

Luke 23:39-43

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[0 : 00] Seeking God's help, let's turn now to the second reading, Luke's Gospel, on chapter 23, and we'll read together again from verse 39 to 43.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled in Solstaten, Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us. But the other criminal rebuked him.

Don't you fear God, he said? Since you are under the same sentence, we are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.

Then he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Jesus answered him, I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.

We've been looking together over this weekend at the seven saints of Jesus on the cross. And we have been focusing, in particular, on three words of affection that Jesus spoke.

[1 : 11] Last night, his words to his mother and to his beloved disciple. This morning, his words to his father in relation to the multitude who are putting him to death.

And this evening, we look together at these words abreast to the malefactor, abreast to this criminal, who is being put to death justly, according to his own testimony, because of what he has done.

And we have also at the table today, just referred briefly, to the two words of anguish that Jesus spoke on the cross.

Father, he couldn't even call him Father. My God, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And the words, I thirst. And then the words of accomplishment.

When he cried out, it is finished. And when addressing his father, he said into your hands, I commit my spirit. So we have been reflecting on the seven saints of the cross this weekend.

[2 : 25] And this evening, in what I trust will be a joint thanksgiving and evangelistic address, we will look together at these words spoken here to this individual at Calvary.

I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise. All of us ought to be thankful tonight that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost.

That spirit of thankfulness in relation to our own salvation is something that each and every one of us should be ready to express as we worship God together this evening.

And a spirit of thankfulness too as we think of others. And of his ability to save them, even as he has saved us. And at the same time, this message ought to speak to anyone here who does not yet know the salvation that is in Christ.

There's a word of warning. Because one of the men who hung there beside Christ on the cross showed no signs of repentance.

[3 : 41] Not even of remorse. The evidence would suggest that he rejected the Saviour, whilst the other received him. As Professor Finlison once said, there were three crosses on the hill of Calvary that day.

There was the cross of rejection. The one who continued to spend the salvation that could have been hers through Christ.

That was offered to him. Just as it must be offered to every man and woman in the world. The cross of rejection. There was the cross of reception.

As the criminal whom we're looking at this evening, embraces Jesus as Saviour and as Lord. And in between the cross of rejection and of reception, there is the cross of redemption.

where Jesus is there on behalf of all the elect of God, who from the beginning of time to the end of time, would come to know salvation through him.

[4 : 57] And so we might ask ourselves at the very outset of our meditation tonight, as to what we're doing with the Son of God, who loved the world so much, that he gave himself for the

salvation of each and every individual who will accept him.

and who will accept salvation on the basis of his finished work. And so I want to combine the element of thanksgiving, of praise, and the evangelistic element as we look together at these words for our time tonight.

And the first thing that I would like to highlight is something that I've been trying to highlight all weekend. the remarkable context in which these words are spoken.

Here we find the Son of God hanging on a cross. As someone said, God is in the most unlikely place in the universe, hanging on a cross between two thieves.

The scriptures tell us what he's doing there. The scriptures tell us why Jesus had to go to Calvary. The scriptures tell us that he was there to be numbered with the transgressors in order that the transgressors might have their sins forgiven and come to know God.

[6 : 35] And as we think of these three crosses, we can actually say quite literally that here he has been numbered with the transgressors. He has been regarded as someone who was worthy of this death.

This death that was reserved for those who were recognized as having brought a curse upon themselves. Cursed is every man that hangs on a tree.

And this is where we find Jesus. Not only here for the salvation of the condemned, but actually here with the condemned, identified himself with them to this extent that he's prepared to hang on a cross between two men who were themselves being justly condemned on account of their wrongdoing.

And here we find him in this place, still ready to receive sinners, still ready to reveal the grace of God to someone who most would have regarded as being quite beyond redemption.

And especially so because as you read the gospel accounts, you discover, not from Luke, but from the other records, that initially, this man, along with the other, ridiculed the Son of God.

[8 : 17] Luke tells us that one of the criminals who hung there held insults Adam. But the other gospels tell us clearly that to begin with, both of them were guilty of ridiculing, of reviling the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that makes what happens all the more remarkable. But someone who a few minutes before that was expressing scorn, was pouring contempt on Jesus, was reviling him, just as the other was reviling him, that such a one should come to experience God's grace.

How that should fill our hearts with thankfulness, that the gospel is one that is able to save to the uttermost those who will come to God through Jesus Christ.

how thankful we should be. May God this incident highlights for us the amazing nature of the grace of God.

