

Remember Me

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[0 : 0 0] Well, would you turn with me please to the passage that we read in Luke's Gospel. Luke's Gospel in chapter 23, and reading again verses 39 to 43.

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us. But the other rebuked him, saying, Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?

And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds. But this man has done nothing wrong. And he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

And he said to him, Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. Just for a few moments then, I want to focus on this very well-known story concerning these three crosses that we find on the slopes of Golgotha, Calvary.

And I hope as we look through these events together in verses 39 to 43, that it would be an encouragement to each and every one of us.

[1 : 1 6] For those of you who may be taking notes, we'll look at the passage under three headings. The antagonism, the appeal, and the assurance. The antagonism, the appeal, and the assurance.

First we have the antagonism, that's in verse 39. And here Luke records the first criminal's words of antagonism. At the very beginning of verse 39, we're told a number of things about this man.

Luke tells us that he was a criminal. Matthew and Mark, in their accounts, both use the Greek word *lestes*. This word can be translated thief, or robber, or even political insurrectionist.

This man, this criminal, it was a problem that the Romans wanted rid of. And Luke also tells us that he was hanging or crucified beside Jesus.

Verse 32, we see that these two criminals had been led away at the same time as Jesus. In verse 33, we see that they came to the place called the skull.

[2 : 1 8] And there they were nailed two crosses on either side of Jesus. And Luke tells us that this criminal proceeded to rail against Jesus.

The word can be translated blasphemy. In verse 35, the religious leaders had scoffed at Jesus as he hung on the cross. Verse 36, the Roman soldiers had mocked Jesus as he hung on the cross.

And now in verse 39, this wretched criminal, the most wretched of wretched of men, hurls abuse at Jesus as he hangs on the cross.

In order to breathe, this man would have had to push himself up on his nail-pierced feet. And once he catches that precious breath, that labor breath, he uses it to hurl insults at Jesus.

The little energy that this man has is used to mock Jesus. It's used to belittle Jesus. It is used to ridicule Jesus. It is very much the climax of Jesus' humiliation.

[3 : 22] And then in the second half of verse 39, Luke records what this criminal said to Jesus. He begins by saying, aren't you the Christ?

Now as we go through the Gospels, we see that the Christ was God's anointed and appointed king. God's promised deliverer. God's agent of salvation.

God's promised bringer of blessing. And now this criminal mocks Jesus as he asks, aren't you the Christ? He's joining with religious leaders who said in verse 35, if you are the Christ.

He's joining with Roman soldiers who said in verse 36, if you are the king of the Jews. This man's full of jokes, full of sarcasm, and clearly has no belief that Jesus could possibly be the Christ.

But he continues, if you are the Christ, save yourself and us. He doesn't believe that Jesus is the Christ.

[4 : 24] He doesn't believe that Jesus is God's promised savior. But he does lay out the conditions which, if met, will cause him to believe in Jesus. He says, get yourself off that cross.

And then once you get yourself off that cross, then get me off my cross. And then, and then, and then, and then I will believe. This criminal wants Jesus to prove himself in a spectacular fashion.

It's like the person who says, Jesus, if you're there, then give me a car. Or give me a job. Or give me a boyfriend or a girlfriend. Or give me a clean bill of health.

If you're there, do something for me. This man doesn't see that Jesus offers a different kind of salvation. A different kind of deliverance.

He doesn't see that Jesus is hanging on that cross so that sinful people can be saved from judgment and for eternal life. He is fixated on the present.

[5 : 26] And only cares about salvation from his cross. Not salvation from his sin. Not salvation from that future punishment. This man's unconvinced.

He's unconcerned. He's unconverted. He's unbelieving. He's a lost man. He's a man who died as he lived. Hardened and blinded to the beauty and the glory and the majesty of the one whom he's dying beside.

Now friends, it's important that we focus on this man. Because I think there's a great danger that we can sometimes focus on the second criminal.

And the theme of 11th hour conversions. Now I am not denying for one minute that a person can be converted on their deathbed. I am not denying the reality of the poem.

Between the saddle and the ground was mercy sought and mercy found. But I want us to remember friends that this man in verse 39 was dying right beside the saviour of the world.

[6 : 27] And could only respond to him with bitterness and contempt. This man is on the brink of a lost eternity. And it doesn't move him one bit. And that is the sad and solemn reality that many find out to their cost.

