

THE THREE CROSSES ON CALVARY
Luke 23:32-43

Intro: As in past messages on the events and the people who were involved in the suffering and death of our Lord, I would like for us to see the picture as presented by the four Gospels.

Our Scripture reading gives by far the most detailed account. This adds to the evidence that Luke must have gained his information through one who was very close to our Lord at this time.

Matthew (27:38) states there were two thieves crucified at the same time the Lord was crucified--that one was on His right, and the other on His left. John gives us the same information (19:18). Mark agrees fully (15:27). Luke, as we have seen, makes the same remark (23:32, 33).

Both Matthew and Mark tell us that both of the thieves originally joined with the crowd in reviling the Lord (Matt. 27:44; Mark 15:32).

Mark alone takes the time to refer to OT prophecy. Cf. Mark 15:28 with Isa. 53:9, 12, "And he made his grave with the wicked . . . and he was numbered with the transgressors!"

Only John tells us that the legs of the thieves were broken (19:32). We will see the point in this a little later.

The whole account shows us even greater depths of our Lord's humiliation. Not only was He crucified, but He was crucified in place of Barabbas, and He was crucified with two thieves who knew their own guilt.

Let us look first of all at

I. THE THIEF WHO DID NOT REPENT.

He started out by reviling the Lord (cf. Matt. and Mark) --and he never stopped (Luke 23:39).

Is there not something very strangely familiar about what they were saying? Cf. Matt. 4:3, 6). This was evidence of Satan's presence at the Cross. He was simply echoing what the people were saying. Cf. Luke 23:35, 37.

How different are the ways of men from the ways of God! Whether Satan knew what this all meant to him, or not,

we cannot tell, but it seems that there may be that possibility. HE WAS PROVIDING SALVATION FOR THE THIEF BY STAYING ON THE CROSS, BUT, LIKE SO MANY OTHERS, HE WAS TOO BLINDED TO KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON.

It would be interesting to know how many who were saved in Acts 2 were present at the crucifixion, and who experienced the first workings of the Spirit of God at that time.

What a tragedy that this thief died in his unbelief!

II. THE THIEF WHO DID REPENT.

Luke 23:40 introduces a remarkable change (from the report given by Matthew and Mark. How long afterwards this took place, we do not know, but it seems possible that it was about the sixth hour (noon), or three hours after the crucifixion.

His first word now is a word of rebuke for his companion in crime. (Read Luke 23:40, 41)

He not only acknowledges his own guilt, but he also has come to discover in some way the guiltlessness of the One who was hanging on the center cross. Possibly the distance between the two made it possible for others to hear what was going on. He was convinced that Jesus Christ had done nothing "amiss," nothing out of the way.

Secondly, we see that he had come to some very definite convictions concerning the Lord Jesus. Cf. Luke 23:42.

Some of the early Church Fathers (Plummer, Luke, 533) believed that this thief had heard Christ preach before. This seems very reasonable to believe. His statement reveals that he had come to a place of amazing understanding.

This is the point: How could the Lord come into His kingdom if He were going to die? Quite obviously this manifests a belief in resurrection--and it may mean that this thief was the only one who actually came to an understanding of this truth before Christ died! How amazing if this is the case!

"Remember me" - from Gen. 8:1 this has been a term which speaks of the mercy of God, the faithfulness of God. The thief knew that he had nothing by way of personal merit, and so all he could do was to cast himself upon the mercy of God.

But note: "when thou comest into thy kingdom." There was at least one man at that scene on that day who did not believe that the hopes of Israel had been lost! He was actually looking beyond the Cross, beyond resurrection, to the second coming of Christ to the earth--because this is when He will come into His kingdom. AND THE THIEF WILL BE THERE.

It is amazing to see the comprehension of the truth which this man manifests.

What would be the response of the Son of God? So many have come to this passage in their dying moments with the question, Is it too late for me to turn to the Lord?

Listen to

III. THE SAVIOUR.

How did He respond?

"Verily" - Amen. So let it be. BUT THEN HE ADDS SOMETHING WHICH THE THIEF DID NOT KNOW TO ASK FOR. The thief was asking for something that was (as we know now) at least 2,000 years away, but the Lord told him what would happen to him that very day!

"Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." We know from 2 Cor. 12 that this meant heaven! Yes, he could be saved. No, it was not too late. Just think--a forgiveness that would include even a guilty thief who had no life to give to the Lord, but who while he was living called upon the Lord in the simplest way that he knew how.

"With Me" - cf. John 17:24; 14:1-3. Oh, how marvelous is the grace of God.

Concl: Let me close with one other thought which has become very precious to me. Please turn to John 19:32-34.

In our Wednesday class many have spoken to me about the blessing it was for them to see that the Lord said to Noah in Gen. 7:1, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark." And we linked this with John 10:4.

Now let us read these verses in John 19. Why did they break the legs of the thieves? Because they were not dead. Why did they not break the legs of the Saviour? BECAUSE HE WAS DEAD! Where was He? In "paradise" waiting for the thief to arrive! The thief must have been the first to go

to heaven after the crucifixion.

Is it possible that there is anyone here tonight who feels that he has sinned too much, or that he has waited too long, so that all hope is gone. Then this very wonderful story is for you. As long as you live there is hope!

But let me add a word of warning. It is stated in a footnote in the NSRB, p. 1119, and is said as well as I could say it: "One thief was saved, so that none needs to despair; but only one, so that none may presume."

There is only one way to get to heaven. That is through faith in Christ. How wonderful it would be for you to turn to Him tonight if you have not trusted Him as your Saviour!