

Preached on 3/3/24@GBC

"A Tale Of TWO THIEVES"

Lk.23:32-43

When most read, teach, or preach on this story concerning these **TWO THIEVES**, they always make it out like the **MAIN REASON THIS STORY WAS RECORDED** is to teach us that it is **NEVER TOO LATE** for a sinner to come to Jesus. They use this story to play on people's emotions, encouraging them to make a religious profession **before it is too late**. They teach it like this thief (who was dying as he lived, A THIEF) had some sort of life changing experience right in the final moments of his life and **DECIDED** "to accept Jesus as his personal Lord and Savior". They even make their case with verses like this one: "*(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: **behold, now** [is] **the accepted time; behold, now** [is] **the day of salvation.**)*"(II Cor.6:2) The thing is, **this verse** isn't talking about what the sinner is to do in order to obtain salvation before it is too late. This verse Paul wrote is speaking about our Lord whom God "*succoured*" (**literally, helped or supported**) as He accomplished "*the day of salvation*". **That is why we read Isa.49 in the "Call To Worship"**. **DON'T MISUNDERSTAND THE POINT I AM TRYING TO MAKE:** I am forever grateful to our merciful and gracious God that it is **NEVER TOO LATE** in life for **ANY OF GOD'S ELECT** to be brought to true faith and true repentance – "*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, **that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.***"(Jn.6:37-39) This wonderful story **IS NOT** about this thief **COMING TO JESUS!** This story is a story of the sovereign grace and mercy of the God sent Messiah in **COMING FOR** and **actually saving** His people from their sins. Christ had told His apostles and us – "*I am the good shepherd, and know my [sheep], and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. **And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: **them also I MUST BRING, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, [and] one shepherd.*****"(Jn.10:14-16) With that as a backdrop, let's see what we can learn from our Lord's interaction with this **THIEF!**

The **FIRST THING** we must consider is **THEIR CONDITION OR STATE** when "*the Lamb Of God*" came into **THEIR** presence. **Look at Vs.32** – "*And there were also **two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.***" The word translated "*malefactors*" means 'base, wrong, wicked, troublesome, injurious, pernicious, destructive'. Whatever crimes these "*two other, **MALFACTORS***" had committed, **BOTH OF THEM** received the same just penalty of death. We aren't given any history of their former lives, or even a recording of the immediate crime they had been convicted of that resulted in this death penalty. Whatever their crime was, these two men were **GUILTY!** They were getting a just penalty for their crime. Most in religion will admit that men like these are actually getting what they deserve, without even thinking about the reality of their own condition before the true and living God. All they consider is that they have never committed such heinous crimes, therefore they aren't the same as these people. The Scriptures are clear – "*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.*"; "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*"(Rom.3:11,12,23) Even

though these thieves faced the penalty of **PHYSICAL DEATH** for their crimes, both these men, **JUST LIKE ALL MEN**, deserve the penalty of **ETERNAL DEATH**, seeing **ALL HAVE SINNED** – “*The wages of sin [is] **DEATH**.*” The issue isn’t just about whatever crime or sin we commit! The issue is that all men by nature do not possess, cannot produce, and are **IGNORANT OF the ONLY RIGHTEOUSNESS** found in the **PERSON** and **WORK** of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here’s the **SCRIPTURAL DEFINITION OF LOST** – “*Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*”(Rom.10:1-3) Both of these thieves spiritual condition was exhibited by their attitude toward the Lord of glory – “*Then were there **two thieves crucified with him**, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, 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. Likewise also the chief priests mocking [him], with the scribes and elders, said, 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. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. **The THIEVES also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.***”(Matt.27:38-44) I don’t remember my Sunday School teacher, or the old men who preached to me, or even my parents relating this part of the story to me – **BOTH THIEVES** hated the Lord of glory and mocked him. These thieves attitude toward God is the **EXACT SAME ATTITUDE AS ALL MEN** by nature when it comes to spiritual matters. Neither of these “*thieves*” were “*seeking after God*”. Christ had stated it plainly: “*No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him.*”; “*And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.*”(Jn.6:44,65) We must always keep this in mind as we deal with lost men and women, including our friends and our families. All of them, just like **THESE THIEVES**, by nature hate the one true God – “*And you [hath he quickened], **who were dead in trespasses and sins**; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*”(Eph.2:1-3) Both these thieves were spiritually dead while they were alive physically, just like all the sons and daughters of Adam.

