

SAVED WHILE NAILED TO A CROSS

Luke 23:42-43

Introduction: Most of us have heard of "death bed confessions" where someone in their last moments on earth make a profession of faith in Jesus, but perhaps the most dramatic and maybe even the first such confession was made by one of the two thieves who were crucified along side of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus had been before Pilate's court, stripped of his clothing, whipped, beaten, mocked, now nailed to a cross to die in agony and along side of Him were two thieves also condemned to die by crucifixion. Put yourself up on a cross along side of these two thieves and see and hear what they did. Could you believe that this man Jesus was really who He said He was? With all the pain and agony what made that one thief change His mind about Jesus, for he had just mocked Him as the others had been doing. What brought about his change of mind and caused him to start defending Jesus? What caused him to ask Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom?

I. THE THIEF ON THE CROSS WAS THE LAST FRIEND JESUS MADE BEFORE DYING

1. Jesus spent His years ministering to "questionable" people, people whom the Scribes and Pharisees ridiculed and called "publicans and sinners," having nothing to do with them, a sorry class of people.
 - What if Jesus associated ONLY with the "worthy," rich, popular, the upper class?
 - Jesus gained no honor in the eyes of some by the company He kept.
 - Which group would you be identified with?
 - Who did Jesus ever turn away from?
 - Who did Jesus die with? What class of people were on crosses beside Him?
2. The man on the cross who turned to Jesus was no ordinary person/sinner.
 - He was a thief, a law breaker, arrested, tried and condemned, a convict who had spent time in jail.
 - He was of the lowest class of people, most unworthy of all classes of people.
 - What were Jesus' words to him? *"...Today shalt thou be with me in paradise..."*
 - Who will Jesus not save if they come to Him in belief?
3. This thief was indeed a great sinner, but he was a sinner who had been awakened to who Jesus was.
 - It is not know if he had ever heard of Jesus before that day on the cross for he joined his fellow thief in scoffing at Jesus.
 - Somehow, suddenly, however, he realizes that the man beside him, Jesus, is more than just an ordinary man. Something was telling him that "this is Jesus, King of the Jews" just like the plaque over Jesus' head was inscribed.
 - This thief had reached the end of his life, but all of a sudden he woke up to the conviction that the Messiah was at his side and he believed on Him.
4. This thief was a man in great misery, for his "sins had found him out" and he was receiving the reward of his deeds. *"...Be sure your sin will find you out..."*
 - He was in horrible condition, not long to live, his legs would be broken and end his life after hours of severe suffering.
 - The time he had left was time enough for the Lord Jesus to save his soul, however.

5. This thief could do no good works, so if salvation was gained by good works, he could not have been saved for he was nailed to a cross hand and foot and would die soon, no time for good works.
 - He might say a kind, good word or two but could do no good deeds.
 - He was a sinner, had led a lifetime in sin, his end was just hours away.
 - This man's life was black with sin but he believed in Jesus and called over to Jesus, "**...Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom...**"
 - He had become a believer in Jesus and confessed his faith and trust in Him.
6. This thief is a picture of what so many of US are and have been and what Jesus did for this man, He will and can do for anybody else who will do as this man did, believe with all one's heart that Jesus is who He says He is.

II. THAT SAME DAY JESUS ESCORTED THIS THIEF THROUGH THE GATES OF PARADISE

1. Jesus had told this believing thief that "**...today thou shalt be with me in paradise...**"
 - Who is this one that Jesus is going to escort into heaven? A great king? A great martyr? A faithful Apostle? A Patriarch like Abraham or Moses?
 - The King of Glory is going to escort a saved thief through the gates of paradise.
 - What does this tell you about Jesus and who can be saved?
2. Jesus escorted a lowly sinner saved by God's grace through the gates of paradise, into heaven where there were shouts of joy and songs of praise unto the Lord Jesus for His love.
3. Jesus escorted this sinful, saved thief into paradise, the place where He will take all of US sinners who believe in Him. If a person trusts Him, that person will ultimately be with Him in paradise.
4. Where Jesus is, that's where He wants those who believe in Him to be also. "**...today thou shalt be with ME...**"
5. There is no place of "limbo" or "sleep" upon death, but immediate change for Jesus told this believing thief that "**...TODAY, thou shalt be with me in paradise...**"
 - As Paul once said, "**...absent from the body, present with the Lord...**"
 - What a change for this thief, from the cross to paradise in the same day.
6. Jesus spoke to the thief with authority, "**...Verily I SAY unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise...**"
 - Jesus said "I SAY..." He claimed the right to speak with that authority and rightly so.
 - Jesus is Lord and King and His Word is all authority.

III. THE CROSS THEN AND THE CROSS TODAY

1. Satan would have everyone join the crowd that mocked and sneered at Jesus.
2. Jesus saved a man at His side also nailed to a cross, with death just hours away.
 - At the gates of death, the man believed in Jesus and Jesus saved him.
 - Jesus saves all who believe in Him and call upon Him to save them.

3. The thief believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ and then asked "*...Lord, remember me...*"
 - Jesus could have questioned the thief, could have turned him away, could have ignored him but He listened to the thief and granted the thief's request to be remembered.
 - Who among us is worse than this thief? If Jesus remembered this kind of a person, who would He turn away?
4. The thief no sooner believed that Jesus guaranteed his belief by assuring that he would be with Him forever in His glory.
5. Heaven and Hell are not that far apart for upon one's death he/she will be in one or the other.
 - "*...Today (within hours), thou shalt be with me in paradise...*"
 - Everyone is very close to either heaven or hell.
6. If, like this thief, one has believed in Jesus, then that person is prepared for heaven and it matters not how much longer one lives on this earth, but it is for sure that whenever death comes, he/she will be ushered directly into the presence of the Lord Jesus in paradise.

CONCLUSION:

1. The conversion of the thief on the cross in his last hours of life is not an exceptional case.
 - The man believed what he saw and heard about Jesus.
 - The man turned to Jesus and asked to be remembered.
 - Jesus told the man that he would be remembered and that very day would be in paradise with Him.
2. Anybody, no matter how bad, evil and sinful their life, upon their belief in Jesus Christ, they, too, will be immediately saved and have a place in paradise, heaven, with the Lord Jesus.
3. Anybody, like the unbelieving thief, who refused to believe in Jesus Christ, will have their place in Hell.
4. If you have not trusted in the Lord Jesus, come and trust in Him now, trust Him wholly, trust Him only, trust Him ONCE.