

Second Midweek Lenten Service

Luke 23: 32-43 [V, 43]

February 17, 2016

My Fellow Redeemed In Christ,

When Jesus Was Crucified There Was A Man On His Left And A Man On His Right. One Of These Criminals Insulted Jesus Just Like The Rest Of The Crowd That Was Standing By And Watching. He Was Only Concerned About Saving Himself From His Painful Fate. What A Contrast We Have With The Other Criminal. We Know Nothing About This Man Other Than He Was Executed By The Roman Government. Luke Simply Refers To Him As A Criminal. It Is Matthew And Mark Who Tell Us That He Was A Thief, A Bandit, A Highway Robber Who Used Violence To Steal From Other People. Clearly He Was A Not A Nice Man. And In Being Crucified... He Was Feeling The Harsh And Heavy Hand Of Roman Justice. But Through The Centuries Whenever And Wherever The Gospels Are Read...This Man Has Come To Symbolize Salvation By The Grace And Mercy Of God. This Man Shows That It's Never Too Late To Believe In Jesus...Not Even On The Day Of Your Death....As Jesus Says To This Man... **"Truly, I Say To You, Today You Will Be With Me In Paradise."**

I. These Words Of Jesus Make Sense Only In Response To That Criminal Who Had Said, **"Jesus, Remember Me When You Come Into Your Kingdom."**

A. This Is A Remarkable Statement. This Man Clearly Knew Who Jesus Was And Wanted To Be A Part Of Him. This Criminal Was Confessing That He Believed That Jesus Was The Long Promised Messiah, The Savior Sent From God. How Could He Know This? How Could Not Know This? Jesus Was A Well Known Public Figure Who Had Been Preaching And Teaching For About Three Years. How Could This Criminal Not Of Heard Of Jesus And All Of The Things That Were Said About Him? Jesus Was The Talk Not Only Of The Town...But He Was The Talk Of The Whole Nation! He Had Heard People Talking About Jesus...What Jesus Had Said...And What Jesus Had Done. Indeed, He Was Still Hearing About Jesus As The Crowd Made Fun Of Him: **"He Saved Others; Let Him Save Himself, If He Is The Christ Of God, His Chosen One!" (23: 35, Esv)**. And Who Knows, Perhaps This Man At One Time Had Been Raised In The Church. Perhaps His Parents Or A Rabbi Taught Him The Scriptures And All About The Coming Messiah.

B. This Criminal Wanted To Be A Part Of The Messiah And His Kingdom.....And He Knew That This Could Happen Only Through The Forgiveness Of His Sins. And His Crucifixion Certainly Reminded Him Of His Sins.....But Even More...So Did His Conscience As He Told The Other Criminal: **"Do You Not Fear God, Since You Are Under The Same Sentence Of Condemnation? And We Indeed Justly, For We Are Receiving The Due Reward Of Our Deeds; But This Man Has Done Nothing Wrong."** What

An Amazing Confession. He Confesses His Own Sin While Confessing That Jesus Had None. And Yet There Was Jesus Right Next To Him Condemned And Dying. And If He Knew That Jesus Was Not Dying For His Own Sins...He Had To Be Dying For The Sins Of Others....For His Sin. And So He Says: **“Jesus, Remember Me When You Come Into Your Kingdom.”** Yes, This Criminal Would Be Able To Enter The Kingdom Because Jesus Had Died For His Sins. Yes, He Believed. For Earlier This Thief Had Heard Jesus Utter These Words To His Father: **“Father, Forgive Them, For They Know Not What They Do.”** **“Father, Forgive Them.”** **“Forgiveness”**. Surely Those Words Of Forgiveness Applied Also To The Thief. And Clearly He Knew About Life After Death.....For There Was No Doubt That He Would Die That Very Day...And Yet He Asks Jesus, **“Jesus, Remember Me When You Come Into Your Kingdom.”**

ii. And Jesus Said To Him: **“Truly, I Say To You, Today You Will Be With Me In Paradise.”**

A. I Wonder What This Condemned, Dying Criminal Thought And Felt When He Heard Those Wonderful And Comforting Words?: **“Truly, I Say To You, Today You Will Be With Me In Paradise.”** Yes, Jesus Would Remember Him. Did The Man Find The Strength To Have A Small Smile? Did He Close His Eyes In Comfort? Did Peace Flow Through His Body? Did Tears Of Joy Flow Down His Checks? He Would Be In Paradise With Jesus That Very Day. Paradise Is Reserved Only For Those Who Are Acceptable To God. And The Only Ones Who Are Acceptable To God Are Those Who Have Forgiveness In Jesus Christ. This Was Confirmation To This Criminal That Jesus Indeed Was Dying On The Cross For His Sins. **“With Me.”** Those Are The Most Important Words, **“With Me.”** Paradise Is Being With Jesus And Where He Is. This Is True Of All Who Believes In Jesus. As He Was Being Stoned To Death Stephen Cried Out: **“...‘Lord Jesus, Receive My Spirit....” (Acts 7: 59, Esv),** When The Apostle Paul Was Thinking About His Death He Wrote To The Philippians: **“...My Desire Is To Depart And Be With Christ, For That Is Better...” (Phil. 1: 23, Esv).** **“Be With Christ”**. This Is Also Our Comfort When We Die.....Our Soul, Our Spirit Will Leave Our Body To Be With Christ. And When Jesus Returns To Judge The Living And The Dead He Will Put The Soul Of The Thief, Of Stephen, Of Paul And Our Soul Back In Our Bodies To Be With Jesus Forever In That New World Of Eternal Life That He Has Prepared For All Who Trust In Him.

B. Of All The Things That Would Have Been Comforting To The Thief On The Cross Would Have Been The Little Word **“Today.”** **“Today You Will Be With Me In Paradise.”** In Saying This Jesus Was Telling This Condemned, Suffering Criminal That He Would Not Have To Wait To Enter The Kingdom. It Would Be **“Today.”** There Is No Such Thing As The Roman Catholic Teaching Of Purgatory....A Place Where The Souls Of Believers Go To Suffer For Their Sins. That's Not In The Bible... No, That Very Day The Thief's Suffering Would Come To And End ....And His Soul Would Be With Jesus That Very Day. Jesus Assured Him With The Word: **“Truly”**. And That Very Day The Thief Died, Ending His Suffering And His Soul Went To Be With Jesus In Paradise, Just As Jesus Promised Him.

Conclusion: And So It Is With Us. We Have The Same Promises From Jesus. Like The Thief On The Cross We Too Are Sinners. And As We Confess Our Sins....He Forgives Us As He Did The Thief. And On Our Death Bed, When We Are Dying, And We Pray: **“Jesus, Remember Me When You Come Into Your Kingdom.”** His Promise Will Ring Not Only In Our Ears....But Our Hearts As Well, **“Truly, I Say To You, Today You Will Be With Me In Paradise.”** Amen.