

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us An Expository Study of the Gospel According to Luke Chapter 23- Luke 23:32-46 347- The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ- Part 3

May 14, 2017

Luke 23:32-46

32 Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him.

33 When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.

34 But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

35 And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One."

36 The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, 37 and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!"

38 Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS."

39 One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!"

40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

41 "And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"

43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour,

45 because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two.

46 And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last.

To the Glory of God

Now Dr. Luke, the highly trained and very educated medical doctor, only uses four words to describe the death of Jesus Christ. In **Luke 23:33**, he wrote:

... there they crucified Him ...

That's it! No mention of what Crucifixion did; no mention of how it affected Jesus' heart and body. No mention of any physical effects of Crucifixion at all other than He died. Just four words. And people throughout the ages have marveled at Luke's understatement of what has to be the single most amazing moment in history, the moment when human beings murdered God, especially seeing as how Luke was trained as a medical doctor and understood human anatomy.

But I think one glaring reason for this understatement was because Crucifixion was still ongoing at the time that Luke wrote this Gospel Record. In fact, there were at least 30,000 recorded crucifixions during the Roman occupation of Israel. So, to the Romans, the Crucifixion of Jesus was not a big deal at the time. It was just one of 30,000 public executions of people ranging from anarchists to thieves to murderers to political terrorism.

Now I don't think that we have to necessarily copy Luke here. I think we are free to try to understand all that happened to Jesus as He hung on the Cross, as long as we understand that, aside from the violence and brutality that went along with this Crucifixion, what God was doing with Jesus, in the judicial damning all of the sins of all of God's elect, is what ushered in the glorious Salvation of unworthy sinners by the Grace of God alone through Faith alone, and *not* by them carrying out religious activities or the keeping of Sacraments or in putting forth efforts to obtain some form of morality.

We have to understand, dear friends, that the Purpose and Reason behind all that God does, is so that He alone will be glorified. So, God does all that He does for His Own Glory. And so, nothing means more to God than that He is known and loved and valued and adored and

treasured and celebrated above all that has been made. And so, the Glory of God is the highest and best of all Goals. There is no more important, or more valuable, or more noble goal that anyone could have as to why they do something other than, the Glory of God.

And the very epitome of the Glory of God is the Glory of His Grace. So, what magnifies God the most, what gives God the highest degree of Glory, what exemplifies the Greatness and the Value of God the best is when His Grace is seen and marveled at.

And nothing displays God's Grace better than sinful rebels being so utterly transformed by what God alone does for them, at great Cost to Himself (the Death of His Son), so that they truly delight themselves in God. Nothing elevates God's Own intrinsic Value more than wicked transgressors finding the fullness of Joy in Him.

And that is what Salvation does. It so radically changes fallen humans that the Commandments of God are no longer burdensome to them. It so completely remakes the sons of Adam that they treasure Jesus Christ above all things, even their own lives. It so comprehensively re-creates fallen Man that he sees the exaltation of Jesus Christ to be his highest and best and most rewarding and most noble goal.

And more than 22 Chapters of Luke's Story of Salvation has brought us to this point here with these four little words:

... there they crucified Him ...

... and I pray I can do these four words justice. Now Dr. Luke begins this amazing Passage by reminding us that Jesus was not the only one who was being crucified that day. In verse 32, Luke says:

Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him.

Now Luke refers to these two men simply as "criminals". But, in **Matthew 27:38**, the Apostle Levi says:

At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left.

... and Mark says:

Mark 15:27

They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left.

... while John says:

John 19:18

There they crucified Him, and with Him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in between.

So, from this we know that these two men had also been scourged in the same manner as Jesus, and they, too, were compelled to carry their own crosses, or at least the cross piece, to the place where they would be crucified with Jesus.

Now as I told you earlier, we can't prove this, but it is very possible that these two men were accomplices of Bar-Abbas, the man who was freed in Jesus' stead. But, in any event, these two men were crucified on either side of Jesus, with Jesus being in the middle. Now look at *where* Dr. Luke says the Romans crucified Jesus:

Luke 23:33

When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.

