

SITUATION AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS

Luke 23:32-43

REPENTANCE

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"Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power"
And he said to him "Truly, I say to you, today you will be
with me in paradise". Luke 23:42-43

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There were 3 men on crosses on Golgatha that day, and
this is the last known request of one of them: "Jesus, re-
member me when you come in your kingly power" The words
came slowly thru dry cracked lips. And the man who spoke
them is just about as historically obscure as one can get
without be^{ing} lost completely. For there is practically no-
thing we know about this man except these words and the
conditions under which they were uttered.

When the other bandit spoke insolently to Jesus: "Are
you not the Christ. Save yourself and us" he had countered
with an admission of their personal guilt and with a de-
fense of the Galilean: "But this man has done nothing
wrong". In his heart he knew that he was getting what
society decreed, but Jesus did not deserve this kind of treat-
ment. Indeed, the insurrectionist saw in Jesus his
only hope for whatever was yet to be. Turning his agony
lined face to Jesus - who in his own misery was not un-
mindful of others pain - he spoke of the future of them
both saying: "Jesus, remember me when you come in your
kingly power".

The Man on the middle cross did not disregard this sin-
ner's plea. What compassion must have been in his heart

when he responded to the penitential man of violence:

"Truly today you will be with me in Paradise". 2

The sinner made his last request. The savior made his final promise.

Jesus' critics had deplored the kind of company he kept and they must have winced when they over heard this dialogue. For the leaders of the established religion did not seem to grasp that if an established religion is worth anything it must keep the "bad company" Jesus kept. High quality Christianity is a ministry to the sinner, not a balm to those who have no need. Jesus said: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners".

The criminal may have seemed unworthy to many but to Jesus he was a candidate for salvation. Between them on that day of death the divine was responding to human need. Jesus made him feel that he was headed for something worthwhile, and that he would be in good company: "Today..... with me".

1. Consider, first, that the final word of this criminal is representative of the longing of the individual to be remembered. And the good news of that Friday experience of this man, who heard Jesus' words fall on his ears, is that the individual is remembered.

Jesus himself did not want to be forgotten. In the Upper Room, he made this request: "Do this in remembrance

of me" And his friends, remembering him, pushed that ³ memory with such dedication that there is hardly a place where human lives have not been touched by him. See then the consequences of a lofty and lively memory.

Of course, the record of his³ history points out that most people are forgotten by the generations which sweep onto the scene after them. Extremely few have had their names penned into the annals of the ages - some marked by evil, others marked by good.

Our individual chances of getting into the record is minute. Few will remember us long. But where men forget, God remembers.

And, tho human memory fades, divine memory is permanent

Christ on the cross is God at war with man's doubts, opening to the believer a glimpse of eternal life and hope.

Tho Jesus's promise was made to the criminal before the resurrection, the implication is that Jesus handed him the hope which we associate with Easter . . the resurrected life...it's coming, it is just ahead. and Jesus knew what he was talking about.

Jesus confronts us with the positive assertion that life is only thoroughly begun in and thru physical death.

Just as Christianity received it strength from the resurrection event, so this moment on Golgotha is to be seen in the light of the resurrection. Jesus makes it unmistak-

ably clear. This was not the finish. Earth's time was running out on the poor man's body, but God's clock was still ticking for his soul: "Today, you will be with me in Paradise".

2. Consider further that Jesus had the authority to make such a promise. If he had not had the power then this brief conversation would have been ridiculous. But notice that the man to whom the promise was given accepted it without question. Why would he have asked what he did if there had not broken across the horizon of his mind the insight that here beside him on another cross was the very son of God. If he had doubted Jesus' authority, he was the kind of man who would bluntly say so. For what reason should he pay heed to someone whom society saw fit to crucify? If Jesus had been an imposter, this criminal would have sensed it from his own cross of misery. Rather, he did not even raise the question: "By what authority do you make that promise?"

Now I don't think we can assume that this rough character fully understood Jesus' response to his plea. Even the disciples who spent 3 years with him did not fully comprehend the full meaning of his messiahship.

Yet, it is not unreasonable to believe that - as sometimes happens - in the twinkling of an eye, in the sound of a heartbeat, an illumination of the soul filled the man.

And he knew without doubt that Jesus had the authority of God in making the promise. 5

We might note here that one of troubles which beset us today is that we have perfect 20-20 vision for material and physical things and might; but our eyesight is terribly poor when it comes to recognizing the presence and authority of God. And as some of Jesus' ancient detractors did we say: "By what authority does he do that or say this". Because he is not what we are we question what he does to human hearts and sometimes pour streams of skepticism on what he says or what he does. Well, Jesus had all the authority he needed to make a repentant thief whole; and he has the power and the authority to make you whole. How often we let the thoughts of our trained minds become stumbling blocks rather than stepping stones to the abundant life.

As this thief sat in the dampness of his prison cell, he was just another condemned man. But on Golgotha he found the deliverer who opened the door to the future; and hanging there he acknowledge Jesus' authority: "Remember me". The time for faith was at hand, the day of doubting was over.

3. So this request of the criminal represents the Longing we have to be remembered; and the answer Jesus gave was spoken with the authority of God. Now, finally, in the

the light of the resurrection, this event has personal
meaning. In the resurrection, Jesus passed from an idle
rumor to a world altering reality, taking up residence in
the lives of all who believed. The defeated disciples became
the bold evangelists who, invading the heart of a heathen
empire with the good news of God's love, won converts in
the household of Caesar and in every empire since.

While we confess that we do not know the manner of
Jesus' resurrection, we can witness to the fact that man's
level of spiritual life has gone up as a result of it. The
world is definitely different due to God's divulging new di-
mensions to life thru Christ.

This we are sure of. We are meant for transformation, not
extinction. The mystery of death that will one day come to
us will not destroy us, but it will bring us to completion.
For at the heart of death is the heart of God.

The promise Jesus made to this dying criminal promotes
a view of death which gives strength to our lives. Jesus
does not offer us a shot of divine novocaine to dull our pain.
No, not that, He offers a gift to sharpen our joy in living
out our years and facing the future with assurance.

"Remember me", Pleaded the penitent sinner

"Today, you will be with me in Paradise", Jesus answered

There is more after death. It is different.

Some of the difference is illustrated by what a man felt

while clinically dead on the operating table. for minutes
his heart did not beat. Massage brought him back to life,
(new 7b)
later he was asked if there was any particular feelings in
the experience. He said: "I can tell you this..life has
been different ever since..I can't explain it. I must have
gone thru something. Life is happier..it just seems to be a
different world".

That is the ⁺inimation of the Easter faith . . LIFE, won-
derfully different....because of the resurrection of Christ.

But, you know, it really was too bad about that criminal,
too bad. What a wonder he missed. Oh, we do not disparage the
gift Christ gave him . . there at the last few seconds of
his earthly pilgrimage. We rejoice in such marvelous Lord and
Savior.

But it's too bad . . for he missed the joy and fullness
of this life.

Still, tho, how beautiful it is "Today, you will be with
me in Paradise".

But here is something more beautiful: "Today you will
be filled with my love and life will never be the same
again".