They console themselves with the thought that they'll get right with Jesus later. They console themselves with the thought that they'll have some sort of deathbed experience.

Some sort of 11th hour conversion. They console themselves with the thought that they'll live by their own rules. They'll have their fun. They'll enjoy what the world offers.

And then there will always be time for them to come to Jesus. But it will be in their time and on their terms. They'll console themselves with the thought that they'll get serious about Jesus and serious about salvation at a later date.

And then they find out to their horror that it's too late. So many who said later to Jesus find that later never came.

[7 : 39] They may not be given a quiet deathbed on which to come to Jesus with reasoned thoughts. Or like this criminal they will be on their deathbed and they will know that death is opening its jaws and they waste that final opportunity.

My friend. If you are conscious today of the Lord wrestling with you. If you are conscious of him speaking to you.

If you are conscious of him calling you to himself. I would urge you not to waste that opportunity. It might be your last. This might be the very last time you hear the gospel.

This might be the very last opportunity you have to respond to the gospel. The Lord says in his own word. My spirit will not always contend with a man. I will not always wrestle with a person.

I will not always plead with a person. A time for grace will eventually cease. That's the antagonism.

[8 : 44] This brings us though to the appeal in verses 40 to 42. And here Luke records the second criminal's words of appeal. In verses 40 and 41 we hear the rebuke of this second criminal.

And we can begin by noting that he rebuked his companion. Matthew tells us that both criminals had at one time mocked Jesus. But now this criminal has had a change of heart.

And we can hear what he says. He asks his companion. Do you not fear God? This man fears God. He knows that God is power over life and death.

Knows that God is sovereign over heaven and over hell. Knows that it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And now he says to the man who is dying beside.

On the brink of eternity. Are you still so unconcerned? Are you still so unresponsive to matters concerning your eternal soul? Do you not fear God?

[9 : 44] He goes on. Since you are under the same sentence of condemnation. And we indeed justly. For we are receiving the reward of our deeds. This man knows he's under condemnation. Knows he's under Rome's condemnation.

But even more he knows he's under God's condemnation. And he knows he's deserving of both. He knows that he is a sinner who deserves to die. But he goes on and he says. But this man.

This man that you are mocking. This man that you are ridiculing. This man that you are full of jokes and sarcasm about. This man has done nothing wrong. In verse 4.

Pilate speaks to the chief priests. I find no guilt in this man. Verse 14. Pilate says. I didn't find this man guilty of any of your charges. Verse 15. Pilate reports to the crowd that Herod had found that nothing deserving of death had been done by Jesus.

Verse 22. Pilate himself claims. I have found in him no guilt deserving of death. And now we hear this criminal also declaring Jesus to be innocent. He literally says this man's done nothing improper.

[10 : 50] Nothing out of place. He's righteous. He's blameless. He's flawless. He's crimeless. This man is the man who has done all things well. But the criminal is not finished speaking.

Because in verse 42. He makes the last request. The last appeal of his life. And he begins by saying Jesus. Throughout Luke's gospel. Jesus is referred to as Lord.

Master. Teacher. Even by his closest friends. His disciples. This is one of the few times where he's called by his first name. And how appropriate it is.

Because you remember friends. That the name Jesus means the Lord saves. The Lord is salvation. And this criminal knows that he needs salvation. He needs the Lord to save him.

And he says Jesus. Remember me. Remember me. This is the simplicity of this man's faith. Remember me. He may not have much. But this man has the root of the matter.

[11 : 53] He knows that his whole eternal destiny hangs on Jesus. He doesn't have confessions of faith memorized. He's not been baptized. He's not received the Lord's Supper.

He's never been to the prayer meeting. He's done no good works. He can't make any restitution for what he's done. All he can say is Jesus please remember me.

Please act for my good. And he says when you come into your kingdom. You know this is up there with Peter's great confession. You are the Christ and Son of God.

It's right up there with Thomas' post resurrection confession. You are my Lord and you are my God. God. This man sees this crucified person on a cross.

And he believes that this crucified man. This Jesus is a king. And he believes that not even the cursed death of crucifixion. Will be able to destroy this king or destroy his kingdom.

[12 : 52] And his great hope and his great longing. Is that he will be gathered with this king's people. On the last day. Now friends how did this criminal come to have this great faith?

