

"The Criminal on the Cross" Luke 23:39-43

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, seeing you are under the same condemnation? ⁴¹ "And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." ⁴³ And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:39-43 NKJ)

It is a wonderful thing, how God saves people!

In Scripture, even in this same Gospel of Luke, we read of John the Baptist who had the Holy Spirit, even in the womb –

"For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. (Luke 1:15 NKJ)

And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1:41 NKJ)

Here we find a man who seems the opposite case, he comes to saving faith in Christ in the last moments of his life ...

I. The criminal (thief) on the cross is a trophy of God's grace –

⁴³ And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43 NKJ)

1. *This man had to be a dreadful person to suffer death on a cross, it was the worst punishment for the worst of criminals:*
 - A. *Roman citizens were never crucified*
 - B. *Lesser punishments were still dreadful –*

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Roman 7:24 NKJ)

A murderer was often punished by being tied inescapably to the murdered body... though this was horrible, it was considered something LESS THAN crucifixion as a punishment!

2. *As we all are trophies of God's grace -*

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, (Revelation 5:9 NKJ)

A. *We are trophies, He is worthy, because He was slain. Not one of us have earned or deserved Heaven, we do not earn redemption, with the thief it is extremely OBVIOUS, with all of us it is true, He is worthy of praise for redeeming us, for saving us, Christ is worthy because He was obedient, unto death –*

saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12 NKJ)

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:8 NKJ)

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11 NKJ)

B. *One of the great purposes of preaching the Gospel, more than saving men from Hell, more than saving men from sin, is God's and Christ's glory –
"The Gospel is witness unto the perfections of God's Son."
A.W. Pink*

3. *The salvation of great sinners shows how God's grace abounds,*

A. *David said - For Your name's sake, O LORD, Pardon my iniquity, for it *is* great. (Psalm 25:11 NKJ)*

B. *Paul, the chief of sinners, said –*

Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,²¹ so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 5:20-21 NKJ)

Wonderful grace of Jesus, Reaching the most defiled,
By its transforming power, Making him God's dear child,
Haldor Lillenas

4. *One of the ways we honor God / Christ as trophies is sharing our testimonies –*

A. *David -*

He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, *And* established my steps.³ He has put a new song in my mouth-- Praise to our God; Many will see *it* and fear, And will trust in the LORD. (Psalm 40:2-3 NKJ)

B. *The man born blind -*

... One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see." (John 9:25 NKJ)

C. *Saul the persecuting Pharisee, turned Paul the Apostle –*

"Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁰ "This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*.¹¹ "And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities.¹² "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,¹³ "at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.¹⁴ "And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, `Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? *It is* hard for you to kick against the goads.'

¹⁵ "So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. ¹⁷ I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, ¹⁸ to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.' ¹⁹ "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, (Acts 26:9-19 NKJ)

II. The criminal (thief) on the cross provides us a picture of the New Birth, the power of God's Spirit and true repentance –

1. Initially both robbers were reviling Christ -

⁴⁴ **Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing. (Matthew 27:44 NKJ)**

2. Sometime, while suffering next to Christ, hearing His words, converted by the Spirit this man changes his nasty tune –

⁴¹ **"And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.**

Note the change:

A. He rebuked the other criminal, calling for the fear of God -

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, seeing you are under the same condemnation?"**

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; ... (Psalm 11:10 NKJ)

This man's "fear" "wisdom" started in the nick of time!

B. While he rebuked the other man he still recognized his own sin and the justice of his own punishment –

⁴¹ "And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds ... (Luke 23:41 A NKJ)

C. He sees the righteousness of Christ - but this Man has done nothing wrong. (Luke 23:41 B NKJ)

D. He prays a humble prayer –

⁴² Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom. (Luke 23:42 NKJ)

E. His prayer is answered exceedingly abundantly beyond –

And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43 NKJ)

III. The other criminal (thief) is an example too: we should not count on repenting LATE to slip quickly past a fast closing pearly gate ...

For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:2 NKJ)

1. Wisdom is calling, crying -

Wisdom calls aloud outside; She raises her voice in the open squares. ²¹ She cries out in the chief concourses, At the openings of the gates in the city She speaks her words: ²² "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge. ²³ Turn at my rebuke; Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.

2. Be careful your right humble repentant response is as soon as it can be, as our sovereign, just God is under no obligation to be patient with sinners

²⁴ Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, ²⁵ Because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, ²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, ²⁷ When your terror

comes like a storm, And your destruction comes like a whirlwind,
When distress and anguish come upon you. ²⁸ "Then they will call on
me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they will
not find me. ²⁹ Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the
fear of the LORD, ³⁰ They would have none of my counsel *And*
despised my every rebuke. ³¹ Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their
own way, And be filled to the full with their own fancies. ³² For the
turning away of the simple will slay them, And the complacency of
fools will destroy them; ... (Proverbs 1:20-32 NKJ)

3. *God's wrath, even for a single act of disobedience, can strike in a moment -*

"Remember Lot's wife. (Luke 17:32 NKJ)

**But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.
(Genesis 19:26 NKJ)**

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