

The Robber's Plea and the Redeemer's Promise

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[0:00] Well, turn with me, if you will, tonight to Luke's Gospel, chapter 23. Luke chapter 23, verse 42.

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.

I would like us to consider two things in relation to the thief, the criminal, the robber on the cross.

The robber's plea and the redeemer's response. Well, perhaps you expected tonight's sermon to focus on Bethlehem's cradle rather than Golgotha's cross.

But I want to ask the question, what is the cradle without the cross? The cradle points us to the cross.

[1:26] And whilst the birth of Christ brought God to man, the cross of Christ brings man to God.

So we are going to focus on how one man is brought to God through the Christ of the cross.

So let's begin by focusing on the robber's plea. Luke 23, verse 42. He said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Well, we live in a polluted world. And pollution comes in all kinds of forms.

There is such a thing as environmental noise pollution. You know the kind of thing where there may be disturbing or excessive noise around you.

[2:36] Well, I want to begin by saying that there is no small measure of noise pollution around Calvary's cross.

This robber cries out for mercy. But in all likelihood, he scarcely hears himself speak.

Why is that? Because his voice is being drowned out by all kinds of disparaging background voices. The noise pollution of a sneering crowd.

The noise pollution of mocking soldiers and scoffing rulers and a deranged fellow criminal. All raging and ranting loudly in unison at and against Jesus.

I want you to imagine what it must have been like from his perspective, the said robber. He must be more than a little anxious that his voice may be falling on deaf ears.

[3:48] Jesus is now weak, bleeding profusely. And as the sixth hour fast approaches, Jesus is about to breathe his last.

Will the robber's plea be heard? Might he be asking himself, is it too little too late? Is my plea in vain?

Will Jesus take any notice of me? He is crucified, isn't he? Next to Jesus. He lodges this eleventh hour appeal for forgiveness.

And it's a very personal plea, isn't it? Jesus, remember me. Forget me not. Don't leave me behind when you come into your kingdom.

Now again, let's put things into perspective. This robber has been crucified next to Jesus for high treason. Perhaps he had appealed to the Roman authorities for mercy, but of course it's been in vain.

[5 : 06] Caesar refuses to give him a hearing. Will Christ, will this plea be any different? Well again, I want to stop there and ask if perhaps some of us are asking questions like that tonight.

Will Jesus hear me? Should I cry to him for mercy and forgiveness? Are you asking questions like that?

Some of us may be conscious tonight of the clock ticking. The sands of time are indeed sinking beneath our feet.

The year is all but over. This is our eleventh hour scenario. And that brings its own air of urgency.

Some of us may be living our lives very sailing close to the wind. And some of us might even be asking, as we roll back the years, is it too little, too late?

[6 : 13] So, question. What lessons can I learn from this attention-grabbing passage of scripture recorded for us by Luke? What gospel message does it convey to us as we approach the end of another year?

Well, the first thing I want us to notice as we explore the robber's plea is that this man is, in many respects, the exception to the rule.

What do we mean by that? Well, look at verse 40. Look at the all-important conjunction that indicates a change of direction.

There's a change of emphasis. But, Luke tells us, and it matters, but the other rebuked him.

He rebukes, you will notice here, his partner in crime for railing at Jesus.

[7 : 19] Verse 39. Now, this is significant. Because the other criminal is uttering blasphemy.

The word for railing, when Luke tells us that he railed at him, what he's saying literally is that he hurled blasphemous insults at Jesus.

Interestingly, the word, the Greek word, is blasphemio. And another thing, he openly confesses his own guilt.

That's significant, isn't it? He acknowledges, too, that his punishment fits his crime. And you will notice that, by contrast, here he highlights the innocence of Jesus.

A blameless man, he says, who has done nothing wrong. And you will also note that he recognizes that Jesus is no ordinary man.

[8 : 34] He reads the title over his head. This is Jesus, the king of the Jews. And he believes it to be absolutely true.

He identifies him as a king with a kingdom. And this robber wishes to be a part of this heavenly kingdom. Remember me, he says to Jesus.

Grant me, if you will, citizenship of your kingdom. Don't forsake me. Don't abandon me. I wonder if any of this resonates with us tonight.

Might there be a deep longing within the deepest recesses of your heart? You can relate to this man's plea.

