**Series – Dr. Luke’s Perspective on Jesus**

**Text – Luke 23:39-43**

**Message 98 - (September 1, 2019)**

**“JESUS, REMEMBER ME…”**

***39One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” 40But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” 42And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”***

**Introduction**

1. This is, to say the least, a fascinating paragraph. One writer said, ***“The climax of humiliation is for Jesus to be scorned by a companion in torment who is deserving of his punishment”*** (Garland, p. 924). But this same paragraph includes a total turnaround beginning with mockery and ending with an amazing promise from Jesus that would be fulfilled for one of the convicted criminals before the day would end!
2. All four Gospels mention the two who were crucified with Jesus. Mark wrote, ***“Those who were crucified with him also reviled him”*** (Mark 15:32). Matthew says the same. Only Luke tells us about the change that took place in the life of one of those two criminals. I think Luke wanted us to see the work of God in salvation, showing us that the salvation God provides is always and only by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone for the glory of God alone.

3. At some point, thief number 1 became silent in his mocking. Thief number 2 continued to rail against Jesus. Then thief number 1 reacted and rebuked his companion. His response to his reviling companion gives us a picture of what a transformed heart looks like. As thief number 2 continued to rail at Jesus, thief number 1…

**I. RESISTS THE PRESSURE OF CONFORMING** – From the text it’s clear that something was happening to one of the thieves on either side of Jesus. As already mentioned, both were initially mocking Jesus, but the one changed his tune and challenged the mocking of the other thief, actually exonerating Jesus! It’s quite amazing here that we have an illustration of how the world views God and oneself and salvation, and an illustration of the pressures that are applied to conform to such a world view, and how that was countered by the other thief. Most have a…

A. Warped view of God – ***“Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!”***

1. I don’t know what this robber really thought about Jesus, but he had heard that Jesus was declared at least by some, to be the Messiah, the Christ. If Jesus was really the Christ, surely, He would not remain on the cross, but would come down and deliver the people from Rome, and surely would also save these thieves from death. The world believes that this is what God is supposed to do!

2. Many assume that God is only behind the good that happens. Anything bad or judgmental in any way could not possibly be from God. The other thief seemed to be saying that not only was the judgment the thieves were now enduring deserved, they would also have to stand before God. So, he was asking his companion, ***“Do you not fear God?”*** Many have a warped view of God. They do not fear God because they don’t understand who He is and that He truly is the Judge of all the earth! The Psalmist wrote, ***“Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes”*** (Psalm 36:1). That is true of all who are outside of Christ. They have a warped view of God. They also have a…

B. Warped view of themselves

1. Why did this thief believe that he and his guilty companion should be spared from death? True, he was calling Jesus to save Himself, but also to save them!

2. Few believe they actually deserve judgment. We tend to compare ourselves with others and that usually yields favorable results for us, making us look better than we are! Whatever the thieves had done, they had been tried and convicted and now they were being punished, and the punishment was death on a cross. They deserved what they were getting. But that is not how the convicted view themselves.

3. The other thief with a new perspective, reminded his friend that they deserved what they were getting; ***“we are receiving the due reward of our deeds”***, he said. Jesus, on the other hand, had ***“done nothing wrong.”*** The world has a warped view of God and themselves, but also a…

C. Warped view of salvation

1. If one has a wrong view of God (believing in a God who is generally loving and merciful and does not judge), and a wrong view of self (believing that people might deserve some discipline, a time out, perhaps, but certainly not severe judgment), then one will have a wrong view of salvation (believing that whatever saving people might need from God, He will do it; after all, that’s His job). The message being communicated by the unrepentant thief was essentially, “If you are the Christ, get me out of this and maybe I will believe in you.”

2. The thief who was answering back was making the case that everything the two of them were receiving was deserved, but nothing Jesus was receiving was deserved; for He had done nothing wrong. Why He did not save Himself, the repentant thief didn’t know, but he did know that Jesus owed them nothing. Let’s look a little more deeply into this. In what the repentant thief was saying in answer to his unbelieving companion, we can see the Spirit of God at work in his heart.

**II. FINDS THE COURAGE IN CHALLENGING THOSE WARPED VIEWS**

A. The fear of God

1. This thief must have been a Jew who understood what it meant to fear God. Generally, the Jews believed that God was a righteous Judge who did good and those who feared Him could expect to receive good from Him. ***‘Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind!’*** (Psalm 31:19).

2. This now, God-fearing thief, dared to correct his companion by reminding him that they both had broken God’s law and both would have to stand before God, the Judge, very soon. Their reviling against Jesus was a demonstration of their lack of fear of God. It was time to reassess their view of God, that He is one to be feared and revered. Again, note how quickly this change in perspective appeared! Something’s happening in this guy’s heart! The evidence of the fear of God was accompanied by…

B. The recognition of personal sin

1. This thief realized that both he and his partner in crime were dying justly, and both would be required to answer to God for their crimes. But he also realized that Jesus had done nothing to deserve what He was now enduring.

2. When the Holy Spirit of God is at work in a person’s heart, there is a recognition of the holiness of God and of one’s own sinfulness. Not only did the thief recognize and admit that he was a sinner, but he also acknowledged that God is righteous and they were not!