Well he'd heard Jesus praying. Father forgive them. Verse 34. And he'd heard the testimony of the religious leaders. And the soldiers who have mockingly spoken of Jesus being the Christ.

Verses 35 and 36. And he's read Pilate's evangelistic text. Pilate's evangelistic tract. That had been translated into three languages.

That was hanging above Jesus head. In verse 38. That proclaimed Jesus to be the king of the Jews. Oh he'd heard all that. And he'd seen all that.

But you know friends. His unconverted. Unbelieving. Unconvinced. Unconcerned companion. Had also seen all these things. Had also heard these things.

[13 : 54] Unconcerned. And so all we can say is that a miracle of grace has taken place in this man's life. Do you remember in John 6 Jesus says. No one can come to me.

Unless the father who sent me draws him. And now we can see that the father has drawn this criminal to Jesus. So that this criminal.

In the last moments of his life can cry out. Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom. A divine sovereign miracle. Has taken place in this man's life.

Well friends as we look at this second criminal. We can see the evidences. Of a conversion experience. This man's concerned over his companion soul.

As he asks. Don't you fear God? This man acknowledges his own guilt. The fact that he's a sinner. The fact that he deserves to die.

[14 : 57] This man confesses Jesus to be innocent. To be righteous. To be blameless. To be holy. To have done all things well. This man declares Jesus to be an eternal king.

With an imperishable kingdom. Whose kingship and kingdom will not be destroyed. Even by a Roman cross. And he cries out that Jesus would save him. That Jesus would remember him for good.

And today friend I want to ask. Do you share the faith of this man? Are you confident that all you need for eternity? All you need as you face death.

Is for Jesus to remember you? Have you appealed to Jesus saying. There is nothing that I have done. There is nothing I am doing. There is nothing I can hope to do.

That would qualify me for your kingdom. But would you please remember me? Are you able to sing with the hymn writer. Jesus thou art the sinner's friend.

- [15 : 58] As such I look to thee. Now in the fullness of thy love. O Lord remember me. Remember thy pure word of grace. Remember Calvary's tree. Remember all thy dying groans.
- And then remember me. Thou wondrous advocate with God. I yield my soul to thee. While thou art pleading on the throne. Dear Lord remember me. And when I close my eyes.
- And death and human help shall flee. And then, then my dear redeeming God. O then remember me. Have you appealed to Jesus?
- And this brings us third and finally to the assurance in verse 43. Where Luke records Jesus' word of assurance.
- Remember what we've seen in verses 39 to 42. We've heard the antagonism of the first criminal. Verse 39. We've heard the appeal of the second criminal. Verses 40 to 42.
- [16 : 56] And now we come to the assurance that Jesus gives in verse 43. And Jesus assures this man that he won't forget him. Listen to what Jesus says. Truly I say to you.
- Jesus uses this phrase six times in Luke's gospel. And now Jesus uses this phrase as he speaks to this dying man. It is a phrase that emphasizes that what Jesus is saying is both important and true.
- Something solemn. Something serious. Something this man can hold on to with hope. Truly, truly Jesus says you will be in paradise. Now many would have looked at this dying man and they would have said to him.
- You rejected the way of God in your life. And now you'll go to hell in your death. You've wasted your life. But not Jesus. He tells this man that he'll be in paradise.
- The word paradise is used to refer to the gardens that belong to the kings of Israel and Judah. In 2nd Chronicles and the song of Solomon. It's also used to describe the garden of Eden where Adam and Eve enjoyed the presence and provision of God in Genesis 2.
- [18 : 06] It's also used to describe the wonderful environment that renewed creation where God's redeemed people will live in the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel. It's also used to describe the world. It's also used by Paul as he speaks about being caught up into a heavenly experience in 2nd Corinthians 12.
- And finally it's used by John to describe the place where those who remain faithful to the end will inhabit in Revelation 2. Paradise is the glorious realm where the righteous are gathered.
- And that is what Jesus promises this dying criminal. He's the savior who is willing and able to save to the uttermost. Think of the unworthiness of this criminal.
- Think of his lack of promise. His lack of potential. The world looked at this man and said he's getting what he deserves and he would have agreed with their assessment. He has nothing to offer to God.
- He's not going to become a deacon. He's not going to become an elder. He's not going to become a missionary. He's not going to be able to give a tithe to the church. He's not even going to be able to give a cup of cold water to someone who's suffering.
- [19 : 17] And yet friends, and yet, and yet he receives a place in paradise. That's mercy. That's grace.
- That's Jesus' one way love. His goodness to the undeserving. But Jesus goes further as he says, you will be in paradise with me. You know, we tend to read Jesus' words as, you will be with me in paradise.
- But the reality is that Jesus is saying, you will be in paradise with me, with me, with me. Being with Jesus is the definition of paradise.
- In Philippians 1, we quote it so often. Paul said that his desire was to depart and be with Christ, which was far better.