You know, you can almost get an echo or you get a little echo of that well-known narrative back in the Old Testament where Ruth makes a plea to Naomi.

[9 : 44] Where you go, I wish to go. Where you lodge, I wish to lodge. All of that is being expressed and more besides in this man's plea.

Notice too, only moments ago, he reviled Jesus in the same way as his accomplice. When we look at Matthew 27, verse 44, Matthew tells us that both robbers reviled Jesus.

Again, the gospel writers choose their words carefully, emphasizing here the use of despicable, derogatory, degrading language.

Again, it's profanity in the extreme. Picture it. That was a moment or two ago. Now, there appears to be a sudden and remarkable change of heart.

Moments ago, this robber was going with the flow. Now, there has been a seismic shift, a turning point from casting personal abuse at Jesus to a personal plea for mercy to Jesus.

[11:12] And so it begs the question, what has led to this fundamental change of heart? Might it have been the poignant, moving, mercy-filled words of Jesus in verse 34?

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. This is remarkable because Jesus is fulfilling a fundamental part of his own teaching and ministry.

When you go back to Luke chapter 6, there we get a snapshot of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus, Jesus utters these words in Luke 6, 27, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.

Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. Now, that was at the outset of the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus will now practice what he has preached. He will now fulfill his ministry. And he will show mercy to his enemies in a crucible of extreme hatred and animosity.

[12:59] Again, we get a remarkable picture of the Jesus of the prophets who spoke many, many, many generations prior.

We see, do we not, the Christ of Isaiah on the cross. The child that would be born to us, that would be given to us.

The words of the prophet in chapter 9. We now see the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 on Golgotha's cross.

There we see him, numbered with the transgressors, forgiving their transgressions, despised, rejected by men, oppressed and afflicted.

He reaches out in mercy with outstretched arms to those around him and crucially beside him who are reaching out against him with their clenched fists and pointed fingers and blasphemous tongues.

[14:19] This is the Christ child of the manger. Now on the cross, he who came to seek and to save the lost.

Do you know him this evening? Word of the Father in flesh appearing, he for me.

And isn't it remarkable that God the Father will answer his son's plea. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

God will answer his prayer in the most dramatic of circumstances. You know, there are any number of unlikely converts around the cross.

You know, if you had stood there. And if we had been asked, right, identify who might just be saved, would you have thought of this robber or the Roman centurion or some of the high priests?

[15:33] Acts chapter 6 verse 7 tells us that a great number of the priests became obedient to the faith.

I believe that such men were there. I'm not sure that many of us would have got it right.

But what all of this highlights is that God the Father saves to the uttermost. God the Father is in the business of bringing the prodigal's home.

Even at this late hour, Isaiah's prophecy is being fulfilled. His hand is not shortened that it cannot save, or his ear dull that it cannot hear.

Again, notice, if you will, even at this closing point in Luke's gospel, Jesus is fulfilling his mission.

[16:47] He is the same Jesus introduced to us in Matthew's gospel who came to save his people from their sins.

Jesus, our New Testament, Joshua. And we see him here touching and transforming lives right up to the end point of breathing his last.

Remember the words of Jesus in John 6, 37, Again, isn't it remarkable that the lost sheep of the house of Israel are being gathered in one by one.

Not one will be lost, not even a despicable thief on a cross. This is the Jesus of Luke's gospel who came to proclaim liberty to the captives.

The Jesus of John and Matthew and Mark, for even the Son of Man, they say in unison, came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

[18:11] He came, did he not, to save sinners. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance like this man, like you, like me.

You know, it's been said that the heart of the Christian faith is the Bible. The heart of the Bible is the cross.

And the heart of the cross is the very heart of God himself. And so it is. This takes us into the very core, the very nucleus of John 3, 16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. The love of God became incarnate at Bethlehem.

And so we sing these words. Child in the manger, infant of Mary, outcast and stranger, Lord of all, child who inherits all our transgressions, all our demerits, on him fall.

[19:32] Do you know this, Jesus? As you spend time around the cradle, do you sense Calvary's cross casting its shadow?

Oh, how we would do well to spend time where the shepherds stood and the wise men.

But we would do even better to turn these pages of Luke and Matthew until we gravitate towards the cross and focus on Christ and him crucified.

Do you know him as you fast approach the end of another year in your life? Does this robber's plea resonate with some of us in a particular way tonight?

