

1st W - Luke 23: 34 - Father Forgive Them.

To. No. - Nov. 1, 70 A.M.

THE SECOND WORD FROM THE CROSS

Luke 23:39-43

In Roanoke Rapids, N. C., a retired merchant 56 years of age finished marking his ballot, dropped dead apparently of a heart attack, and the wife asked if the ballot was still clutched in the voter's hand that it be dropped in the box. Registrar A. E. Akers complied. The retired merchant had the satisfaction of casting his vote for the candidate he preferred, as his last act in this life. The incident causes us to think of the thief hanging on the cross beside our Lord Jesus Christ. As he was dying for their sins, that thief as a last act on earth, cast his vote. Not by ballot but by voice for the man of his choice. Lord remember me when thy comest into thy Kingdom. And he was assured of being in paradise that very day.

Now there is only one such case, an instant like this, in all the Bible. And it tells us that no man should presume upon the 11th hour. There are those, however, that think they will wait and put off this choice. But I think what the New Testament is trying to say to us is, that even for those who have put it off, you have an opportunity if you will take advantage of the one instant that you have now. And I think it says, don't wait for the death bed repentance.

The Bible (always) says, today, is the accepted time. The day of salvation - the present moment must be ceased, in which you can voice your choice.

Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. Prov. 27:1.

Remember now thy creator, the days of thy youth. While the evil days come not. Ecc. 12:1.

If thou shall confess with thou mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in thy heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shall be saved. For with the heart the man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made, unto Salvation. Rom. 10:9-10.

Therefore, If you are going to vote for Jesus, don't wait until that last time. As that man in N. C. barely marked his ballot, and the thief on the cross barely got his vote in.

Now this morning, let's go back to that ancient city of Jerusalem. Crowds are thronging the streets for this is the time of the annual celebration. The Passover Feast - for several days people had been coming.

They are having a fine time of fellowship, greeting old friends, relatives are meeting. This was done once a year. And they had the religious rites of the season.

But this morning, things are going to be different. There is great expectancy in the crowd - something is going to happen.

Word has gotten out that three men are going to be crucified. Most of these people have never seen such a sight and some are waiting to look on.

Soon the Roman Centuron goes to the prison and shouts, "Bring out the prisoners".

First, Jesus is led forth. Wearing a seamless robe. The soldiers eye this garment because they plan to gamble for it at the foot of the cross.

Two other prisoners, hardened criminals, are led out. Pilate figures he might as well get rid of them at the same time Jesus is crucified. Three men are lead through the crowd. The spectators look on. They have a card telling that two of them are thieves. One is a robber and the other a murderer. Jesus, of Nazareth, King of the Jews, simply told the story about Christ. I imagine Pilate looks on for a moment, his wife perhaps standing near by, says quietly to him - I am afraid that today you have condemned an innocent man.

In a few minutes, the three men are nailed to three crosses. And hanging high above the earth, the crowd cries and looks on. And suddenly we see one of the criminals turning to Jesus and making a simple request -- "Lord remember me".

And then we have the second word of Jesus, verily I say unto you this day, this very day, thou shalt be with me in paradise.

Let us notice two or three things here surrounding this second word of Jesus.

I. The Man's Situation -- The Thief.

He was first a sinner. When life flows along smoothly a man can joke and laugh about his short comings. When a man dares to stare at death, in his face - in a short while, he is going to stand before God in a few minutes. It is quite a different matter.

On Monday I talked with a man that is in a horrible condition and of course he knows that the outcome is not bright at all. He has never made a profession publicly or united with a church, but here in this last hour I was speaking to him about the faith we needed in Jesus Christ. And I had a prayer with him. And his parting remarks to me were I have only one way to look and that is up.

Many men have committed crimes but they have denied them through long trials and men have even been in death cells waiting for the electric chair. And when they think about death, they begin to make a full confession - because they refuse to play the hypocrite at that time.

Now you probably have not sinned as this man. You are not a thief as this man was, you know. But the Bible tells us the fact that you and I and all men are sinners. We are sinners by birth, we are sinners by choice, we are sinners because the evil germs that flowed in Adam's veins - flow in ours.

The world is full of all kinds of men - rich, poor, good, bad, ignorant, educated, black and white, red and yellow -- but there is one man you will never find in the world. That is the man that has never sinned. All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Now this man even admitted that it was only right for him to be punished. He had sinned. Not many men will admit that, they will admit that they are not perfect, but they presume upon the goodness of God and say, in spite of all that I have done, he is a God of love. And I will be punished. Too many people have a strange way of thinking about God. They can live anyway they desire, treat God anyway, and then expect God to reward them with prosperity and give them a home in Heaven in the life to come.

But the thief didn't think like this. He knew that he was a sinner and that he did not deserve anything. He knew he deserved death and Hell. And before you can be saved, you must come to the same conclusion.

Another thing, you notice that this man was helpless to save himself. He was nailed to the cross and soon he was going to die. This man was helpless to save himself. He can do nothing to save him now.

