

Today shalt Thou be with Me in Paradise

Luke 23: 39-43

Last week we began our study of the seven sayings of Jesus upon the cross with the first of those, a prayer of forgiveness offered to God the Father. This morning we have come to the second of those gracious and powerful sayings, with a promise to humanity.

We aren't sure of the exact time that transpired between these two statements, but I am sure the few hours must've seemed like days to those who were enduring the torments of the cross. Christ has suffered mockery and chastisement by the multitude and the soldiers. He was challenged to prove that He was who He claimed to be and come down from the cross, if He were able to do so. Supposed as a form of mockery, the soldiers placed a superscription over Him, written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, that declared, **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS**.

We have picked up there in the proceedings of the crucifixion. In this passage we discover a conversation between Jesus and the malefactors who were crucified with Him. These verses reveal a message of comfort and hope to all who look to Christ. I want to consider the **promises** revealed as we think on Jesus' second saying: **Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise**.

I. The Plea of a Sinner – Each of the malefactors spoke in this passage, but I am interested primarily in the one who sought forgiveness. Consider:

A. His Condition (33) – **And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.** He is described as a malefactor, literally “an evil doer.” He had been tried, declared guilty, and sentenced to death by crucifixion. He was literally in the grip of death as he hung upon the cross. There was no hope for pardon or leniency. He would die hanging upon the cross. He was guilty of his crimes and was receiving his due reward. (Illustrate how we too were guilty and condemned to a sentence of death, hopeless of pardon or reprieve within ourselves!)

B. His Confession (40-41a) – One of the malefactors railed on Jesus – **if thou be the Christ, save thyself and us.** The other malefactor realized that they were receiving what they deserved. Upon the cross he made a confession. **But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?** ^[41] **And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds.** He knew he was a sinner. He knew he deserved to die for the crimes he had committed. He knew that he had no hope within himself. He confessed his guilt before the Lord.

- There is a profound truth revealed in the words of this malefactor. We must come to the place that we realize we are sinful and undone before the Lord. We must admit that we are guilty and in need of salvation. We must confess our sins before a holy and just God. Many are aware of their need, but few are willing to confess their sins unto the Lord. Confession is essential to salvation. Simply knowing our need isn't enough; we must pour our hearts out to the Lord in honest confession.

C. His Petition (42) – [And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.](#)

The malefactor sought forgiveness. He sought reconciliation to God. He did not want to die in his sin and remain separated from the Lord. He begged Christ for mercy, so that he might be present with the Lord when He came into His kingdom.

- We too must seek the Lord for forgiveness and reconciliation. Apart from salvation, we have no hope of eternal life. Apart from the cleansing blood of Christ, men are condemned to eternal separation and torment in hell. [Rev. 20:12, 15 – And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. ^{\[15\]} And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.](#)

D. His Recognition (41b-42) – This malefactor recognized some divine attributes of Jesus, seeing Him for who He really was. He recognized:

1. The Lord's Purity (41) – [And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.](#) It is not confirmed whether this man was present during the trial of Jesus. We don't know how much he knew of Jesus until this point in his life, but something revealed to him this was no ordinary man. He was aware that Jesus was innocent of the charges brought against Him. He saw the Lord as One who was sinless, holy, and undefiled.

- This too is an essential element in salvation. All must come to the realization that Christ is holy and undefiled. God demanded that sin be atoned by the offering of a perfect sacrifice. Christ was the only One who was qualified. Had He not been pure and holy, He could not have offered Himself as the atonement for sin!

2. The Lord's Sovereignty (42) – [And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.](#) This malefactor recognized that Jesus was the Messiah and addressed Him as Lord. This refers to "*he to whom a person or thing belongs; one who has the power to decide; master.*" The malefactor recognized that his life literally lay in the Lord's hands. He saw Jesus as his Lord and Master. He was submitting himself to the lordship and authority of Christ.

- Salvation is impossible if one doesn't recognize the sovereignty of Christ. He purchased your redemption on the cross, through His precious blood, and He must be recognized as the Lord and Master of your life. Submission is essential to salvation!

