

The Man Who Looked and Lived

Sunday, September 8th, 1991

Luke 23:39-43

And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise.

I am going to be speaking today, from the Book of Luke, Chapter 23. The title of this message is: "The Man Who Looked and Lived." I'd like for you to follow along in your Bible. My text will be taken from the Book of Luke, Chapter 23 verse 39. We'll be reading four verses.

There are few passages in the scripture in which men are more familiar with than these verses. I want you to listen as I read it again. I know you are familiar with it, you've heard it. I know you have heard it and read it many, many times. Listen once again!

"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

These verses have been a source of great comfort to many people. William Cowper wrote the great hymn, "There Is a Fountain." In the second verse, it goes like this:

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in His day,
There may I though vile as he
Wash all my sins away.

What great assurance this is that Jesus Christ came to save sinners like me and you and this thief. These scriptures have been a great comfort to many, many believers.

Also, these verses have been a source of contention. Instead of finding comfort here, others have chosen to doubt these scriptures, to debate them, and question them. Here they are our Lord crucified on a cross. On either side of Him was a thief. They both

began to blaspheme. That is what the scripture says, *“Both of them.”* One of them stopped cursing and blaspheming and he looked at the other thief and said, *“Don’t you fear God, seeing that you are in the same condemnation, and we indeed, justly.”* He meant that they were getting exactly what they deserved. This man had done nothing amiss. He said to Jesus, *“Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”* Our Lord said to him, *“Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.”*

Let me show you something that gives this incident such great importance and great significance. What is important is when this took place. It is very significant when this conversation took place. It took place during that hour in which all of the Old Testament promises, pictures of salvation, patterns and types of salvation were fulfilled. This is the hour concerning salvation.

This is fulfillment Abel’s lamb that was sacrificed; this is the Redeemer to which Abel looked. This is the Redeemer of which Abel spoke. This is the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. This is the hour; this is the Passover Lamb of which Moses wrote. This is the great atonement. Here is the *“Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. Here is the brazen serpent lifted up.”* This is the hour in which everything concerning Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on Calvary was fulfilled. It is in this hour that our Lord spoke to the thief and assured him of a place in that kingdom.

I’ll tell you something else about this hour; this is the hour in which our Lord spoke from the beginning of His ministry. The very first miracle that He performed was at Canaan of Galilee, when He made the water into wine. This was when His mother came to Him and said that they were out of wine. He said, *“Woman, what have I to do with thee; Mine hour is not yet come.”* Well, it has come now and this is the hour.

Again, the disciples were discouraging Him from going to Jerusalem. He told them He would go there to His death. They said, *“Well, don’t do it.”* He said, *“Shall I ask the Father to deliver Me from this hour? For this cause I came to this hour.”* This was the hour that He spoke to the thief. When He prayed in Gethsemane’s Garden and He lifted His eyes to heaven and said, *“Father, the hour is come, glorify Thy Son.”*

People want to argue about the thief on the cross. They fail to take into consideration when this conversation took place. Our Lord only spoke seven times from the cross (as far as we know). Many say that He quoted the whole 22nd Psalm; I do not know. There are only seven times recorded in the Bible that He spoke from the cross; there were only seven statements made from the cross.

The first word or saying that He spoke was when they nailed Him to the cross. He looked down upon the people and said, *“Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.”* Here in this saying is Christ the Mediator (many of these same people would later be converted at Pentecost). Here is our Lord praying for His own, even from the cross. That is significant. You have put a lot of confidence in that, haven’t you? Christ prayed, *“Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”*

Then, He saw from the cross, the woman who brought Him into the world. Her name was Mary. Over in another place was John, one of His disciples. Our Lord, our great provider, the one who cares for His own, said, *“I will never leave you; I will never forsake you.”* He said to Mary, *“Woman, behold thy Son, then to his disciple, behold thy mother.”* There is Christ the Provider. It is so significant. This is in His hour of suffering. This is in the hour in which He was accomplishing our redemption.