C. The acknowledgement of just judgment

1. It is one thing to admit that we are sinners. It is quite another to acknowledge that we deserve the judgment that God has promised against those who have sinned and who are separated from Him.

2. Do we really believe that all those who have not trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ will not only stand before God in the judgment, but will also be separated from God and will be cast into a place of torment that will never, ever, end? The second part of that question is, do we believe that we deserve the same judgment that those who have rejected the Lord Jesus deserve? And do we believe that apart from God’s saving grace on our behalf, based on nothing we could have done, have done or ever would ever do, that we would experience that same judgment? If we do not believe that to be true, we do not understand the Gospel, we do not really fear God and we have underestimated the affront that sin is to a holy God!

3. When God is at work in the heart of a sinner, bringing about regeneration, that one…

**III. DEMONSTRATES A NEW-FOUND HUMILITY IN ASKING (for God’s intervention)**

A. A simple request

1. When the thief said, ***“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”***, what was he asking and what was he implying? What do you think? Let’s start with the implications. When he called Jesus by name and mentioned Jesus’ kingdom, he may have known a little about Jesus’ reputation, or maybe he was referencing the sign Pilate had placed on the cross. In either case, he was accepting as fact that Jesus really was a king.

2. Was he asking Jesus for some leniency when the Lord exercised His sovereign powers of judgment as King? Or was he simply asking Jesus to remember him and this conversation, expecting nothing in return? He certainly was not pleading for physical deliverance, but for some kind of remembrance or maybe even salvation in the world to come. Some assume that this criminal was petitioning Jesus to remember him when He returned in power and glory at His second coming. That is assuming the thief knew much more than he probably knew. More likely, he was asking Jesus to remember him when Jesus entered into His kingdom, into Paradise, whenever that would be. Either way, I suspect he was mostly asking for mercy. When we are facing judgment and we know we deserve it, there is nothing else we can plead.

3. What would make the thief think this? He had seen Jesus’ response to the harsh treatment He had received, the ugly ridicule, and this thief had heard Jesus pray only moments earlier, calling upon His Father to, ***“forgive them for they know not what they do.”*** This simple request opened the door to…

B. A staggering revelation - ***“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”***

1. The Father, at least in part, answered the prayer of the Son in revealing His Son to this convicted criminal by opening his heart to believe in Jesus and to be saved from the judgment the thief deserved.

2. ***“He becomes very, very aware of God and the fear of God.  Then he openly acknowledges his own sin.  Then he confesses the sinlessness of Christ and affirms his messiah-ship and his savior-hood.  It’s an amazing thing.  And all of these are responses to the miraculous sovereign work of the Spirit of God on his dark heart. This is the light of the glorious gospel of Christ shining in the midst of the darkness and dispelling it. The other sinner, no fear of God, no fear of judgment, no sense of sinfulness, no sense of justice, no sense of guilt, no desire for forgiveness, no longing for righteousness, no desire for reconciliation.  And the thief who has been transformed confronts that tragic condition, which moments before had been his own condition.  He can’t understand it any more. In a moment of time he went from being a part of it to not being able to comprehend it”*** (MacArthur).

3. I don’t know what the criminal expected Jesus to say, but I doubt that it was, ***“today you will be with me in paradise.”*** Jesus gave the thief a time and place, but even better than that, He gave him a promise of companionship. ***“Today…in paradise…you will be with me.”***

4. This was more than just, “When you die you will go to heaven.” Now that’s true, and that will be wonderful, but Jesus was saying that this very day, the thief was going to be with Jesus!

**Conclusion**

1. ***“If this verse doesn't teach salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, I don't know a verse that does, because it's certainly not because this thief was a good person who had earned his way to Paradise. It is that the King, Jesus, has forgiven him and welcomed him into Paradise not because he deserved it, but because Jesus had paid for his sins and forgiven him of those sins and welcomed him by grace into His presence”*** (Duncan).
2. With some help from Alistair Begg, I was reminded of two passages. The first is from Jesus’ prayer recorded in John 17:24 and the second is from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, 1:4-7. Listen, first to John 17: ***“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”*** Now, to Ephesians: ***“*** ***4But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5even when we were dead in our trespasses,*** (think here of this thief as he hung opn the cross beside Jesus)***made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”*** That’s right now – not future, but right now. Today, if you belong to Jesus, you are with Him because He is with you. He is seated in the heavenly places, meaning that He has accomplished all that needs to be accomplished for the salvation of all those whom the Father has given to Him. And we are immediately seated with Him. There is nothing we could do or need to do in order to gain salvation. He drew us to Himself, He forgave us of our sins and we rest in Him, seated with Him in the heavenly places! And the day is coming when we will see Him face to face!
3. But that will only be true of those whose hearts are open to Jesus. I have said on numerous occasions, if you do not belong to Him, but God is warming your heart, what do you do…you ask. Ask Him to remember you. Acknowledge that you are a sinner and that you deserve the judgment of God, but you know and believe that Jesus took your place, that He paid the debt you owed. In humility, ask Him to have mercy on your soul, to save you for the glory of His name…and you can be assured that He will save you, and you will be with Him – and that glorious position is given to you…immediately!