Grace Evangelical Free Church April 9, 2023

**Luke 23:32-43** The Dying Thief’s Prayer

The prayer prayed at, “**the place called The Skull**” (**Luke 23:33**) in the midst of a chaotic scene brought salvation and, arguably, a peace that passes all understanding to an underserving sinner who, moments later, would continue at the side of Jesus per His own assurance.

**Luke 23:42**: “**And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.**”

* **Grammatical Usage:** “**remember**” or in the Greek, “mimnéskó” meaning, “actively recall”; “**kingdom**” or “basileia” meaning, “sovereign realm”.
* **Literal Interpretation:** “**And he said, “Jesus, recall me when you come into your sovereign realm.**”
* **Contextual/Comparison:** God keeps His Word: God continually uses His Word. We are reminded at once of the fact that our Lord was not alone in His death, for on either side of Him was a transgressor (**Isaiah 53:12** and compare **Luke 23:32**). Our Lord’s purpose in coming into this world was to save sinners (**Matthew 1:21**; **Luke 19:10**; **1 Timothy 1:15**); and we see Him doing that even here, nailed to a tree in physical and spiritual agony. There are three reasons why this incident makes a special appeal to us:
1. It is the story of the salvation of a sinner. Whatever we appear to be on the outside, or whatever we like to think about ourselves, we are in fact sinners in the sight of God (**Romans 3:20; 23**; compare **Isaiah 53:6**; **64:6**). This dying robber was an evil man; he had broken the law of the land and had been condemned to death for that reason. We may therefore feel encouraged to know that salvation is available to sinners, just like ourselves.
2. It is the story of a man who was saved in the eleventh hour. He was saved within a matter of minutes before dying. Thank God, as long as there is life there is hope! As long as a man can repent he can be saved, and a man can be saved even while he is dying (**Isaiah 55:6-7**). The promise of **John 6:37** holds out until the moment of death.
3. It happened so simply, so quickly and so definitely. To begin with, this dying thief joined his friend in reviling Jesus (**Matthew 27:44**; **Mark 15:32**) – then suddenly a change took place; he recognized who Jesus was, turned to Him in repentance and in faith, and received salvation. How quickly the Lord can reveal Himself, and how quickly anyone can call upon Him for salvation!

Now notice three things about the prayer of the man, and three things about the answer of the Lord:

1. THE MAN’S PRAYER

We have this recorded in **v. 42**, and what does it tell us?

1. His prayer shows us that he believed in life after death. Quite obviously, as **v. 42** shows us, this man believed that Jesus had a kingdom; he did not believe in the theory of annihilation - that we go out like the snuff of a candle when we die! How foolish to think of such a thing! Life would not make sense if it only held out hope of just a few short years of struggling and suffering on earth.
2. His prayer shows us that he recognized and acknowledged Jesus Christ as Lord. It is a remarkable thing that this man acknowledged Jesus as Lord at the time of His death. How did this come about? By spiritual revelation (**1 Corinthians 12:3**). This irreligious man saw the glory of God in the face of Christ (**2 Corinthians 4:4-6**).
3. His prayer shows us that he believed Christ had the power to save him, so he asked Him to do it. He said, “**Lord, remember me…**” - that is all, because that is all that is necessary. How wonderfully simple the way of salvation is! How easy it is for anybody, at any time and in any place, to lift up his heart to the Lord and say, “**Jesus, remember me!**” (**Romans 10:13**).

But now notice how this man’s prayer for salvation was answered:

2. THE LORD’S ANSWER

Jesus said three very definite things to the dying thief:

(A)The first part of our Lord’s answer was, “**You will be…in paradise**”. It is important for us to notice that our Lord did not promise that the man would first of all be in purgatory. There are no grounds at all for believing in purgatory as an intermediate place between earth and Heaven, where the soul is purged. Purgatory is past tense - look up **Hebrews 1:3**. When we die we either go to Heaven or Hell, either to Paradise or to Perdition. Jesus gave this man the absolute assurance that he would go to Paradise. How wonderful to know this!

(B) The second part of our Lord’s answer was, “**You will be WITH ME in Paradise**”. One writer observes that this man had breakfast on earth with the Devil and supper in Heaven with the Lord. So great is the grace of God that a guilty sinner can come back into fellowship with the Lord Himself. It was not simply that Jesus promised this man that he would go to Paradise, but that He said that he would be with Him in Paradise: “**You will be with me in Paradise**.” What a wonderful salvation ours is! (**1 Thessalonians 4:17**).

(C) The third part of our Lord’s answer was, “**TODAY you will be with me in Paradise**” - so our Lord promised him immediate salvation (look up and compare **Luke 19:5** [“**today**”] and **Luke 19:9** [“**Today salvation has come**”]. Conversely, the same is true for the sinner, immediately having taken a last breath finding himself in the midst of Perdition: ever lasting damnation…utter destruction.

* **Conclusion**: Thank God, you can be saved now, at this very moment - not only today, but here and now! Today salvation has come to you: what is your answer?