So that this evening we can continue to pray for any who may be weighing heavily on our hearts who are at this moment just as those two men were at that moment, refusing to accept Christ as Saviour, rejecting him even as they were.

[9 : 58] What a wonderful encouragement this story ought to be to us to continue in prayer for people of that kind who may to now be a heavy burden on our hearts.

And what a challenge this message brings to each and every one of us this evening who might not yet know the Saviour as to where we stand in relation to Jesus Christ.

Are you tonight among those who like these two criminals are ridiculing the very concept of Jesus being the only name given under heaven among men by which you can be saved?

Are you tonight among those who are refusing to accept Jesus as your own Saviour and Lord?

Well, if you are, there's a word for you this evening from this story.

And it's this, that unless God's grace lays hold of you, you will remain as you are, as the criminal whom Luke highlights remained as he was, and you will be lost forever on account of your ongoing rejection of the overtures of God's grace in the gospel.

[11 : 29] But on the other hand, there is this great message, that you can take on board in relation to yourself. Another is that you are not yet beyond redemption.

You are still on mercy's ground. And God's grace is still as able to change you as it was to change this man of whom we're seeking in particular in our meditation tonight.

So we have this remarkable context in which we find the Lord Jesus Christ hanging on a cross between two feeds, numbered with the transgressors, and giving himself for the salvation of the transgressors.

and we have these two men who are initially rejecting and ridiculing the very concept that Jesus is the King of the Jews, that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus is able to save them at this time. But we see next that in Luke's account, Lord, although one of the criminals continued to pour scorn, although one of them continued to reject, the other criminal, verse 40, rebuked.

[13:00] Don't you fear God, he said, since you are under the same sentence. We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve, but this man has done nothing wrong.

There is evidence here of God's regenerative work taking place in the heart and in the life of this man.

First of all, he rebukes the other, and he rebukes them for continuing in the same sin that he himself had been dating of, only a few moments before.

So this shows that he's been given a change of mind and of heart in relation to sin. And that is surely at the very root of what repentance is all about.

Repentance involves a change of mind and of heart in relation to ourselves as sinners and in relation to God in Christ as Saviour.

[14:14] And we find here that all the elements that are central to the whole doctrine of repentance are found in what this man says.

He acknowledges his own guilt. He's persuaded of his own unworthiness. He's persuaded of his own sin and misery.

God's saving work is taking place in this man's life. He is convinced of his sin and misery. And he expresses that so eloquently in what he says.

We are punished justly for we are getting what all deeds deserve. He's recognizing that he is under the just condemnation of the law of the land.

And I believe he's also recognizing that he's under the just condemnation of God. And you know there is no greater darkness of soul that any man can be in than that.

[15:28] To be made aware, to be persuaded of your guilt before God and man. To be persuaded of the fact that you are indeed under sentence of death.

That you deserve to be condemned. That is something I believe that the natural man will not accept. It is something that the natural man just cannot grasp until God's grace begins to work and convinces him, convinces her of that solemn truth.

Because by nature we're all prone to rely on our own goodness, on our own righteousness. None of us will acknowledge before God or none that we are justly under sentence of death.

that we are justly condemned. That is something that we'll only really acknowledge and accept when we realize the truth of it and the reason why it is true.

God made us to live for him. God made us that we might glorify and enjoy him. And if we're not living for him, if we're living for ourselves rather than for him, we might never plumb the depths that these criminals plumped in terms of the awful crimes of which they were guilty.

[17:03] But we're guilty of a sin that is greater than any crime known to man. The sin of not accepting the Lordship of Christ. The sin of not living for God.

And when we come to realize the enormity of that sin, then we will acknowledge not only that we are under sentence of death, but justly so.

And we will come to realize that there is only one possible way of being delivered from that sentence of death. And I believe this criminal came to realize that for himself, even if he's hung there on the cross beside Jesus, he acknowledged that Jesus had done nothing wrong.

Now if that was all that he had acknowledged, then there might not have been much hope for him.

He acknowledged obviously that Jesus wasn't a criminal, as he was, and as the other man was.

He recognized at that level that Jesus was without fault. God, but I believe what he goes on to say next demonstrates that his awareness of who Jesus was went far deeper than that.

