

LESSONS ON PREDESTINATION #59
"The Battle of the Cross" (Part Thirteen)
(Scriptures from NKJV)

Luke 23:39-43:

Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

John 19:25-27:

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.

INTRODUCTION: We resume today where we left off in our last lesson. Jesus is now on the cross, and the battle of the ages is now being fought. Jesus, the innocent, humble Servant of God, is warring against His great foe, the Devil. It is a warfare between two opposing principles, namely the principle of humility and servanthood vs. the principle of pride and dominion. The first principle seeks to save others through the giving away of one's life, while the other seeks to save oneself by promoting one's self-interest above the interest of others.

Satan is shooting his fiery darts or arrows into the heart of Christ's committed obedience to the mission upon which He was sent to secure the salvation of a people given to Him by the Father. His strategy is two-fold. On one hand, it is to get Jesus to reject His mission and save Himself, and on the other hand, if the first effort fails, then to inflict death upon Christ in such a way as to bring down the curse of God upon Him by dying on a tree. Satan does not care which of these efforts succeeds, in that either will enable him to claim the victory and dethrone God by making a display of God's impotence. This would enable Satan to show that he is greater than God, thereby enabling him to assume the throne of the universe and establish His own kingdom of self-centered pride and dominion.

We have covered: (1) Christ's arrival at Golgotha, (2) His refusal to take the painkilling drug, (3) His crucifixion between two robbers, (4) His first cry from the cross, **"Father forgive them,"** (5) His garments divided among the soldiers, and (6) His mockery by His own kindred. We are now ready to watch as the battle continues.

**B. JESUS ON THE CROSS - Matthew 27:32-56; Mark 15:21-41; Luke 23:32-49;
John 19:17-37.**

4. Jesus utters His second cry from the cross, "**Today you will be with Me in Paradise.**"

While all four Gospels record the fact of Jesus dying between two robbers or thieves, only Luke records the account of the conversion of one of them. How low was Jesus willing to go in the redemption of sinners? In His birth, He is mixed in with the lowly beasts of the earth, and in His death, He is identified with the lowest scum of the earth.

The two robbers, criminals, thieves, however you may desire to refer to them as being, both initially joined in with the crowd in mocking Jesus. In Matthew 27:44 we read, "**Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing.**" Neither of them saw anything about Christ which was appealing. Both were "**dead in trespasses and sins.**" There was neither a natural ability residing in either of them, nor was there a restored ability through what is called "prevenient grace" residing in either. How then do we account for the conversion of one of them? Who or what made him to differ from the other thief? Arthur Pink gives us the answer.

His conversion occurred at a time when to outward appearance Christ had lost all power to save either Himself or others. This thief had marched along with the Savior through the streets of Jerusalem and had seen Him sink beneath the weight of the cross! It is highly probably that as one who followed the occupation of a thief and robber this was the first day he had ever set eyes on the Lord Jesus, and now that he did see Him it was under every circumstance of weakness and disgrace. His enemies were triumphing over Him. His friends had mostly forsaken Him. Public opinion was unanimously against Him. His very crucifixion was regarded as utterly inconsistent with His Messiahship. His lowly condition was a stumbling-block in the Jews from the very first, and the circumstances of His death must have intensified it, especially to one who had never seen Him except in this condition. Even those who had believed on Him were made to doubt by His crucifixion. There was not one in the crowd who stood there with out-stretched finger and cried, "**Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!**" And yet, notwithstanding these obstacles and difficulties in the way of his faith, the thief apprehended the Saviorhood and Lordship of Christ. How can we possibly account for such faith and such spiritual understanding in one circumstanced as he was? How can we explain the fact that this dying thief took a suffering, bleeding, crucified man for his God! It cannot be accounted for apart from *Divine* intervention and supernatural operation. His faith in Christ was a *miracle of Grace!* (Pink, *The Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross*, pp. 28-29).

There are those who disagree with this assessment and say this thief was of a more noble and worthy character than the other thief. But in so doing, they mar the glory of his

conversion and rob God of His sovereign grace. It is God's grace which works in the heart (nature) of the sinner producing the repentance and faith which God requires. Repentance and faith are the twins formed in the womb of regeneration. They do not originate in the nature of man as the free-will system contends. What was true in the salvation of the criminal, is true of all those whom God does His work of salvation.

Just how the transformation begins and continues until conversion occurs is seen in this manner:

First, he came to fear God and His judgment. In a moment of time, he sharply rebuked the other thief by saying, **"Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?"** It is characteristic of the unregenerate to have no fear of God. In Romans 3:18 we read, **"There is no fear of God before their eyes."** This is universally true. Then we read in Proverbs 1:7, **"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."** This holy fear is produced by the power of the Holy Spirit. Convicted sinners cry out like the publican (tax collector) in Luke 18:13, **"God, be merciful to me a sinner."** He was not asking to be delivered from material poverty, poor self esteem, or society's injustices, but from God's wrath, justice, and His judgment. No one should be told to pray this prayer until it is evident they have a fear of God and are deserving of punishment in Hell.