Men today feel that they must do certain things to be saved. But this man could do nothing. He couldn't be baptized, he couldn't give his money, he couldn't render any service, he didn't have an opportunity to join a church - he was helpless. In like manner today, the sinner cannot save himself.

All of his works are of no value in connection with salvation. His righteousness is as but filthy rags.

D. L. Moody and a Mormon leader rode for an entire day upon the train. Each of them tried to convert the other, to his way of thinking, but their efforts were all vain. When they parted, Mr. Moody said, the difference in our religion is the difference in spelling. You spell your religion "do" - and I spell mine "done".

It has all been done - Christ has tasted death and every man -- the great transaction is done.

Picture a man in a dark dungeon. He is chained to the floor in utter darkness. There are no doors and no windows to this dungeon. There is no living person within a 100 miles. Can he be saved in that condition - yes. He has only

to use his head and his heart. The works of his hands are not necessary. So it was with the poor thief - he was not able to save himself. That was his situation.

✓ II. The Supplication Which Led To The Second Word

We notice now the request is very simple. "Lord, remember me."

First, in the presence of Jesus he felt his sinfulness. You can't come near to Christ without feeling your own sin.

Peter expressed this - depart from me, o Lord, for I am a sinful person.

Isaiah, whose is me for I am a man of unclean lips.

The thief looks at Jesus and sees a man without sin.

When you hold a piece of coal in your hand, you know that it is black. When you bring it up close to the light, it seems that it is even blacker. Now when you measure yourself by other men, you feel pretty good. But when you come up close to Jesus, you feel that you are the blackest sinner in all of the world. That this is the way the thief felt on the cross.

A woman came to a Preacher in Chicago and said, I have been to a number of Preachers, but I (cannot find peace) for my soul. Can you help me. The preacher replied, if you will answer one question - I will tell you whether I can help you or not. What is your question, asked the woman. Then the Preacher said, are you conscious that you are a poor lost sinner. Do you realize that you are ruined and undone. The woman began to sob and said, oh, I know that I ought to go to Hell. I don't see how God let's me live. I have never realized before, what a sinner I am. Well, said the Preacher, I know that I can help you. He led the woman to

find peace in Christ. But no one can be saved until they know that they are lost.

So the poor thief, side by side, with the spotless son of God, realizes there is a difference between himself and the Saviour.

The second thing to notice in the man's request is his (great faith). Jesus was dying - soon he would breathe his last breath. And his body would hang helpless upon the cross. Can he help a poor thief. The thief believes it, and asks him to remember him.

Over the head of Jesus was a sign, Jesus, King of the Jews. Now that was the joke of the day. The idea of a man dying on the cross - (being a king). But the thief believed it - he had faith that this man would come down from the cross and someday mount a throne. He said, Lord remember me. And he didn't say (if you come into the Kingdom - but when you come, into your Kingdom).

The mob cried out, he is King. Then he must have a crown. A crown of thorns upon his brow. If he is King, then we must give him a scepter. So they placed a reed in his hand. If he is a King, then we will show our allegiance to him. So they spat in his face. Is he a King, then we must give him a robe. And they put a purple robe on his shoulder. If he is a King then we'll raise up our hands to him, so they slapped him and pulled at his beard. If he is a King, then he must have a throne, so they raised him on a cross.

Now the quality of this man's faith - he had a head faith. He looked at the inscription and he believed in deed that this man was King. He called him Lord and before a man can be saved, he must have some head faith - he must believe that Christ is the son of God that died and rose again. That his blood will wash away all sin.

A man can believe a lot of things about the Bible. And he can still go to Hell. This man had great faith and he had heart faith. He not only believed, but he trusted him with his whole heart. A person is saved.

Now the jailer said - rather Paul said to him believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. We must believe and act upon this from the heart and trust him completely. The seat of religion is in a man's head as well as his heart. And you can read books about seeking God with you head only but you'll never find him. The heart must move, the emotions must be stirred, etc.

Now look at what his faith expressed - it expressed belief in the future life. It expressed the need of his own soul. He confessed that Christ was divine when he called him Lord. He showed that he believed in him as the Saviour when he asked him to be remembered. And he showed that he believed in the Kingship of Christ, when he said, come into thy Kingdom. He showed that he believed in the second coming of Christ when he mentioned his Kingdom which was to come.

He had a courageous faith - all the crowd was crying out for the death of Christ. Even his disciples had forsaken him. Do you have this kind of courage. When you speak up when others berate Christ and his church. It ought to be a matter with you - not what others do and say. But you ought to be loyal to Christ and to his church.

In the last place about this man's request, he really didn't ask a whole lot. He didn't say, now I want a real place in Heaven. He didn't say, I'd like to have a crown. I'd like to be second in the Kingdom. He just asked to be remembered. You know Christ always gives us more than we ask for. So he not only remembered the man but he gave him a home in Heaven. Where death and trouble would never touch him

again.

✓ III. The Man Heard the Second Word from the Cross

Jesus said, today, this day - thou shalt be with me in Paradise.