[18:24] And that expressed itself in the request that he made to Jesus. Jesus, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

He recognizes that this man who is dying on the cross beside him is Lord. He recognizes that he is saved. He recognizes that he has a kingdom that is spiritual and of which, to which he as yet does not belong, but a kingdom of which he would dearly love to be a citizen.

and so he asks Jesus, in a word, to receive him into his kingdom. He apprehends the mercy of God in Christ for himself and asks Jesus to make him one of God's people.

And that again is at the very heart of what is involved in becoming a Christian. In God effectually calling us from darkness to light and from death to light.

He not only convinces us of our sin and misery, he persuades and enabled us to embrace Jesus Christ as he is freely offered to us in the gospel.

[19 : 54] And this man's request made to Jesus revealed his readiness to embrace us as his own saviour, as his own Lord, as his own king, whose readiness to become a child of God.

What a wonderful example of God's grace at work we have in this man. What about you tonight? Have you come to the point, not only where you recognise that you're a sinner, but where by God's grace you're ready, need to ask Jesus to be your saviour, to ask Jesus to remember you when he comes into his kingdom.

How willing are you tonight to be a child of God, to have this man as Lord of your life? Are you among those who are still rejecting him?

or are you like this man among those who are now receiving him and asking him to receive you? Is your awareness tonight, as whose awareness was, that you need him to receive you as one of his own?

[21 : 19] Are you throwing yourself tonight on whose mercy and on whose grace, as this man clearly was? He doesn't turn to Jesus and say, Lord Jesus, you see the sin and misery that I've brought on myself, therefore look on me and save me from this immediate circumstance into which my sin has brought me.

That I change of tune, as far as this man is concerned now, because earlier on, along with the other one, he'd been saying, to Jesus.

Aren't you the Christ, save yourself and us? At that time, the only salvation that he and the other men were thinking of was immediate salvation from the cross.

But now, his desire to be saved goes far deeper. He's no longer anxious that the Lord would deliver him from the cross. But what he is anxious about is this, that the Lord would receive him into his kingdom.

Spiritual things now matter most as far as this man is concerned. What about you? There are so many things that we may wish to be delivered from as far as this world is concerned.

[22 : 46] But can we say tonight that by God's grace we have realized that greatest need we have is to be delivered spiritually. That the greatest need we have is that God in Christ would receive us into his own kingdom.

Are we tonight at the point where we recognize that there's nothing that we need more than this? That there is nothing that is more important as far as we are concerned than that he receives.

That he receives on the basis of Christ dying on our behalf on the cross. Now this man may have been forgiven for having wondered whether Jesus might have saved him.

But such a thought never enters his head once he realizes who Jesus is. Once he realizes that Jesus is king of the Jews that Jesus has a kingdom of which all who trust in him belong there is no longer any hesitancy on his part.

He simply asks the Lord to receive and how does the Lord respond? Jesus answered him I tell you the truth today you will be with me in paradise.

[24 : 21] Now our translation doesn't quite convey the push of the words that Jesus employs. The older translation verily verily I say unto you perhaps conveys it a little bit better.

Jesus emphasizes the truth of what he's saying so that this man need be in no doubt. Jesus is saying to him that he need be in no doubt whatsoever that that very day he would be with him in paradise.

Jesus is saying to him that right then at that very moment he was prepared to receive him into his kingdom.

But salvation was his that very day and he wants him to know it. And he wants us to know tonight that this is the day of salvation.

salvation. There are so many of us who might think of our need of being saved but who at the same time might think that maybe tomorrow or on some future occasion the Lord will receive us.

[25 : 40] And there may even be someone here who on the basis of the story that we're just glancing at tonight may be thinking that at the eleventh hour or even at a minute to midnight that you too will be saved.

But as we see so often all around us none of us can tell when our eleventh hour may have come. None of us can tell what's going to happen.

In a moment's time we've but a breath away from eternity. That's all that lies between us and meeting God.

Just a breath. God's word tells us that today now is the day of salvation. That we put salvation off at our peril.

And if tonight we hear his voice, God's word is telling us not to harden our heart. If we are even entertaining the notion that we can put salvation off to tomorrow, we are in effect hard in our hearts. [26 : 58] And we're saying not none. But Jesus is saying truly, truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

Paradise signifies the presence of God. truth. And although for many of us it may not literally be true, as it was for this man, that the day of our salvation becomes the day when we literally enter with him into paradise.

Christ, nonetheless it is spiritually true that when we come to know salvation through Christ, we too find ourselves as never before in God's presence.