... the Apostle John says:

John 19:17

They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.

John Mark wrote:

Mark 15:22

Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.

... while Levi said:

Matthew 27:33

And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull,

Now the name of this place originally came from the Aramaic word "Galguta", and was renamed by the Jews "Golgotha", which in Hebrew meant "the Place of the Skull". And when the New Testament Greek was originally translated into Latin by Jerome, late in the 4th Century, the Latin word for "Golgotha" was "Calvaria". And when the King James translators were working on a modern English translation of the Bible in the 17th Century, they simply "anglicized" the Latin word "Calvaria" instead of actually translating it. And, in **Luke 23:33**, in the King James, they used the word "Calvary" for the first time.

Now according to the Apostle John, Golgotha was located:

John 19:20b

... near the city ...

The writer of **Hebrews** said that Jesus was crucified:

Hebrews 13:12b

... outside the gate.

And **Matthew 27:39** and **Mark 15:29** indicate that this place was located where people who were passing by could see it. Now it was common for the Romans to find a hill or even a mountain to crucify on, as they wanted those whom they were subjugating to see what the enemies of Rome would receive.

So, based on all of that, it is possible that the original location of Golgotha was actually *not* where it has been traditionally thought to be. Golgotha is probably the area that was mentioned in **Jeremiah 31:39** as "Goath" when the prophet was describing the area around the city of Jerusalem.

Now there are many legends surrounding why Golgotha was called "The Place of the Skull". Some say that it was because of the many skulls from all the crucifixions that took place. Others say that Adam's skull was buried there. Still others say it was because the hill itself resembled a skull. But we can't verify any of these legends. But suffice it to say that by the time of Jesus' Crucifixion, Golgotha was known as the place where the occupying Romans would exercise capital

punishment against the very worst of criminals. And this is where our Lord was killed.

Now a lot happened as soon as Jesus reached Golgatha. It was, at this time, about 9:00 on Friday morning. And if Jesus had carried the *entire* Cross, the soldiers would have taken the Cross from Simon, who actually carried it for Jesus, and they would have put the Cross on the ground. Then they would have laid Jesus down on top of the Cross and begun the process of fixing His Arms and Legs to the Cross with rope and nails.

The Romans would have tied the Arms onto the Crosspiece and slightly bend the arms, and then sought to find the place near the base of the thumb or even the wrist, where the median nerve would go into the hand. They would then take metal stakes, that resembled long, slender spikes, and they would have nailed Jesus' Hands to the Crosspiece with the median nerve *under* the nail so that when Jesus' Body weight would rest on the nail, it would send excruciating pain through His Arms. And as the nails pierced His flesh, they would have pushed aside the rounded bones of the wrist aside so that none of Jesus' Bones would be shattered by the spike.

Now if the vertical pole was permanently fixed in the ground before He ever got there, several soldiers would take the cross piece, with Jesus nailed and tied to it, and hoist it up to fit onto the vertical pole by using long poles on each side. And once the cross piece was fitted down onto the vertical pole, they would have positioned Jesus' Feet and then tied Him to the vertical pole. And like they did with the Hands, they would have slightly bent the legs and then nailed Jesus' Feet together to the vertical pole. If the entire Cross was on the ground, the soldiers would tie and nail Jesus' Feet to the vertical pole *before* raising the entire Cross to slide into the hole.

Now after many crucifixions, the Romans knew that by bending the legs, they could magnify the pain of the condemned as he would push up on the single nail in the feet to exhale and then slide back down to hold his own body weight by the nails in the hands to inhale, when the pain became too much to bear.

So, at this point, Jesus, the Lamb of God is now Crucified. The only sinless man Who ever lived is now suspended between earth and Heaven, and His Death is only a few hours away.

