

EXAMPLES AT THE CROSS

Luke 23:42-43

Matthew 27:41-44

Introduction: The death of God's Son was spoken of even in the Garden of Eden as well as throughout all the Old Testament. Prophecies by men of God spoke of various details surrounding the coming of the Messiah, the life of the Promised One, and even the death of God's Son. So the cross was no surprise to Jesus nor God, the Father. Why, though, did God arrange it so that Jesus would be crucified between two thieves, criminals? God's wisdom is revealed as we consider:

- how the depths of shame God's Son descended for humanity (us).
- what God's Son had to become in order to become man's substitute (ours).
- how man's real opinion of God's Son was revealed.
- the drama of salvation offered by God and how man responded.
 - Two criminals, thieves, one on each side of Jesus, saw and heard all that happened.
 - Both were very wicked, were suffering equally, were dying, needed forgiveness, yet, one died in his sins, as he had lived, while the other repented of his wickedness, believed in the man Jesus at his side, called on Him for mercy and was promised Paradise upon his death that very same day.
- a very clear picture of saving grace was revealed.
 - Paul (Saul) lived a very moral life, was religious, pious before meeting Jesus but was saved and went on to live a devoted life for Jesus Christ.
 - The thief had no moral life, joined in making fun of Jesus with the others before he believed in Jesus but had no chance whatsoever to live a life for Jesus after his being saved.
 - The thief was saved without seeing anything supernatural happen as did Paul. So, how did this thief under the most unfavorable circumstances come to be saved? The same way Paul and everybody else who is saved - **by God's miracle of GRACE!**

1. The thief is an example of a typical, everyday human being, needing to be saved.

- Here is a man in his dying hour mocking and deriding the suffering Lord Jesus Christ.
- Every human being has the same depravity, enmity in his/her heart as the thief and it is not until a desperate condition occurs that one discovers the need of a Savior.
- Abased before exalted - stripped of self-righteousness before salvation - empty handed before the gift of eternal life - standing with lost sinners to be saved.

2. The thief is an example of how one must come to an end of him/herself before he/she can be saved.

- The Prodigal son finally came to himself and turned around and went back home.
 - The woman bowed over with illness finally went to Jesus for help.
- A person must see him/herself as a lost sinner first, then must realize that there is nothing that he/she can do about it by him/herself and must then look for somebody who can save him/her.
- Before anybody can be saved, a realization of helplessness must come. Just what could the thief do?

3. The thief is an example of coming to repentance and faith.

- Repentance includes a change of mind, discovering one's lost condition, looking at one's own self and admitting that he/she is lost.

- The thief rebuked the other thief when he said, "*...doest thou not fear God, seeing thou are in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds...*"
 - The thief realized that he was getting what he deserved.
- Before a person can believe "savingly" in Jesus, he/she must believe intellectually in Jesus. "*How can one believe in Him of whom they have not heard...?*"
- The thief then asked after realizing his condition and who Jesus was and what Jesus could do, "*...Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom...*"
 - True faith is a confident faith, a faith from the heart. "*For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation..*"
- The thief expressed humble, simple faith. All he asked for was to be remembered.
- The thief also expressed courageous faith. He had just mocked Jesus but now he had changed his mind and with his heart believed in Jesus and was a changed man.
 - Before the still mocking crowd, the hardened soldiers and his fellow thief, he confessed the Kingship of Jesus, the Son of God. That's an example for us today.

4. Here is an example of a sinner receiving spiritual illumination (eyes opened).

- What amazing spiritual progress was made in such a short time by this thief.
 - His statement "*...doest not thou fear God?*" expresses his belief in a future life.
 - He realized his own sinfulness when he said "*...thou art in the same condemnation, and we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds.*"
 - He spoke of Jesus's sinlessness when he said "*...this man had done nothing amiss...*"
 - He openly and verbally confessed Jesus as his Lord when he said, "*...Lord remember me..*"
 - He believed that Jesus could save him as he said, "*...Lord, remember me...*"
 - He showed his faith in the greatness of Jesus when he said, "*...when thou comest into thy kingdom...*"
 - He saw beyond death when he said, "*...when thou comest into thy kingdom...*"
- Here is a man who was a vile, wicked, ungodly sinner moments before, where did he get such spiritual insight into who Jesus really was? It wasn't "flesh and blood" that had revealed these things unto him, but the Father in Heaven.

5. Here is an example of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

- A little bit earlier, this very man, this thief, had joined everyone else in making fun and deriding Jesus. What was Jesus' response to this thief's request? What would have been your response?
 - Jesus did not respond to the priest's when they called for him to come down off the cross and prove He was who He said He was.
 - Why did Jesus respond to this criminal, this thief but not the religious, holy men, the priests?
 - The sincere, from the heart, prayerful request got Jesus' attention.
 - Jesus was ready and quite able to save this sinful thief.
 - If a dying Savior could care enough and give eternal life from a cross, how much more does He care and is able now that He has gone back to His heavenly Father to intercede for us.
 - If Jesus was willing and able to save such a man as this dying thief, then He is also equally willing and able to save all who call upon Him as did this thief.

- Jesus the Son of God came into this world to save sinners and He left it and went to Paradise and took with Him a thief He had just saved who was the very first trophy of His redeeming blood.

6. Here is an example of what happens to those who call upon Jesus before they die.

- *"...and he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom, and Jesus said unto him, verily I say unto you, TODAY shalt thou be with me in paradise."*

- The thief asked only to be remembered in Jesus' coming kingdom but Jesus assured him that before the day was over, they both would be together in paradise.

CONCLUSION:

1. The cross reveals three truths: mankind is wicked and sinful, Jesus is loving and wants to save, and anybody, no matter how wicked he/she has been can be saved if he/she truly wants to be.
2. Jesus has prepared a place for all who believe in Him and God, the Father welcomes into His Family all who do believe in His Son, Jesus.
3. The cross does away with any and all excuses one might try to make for not accepting God's offer of eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ.
4. Take a good, deep, long look at the cross and those two hanging beside Jesus. Which of the two do you identify with?

(This message not totally original with me.)