The **SECOND THING** I’d bring to our attention is this: The **GREAT CHANGE** that occurred in one of the thieves – “*And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. **But the other answering rebuked him**, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? **And we indeed justly: for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss.** And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*” Moments before, this same thief was in league with this other rebel as they both “*cast the same in his teeth*”. Think back to what we read they were all saying in Matt.27 – “*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. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.*” Yet in an instant, this former hater of the true Christ, **one who was basically a blasphemer**, became a defender and follower of the One he formerly despised. Paul told the Corinthians – “*Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] **A NEW CREATURE**: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*”

(II Cor.5:17) Paul told the Ephesian believers: “*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised [us] up together, and made [us] sit together in heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus.*”(Eph.2:4-6) What we have on display in this “thief” is the MIRACLE of regeneration and conversion by the grace and mercy of our God. It is the same exact miracle that occurs in the life of every regenerated and converted elect sinner in God’s appointed time – “*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to [give] the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*”(II Cor.4:6) **Let me make this as clear as I can:** This thief, though “*born again*” was **STILL A THIEF.** We know that to be the case by his own words – “*Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss.*” This phrase that he used in rebuking the other thief is evidence God had performed a work of grace in his heart – “*Dost not thou fear God.*” According to what Scriptures tell us, with all men by nature there is “*no fear of God before their eyes*”, yet **THIS THIEF “fears” God.** **THIS IS SO IMPORTANT:** God promised that for all His elect, He would put His fear in their hearts – “*And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.*”(Jer.32:40) That true, godly fear or reverence for the one true God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the **fruit and effect** of a knowledge of sin forgiven – “*If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But [there is] forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.*”(Ps.130:3,4) We also know he was regenerated by God the Holy Spirit because he addressed Christ as “**LORD**” – “*And he said unto Jesus, LORD, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*” **Listen to Paul** – “*Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and [that] no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.*”(I Cor.12:3) If you’ve been born of God, you understand fully the radical change that has occurred in your life regarding sin, righteousness, and judgement in all things spiritual. It’s earth shaking, **ISN’T IT! We have so many Scriptural examples:** The Samaritan woman; the woman caught in the act of adultery; the Gadarene demoniac; Saul of Tarsus; the Philippian jailor. I think of it the way those unbelieving Jews spoke of it when Paul and Silas preached the Gospel in Thessolonica – “*And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.*”(Acts 17:6) **One more thing before we move on:** This thief recognized and saw something that **WORLD** could not see – **A KING** and a **KINGDOM** established – “*And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*”**ELABORATE**

Finally, let’s consider how this miracle was accomplished – “*And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*” We know from our Lord’s teachings that **NO SINNER** can, will, or does come to Him for salvation God’s way except they are “*drawn of God*”. We also know from the writings of the Apostles that in order for one to be “born of God”, they must **HEAR** the word of God – “*How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*”(Rom.10:14-17); “*Of his own will*

**BEGAT HE US WITH THE WORD OF TRUTH**, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”(James 1:18); “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, [see that ye] love one another with a pure heart fervently: **Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.**”(I Pet.1:22,23); “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, **but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.** Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”(Rom.6:17,18) Think of who it was that **HUNG** between these two thieves! Think of the **WORD** spoken by Him who is the living **ETERNAL WORD** of God that liveth and abideth forever as He hung between them on the cross. **Christ’s first saying** on the cross concerning **FORGIVENESS** was heard by both these men – “**And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then SAID Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.**” In the case of **ONE THIEF**, it fell on deaf, dead ears. But to the one the Lord was pleased to give ears to hear, they were words of **ETERNAL LIFE**. We see here the literal fulfillment of what Christ had declared concerning His accomplished death – “**And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all [men] unto me.**”(Jn.12:32) Christ spoke to Nicodemus of the necessity of His death for the regeneration and conversion of His elect people – “**And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.**”(Jn.3:14) The phrase “**if I be lifted up**” and the phrase “**be lifted up**” are the same Greek word meaning ‘to raise to the very summit of opulence and prosperity’. To the world it looked like the end of what they considered a blasphemous and heretical ideology. But to **THAT THIEF**, and to all God’s elect in every generation, those who have been given eyes to see, ears to hear, and the mind, will, and understanding to perceive Christ’s Person and His work, this was the fulfillment in time of God’s promise before time – “**And all things [are] of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.**”(II Cor.5:18,19) To the world, this man died justly as a thief. But **THIS THIEF** was one of Christ’s **SHEEP**, one who Christ laid down His life for, and because of that accomplished work, **THIS THIEF** is promised by His Lord: “**Today thou shalt be with me in paradise.**” This **THIEF** was now a **GODLY MAN**, guaranteed eternal life by virtue of His oneness with Christ in the eyes of God’s law and justice. John’s words apply to him as much as they do to us in this present, evil world – “**Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son [to be] the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.**”(I Jn.4:13-17)

This wonderful story gives me great comfort in this world, particularly as it concerns those who I love in this world that are presently in unbelief. As long as they are breathing, the **TALE OF THIS THIEF** gives me hope. May the Lord give us grace to rest in the **POWER** of Him who came here to “**save His people from their sins.**”