Now while it is true that we know "how" God took all of our sins and placed them on Jesus, we don't exactly know "when". But we *do* know that all of our sins were credited to Jesus. So, it may be that God placed all of our sins on Jesus at the same time. It is also possible that the longer Jesus hung there, the more sins God heaped on Him. But we must also allow for the possibility that the Act of Imputation of all of the sins of all of God's elect began not on the Cross, but when Jesus was being beaten and scourged. This is what the Prophet Isaiah said about this:

Isaiah 53:3-6

3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.

6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

Now many people in the modern Church scoff at the notion of the "Doctrine of Original Sin". They say it is ridiculous and even unrighteous to assume that a Good and loving God would ruin all generations of people by tainting them with the stain of Adam's Sin. Now, as we have already studied, one of the most important times and decisive battles in Church History occurred late in the 4th and early in the fifth Century when a British monk by the name of Pelagius attacked the concept of Original Sin.

And the heresy that this man brought forth that taught Man is basically Good and has not been ruined by the Fall, was originally called "*Pelagianism*", and later this false teaching morphed into what we call today "*Secular Humanism*". Pelagianism taught that Adam was the only one affected by his sin, and that all babies after Adam are born "*tabula rosa*" or with a "clean tablet" or a "clean sheet", completely *free* from the stain of Original Sin. It is from the unbiblical concepts of Secular Humanism that we get statements like, "*He's a good man, even*

though he may have done some bad things”, or “Deep down, all men are basically Good.”

The Bible, however, teaches that deep down, all Mankind are basically “Evil”, because they have all been radically ruined by the Fall. The Bible goes on to teach that Original Sin is passed from one generation to the next through the seed of the father through a process called “Imputation”. So, the biblical Doctrine of Original Sin is broken down into two parts:

1. All children born after Adam have the very same fallen, “sin nature” that Adam had after the Fall. The effect of this Truth is that as soon as children reach an age where they are able to rebel and sin, they will. And so, all humans are born “fallen”. They are conceived in sin and shaped in iniquity in their mother’s womb. So, human beings are not sinners because they sin, they sin because they are already sinners in their nature.

2. All children conceived after Adam are personally guilty of the Sin of Adam. This is also called “The Federal Headship Doctrine”, where Adam was the “federal head” of the entire human race. And because we were in his loins, when he sinned, we sinned. It is this personal guilt that allows for people to die.

1 Corinthians 15:22

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

So, the imputation of Original Sin onto every human born after the Fall is the first occasion of the Doctrine of Imputation. Now many people think that the imputation of Original Sin onto the sons and daughters of Adam is patently “unfair”. They reason that each person should pay for *their own* sins, and not be considered guilty for the Sin of Adam. And so did Pelagius. Secular Humanism teaches that Adam should pay for his sins and we should pay for ours, because that is “fair”.

Now, aside from the fact that this is *exactly* the reasoning of the heretic, Pelagius, the people who complain so easily at this first example of Imputation are strangely quiet when we begin to examine the other two cases where the Doctrine of Imputation exists.

The second occurrence of "Imputation" occurs right here, with Jesus on the Cross, when God the Father took all of the sins of all of God's elect and placed them on Jesus through the process called "Imputation". So, in the first case of Imputation, we are credited with the Sin of Adam, and in this case, Jesus is credited with our sins.

Now, Jesus did not personally become sinful when this happened. No, the imputation of our sins on Jesus was, in a legal sense, or a spiritual sense, not in a real sense. So, in a *real* sense, Jesus remained perfectly sinless on the Cross. But, in a *legal* or a *spiritual* sense, Jesus became pure sin because God credited Jesus with our sins.

So, in reality- Jesus remained perfectly sinless, but legally or spiritually Jesus "became" sin on our behalf. And the Apostle Paul verified this second imputation by saying,

2 Corinthians 5:21

He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The third occurrence of Imputation comes immediately after we repent, believe the Gospel, and put our faith and trust in Jesus *personally* and in His finished Work for Forgiveness. At that very moment, God takes the spotless Righteousness that Jesus earned while living on this earth for 33-1/2 years and never sinning, and God *imputes* or *credits* that Righteousness to us.

