written to me, to you! God's word is given to us to expose us as guilty as the worst of men. And it is given to us to exalt Christ, because He alone is good, He alone is the only righteous man God will accept on the basis of His personal obedience. To underscore this truth, the apostle Paul, in light of the sin of both Gentiles and Jews asked this question: "*What then, are we better than they? No. In no wise*" (Rom. 3:9-12). The best of men is no better than the worst of sinners in the sight of God! According to God's word, "*There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become*

unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10-12)¹.

He hardened himself against every testimony from God

This first thief hardened himself against every testimony God gave of His Son. In denying God’s testimony, he made God a liar. Though guilty, though justly condemned, though dying and facing eternity and eternity’s Judge, he blasphemed and rejected Christ before whom He would soon stand as his Judge. He opposed his own salvation (1 John 5:10; 2 Tim. 2:25). God holds him up that we might see ourselves. This man is a mirror to us. God draws the conclusion for us. Of everyone of us, what we, by nature are precisely what God says to us by the rebuke of the believing thief to this man, *“There is no fear of God before their eyes”* (Rom. 3:12)! This is how God sees us in ourselves, apart from Christ.

Men will not repent apart from grace

Apart from God’s grace in Christ, men will not repent! Solomon said, *“Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him”* (Prov. 27:22). Scripture proves that men will not repent even though God brings upon them the judgment their sins deserve (Rev. 16:9, 11). God’s justice never turns a sinner. Only grace can turn a sinner (Acts 18:27; 1 Tim. 1:15; Jer. 31:18-19)! Yet

¹ These are the only “nones” scripture speaks of. We are all “nones” before God.

even when Christ is declared to sinners in the Gospel, that word will not alter the course of an unbeliever unless God opens their heart (Acts 16:14). Unless God removes our stony heart and puts a heart of flesh in its place, we will not and cannot believe (John 5:39; 6:44). None turn but those the Lord turns (Ezek. 36:36; Jer. 31:18-19; Acts 5:31). None believe but those to whom God gives faith by grace (Acts 13:48; 18:27). None call but those God calls to life by His Spirit of grace (Ezek. 37:3-14; Eph. 2:3-9).

Did you notice how hard this man was? He blasphemed Christ on the very premise that Christ saves! He said, “*If thou be Christ, save thyself and us*” (Luke 23:39)! He admitted that he knew Christ is God’s Savior. Yet, he showed no interest in his own salvation from sin and from the wrath of God. He did not believe Jesus was Christ, and therefore he did not call upon Him as Lord! You see, salvation is a rescue mission. God does all when men are guilty and oppose their own salvation. God saves by His grace alone. God cannot find anything in you or me, nor does He look for anything from us. He looks to Christ alone, and teaches sinners to do the same!

In this man we see that no man will turn, no man will believe, no man will bow to Christ apart from His grace! He heard the testimony of the people. They told how Jesus said, “*I am the Son of God*” (Matt. 27:43). He heard them say, “*He trusted in God.*”

He heard them say, “*He saved others.*” He heard the rebuke of his fellow thief, a believing sinner, and heard that sinner call on Christ! He even heard Jesus pray to His Father as the one Mediator between God and men, the High Priest who offered Himself as the Lamb of God. He heard Him make intercession to God for transgressors, His very enemies! He saw Jesus give Himself to shame and spitting and the most cruel treatment and mocking imaginable. He saw them crucify Him, and He saw Christ submit to it all willingly. This man heard no vengeance from Christ against His murderers. He saw only His quiet submission in obedience to God. When sinners contradicted Jesus, when He was reviled, He did not strike back and revile and strike back in return. He did not condemn. He prayed for His own. But though this dying man saw Christ with physical eyes, though He heard the testimony of God concerning His Son with physical ears, though he died next to the Lamb of God, dying in his sins, facing eternal judgment, he remained hardened in his unbelief!

When we consider this man in his hardened unbelief and opposition to Christ, we naturally judge him. But realize this: the lesson taught here is meant to cast the light of the cross on each one of us. This is what we are by nature. This is how God sees us outside of Christ. This is what we, what we have done and what we will do unless the Lord rescues us from ourselves! Scripture warns sinners who hear the Gospel, “*Let us therefore*

fear, lest a promise, being left us of entering into His rest (eternal salvation in Christ), any of you (me and you) should seem to come short of it.” (Heb. 4:1).

Do you want to know your own great need of God’s sovereign mercy? Then see yourself in this hardened, unbelieving, blaspheming thief as he dies next to the Lamb of God! He heard Jesus make intercession for transgressors, yet he never prayed to Him. He heard that Jesus is the Son of God, yet he never bowed to worship Him! He heard that Jesus is the Savior. Yet he never believed on Him. **The first lesson of the cross is our great sin, our just condemnation, and the corruption of our nature. This lesson teaches us of our great need for God’s mercy in Christ!** Unless God, in His mercy, does all for us in Christ by His grace, we cannot be saved! O sinner! Flee to Christ!