Second, the next thing occurring in the transforming of a sinner into a saint is a sense and confession of one's sinfulness. He said to the other thief, **"We indeed (suffer) justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds."** He admits that he is a hell deserving sinner who has nothing to offer God in payment for his sin. He can only bow before the Lord and beg for forgiveness for his sins. Until a person is willing to confess he is a helpless sinner, he is not a candidate for God's forgiveness. Repentance and confession of one's sins precedes the promise of God's forgiveness as we have already seen in the previous lesson.

Third, the final evidence of a transformed heart was seen in the robber's faith in Jesus Christ. He moves onward from an assessment of his sinful condition, to an assessment of the Savior's sinless character. He says in verse 41, **"This Man has done nothing wrong."** He then prays to Jesus, **"Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."** (v. 42). He knew that no one enters God's kingdom who does not ask for forgiveness. He asks for forgiveness because he has heard Jesus pray for the forgiveness of sinners, and he believed that Jesus was both willing and able to forgive sin.

Fourth, the repentant robber believed in life after death, and that Jesus was going to

rise from the dead. **"Remember me when You come into Your kingdom."** Jesus would continue to live after He died in the body. The Apostle Paul would express this universal truth in these words in Romans 10:9-12. **"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him."**

Christ has deflected another one of Satan's arrows. Satan had tried to get Him to forget His saving mission which He was sent to do, by getting Christ to focus upon His own sufferings. Instead, He saves one of His sheep while they are both on their crosses.

5. Jesus utters His third cry from the cross, **"Woman, behold your son."** Then He said to the disciple, **"Behold your mother."** John 19:26, 27.

Jesus' third cry from the cross was spoken in the presence of four women and one man. Although there is some dispute of the number of women, the preponderance of the evidence points to four. They are:

a. Mary the mother of Jesus. She is evidently a widow by now. The Scriptures do not tell us what happened to Joseph. The best answer is that he is now dead. This would have had to occur sometime between the time when Jesus was twelve years old at the temple, and the beginning of Jesus' ministry at age thirty. As Mary watched her Son die, the words of Simeon would come to her understanding when he said to her at the time of Christ's birth, **"And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, 'Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'" (Luke 2:33-35).** No greater physical pain could be inflicted upon her than the emotional pain she feels as she watches her Son die.

b. Mary's sister. Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:40 suggest that she was Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, namely James and John. She appears elsewhere in the New Testament in Mark 16:1 as one of the women who bought spices to anoint the body of Jesus. She would also appear in Matthew 20:20, 21 where she asked Jesus to grant her sons positions of honor in His kingdom. Some hold that she was called Mary, the wife of Clopas, but parents would not name two of their daughters by the same

name of Mary.

c. Mary, the wife of Clopas (Cleophas = KJV). She was known as "the other Mary" who kept watch at Jesus' tomb with Mary Magdalene (Matthew 27:61), and was one of the women who went to the tomb on the resurrection morning. (Cf. Matthew 28:1). She tried to persuade the apostles that Christ had risen. (Luke 24:10). She was the mother of the apostle James, who is called James the less in Mark 15:40.

d. Mary Magdalene. Her name suggests that she was from the village of Magdala, located on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee between Capernaum and Tiberius. Luke 8:2 describes her as one **"out of whom had come seven demons."** She was one of the prominent figures in the accounts of Christ's resurrection (Matthew 27:61; 28:1; Mark 16:9; Luke 24:10; John 20:1-18).

e. John, **"the disciple whom Jesus loved"** (John 19:26). John was the only man with the group that was gathered at the foot of the cross. He would never refer to himself by his common name, but as the one whom Jesus loved. This is not to be understood as the only one whom Jesus loved, but is an expression of wonder, how Jesus could love a sinner such as himself.

What thoughts must have run through Mary's mind when Jesus said, **"Woman, behold your Son."** Jesus does not address her as His mother, but as the woman. Much speculation has been made why He did so. I find none of them satisfying to me. I will register mine. Mary is in the line of the seed of the woman mentioned in Genesis 3:15. Christ is the Seed who is now inflicting the fatal wound upon the head of the serpent, destroying both him and his kingdom. Jesus is saying, "Look carefully at what you are seeing and your understanding will become clear as to what is now taking place. Do you recall the angel's message to you explaining the nature of your giving birth while you were yet a virgin? Do you recall the event at the temple when I was twelve years of age? Do you remember when I said, **"I must be about my Father's business?"** Look at Me now! I am about my Father's business!