Now God doesn't do this third Act of Imputation as a result of us partaking of the Sacraments, as some teach, but He "credits" the Righteousness of Jesus to us *by the agency of faith alone*. So, we "believe", and it is that belief, it is our faith that is accounted to us as Righteousness. Here is what the Apostle Paul said about that in **Romans 4:1-5:**

1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?

2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

3 For what does the Scripture say? "*ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.*"

4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.

5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

So, at the very moment we trust and believe in Jesus for Forgiveness, we are “declared” to be Righteous by none other than God the Father. And it is this Righteousness that makes us to be fit for all the glories of Heaven because, as far as God is concerned, we are now just as Righteous as God Himself is Righteous, even though, on a personal or a real level, we are still sinners.

And the Reformers of the 16th Century had a phrase in Latin that they used to illustrate that born again and justified sinners are made Righteous by Faith alone and *not* through the Sacraments, and that phrase is “Sola Fide”.

So, in a *real* sense, we are still sinful, frail, and weak humans. But, in a *legal* or *spiritual* sense, this third Act of Imputation makes us the very Righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. So, as saved sinners, we actually hold a “dual status” with God. We are “personally sinful”, but we are, also, at the same time, “legally Righteous” because of this Imputation. And the phrase that the Reformers used to denote that *dual status* was:

Simil Ustes et Peccator- Simultaneously Just (Righteous) and Sinful

Now we have to realize that God taking all of our sins and “imputing” or “crediting” them on Jesus, and God “imputing” the very spotless Righteousness of Jesus onto us at the moment of Justification, is not any more “fair” than God imputing the Original Sin of Adam onto successive generations. So, if God is wrong to credit us with Adam’s nature and guilt, then God would be equally wrong to credit Jesus with all of our sins and to credit us with Jesus’ Righteousness.

And that would mean we are doomed and without any hope at all of going to Heaven at all. So, be careful when judging the correctness of a Biblical Truth by how “fair” it appears to be on a human level.

So, even though the Romans carried out about 30,000 crucifixions during their domination of the land of Israel, this Crucifixion was unique. Because the Crucifixion of Jesus by the Romans was not what

it appeared to be. To them, Jesus hanging on the Cross was just another condemned man being executed. But this Crucifixion was actually the fulfillment of God's Original Plan, that He had before He ever made the world, to magnify the Glory of His Grace by saving unworthy sinners by what He alone did for them.

The Crucifixion of Jesus was *not* simply the execution of a condemned Jew by the Romans. The Crucifixion was not merely the result of a kangaroo court. This was not the result of trumped up charges by a sinful and hypocritical religious body. This was not the result of a weak and vacillating Roman Governor.

This Crucifixion was God the Father judging and damning all of the sins of all of God's elect. This Crucifixion was God pouring out the full Fury of His Wrath against those sins as they were put on Jesus. The Crucifixion of Jesus on this particular Friday was the culmination of hundreds of Old Testament Prophecies. This Crucifixion was the sovereign adjudication of the Righteousness of God that suffered insult because of our sins. This Crucifixion was the Act of Divine Justice against God's Own Son so that God's Mercy could flow to unworthy rebels. This Crucifixion was God the Son taking the place of every single one of God's elect and assuming the Role of propitiation, appeased the Wrath of God against all of their sins.

So, we must understand that the Crucifixion of Jesus was not providing people with an "offer" of Salvation if they would "choose" to take God up on His Offer, as so many teach. No, this was the premediated Sacrifice of a spotless Lamb that would forever *secure* the Salvation of all of those chosen by God for Salvation.

The Crucifixion of Jesus on that Spring day just outside Jerusalem brought to an end the sacrifice of millions of animals. From this moment on, whoever offers an animal as a sacrifice to God commits an abomination. This is the Act that sealed the end of the First Covenant. Jesus nailed to a tree, screaming in agony, forever ended the need for a Levitical Priesthood. It transformed an inferior and temporary Covenant, that was based in types and shadows and symbols, and that had an earthly Sanctuary, into an infinitely superior and everlasting Covenant based in Spirit and Truth, and that has a heavenly Sanctuary.