God saves sinners by His grace

The **second lesson** of the cross is that **God saves by His sovereign grace!**

Hope for the worst of sinners

No sinner should despair because of his own foolish, proud rebellion and unbelief. Every sinner, on hearing the Gospel, should flee to Christ as this man did. The Lord saved this man in his dying hour! If we look for some reason in ourselves for God to save us, we are blind and ignorant of our sin and of God’s

holy nature. And if we find something in ourselves that would give us reason why God saved us, we have found a lie. The reason for grace is found in Christ alone. This fact, when believed, makes God's sovereignty in salvation the sinner's only confidence, all of his hope and his great joy! If God does not save me by His will alone, for His grace alone, because of Christ alone, then I have no hope. But because God does save without consideration of my good works, for I have none, or my sin, for it is His glory to make satisfaction for sins in the blood of His Son and cleanse sinners by the blood of Christ, therefore, I who am a great sinner find Christ to be all of my salvation!

A sinner in every way like the other

In this scripture we see two men. Both heard and saw the same things. Both died next to the Lamb of God. Both heard Christ's words. Both saw Him give Himself to shame and spitting. Both saw Him submit to mocking and cruelty without replying in anger or vengeance. Both heard and saw that he trusted God under the grossest injustice from the worst of men. But one believed. To all onlookers, Jesus died in weakness. But to the eye of God-given faith, the Lord Jesus overcame sin and death and the devil, with the power only the King of glory possessed, only the power the Lamb of God could exert in His substitutionary, sin-atonement death.

None turn but those He turns

None turn but those God turns. Jeremiah the prophet said, “*Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh*” (Jer. 31:18-19). The Apostle Paul told Timothy to instruct “*those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth*” (2 Tim. 2:25)

None turn, but those the Lord turns. None believe but those to whom God gives faith. Understand this: Faith is not the cause of our salvation; it is the result of it! Jesus said, “*He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life*” (John 5:24)! If we believe, it is because we have already passed from death to everlasting life. If we believe, it is because we were ordained to eternal life (Acts 13:48). If we believe, it is because God gave faith to us because of His grace. “*For by grace you are saved, through faith, and that, **not of yourselves**, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast*” (Eph. 2:8-9). In the book of Acts, Paul helped those “*believed through grace*” (Acts 18:27). Jesus said, “*No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him*” (John 6:44, 65). And He told His disciples, “*To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven*” (Mark 4:11).

None turn, but those the Lord turns, and none believe, but those to whom the Lord gives faith. And none call but those the Lord calls to life by the Spirit of His grace. Peter told the Jews, *“the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call”* (Acts 2:39).

When God saves a sinner, He causes him to hear the Gospel and produces faith in his heart by His Spirit (John 3:3-15). Faith is God's gift. No man has it by nature. *“God hath concluded them all in unbelief”* (Rom. 11:32). Faith is not given to all men (2 Thess. 3:2). God gives faith to His elect. *“The faith of God’s elect”* (Titus 1:1; Acts 13:48; John 6:65; Eph. 2:3-9; Titus 3:3-7)

This man believed Christ because He heard the word of God. What he heard: the truth about Jesus

But what did this man hear? What did He believe? He heard the truth about Jesus. He heard that He said, *“I am the Son of God”* (Matt. 27:43). He heard them say He was *“Christ, the chosen of God”* (Luke 23:35). The unbelieving crowd admitted that *“He trusted in God”* (Matt. 27:43). They admitted, *“He saved others”* (Matt. 27:42). To all onlooking physical eyes, Jesus died in weakness. But incredibly, to the eyes of this man’s unparalleled, God-given faith, Jesus, dying on the cross, was the Lord of all, the King of heaven, the almighty Savior who would overcome

sin and death and the devil to save His people from their sins (Gal. 1:4; 2:21; 3:8)!

There is nothing in this life more precious than the gift of faith in Christ. It is to have and to know the Son of God and His saving grace and love for sinners!

