

Seven Other Sayings from the Cross

Luke 23:32-43

You have probably heard of the seven saying of Jesus Christ from the cross: 1. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34); 2. “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43 – to the repentant criminal); 3. “Woman, behold your son! ... [Disciple], behold your mother!” (John 19:27f – to His mother and disciple John); 4. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46 / Mark 15:34); 5. “I thirst!” (John 19:28); 6. “It is finished!” (John 19:30); 7. “Father, ‘Into Your hands I commit My spirit’” (Luke 23:46).

We here will consider seven other sayings from the cross. But these will be from the repentant criminal who was crucified with Jesus. His first six sayings were directed to the unrepentant criminal. His seventh and last saying was directed to his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

1. Words of revilement and blasphemy. There were a number of these. They were said by both criminals at the beginning of the crucifixion. Matthew records the blasphemous words Christ’s enemies said against Him (27:38-43), and then adds “Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing” (v.44; cp. Mark 15:32).

They who reviled and blasphemed Christ did not know that they were fulfilling a prophecy about them written a thousand years earlier. Jesus had said in Psalm 22:6-8: “6 But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. 7 All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, 8 ‘He trusted in Jehovah, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!’” (see Matthew 27:43).

This criminal was one of those revilers against Jesus Christ.

And you and I have reviled Jesus Christ! We reviled Christ if we disrespected Him like those who did so on Mount Calvary. We reviled Christ if we took His name in vain, even with a minced oath (e.g., “Gee whiz”, “Cheese and rice”, “Chrissakes”). We reviled Christ if we denied His deity. We reviled Christ if we represented His death with an idol such as a crucifix or a cross worn as jewelry. We reviled Christ if we denied that He will save all for whom He died. We reviled Christ if we claimed to fulfill God’s law – “for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Galatians 2:21). We reviled Christ if we claimed believers may lose their salvation and afterward be saved again – “since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:6). And we reviled Christ when we refused to believe His gospel and trust in Him.

I hope you are no longer one of those wicked people reviling and blaspheming the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2. “Do you not even fear God?” (v.40a). Consider this saying in its context (vv.39f): “39 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’ 40 But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God.’”

Something marvelous had happened to the criminal we now consider. He had been converted! He had been changed from one who reviled Christ to one who feared God in a holy manner.

What is it to “fear God”? Our English word *fear* here translates the Greek verb *phobeō*, whence English *phobia*, which is the dread of something. You have heard of *arachnophobia*, the dread of *spiders*. Here we have *deophobia*, the dread of *God*.

But we must here distinguish between two different fears or dreads of God – for one of these is *bad*, but the other is *good*.

The *bad* fear of God is *terror* fear. This is the dread of facing God as the Judge, and being in terror of His power and righteous retribution. Paul the apostle speaks of this fear when he says, “Knowing, therefore, the terror [Greek *phobos*] of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Corinthians 5:11). If you are unprepared to meet God, you will be in terror as you stand before Him.

The *good* fear of God is *reverential* fear. This is the dread of displeasing Him. This is the meaning of this word when we read “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all” – all that God requires of us (Ecclesiastes 12:13). This reverential fear banishes the terror of facing God, for they who experience it are told “you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’” (Romans 8:15).

What did this criminal mean when he said to the other, “Do you not even fear God?” It is as though he said, “You will meet God very shortly, and yet you are rejecting and reviling and blaspheming His Son – your only hope of a Savior! Do you not dread the thought of meeting Him on such terms?”

I ask the same question to you who are yet unrepentant.

3. “*You are under the same condemnation as Jesus*” (v.40b paraphrased). It is as though he said, “You and Jesus were condemned alike as criminals, and now are undergoing the same punishment. Have you no humanity? Must you insult a fellow-sufferer to the delight of His enemies?” Truly “There is no honor among thieves.”

But a gospel truth is here also expressed. Both Jesus and the blaspheming criminal were under condemnation from God for their sins. This blasphemer was under God’s condemnation for his *own* sins of *commission*. But Jesus was under God’s condemnation for the sins of *others* through *imputation*. All the sins of all God’s people were charged to Jesus’ account when God made Him to be sin for them (2 Corinthians 5:21). This resulted in Jesus confessing the sins of God’s people as “*My iniquities*” (Psalm 40:12), and being “*numbered with the transgressors*” (Isaiah 53:12), and crying “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*” (Psalm 22:1 / Matthew 27:46). Among these whose sins Jesus bore was this repentant criminal and all other believers in Him. Are you one of them?

4. “*You and I are justly under condemnation*” (v.41a paraphrased). Both these men crucified with Jesus were justly condemned by the Roman government for being “*criminals*” (Luke 23:32). Many scholars identify them as accomplices of Barabbas, a “*notorious criminal*” (Matthew 27:16) who had led a gang of brigands in committing murder during a rebellion (Mark 15:7).

Criminals are notorious for denying their guilt. But not this one.

And they were – and all of us by nature are – justly under condemnation by God the Judge (Romans 3:23): “*for all have sinned*” “*And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world [through Christ and His gospel], and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*” (Jesus Christ in John 3:19). All of us are by nature condemned criminals before God, and therefore “*children of wrath*” (Ephesians 2:1-3).

5. “*We receive the due reward of our deeds*” (v.41b). It is as though he said, “The reward for our deeds is the penalty of death now being inflicted on us. Our crimes are so great that we deserve to die for them.”

And they – and all others in their natural state – deserve the penalty of death from God: “*For the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23) and “*The soul who sins shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). The death we deserve is “*the second death*”, everlasting punishment in Gehenna, “*the lake of fire*” (Revelation 20:14; 21:8).

6. “*But this Man has done nothing wrong*” (v.41c). He here refers to Jesus Christ, and declares His innocence. We are not told how He knew this. Perhaps he was among those who knew that Jesus had done nothing but good everywhere He went (Acts 10:37f). Perhaps he was aware that Pontius Pilate had at least thrice declared “*I find no fault in Him*” (John 18:38; 19:4, 6). Perhaps he had been favorably impressed by the holy manner in which Jesus conducted Himself during His agony. But undoubtedly he had been convinced by the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ’s innocence. Have you?

This criminal’s first words reviled Jesus Christ. His next five words evidenced his conversion and repentance. Now he in his final recorded words expresses his faith in Jesus Christ:

7. “*Lord, remember me when You come in Your kingdom*” (v.42). Our English translation has this believer speaking of Jesus coming “*into*” His kingdom, as though He was not already in it. (See Him already in it in Luke 11:20; 16:16; 17:20f.) But commentators generally agree that this believer pled to be remembered with mercy and grace by Christ when He returns at His second coming, when He will come in the glory of His kingdom (see Matthew 25:31).

Jesus answered with words that promised to this man more than he had asked (v.43): “*And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’*” It is as though Jesus said to him, “*You do not have to wait until the end of this age to be in My presence. You will join Me in heaven as soon as you die.*” This criminal was to experience the blessed truth that “*to be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 5:8).

Here is the only effectual deathbed confession in the Holy Scriptures. This one effectual deathbed confession means they are *possible*. But this being the only one means they are *very few*.

And Christ’s promise to this criminal applies to all of us who, like him, trust in Jesus Christ. Will you receive this promise?