This Crucifixion was the display of God's Righteousness. This Crucifixion was the exaltation of Grace. This bloody and violent and

terrible Crucifixion was the highest and the best and the most vivid manifestation of the Love of God that the world has ever seen.

And, at the very same time, the Crucifixion of Jesus is the single most evil sin that human beings have ever committed since the Garden. And so, the Crucifixion is both the highest expression of the Sovereignty of God, while displaying the lowest expression of the wickedness of Man. And that is why we stand silent before it. It is why we put our hands over our mouths. It is why all foolishness leaves and why we are broken before it.

We must understand that the Jews did not kill Jesus. We must believe that the Romans did not kill Jesus. We must understand that God killed Jesus. Jesus Himself said in **John 10:17-18**:

17 "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.

18 "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

So, on this Cross on this day, God slays the Best of Heaven. God kills the express Image of Himself. God takes the Life of the Darling of the Trinity.

Now immediately on being fixed to the Cross, indescribable pain shot through Jesus' Body. Excruciating agony ripped through his Arms and Feet up to His Brain. And there is no doubt in my mind that Jesus groaned in pain as He hung there.

Remember, Jesus has been awake since Thursday morning. And He has endured many hours of interrogation and beatings by many different people. His Innocence has been attacked, His Character maligned, His sinlessness cast aside. He has been lied about and falsely accused. He has been slapped around and spit on. He has been beaten by none other than Pilate himself. And Jesus has been scourged to within an inch of His Life.

In absolute humiliation, Jesus has been stripped naked and made to carry His Own Cross. And as He stumbles through the streets of the City that David once called "The Habitation of Peace", the crowds, who once called His Name, laugh at Him and throw rocks and food at Him.

The people that Jesus fed and healed and delivered from demons, now mock Him, their faces lined with hate and disgust.

Some who honestly thought that Jesus was the military leader they were looking for, that would once for all rid them of their Roman tormentors, now were ashamed to see the Man Whom they held in such high esteem beaten and bloody and defeated. 600 years earlier, Isaiah told us they would do this when he said:

Isaiah 53:3

He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

As the disciples look at their Messiah hanging on the Cross, so helpless, so weak, so defeated, the main emotion they had was embarrassment, shame. Here was the Man they had left everything for, beaten and at the mercy of the despised Romans, hanging on a Cross, just hours away from death. They had to be an unbelievably confused and afraid.

Jesus is now struggling to breathe. He is constantly pushing up on the single nail that pierced His Feet in order to exhale. And as the pain becomes too unbearable, He sinks back down with His full Body weight supported by His Arms. But then the searing anguish from the nails against the median nerve caused Jesus to repeat the process. Over and over pushing up and then sagging back down. Each time, His weakened Body has a harder time just to breathe. And there is now no end to the pain. No relief but death.

It was during this time that unbelievable verbal abuse and insult was thrown at Jesus. The Apostle Levi wrote:

Matthew 27:39-44

39 And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads
40 and saying, "You who *are going to* destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking *Him* and saying,

42 "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him.

43 "HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE Him now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

44 The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

John Mark wrote:

Mark 15:29-32

29 Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ha! You who *are going to* destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days,

30 save Yourself, and come down from the cross!"

31 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself.

32 "Let *this* Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!" Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him.

... and Dr. Luke said:

Luke 23:35-37

35 And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One."

36 The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine,

37 and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!"

Now the Apostle John paid a lot of attention to the fact that the soldiers who were at the foot of the Cross fulfilled a thousand year-old Prophecy from King David, in **Psalm 22:18**, as they began to gamble for Jesus' garments when he wrote:

John 19:23-25a

23 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier and *also* the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece.