Now this second word is the key to this man's salvation. How was he saved. He was saved by his faith. Not by his works - he was hanging on a cross. And if some sort of confirmation or orientation program had to be gone through before he could have gotten in, this man would never have been saved. He never had the privilege of partaking of the Lord's Supper. The man wasn't saved by his good works. But by the second word of Jesus. He would never be able to contribute a penny. He wouldn't be able to stand up and give a testimony, about the good things in his life. The Bible plainly states, that by grace are ye saved through faith. And that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God - not of works, less any man should boast.

✓ Now suppose this thief had not died on the cross - suppose that the soldiers had taken him down immediately. And he had been restored to his family. Suppose he had lived ten more years. I believe that he would have been baptized, that he would have joined the church, he would have taken part in the Lord's Supper, and talked about the grace of God which saved him.

Now you have been saved by faith. Are you showing your faith by your works.

How long did it take Jesus to save him?

How long does it take Jesus to save anyone?

How much time does it take Jesus to change us from sinners to saints.

How much time does it take Jesus to lift us out of the family of the Devil, and put us into the family of God. He does this in the twinkling of an eye. Even this moment, before we leave this church today - you can be saved.

Now where did Jesus take this man. He took him to paradise. It is in Heaven, where Jesus is. When Jesus died, he said, Father - into thy hands I commend my spirit. He told the thief, this day, you are going to be with me.

How long will the thief be there. He will be there forever. He will be there when we get to Heaven. And when we have been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun. We have no less days to sing God's praise, than when we first begun.

Now this man didn't have long to live. So he did something about his soul. He didn't say, well, like some of you - I'll think about it. Next year I think it will be time for me to get ready to meet God. He didn't have anymore time. And do you really have another week. Do you have another year. So let me urge upon you now - to come and put all your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ernest Hemingway was a famous author. He wrote many books. He made lots of money and he had lots of friends in high places. He was married several times but all of this didn't bring him happiness and peace. No, these things can't bring happiness. You must have Christ in your heart. So Ernest Hemingway some time ago ended it all with a gun. And a fitting inscription on his tomb would be what shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul.

Quovadis is a story of the old spy, who posed as a Christian, entered the homes of believers - visited their meeting places because they had their confidence and then he would report the names of the Christians. Scores of people were dragged into the arena as a result of his betrayal. And thrown to the wild beasts. At last the Christians discovered his deception. It was hard not to be bitter against him. Should they attempt to win him to Christ. Nothing could reach him. He seemed to be damned. Even while he live. The story goes the old spy sat in the collesium and watched the Christians die. He saw the wild beasts and he watched them being burned at the stake. One day he saw Christ in the face of those martyrs - Boldy he said, I too am a Christian, he confessed. He was tied to a stake, by another victim. And as he died, he was heard to lift his voice to Heaven and cried - Jesus, Jesus.

His cry was like the thief on the cross. And you know, our Saviour never turns anyone away - there are no hopeless cases.

Suppose the penitent thief had doubted or delayed. One minister once was faithfully warning the people of the danger of procrastination. When a man asked, what about the thief on the cross. He was indicating that he waited until his dying breath. The preacher asked - which thief. It is dangerous to delay.

One saved - the Lord makes room for contrite souls above. One lost - let none presume on his exceeding love.

A Texas woman had gone down into sin and couldn't believe that God could save her. She wrote to a preacher and told him all about her sins. And asked in the light of her sins, if she could be saved. That night she came to church and with down cast eyes, she asked him if he had read the letter. He told her that he had read it and that God could save her. He then turned in the Bible to Isaiah 1:18.

Come, now and let us reason together. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

The woman simply couldn't believe the truth of the text, and went away with a trouble heart. The next day she returned with great joy on her face and said, I had a dream last night. Someone held the Bible before my face and opened it to Isaiah 1:18 and I read that precious promise again. Then I looked up to see who was holding the Bible and I saw that it was Jesus, and I knew that the promise was made for me. She was saved and became a soul winner herself.

Like the old spy, like this woman, like the thief - if you will but make your request, the second word on the cross will become personal in your life.

Don't you love to think about Heaven. And these are words that ought to be heard in each Christian heart. These memorable words of our Lord - today thou shall be with me. What a day to that dying man - what contrast between it's opening and it's closing. It's morning and it is night. In the morning time, he was condemning and condemned by earthly judgement. In the evening, he was in the very shadow of the hill of Zion and he stood accepted at the bar of Heaven. In the morning he was led through the earthly city gates in company with the mob and before night time and the darkness descended upon Jerusalem, he was in another city. Even the heavenly - all the hosts of heaven were looking forward to receive back to the throne.

This man casted his vote - he didn't mark his ballot - but by a voice vote. On that bed of agony - in that chamber of sobs and tears, the next hour he was up and away in the paradise of God. Where there was the renewing, perhaps, a fellowship with the lamb.

If you receive this second word, then be thou faithful until death.
Struggle on. For verily thou shall be with me in paradise - he says.