Then, He is our Substitute. When He spoke from the cross and cried out, *“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”* Here is our Lord baring our sins and our guilt and shame, separated from God. That is what hell is; it is separation from God. He cried, *“Why hast Thou forsaken Me?”* That is very important to us, is it not?

When He cried, *“I thirst,”* it was He who made the rivers and who could have called upon heaven and rain would have fallen upon that scene. Yet, He is a man who is limited. He is limiting Himself. He was born into this world, God in human flesh, but a man who thirsted. He was weary, *“A man of sorrows, a man of grief, and was a man who was tempted and tried in all points as we are.”* He demonstrated that from this cross. He said, *“I thirst.”* He was our Representative.

Being our Representative, He could not perform a miracle to relieve His distress. We can’t perform miracles to relieve our distress. *“Christ, in all points, was tested, tried, and tempted as we are, yet without sin.”* He never gave in. He never gave up. He said, *“I thirst.”* That is so significant. Here is Christ the man!

He cried, *“It is finished!”* All the Old Testament patterns are finished. All of the Old Testament types are finished. All of the promises and prophecies are finished. *“He has finished the work that God gave Him to do.”* That is a very significant statement from the cross. He said, *“It is finished!”*

He also said, *“Into Thy hands I commend My Spirit.”* When He gave up the ghost, the last word that He said was, *“Into Thy hands I commend my Spirit.”* The Father said; *“He raised Him from the dead, exalted Him, and seated Him at His right hand until His enemies become His footstool.”* What He is saying is that He was our Forerunner, who

was entered within the veil. He's our Intercessor who makes intercession for us. All of these statements from the cross are very significant.

Christ is our Mediator. Christ is our Provider. Christ is our Substitute. Christ is our Representative. Christ is our Redeemer and Christ is our Intercessor. In the midst of all this, He turns to a thief and says, "*Today, thou shalt be with me in paradise.*" This clearly shows for whom He is the Mediator, for whom He is the Provider, for whom He is the Substitute, Redeemer and Intercessor. This is the reason that the Saviour died; He died to redeem sinners.

He said, "*I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*". Paul would later write, "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief.*" What I am saying here is that when this took place, the thing that makes it most significant, lends great importance to it. This is in the hour that our Lord was suffering for sinners. He was dying as a Substitute, as our Redeemer. He demonstrates the very thing for which He suffered. He saves a sinner and takes them to glory with Him.

They hymn writer said:

Sinners, Jesus will receive!
Soundest word of grace to all
Who the heavenly pathway leave,
All who linger, all who fall.
Sing it o'er, and o'er again
Christ receiveth sinful men.

I ask you today, was there ever a person more helpless than this thief? Was there ever a person more hopeless than this thief? Was there ever a person more desperate than this thief? He was a wicked man. He was very wicked to be sentenced to such a cruel and awful death. Perhaps he was a thief or a murderer, I do not know. Even the Romans, noted for their cruelty, paganism, and heathenism wouldn't even suffer for this man to live. He was a dreadful, wicked and sinful man. He was also a dying man.

He was hanging on a cross. He could do nothing. He couldn't move anything but his eyes and his tongue. His grave awaited him. All hope was gone. If there was to be any hope, it was entirely outside of himself. Here is a sinner, helpless, hopeless, desperate, wicked and dying. What hope does he have?

I will tell you this, if you would bring him one of today's preachers or soul winners, they couldn't offer him any hope. He couldn't raise his hand. He couldn't walk an isle. He couldn't call a counselor. He couldn't be baptized or join the church. He couldn't pay a tithe or plant a seed. He couldn't do a good work. He was hopeless, helpless, desperate and dying. There is one thing that he could do and that is what he did do; he looked to Christ!

The thief was looking to Christ as a sinner. He stopped his blasphemy and he began to think, "This man is the Son of God. This man is coming into a kingdom. I'm a sinner. I'm wicked, depraved, hopeless and helpless. There is no hope for me. I am getting what I deserve." He said that to the other thief, "*Don't you fear God, seeing that we are in the same condemnation and we indeed justly?*" That is what David said in Psalm 51, "*If you condemn me, God, you are just.*" "You are righteous if you condemn me. We are getting what we deserve."