We find ourselves enjoying fellowship with God, such as in the past we could never even have contemplated. We find ourselves coming to know God as in the past we could not have known us. in that sense we too can be with him in paradise today. We too can be with him enjoying God's presence in a new unsaving way, enjoying a relationship with God such as in the past we knew nothing about.

[28 : 18] This man was literally with Jesus in paradise that day. And there are some indeed, there are some, who like this man, are saved and brought to glory at one and the same time.

But for us tonight, whatever God's mind is with respect to calling us to glory, what he wants us to know through the gospel is that this is the day of grace, that this is the day of opportunity, that this is the day of salvation.

salvation, and he wants us to hear his voice tonight. As this man heard Jesus' voice on the cross, responding to our request, that he might be our saviour, and saying to us without any shadow of our doubt, truly, truly, I say to you, today, you will be with me in God's presence.

Do you want to come into God's presence? In a spiritual sense tonight, do you want to know God? Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father but by him. But the door into God's presence is open. And just as this man entered into paradise through Jesus, so you and I can enter into God's presence tonight in our spiritual experience.

[29 : 50] through Jesus Christ. And so as we bring our brief meditation to a close, let us all be thankful that this is the kind of saviour we have, that God is able to save to the uttermost those who come to him through Jesus.

And let's, if we're not in Christ tonight, be thankful that the offer of salvation is being extended to us on this day of salvation.

So that no matter who we are, he says come. No matter what we've done, he says come. And he tells us that now is the day and now is the hour.

As we draw to a close, let's again think of the three crosses. It's the cross of rejection.

There are many who hear the gospel, but who reject it. Are you represented by that cross here tonight?

[31 : 03] There is the cross of rejection. Maybe an unlikely individual as far as some were concerned, but just the kind of candidate that the gospel ought to be offered to.

An undeserving sinner. And yet the gospel is for him. All of us are undeserving, indeed all of us are hell-deserving sinners.

The gospel is for us. We have three crosses here. On one cross we have a man who's dying in his sin.

On another cross we have a man who by God's grace dies to his sin. Because in the middle we have a man who has died for our sins.

Where does that leave you tonight? This man was saved on a cross. He was also saved by the cross of his Lord Jesus Christ.

[32 : 14] None of us are on a cross tonight. But one was on a cross that we too might know his salvation. The hymn writer put it this and I finish with this.

Asking as I quoted whether or not you are able to identify with what he's saying. There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins.

And sinners plunged beneath that blood lose all their guilty stains. The dying faith rejoiced to see that fountain in his day.

And there have I, though they left he washed all my sins away. Dear dying lamb, thy precious blood shall never lose its power.

Till all the ransomed church of God be saved to sin no more. Ere since thy faith I saw the stream thy flame wounds supplied, redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till I die.

[33 : 25] Then in a nobler, sweeter song, I'll sing thy power to save, when this pure lifting, stammering tongue lies silence in the grave.

Lord, I believe thou hast repaid, unworthy though I be. For me a blood bought free reward, a golden heart for me, sprung and tuned for endless years, and formed by power divine, to sound in God the Father's ears, no other name but thine.

there is no other name given under heaven among men by which we must be saved. What a word of affection addressed to our most unlikely individual.

What a word of affection we have in the gospel addressed to us who are equally unlikely and unworthy but for whom tonight there is good news that he died so that we might not die.

May God bless his word to us tonight and forever. Amen. We close our service this evening by singing to God's praise from Psalm 79 in the Scottish Soccer.

[34 : 46] Psalm 79 and singing verses 9 to 11 to the tune Stuttgart. It's actually in the Psalm version page 106. The Psalm Psalm version is Psalm 79 on page 106 and it's verses 9 to 11 Help us Lord our God and Saviour for the glory of your name for your name's sake come and save us take away our sin and shame why should the surrounding nations say to us where is your God make the peoples know your vengeance for your servants earth poured blood may the groans of every prisoner come before your throne on high by your arm out stretched in power save all those condemned to die that's what the Lord did for the thief on the cross condemned to die yet he saved may all of us be able to say that he did the same for us for his glory sake psalm 79 9 to 11 on page 106 to the tune

Stuttgart Stuttgart and Cheney Why do the proud of the nations make you a greater call make the people know your vengeance for your strength and for

And now may grace, mercy and peace from Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God rest on and remain with each one of us tonight and forever.

Amen.