Might we be asking something similar? Do the sentiments of this man's appeal register with us? Perhaps even touching a raw nerve?

[20:56] Well, let's move on and let's focus on the Redeemer's response in verse 43. And he said to him, Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

Well, bulging with encouragement, Jesus' response, Luke tells us, couldn't be more forthright. There is no indication that Jesus hesitates in his reply.

There is nothing here to indicate that he didn't hear the robber's plea the first time. Nothing to indicate that Jesus ignores him with a cold shoulder or with a prolonged silence.

No, not at all. Jesus responds with his forthright words, Truly, with absolute assurance, Without question, without a shadow of a doubt, With absolute certainty, I say to you, I give you my word, By royal statute and decree, Today, Yes, This very day, You will be with me in paradise.

Paradise? Paradise? Why didn't Jesus say heaven? Paradise is one of the most glorious words in Scripture for heaven.

[22:25] You will find this word three times in the New Testament. It's a Persian word for garden.

And Jesus here, the royal gardener, Promises this robber, An eternal relationship of unbroken fellowship.

Yes, between this robber and his redeemer. In heaven's green pastures. In that heavenly garden.

I said it's mentioned three times here. In Revelation 2-7, Heaven is referred to as the paradise of God.

Reserved for the one who conquers through Christ. It's mentioned too in 2 Corinthians 12, Where Paul speaks of a personal heavenly experience, And he refers to that heavenly experience, Within the use of this word, Paradise.

[23:43] There, Jesus promises endless fellowship from this day forth. In a glorious garden that perhaps resembles the former glory of Eden.

But unlike the old Eden, Of the book of Genesis, There will be in this garden, No tears, No mourning, No crying, No pain, No parting.

No longer will there be anything accursed. Jesus is saying, In no uncertain terms, You will be with me.

Today. And every other day. World without end. You will remain with me. By me. Isn't it remarkable? Unlike his first parents, He will not, This will not be a temporary stay for the robber.

It will be a permanent, Perpetual stay With Jesus Christ. Truly.

[25:02] These words Do matter. The words of the Lord Jesus, Truly I say to you. Jesus is saying, Truly I tell you the truth.

This is a robust, Concrete promise. This man is assured of his salvation. And I want to pause at this point, Because there is much here that encourages those of us, Who know this Jesus, Of Luke 23.

There is enduring comfort, Here, In the Redeemer's response, For all of us, Who are followers, Of Jesus Christ.

Because when your end point comes, And come it will. Jesus is saying to you too, That you too will be with him in paradise.

You know sometimes, Along the Christian walk, The journey can be taxing. Tell me about it, You might be saying tonight.

[26:20] There are occasions, When all we have, To say, Is Lord, Remember me. You ever find yourself like that?

Perhaps echoing the sentiments, Of the psalmist, Remember, Lord, Your love and grace. Remember me, And your great love. Have mercy on me.

Do not forget me. Do not forsake me. Remember me. Remember me. And Jesus says, In response, I will. I am with you always.

And when time is no more, When you draw your last breath, Your soul will immediately pass into glory, And you will be with me.

As one poet puts it, Face to face, Oh blissful moment, Face to face, To see and know, Face to face, With my Redeemer, Jesus Christ, Who loves me so.

[27 : 35] Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Once preached, On, Joseph, And in his series, On Joseph, When he reached chapter 40, He drew a comparison, Between Joseph, And Jesus, And it goes like this, Joseph, In prison, Asked the chief butler, To remember him, When he was restored, To power, But he forgot him, And Spurgeon goes on to say, Our Joseph, Never forgets, A sinner, Who cries to him, In the low dungeon, In his kingdom, He remembers, The moanings, And groanings, Of poor sinners, Who are burdened, With a sense,

Of sin, Does that not bring encouragement, To those of us, Who may be finding, The going tough, And in need, Of assurance, Anew this night, I want us to see too, That Jesus recognizes, That there is much more, Than just an acknowledgement, Of wrongdoing, Or a confession of guilt, On the part, Of this robber, Jesus discerns, Does he not, The cry, Of a penitent heart here, A heartfelt confession, Of sin, Of wrongdoing, Jesus recognizes, A spirit of repentance, An awareness, Of faith, Being exercised, Faith comes, By hearing, And we can, We can conclude, That this robber, Has heard much, And he cries,