The thief confessed about the Lord Jesus, "*This man hath done nothing amiss.*" He turned to the Lord Jesus Christ and said, "Lord (King of Kings and Lord of Lords), you are not going to stay dead. You are coming into a kingdom; will you think on me? Would you remember me?" Our Lord said, "*Today, shalt thou be with Me in paradise.*"

That is what He said in Isaiah 45; He said, "*I am a just God and a Saviour; look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none else. Come unto Me, all ye that labor and our heavy laden and I will give you rest. If any man thirst, let him come to Me. In Christ dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; we are complete in Him.*" Look to Him. This is what this man did; he looked and he lived. This man looked and lived.

From these verses, I want to ask you six questions. This will be in the light of what we have read and what is recorded here. I want you to prayerfully and carefully consider these six questions. Here is a man, a thief, a sinner getting what he deserved and had no right to live. He was a wicked man but he turned to the Lord and said, "Lord, will you think on me when you come into your Kingdom of glory and power? Would you just think on me and remember me? Consider me and show mercy to me." Our Lord Jesus said, "*To day, shalt thou be in paradise.*"

Here are the six questions. In the light of this scripture, do I not have the right to say that this man was saved? Was he saved? I'm saying, do I not have the right to say that this man was redeemed, that this man was a child of God, and that this man is in glory? Do you believe that? I do believe it!

The Lord said, yes. He said, *“Today, shalt thou be with Me in paradise.”* Where is paradise? That is where Paul talks about being taken up into paradise, the third heaven as stated in Second Corinthians 12.

Of all the multitudes of people, redeemed throughout history, none of them ever received so glorious assurance of his salvation as did this thief. God never said to Moses, *“To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.”* He didn’t say that to Abraham. He never said that to Isaiah. You can go from Genesis to Revelation and tell me to whom the Lord Jesus Christ ever said, *“Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise?”* Yet, He said it to this thief. I am totally confident this man was saved. This man was redeemed. Now, remember that! This is the first question, was he not saved? Yes, decidedly, he knew God.

Secondly: From these verses, do I not have the right to say that this man was saved by grace and grace alone? I am talking about salvation without works. Was he saved totally and completely without works? He was never baptized. People put a lot of emphasis on baptism. This man was never baptized. He never took communion. I have heard that some are given wafers in wine and they are put on the tongue to say that they are actually giving salvation as a sacrament or a saving ordinance. This man never took communion. This man never belonged to a church. People are always talking about salvation being in a church. This man never belonged to a church.

This man never did a good deed. I hear people say, “Do the best that you can and you’ll go to heaven.” This man didn’t do the best that he could do; he did the worst that he could do. He did so badly that they nailed him to a cross. Someone said, “The outcast, cast this outcast out.” He was a thief. He never did anybody good; he stole from people. He was saved by grace, without works. He was saved totally, and completely by grace. This is a perfect example of what Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8 and 9; *“For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God. It is not of works lest any man should boast. It is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, (mercy, mercy) He hath saved us.”* Grace chose us, grace awakened us, grace redeemed us, grace called us, grace keeps us and grace will exalt us. Are you with me? Was this man saved? Well, you know he was.

How was he saved? He was saved by grace alone, plus nothing and minus nothing. He couldn’t work, he couldn’t walk, he couldn’t wash, he couldn’t witness, and he couldn’t wait. That’s a desperate situation!

All right, here is the third question: From the same verses, do I not have the right to say that the youngest, weakest faith, if it is in Christ alone, will save? How long was this man a believer? People talk about how long they have believed. The answer is not how

long that you have believed; it is in whom you believe. How long was this man a believer? How much did he know of theology and doctrine? How many of the great writers had he read? This man was a gutter-rat. This man was a thief. This man hung out in the dives and dens.

