

Thorn-Crowned Devotions

Week Two

Blasphemy

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

Luke 23:39

Matthew and Mark report that Jesus was reproached by the robbers as he hung upon the cross. Luke gives us their taunt, for that is what it was, "*Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!*"

In the earliest manuscripts, the dig is subtle, but transparent. They were not concerned about Jesus, but themselves. He should not save himself so as to rule in righteousness, but to get them out of their current difficulty. Most later Greek manuscripts made their sarcasm more apparent by replacing the *not* with the word *if*.

As we think about Jesus hanging their on the cross, we should listen to the words of the robbers ... and identify with what they say. Isn't it true that our concern is about getting out of our own difficulties rather than the kingdom?

We think of Jesus as "Christ" as though that were his last name instead of as his claim to our loyalty. The word comes from a root which meant "to anoint." The ritual for identifying an official whom God had chosen for office. Only priests and later kings were anointed. To be against the Christ, the anointed one, was to be against God. To kill the Christ brought certain death (*2 Samuel 1:14-16*).

To identify Jesus as "*the Christ*" should elicit respect for his authority. It demands righteousness of ourselves. The appropriate response is loyalty, even to the point of self-sacrifice. To use the title in order to get what we want to continue in our selfish ways is blasphemy.

We Justly

40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

Luke 23:40–41

As sinners we have no claim upon the Christ or right to be spared from the consequences or the judgment for our sins. One of the robbers apparently came to his senses hanging there in agony. He ceased to taunt and plead, but instead issued a rebuke.

We don't know if these two robbers were partners in crime, but they knew each other well enough to know that they were common highwaymen concerned only with getting the material things they wanted in life no matter who they had to hurt to get it.

In Jesus, the one man recognized someone different, innocent. Being incarcerated is bad, but it has one benefit ... you eventually come to know who is truly guilty and who is truly innocent. Once in jail ministry, I was approached by a couple of the inmates on behalf of another man who was from another country. He was a kind and gentle soul, an artist, whom they recognized didn't belong. They even confessed to me that they were in for what they had done, but not this man. Could something be done to get him freed?

If one man could have been freed from the cross, it would have been Jesus. He didn't deserve to be there. The other men were dying justly for their crimes, not him.

He was worthy of respect, not reproaches.

Remember Me

And he said,

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Luke 23:42

We don't know exactly when this murderous robber quit hurling insults at Jesus and started defending him, but we do know that he became a believer.

Perhaps it was through close observation of *the way* the man suffered that convinced him. Maybe as he realized with horror the certainty of death and eternity, this Jew recognized his utter helplessness extended beyond his body to his very soul.

Once a person is convinced that Jesus is indeed God's choice to rule the world and establish the kingdom, that belief moves us to express our faith directly to the Savior, *“Jesus, remember me.”*

He had gone from wanting to be saved from his cross to wanting to be with the one who was dying on that cross.

He believed that Jesus was the Christ and would come into his kingdom. What God had declared would be fulfilled and nothing, not even death, could prevent it.

Belief brings an expression of faith, an appeal to the King. No longer to be saved from death, but into the kingdom with Jesus. When Christ's kingdom comes not only will people be blessed, but we will understand that the blessings we have are because we are *with* God.

Today

And he said to him,

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23:43

Sooner or later, we will all *long* to hear those words. For this man, *today* was that day. He was hanging on a cross next to Jesus slowly suffocating in the agonizing death that is crucifixion.

Previously, the primary thought on his brain was relief from this agony by being taken down and allowed to live. Now he is reconciled to his death as punishment for his crimes.

His thought now turns to the one who gives eternal life, the king who would one day come into his kingdom. It took a lot of faith for this man to look on Jesus dying next to him in the same agony and to see the king. From a *realistic* point of view both of them would be dead before nightfall if there was any mercy. He knew that Jesus was going through death and would rise again to rule and reign as the Messiah, the king of Israel.

It was an ancient belief that we can trace with confidence back to Abraham who when confronted with the command to sacrifice his son Isaac, reasoned that God would raise him from the dead. Now this wicked man, repentant for his sins, has turned to Jesus.

The reply, “... today you will be with me in paradise.” These are the words that will one day come true for everyone living who has put their trust in Christ. Unless the Lord returns soon, you may find yourself longing to hear this promise as you lie struggling with the pains of death.

They are true because he is true!

The Torn Veil

⁴⁴It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour,⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

Luke 23:44-45

On that day, about 3 o'clock in a dark, gloomy afternoon there came an earthquake that split the rocks and tore the massive curtain in the temple in two (*Matthew 27:51*).

What was this curtain? The temple consisted of two main parts, the larger room that the priest entered first was the holy place. At the back was the curtain which separated it from the holy of holies. Into that area, where the presence of a holy God was, the high priest alone was allowed to enter as long as he brought the proper sacrifice of blood. It was death for anyone else, or even the high priest to enter God's presence, at any time except this one day.

We are told that this curtain was about one foot thick. Luke records for us the fact that it was torn, without giving us any indication of the means or the explanation. One can read Matthew's account and reason that it was the earthquake which tore it. He also tells us that it tore from top to bottom, that is, without any human being involved.

It would have seemed obvious to both Luke and Mark that Matthew believed it was God who showed the way was now open into his holy presence. The blood of the perfect sacrifice had been shed. Now there was no penalty for anyone seeing or entering into the holiness of God.

This is what Jesus did on the cross. God testifying that the way is now open for all who will by faith enter in.