What he believed

What did this man believe, when he heard the testimony of God in the words of the people, and in the Lord's own words? He believed that **Jesus was God** against whom the crowd and the other thief blasphemed. He told that thief, "Don't you fear God" (Luke 23:40)!? He believed that **Jesus was Lord of all** (Luke 23:34, 39-40; Zech. 6:5; Acts 10:36; Rom. 14:9). He spoke to Him, calling Jesus, "Lord..." He believed in **the righteousness of Christ**. He said, "*This man hath done nothing amiss*" (Luke 23:41). He heard Jesus pray to His Father for His enemies and saw Him offer His sin-atoning blood to God for them! That is love, and that love fulfilled God's law in their place (Rom. 13:10; 10:4; 1 Cor. 1:30; Jer. 23:5-6). He believed Jesus died, not for His own sins, because He did nothing amiss, but for the sins of others, by the will of God, as the Substitute for His people. He believed Jesus was God's chosen High Priest, the Son of God and Son of Man, ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that He might offer gifts and sacrifices for sin to make reconciliation for the sins of the people by His

God-honoring, justice-satisfying, sufferings and death on the cross. This thief believed he was a sinner and justly condemned. He did not elevate himself above the other thief. He spoke of his condemnation and sins using the word, “we.” We are “*in the same condemnation...we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds.*” He owned his sin. He believed and confessed Christ against all appearances and all the opposition of the world. His faith is therefore incredible, unparalleled and astounding. But it is the same faith of all of God’s elect!

His prayer: Lord, remember me...

Now consider what this man was and how the Lord saved him. He was a blasphemer, even as the Apostle Paul said he was (1 Tim. 1:13). Only moments earlier, he had joined the blaspheming crowd with the other thief and “*cast the same in His teeth*” (Matt. 27:39 - blasphemed, v44). He committed the same crime and he was sentenced to the same condemnation. But, incredibly, he now owns his sin and the justice of God in his condemnation! And now he believes and confesses Christ as Lord, the righteous Substitute, the Lamb of God, who would rise in triumph over death and reign as King and come again as Judge.

His prayer

Now, consider his prayer. He said, “*Lord, remember me*” (Lk. 23:42)!

To be remembered by Christ is to be in His heart. All who are thus remembered will be with Christ in glory. This man, by his prayer, reveals his thoughts of Christ. “The deepest need of my soul will be met if Christ remembers me! Lord, your memory of me is all my salvation. You remember those you love. Your memory is my eternal salvation. If you remember me, if you think on me, you will accomplish your thoughts (Ps. 33:11; Jer. 29:11). If you remember me, then I will be eternally happy, because I will know that I am yours and you are mine (Isa. 43:1). You will save me from death. You will not remember my sins. You will bring me to yourself.

- The Psalmist prayed this, “*Do not remember against me former iniquities. Let thy tender mercies speedily go before us (prevent)*” (Ps. 79:8). My case is desperate. I am a great sinner. I face eternal separation from God in judgment. Therefore, O Lord, send your mercy before me in judgment. Remove my sins. Give me a righteous standing. And do it for your name’s sake (Ps. 79:9; 25:11)!
- Listen to the words of this Psalm. “*Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation*” (Ps. 106:4-5). The thief prayed according to the prophecy in the Psalms. “Remember me, O LORD, with the favor that you have for your elect, chosen people. Visit me with your salvation! Save me from my sins and from the justice I deserve! Let me see your

goodness to your people. Cause me to be glad and glory in your salvation with them (Ps. 106:4-5)!

- Lord, remember the sacrifice of your Son, how you provided Him and laid on Him the iniquities of your people. Remember how you poured out your justice on Him. Remember that you received His obedience and sufferings and death for the full remission of their sins (Heb. 10:14-18; Matt. 26:28)!
- And remember your word to sinners, that we are to look only to Him as all of our salvation, because you only consider Him when you receive us for His sake.
- Lord, remember me with your saving grace when you think of Christ! This is what God tells sinners to do. “*Put me in remembrance*” (Isa. 43:25-26). Put me in remembrance of the blood of Christ that made remission for all of the sins of all of His people (Heb. 10:14-18)!
- Though a woman may forget the son of her own womb that she nursed at her bosom, the LORD will not forget His people (Isa. 49:15)!
- If the Lord Jesus Christ remembers me, He will bring me to Himself. I will be with Him in paradise. All my desire is to see His face, to be with Him, to know the smile of His acceptance.
- The prayer of this sinner to Christ was put in his heart by the Spirit of God, because that prayer expresses the eternal desire of the Lord Jesus Christ to save His people, and to

have them as His own. It is a request for the most intimate communion a man can know: the communion of a sinner, naked and empty, guilty before God, yet in a look, finding all in His Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ! And yet, there is a much greater desire on Christ's part to save and have His own!

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ

In this man, we see the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ! What a mercy that He would save a wretch like me! What grace, that He would give Himself and make intercession for His enemies! What love, that He would find satisfaction in saving sinners for Himself! What a delightful, endearing thought to know that Christ "*died, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God*" (1 Pet. 3:18), and to bring us to Himself. This is His assurance and promise to every sinner so looking to Him in utter dependence! May you and I, by God's amazing grace, so look to Christ even now!