When Jesus said to John, **"Behold your mother,"** He was careful to assign to John the responsibility of loving and caring for her as if she was his own mother. This he did as John records, **"from that hour that disciple took her to his own home."**

D.A. Carson notes that,

It is wonderful to remember that even as He hung dying on a Roman cross, suffering as the Lamb of God, He took thought of and made provision for His mother. Some have found it surprising that Jesus' brothers did not take over

this responsibility. But quite apart from the fact that they were at this time quite unsympathetic to their older brother (7:5), they may not have been in Jerusalem; their home was in Capernaum. (Carson, *Commentary on John*, pp. 616-617, Eerdmans).

NOTE: I would further add that later after Christ's resurrection, His brothers became believers. (Acts 1:14; I Corinthians 15:7).

We must remember that Jesus was not only **"made of a woman, He was made under the law."** If He yet sins while on the cross, His sacrificial death loses its value. He is still under the fifth commandment to **"Honor thy father and thy mother."** Here we see Satan's temptation. If he can fill Jesus' mind to so focus on His sufferings and neglect providing for His mother's welfare, then He becomes a sinner and loses the battle which He came to fight. Wars are won when the military leader or leaders find a weakness in the enemy's lines, and send their forces to that spot. This is why the Holy Spirit chose to include this third cry from the cross. What might seem to be a small thing in reference to Christ's large work of substitution, is actually a necessary part of Christ's obedience to the law of God.

Arthur Pink makes this exceptional point when he says that "spiritual relationships must not ignore the responsibilities of nature." He then goes on to say:

The Lord Jesus was dying as the Saviour for sinners. He was engaged in the most momentous and the most stupendous undertaking that this earth ever has or ever will witness. He was on the point of offering satisfaction to the outraged justice of God. He was just about to do that work for which the world had been made, for which the human race had been created, for which all the ages had waited, and for which He, the eternal Word had become incarnate. Nevertheless, He does not overlook the responsibilities of natural ties; He fails not to make provision for her who, according to the flesh, was His mother.

There is a lesson here which many need to take to heart in these days. No duty, no work, however important it may be, can excuse us from discharging the obligations of nature, from caring for those who have fleshly claims upon us. They who go forth as missionaries to labor in heathen lands, and who leave their children behind, or who send them back to the homeland, to be cared for by strangers, are not following the steps of the Savior. Those women who spend most of their time at public meetings, even though they be religious meetings, or who go down into the slums to minister to the poor and needy, to the neglect of their own family at home, do but bring reproach upon the name and cause of Christ. Those men, even though they stand at the forefront of Christian work, who are so busy preaching and teaching that they have no time to discharge the obligations that they owe to their own wives and children, need to study and practice the principle exemplified here by Christ on the Cross. (Pink, *The Seven Sayings of the Saviour on the Cross*, pp. 59-60).

It is my ongoing purpose in this study to show that the Biblical doctrine of Predestination is not some cold stoical idea rooted in an impersonal fatalism. Instead it is a warm living concept rooted in the person of an all wise, all powerful God. It is found on nearly every page of the Bible, and is summed up in Paul's words in Ephesians 1:11, "***In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.***" Notice: it is not "some" things, but "all" things, and the cross is the center of it all!

We close this lesson with the words of Pink as he describes the marvelous perfections of Christ and His saving mission to redeem lost sinners and conquer the powers of darkness.

This is one of the greatest wonders of His Person—the blending of the most perfect human affection with His Divine Glory. The very Gospel which most of all shows Him to be God, is here careful to prove He was Man—the Word made flesh. Engaged as He was, in a Divine transaction, making atonement for all the sins of all His people, grappling with the powers of Darkness, yet amid it all, He has still the same human tenderness, which shows the perfection of the Man Jesus Christ.

This care for His mother in His dying hour was characteristic of all His conduct. Everything was natural and perfect. The unstudied simplicity about Him is most marked. There was nothing pompous or ostentatious. Many of His mightiest works were done on the highway, in the cottage, or among the little group of sufferers. Many of His words, which today are still unfathomable and exhaustless in their wealth of meaning, were uttered almost casually as He walked with a few friends. So it was at the Cross. He was performing the mightiest Work of all history, He was engaged in doing that, which in comparison, the creating of a world fades into utter insignificance, yet He forgets not to make provision for His mother—much as He might have done had they been together in the home at Nazareth. Rightly was it said of old, "His name shall be called *Wonderful*" (Isa. 9:6). Wonderful He was in all that He did. Wonderful He was in every relationship that He sustained. Wonderful He was in His Person, and wonderful He was in His Work. Wonderful was He in life, and wonderful was He in death. Let us wonder and adore. (Ibid. pp. 61-62).