Jesus is the hope of heaven. The promise of heaven. The reward of heaven. The goal of heaven. The joy of heaven. John Piper writes, if you could have heaven with no sickness.

[20 : 24] And with all the friends you ever had on earth. And all the food you ever liked. And all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed. And all the natural beauties you ever saw.

All the physical pleasures you ever tasted. And no human conflict or any natural disasters. Could you be satisfied with heaven if Christ were not there? Christ did not die to forgive sinners who go on treasuring anything above seeing and savoring God.

And people, listen to this friends, people who would be happy in heaven if God were not there. If Christ were not there, will not be there.

The gospel is not a way to get people to heaven. It is a way to get people to God. To get them to Jesus.

And here Jesus says to this wretched man, Not only will I remember you. Not only will you be admitted into paradise. But I will take you to be with me forever.

[21 : 33] And Jesus says in verse 43, Today you will be in paradise with me. What a promise. That morning this criminal had breakfasted with the devil on earth.

And that night he supped with Christ in glory. That morning he'd stood before the bar of earthly justice and was condemned. That night he stood before the bar of divine justice and was acquitted.

That morning he went outside the gates of Jerusalem to the jeers of the onlookers. That night the gates of paradise swung open. And the angels rejoiced as this prodigal came home.

But note friends. That nothing is said to the first criminal. There's only this fearful silence.

Perhaps Jesus gave him one final pitying gaze. But there's no word for him. No promise for him. No hope for him.

[22 : 43] You know friends, as we consider this verse, Jesus didn't need to speak to the second criminal. This man clearly had faith and that was enough.

But Jesus spoke to assure him. You see, Jesus wants his people to be confident of their place and standing with him.

Jesus wants his people to be assured and secure in their faith. Jesus wants his people to know the joy of being loved and accepted in him.

And that is why he says to this man as he breathes his last. Truly I say to you, you will be in paradise with me today.

So many people struggle with assurance. And they struggle with believing that Jesus has really accepted them. And maybe there's even a lurking thought in the back of their minds.

[23 : 41] Perhaps Jesus wants me to be this way. Perhaps Jesus wants me to be wrestling with this lack of assurance. Wrestling with whether I am truly loved by him and accepted by him.

Perhaps there are even some here today. Perhaps you're here today, friend, and you're really wrestling with that assurance. And if you have that problem, look at verse 42.

Have you appealed to Jesus? Have you said to him, Jesus, remember me? Have you said to him, I need you to save me because I cannot save myself? There is nothing that I have done.

Nothing I am doing. Nothing I can hope to do that would qualify me for your kingdom. Please, would you remember me? And if you've appealed to him, then verse 43 are his words to you.

You will be with me in paradise. What an encouragement. What a comfort. What a consolation. What an assurance for our trembling hearts and souls today that Jesus won't forget those who ask him to remember him.

[24 : 52] As we close, let's listen to these words from Jeff Thomas, who writes, In Christ you are ready. You are as ready this moment sitting in that chair as the moment you die.

You are as ready as if you had served and suffered for Christ as Paul had through his 30 years. You are as ready for a glorious entrance into heaven as anyone whose faith is in Christ.

If your faith, and I love this turn of phrase, if your faith is as thin as a spider's thread, as long as it is lodged in Christ, you are safe.

It is not great faith that makes us ready for heaven. It is a great saviour who saves us. Our salvation depends not on our good works, but on God's delight with the Lord Jesus and his perfect work.

For Jesus' sake, God washes us and takes us to himself. It is his joy to open heaven for all of us.

[26 : 03] What an assurance. What an assurance from a saviour who spoke to that dying criminal who made that final appeal.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us today.