24 So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, *to decide* whose it shall be"; *this was* to fulfill the Scripture: "***THEY DIVIDED MY OUTER GARMENTS AMONG THEM, AND FOR MY CLOTHING THEY CAST LOTS.***"

25 Therefore the soldiers did these things...

Now Dr. Luke tells us that it was during all this verbal abuse, as Jesus hung there, with the soldiers casting lots for His clothes to take as souvenirs, that Jesus makes His first Statement while on the Cross, when He said:

Luke 23:34b

... Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing...

So, Jesus' response to attacks against His Character and those who were at that moment killing Him was to pray for their Forgiveness. So, even at His weakest moment, Jesus never lost His Compassion, and He kept His primary Mission in focus that He spoke back in **Luke 19:10**:

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Now in verses 39-43, the good doctor gave us a very important narrative that went on between the two robbers and Jesus as they were being crucified. And I really think that this narrative should be in a sermon all by itself; it is that important. But the narrative says:

39 One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!"

40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

41 "And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"

43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

Now I have covered the issue of Paradise versus Heaven back when we were in Chapter 16, so I won't get into all the details here. But suffice it to say that there was a difference in how the dead were handled by God *before* the Resurrection and how they are handled now. Before Jesus rose from the dead, those who died went into a place called Sheol. And Sheol was divided between those who were saved and those who were not. Those who died before Jesus rose and were saved went into a place called "Abraham's Bosom", while the others went into a place called "Hades". And the Bible says there as a wide gulf between Abraham's Bosom and Hades where those who were lost could actually see those who were saved sitting at the table with Abraham, while they themselves were cast out.

So, when Jesus says here that this man would be in Paradise before the end of the day, He is promising this man that his sins have been forgiven and that he will be in Abraham's Bosom before the end of the day.

So, just what is this "Paradise"? Well, besides right here in **Luke 23**, the word "Paradise" is only found in two other places in the New Testament. The first one is **2 Corinthians 12:3-4** where the Apostle Paul says:

3 And I know how such a man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows —

4 was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

So, right off jump street, we know that Paradise is the heavenly abode of God where there are found things prepared by God for those who love Him, which are utterly indescribable.

The second place the word "Paradise" is found is in **The Revelation 2:7** where Jesus Himself says to the Church at Ephesus:

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.

... and if we look at the end of **The Book of the Revelation (22:2)**, we find that the "tree of life" is in the heavenly City of God.

So, from this we know that whoever goes to Paradise will be in God's Presence forever and will have access to the Tree of Life. So, this very good.

But it is very important that we understand that going to Paradise is not the best thing that could happen to this robber. The most important thing that could happen to this robber is that he is able to be with Jesus. Luke didn't simply record that Jesus said that this man would be in Paradise, but that Jesus told this man,

... today you shall be with Me in Paradise.

And from this amazing account, we know several things:

- ✓ **Salvation is a Sovereign Act of God.** The first robber was *never* convicted of his sin. So, even at the point of death, he never "woke up" to his deadly condition before God. The notion that many say that, *"If a person can sink low enough, he will see the Light"*, is simply not true. Unless God the Holy Spirit sovereignly opens the eyes of a sinful human and sovereignly grants him the "gift of repentance" he will never be convicted, he will never repent, and he will never be saved, no matter how low in this life he goes.
- ✓ **The second robber is not sucked in by the other fellow's railing.** And if we are to follow his example, we will have to stand our ground and not be sucked in by the people all around us who say, *"If your God is so great and loving, then why were 20 kids shot in Atlanta?" "Why sixteen miners buried in a cave?" "Why a village slaughtered in El Salvador?" "Why doesn't your Jesus come down off His perch and do something about all this injustice?"* The first thing the repentant thief does is *not* get deceived by the false accusations of the other robber.
- ✓ **The chosen robber was blessed with the Fear of the Lord.** He asked the one who was railing out against Jesus, **"Do you not even fear God ...?"** This tells us that God was real to him. God was his Creator, and he knew that a pot has no right to rail out against the Potter. While this man was dying on a cross in excruciating

agony, he was graced with the understanding that it is fitting that creatures bow in submission before their Creator and subject all their life to His Wisdom.