3. The Lord's Ability (42) – Keep in mind, this man is dying the cruelest of deaths. He has been placed on a cross, lifted in the air, and is hopeless of any means of escape. Apart from a miracle, he will surely die a slow and painful death. He realized he could do nothing about his present situation, but he was confident in the Lord's ability to ensure his eternal condition. He trusted in Jesus' ability to provide eternal life beyond the grave. He wasn't seeking immediate restoration, but was content to be with Jesus when He returned to establish His kingdom.

- You may not realize it or want to embrace the idea, but Jesus is your only hope today. You are not hanging on a physical cross, but apart from Jesus you will face a slow and painful death for all eternity. Jesus is the only One who has the ability to pardon your sin and provide eternal life. Good works, baptism, or church membership can't do it, but Jesus can!

II. The Promise of the Savior (43) – *And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.* The malefactor had submitted to Christ as Lord, seeking salvation, and Jesus revealed a precious promise to him, as well as all who seek Him. Notice:

A. The Assurance – Jesus didn't hesitate or tell the man He would consider His request. He replied, *Verily I say unto thee.* This must have brought comfort to the malefactor. Verily is simply the word *amen*. It is "*firm*" in nature; carries the idea of "*faithful*," and literally means "*surely or truly*." Jesus was saying that his request had been granted and it surely would come to pass!

- The world makes many promises that it doesn't have the ability or the authority to keep. Jesus is the only real assurance we have. We are not promised tomorrow, but the saved are promised an eternal future with the Lord. The redeemed can rest in full assurance that all is well with their souls. Had He not loved us and desired to provide salvation for us, He would not have submitted to the death of the cross!

B. The Acceptance – *Verily I say unto thee.* This was no blanket statement or impersonal response. The Lord made a personal promise to one who had a particular need. Jesus didn't condemn or judge Him for the crimes he had committed. Because of his recognition and acceptance of Christ, our Lord accepted him based upon his faith.

- There is hope for all humanity in this simple statement. None are beyond the reach and compassion of Christ. None have lived so wickedly or gone beyond the Lord's ability to save. He will turn none away who come in faith, believing.

C. The Arrival – *Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.* Remember, the man requested to be remembered when the Lord came into His kingdom. That is yet to happen. Had the Lord granted that request, the malefactor would still be waiting. Jesus promised that he would be with Him in paradise that very day. There would be no purgatory or waiting period. He wouldn't have to go through a process to prove himself. His faith in Christ had ensured immediate results.

- The saved have the assurance of knowing that to be absent from this body is to be present with the Lord. We all live in a body of flesh that will perish and decay, but we have a soul that will live forever. When I draw my last breath in this life, I will immediately enter His presence!

D. The Association – Jesus also revealed another precious promise. As far as we know, this man had not met the Lord until that day. He was not a disciple; he had not walked with the Lord. In fact, he probably had never heard the Lord expound the word. That didn't matter to Jesus. This man was promised to have the glorious privilege of being with the Lord in paradise that very day!

- We all have our own ideas of what heaven will be like. Many songs speak of loved ones who have gone on, mansions on the hillside, the street of gold, and so forth. All of that will certainly be wonderful, but the real beauty and blessing of heaven will be the Lord's presence. We have never beheld him with our natural eye, but we will spend one eternal day with our Lord.

E. The Abundance – Jesus promised he would be with Him that very day in paradise. There is much debate and discussion concerning the abode referred to as paradise. Regardless of where or what it actually was, the point is this man would be with Christ, enjoying the presence and abundance of the Lord Himself. Wherever Christ made His abode, this malefactor was there to enjoy it also.

- The redeemed have the hope and promise of heaven. All who have ever trusted the Lord in salvation will enjoy the endless ages surrounded by the presence of the Lord in the splendor of His heaven. I stand amazed that the Lord would even come at all, much less die for our sin and prepare a place for us. We can't begin to imagine what waits on the other side!

Conclusion: This malefactor was on the verge of death, but he realized his need and found the Lord faithful to him even though he was undeserving. This passage reveals the passion of Christ. He came to die so we might live. Do you know Him as your personal Savior? Have you confessed your sin and accepted Him by faith? Eternity is a long time and you will spend it somewhere. You will be as one of the two malefactors in this passage. Which will it be? Now is the time of decision; don't put it off!