He didn't run around with church-folk. He knew that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. He did know that! He knew that he was a sinner. God taught him that. He knew Christ was not going to stay dead. He knew that Christ was going to reign in a kingdom. He knew that Christ Jesus had all the power and could if He would, do something for him. He begged for mercy. In other words, he knew who God was. He knew that this was the Son of God. He knew what he was and he knew what he needed. He needed the source of mercy and called upon Him.

There is no put-on here. There is no show. There is no religious charade going on here. This man was desperate. I told you that he was hopeless, helpless and desperate. I pray to God that we could get into that condition:

In my hands no price I bring
Simply to the cross of Christ I cling.
Could my tears forever flow?
Could my zeal no languor know?
These for sin could never atone
Christ must save, Christ alone.

We say it, but do you believe it? We better believe it. They said, "*Lord, we prophesied in your name.*" He will say, "*I never knew you.*" They said, "*We did many wonderful works.*" He'll say, "*I never knew you.*" They said, "*We cast out devils,*" He'll say, "*I never knew you.*" They won't be in glory but this man will.

You see; they sought it not by faith, but by works. He sought it one way; he sought it by mercy, grace and righteousness, one way. "*Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom!*"

If the thief had come down from the cross and lived another forty years, he would have grown in grace, he would have grown in faith and he would have grown in Christ. He would have done all these things. He would have prayed, worked and witnessed out of a love for Christ. He was saved, nonetheless, only looking to Christ. Is that clear? I'm not discounting works, but I am discounting works in this matter of salvation.

This is the fourth question: do I not have the right to say that our Lord is able to save any needy sinner who will look to Him and call upon Him for mercy and truth? Here is the proof. Was ever a man more hopeless, was ever a man more helpless, and was ever a man more desperate? If there is any doubt that Christ will receive a sinner, I'm talking about a bonified, genuine sinner, here is the proof. This man is a sinner! There is no pretension here. He is hopeless and he is helpless. He is going to hell. He lives in evil and he dies in evil, unless God does something for him.

"Christ delights to show mercy. He is plenteous in mercy." He delights to show grace. He said, *"I didn't come to call the righteous, the well have no need of a physician. I came to call sinners to repentance. Go and learn what that means."* I wish we could.

Come ye sinners poor and needy
Weak and wounded sick and sore,
Jesus ready stands to save you
Full of pity, love and power.

Oh, the pity for the sinner, Oh the grace for this wicked man. Oh, the mercy extended to the miserable. *"Lord remember me. Today you will be with me."*

Come ye needy, come and welcome
God's free bounty glorify,
Without money, without money
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.

Fifthly: From these verses; have I not the right to preach that all who repent, believe and call upon Christ, go straight to heaven when they die? I hear all the talk about purgatory, soul sleep and compartments. These are all means and methods and ways for religious hucksters to raise money. This is part of the world. All of this gingerbread that they tie on their religious organizations is to duke poor folks like you out of your money. That is all!

These folks can't help you or hinder you. It is Christ that saves, it is Christ that provides, and it is Christ that redeems. When a believer dies, he goes straight to glory. He doesn't go to purgatory for someone to pay him out or pray him out. He doesn't go to a compartment, Christ said, *"Today, you will be with Me in paradise."*

The apostle Paul said, *"To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."* As long as I am in the body I am absent from the Lord. *"When I am absent from the body, I'm present with the Lord."* That is so and that is paradise, the third heaven. That is

glory! Close your eyes here, and if you know Christ, open your eyes in glory, never to depart.

The last question: this man is saved, right? He's saved by grace. He has the youngest faith. He believed and he looked to Christ. He looked to Christ alone. He went straight to glory when he died.

Here is the sixth question: then, there must be just one way for you and I to be saved. There is just one gospel. There is one way of salvation. Christ said, "*He's the way the truth and the life.*" Isn't that right? Then, you and I are going to have to be saved just like this thief. That's right! We are going to have to come to Christ as a sinner and look to Him. We are to look nowhere else, to no one else, or to nothing else. There is no difference. "*All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" There is just one way to salvation. He says, "*I am the way the truth and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by Me.*" So, we'll be saved like he was.