

JESUS, THE MASTER SOUL-WINNER

(Part Eleven – Christ’s Dealing with the Penitent Thief)

TEXT: Luke 23:34-43

INTRODUCTION: Jesus is hanging on a Roman cross, having been delivered up by Pilate to the bloodthirsty Jews. The Jewish rulers along with the rabble are taunting Him by saying, *“He saved others; let him save himself”* (v. 35). Little did they understand that it was only by Christ’s refusal to save Himself that He was able to save others! This is beautifully and clearly demonstrated by His reaching out to the thief hanging by His side.

The story of the repentant thief – found only in Luke’s gospel – is classic. Not only does it highlight the grace and mercy of God in granting “deathbed repentance,” but it brings into bold relief what are the “bare essentials” of salvation. These are the same crucial elements that we must insist upon in our witnessing to the lost.

OUTLINE: What are the “non-negotiables” of salvation found in this story?

I. The Centrality of FAITH

A. Faith in the Person of Christ

1. As perfect Man (*“this man hath done nothing amiss”*)
2. As Savior (*“Jesus, remember me...”*)
3. As King (*“your kingdom”*)

B. Faith apart from works (hands and feet nailed)

C. Faith born of fear (*“Dost not thou fear God”*)

II. The Crisis of CONVERSION

A. The cause of the thief’s change (v. 34)

B. The evidence of his change (vv. 40, 41)

III. The Certainty of CONFESSION

A. A confession of sin

B. A confession of faith

1. In Christ as “Lord”
2. In Christ as King

C. A confession in the dark

IV. The Certification by JESUS CHRIST

“Today shalt thou be with me in paradise”

A. Assurance of full reconciliation (*“with me”*)

B. Guarantee of immediate bliss (*“Today...in paradise”*)

CONCLUSION: This poor condemned sinner was the first soul that Jesus brought to Paradise from the world He had just redeemed! Truly, *“the first shall be last, and the last first.”* Christ refused to save Himself that He might save others.

Let us never forget that only one of the two thieves repented and was saved on that fateful day. The other “malefactor” perished in his sin and rejection of Christ. A keen sense of excruciating pain and the knowledge of approaching death are not enough to drive a soul to Christ. The grace of God must melt the heart and convince the will.

“One thief was saved that no sinner might **despair**, but only one, that no sinner might **presume**.”

J.C. Ryle