- ✓ **The chosen robber was gifted with Repentance.** He admitted that he had done wrong: "**we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds**". He had no desire to save face any more; he had no more will to assert himself. He was laid open before the God he feared and there was no way to hide his guilt. I know people who, right now, are in serious trouble. But instead of laying down their self-righteous defenses, they are devising every means to finagle and distort their position so they can appear to be innocent and cool. True repentance gives that up.
- ✓ **He understood that his punishment was Just.** Not only did he admit to wrong and guilt, he accepted his punishment as deserved; "**we indeed are suffering justly**". And this is the real test of humility before God. Many will mouth the confession of sin, "*God be merciful to us miserable sinners,*" but when they don't get what they want, when some trouble comes, they get angry at Him. And this anger reveals that they do not really feel undeserving before God. They still feel, deep down, that they have some rights before God. There are not many people like Job, who, when he lost everything, said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked shall I return; the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." But this penitent thief did become like Job in the last minutes of his life, he took his suffering without complaint, and feared God.
- ✓ **He acknowledged Jesus' Righteousness:** "**This Man had done nothing wrong.**" It didn't make any difference to the first thief if Jesus was right or wrong. If he could drive the get-away car, that's all that mattered. But it matters a lot to Jesus if we think his life was good or bad. Jesus does not want to drive a get-away car; he wants to be followed because we admire Him. We must say with the thief: "**This Man has done *nothing* wrong.**" *This Man only does what is good. This Man only speaks the truth. This Man is worthy of our faith and allegiance and imitation.*
- ✓ **He acknowledges that Jesus is a King.** "**remember me when You come in Your kingdom!**" So, even though Jesus is beaten and bloodied, and is dying right along with both of them, this robber

knew that Jesus has the mark of a King. For those who have eyes to see, He has a Power here on the Cross, a Power of Love that makes Him King over all his tormentors. He is not only Good, He is powerful, and one day He *will* vindicate His great Name, and every knee will bow and confess that Jesus is Lord, to the Glory of God, the Father.

And so, the penitent robber fears God, admits wrong, accepts justice, acknowledges the goodness and power of Jesus. And now he *pleads* for Divine Help:

"Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom."

Now keep in mind that *both robbers* wanted to be delivered from death. *Both* wanted to be rescued from their crucifixion. But only one wanted to be saved from sin. So, the one robber says:

"Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!"

... while the other one said:

"Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom."

So, from this we know that there is an infinite qualitative difference between *one* kind of "*Save me!*" and the *other* kind of "*Save me!*"

I ask you all this morning: What motive does Jesus give us to follow in the steps of the penitent robber? There is a fearful silence that Jesus gave toward the railing thief. There is not a single word recorded that Jesus ever gave him. There may have been a final pitying glance. But, no Forgiveness. No Promise. And no hope.

But to the penitent Jesus says:

... today you shall be with Me in Paradise.

And this was almost too good to be true. There would not even be a delay. Today the Spirit of Jesus and the renewed spirit of this robber

who had spent his entire life in wicked sin would be in union in Paradise. The Promise would be without delay.

But, in all this, the one thing that Jesus chose to mention to the repentant robber on the cross (if you can only say one thing, what do you say?):

... today you shall be with Me in Paradise.

... and this is what Salvation truly is. Lost people can read their Bibles and go to Church and sing in the choir and even preach the Gospel. Lost people can want to go to heaven and to have a better life, and to be delivered from sickness and poverty and terrible things. But only saved people can be with Jesus in Paradise. And that is why the writer of the song said:

And when I come to die
And when I come to die
And when I come to die
Give me Jesus
Give me Jesus
Give me Jesus
You can have all this world
You can have all this world
You can have all this world
Give me Jesus

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.