Out, In faith, What is faith, We break it down, Don't we, Forsaking all, I trust him, And that's precisely, What this man does, Remember me, He realizes, Doesn't he, That death, Is not the end point, Beyond death, There lies, Another world, A kingdom, Like no other, And he, Wants to be, A part of it, And Jesus, Assures him, Of a plot, In Emmanuel's land, He wants, To be, A part of it, Do you, Because there is a heaven, To be gained, There is a hell, To be shunned, This man, Knows,

Where he wants to go, And he takes, The necessary steps, To secure, His place, There, Have you done that, Will you do that, In the here, And now, You know, Somebody once said, That faith, Is not faith, Until it's, All you're holding on to, What might you be, Holding on to tonight, Might that be, A stumbling block, Might that be, A wedge, That needs to be taken away, Between you, And Jesus Christ, Nothing in my hands, I bring, Simply to thy cross, I cling, And as we close, I want us to notice as well, That this passage, Does not give any of us, Tonight, A warrant, To adopt, This robber's, 1159, Appeal, For mercy, To do that,

If you like, Just before the bells, Toll, A plea, That can wait, Until much, Much later on, In life, Perhaps some of us, Think like that, I've just put off, Perhaps it's some kind, Of new year, Resolution, To what next year, Is going to be different, I'm going to do, Business with God, I'm going to take up, The cross, I'll deny myself, Perhaps six weeks, Into January, When it's all over, Perhaps you're saying, You look at this man, And you think, Well, Maybe I could be like that, I could, It'll work out, In the end, People look at this passage, But it's a false economy, Isn't it?

[32 : 32] Because we mustn't, Underestimate the pain, And the anguish, Of this man's, Christian life, Short as it was, Let's just, Analyze a little, This man's, Faith, Will be tried, It'll be tested, To the very limit, Look at verse 46, We read, That Jesus, Breathes his last, But the robbers, The thieves, Live on for a time, Don't they?

This man, Who is under the spotlight, He will now witness, Jesus' death, This new convert, In a moment, Will be on his own, Perhaps, Being taunted, By his fellow criminal, Perhaps, He'll be intimidated, By others, Would he not, Have been susceptible, To doubt, To questions, Might he have been, Lacking assurance, Under oppression, From the demonic, Atmosphere, Around Golgotha, The devil himself, Whispering in his ear, You are lost, Imagine the agony, The anguish, The torture, Of having his legs, Broken, As John tells us, In chapter 19, And at that point,

He will, He will no longer, Be able to, To use his legs, To remain upright, And ease his breathing, He will soon die, In absolute, Agony, And so, He asks the question, What, Will keep this man going?

What did keep him, Fueled? Well, No doubt, His, Redeemer's, Promise, Of a, Glorious, Paradise, Beyond the pain, And the torment, And the suffering, Of crucifixion, What keeps him going?

He knows, That the best, Is yet, To come. Imagine the chief priests, And the rest, We have no king, But Caesar, And imagine the robber, Perhaps responding back, I have no king, But Christ.

[35 : 07] Oh, Long before the apostle Paul, Uttered these words, In 2nd Corinthians 4, 16, This robber, Might have uttered words, Not unlike these, So, I do not lose heart, Though my outer self, Is wasting away, My inner self, Is being renewed, Moment by moment, He is saying to himself, For this light, Momentary affliction, Is preparing for me, An eternal weight, Of glory, Of glory, Beyond comparison, And so he perseveres, And he persists, And Jesus' ministry, Is being fulfilled, I will build my church, And the gates of hell, Shall not prevail, Against it, So I want to challenge you tonight,

To adopt this plea, This appeal, In the here and now, Cry, If you will, As this man did, Remember me, And take encouragement, If you will, From the robust response, Of a compassionate Christ, Who saves, To the very uttermost, Now I want to, Close with, These words, I mentioned Spurgeon, A moment ago, But there is a great, Book, There are three volumes, Published by the banner of truth, It's called, Majesty, In misery, And in volume three, Spurgeon, It's a sermon, He preached, At the metropolitan tabernacle, Possibly 1870, 1880, Thereabouts, And I want to leave,

These words with you, These words left, An impression on me, And I want to convey them to you, For your encouragement, And we close, I quote, I would invite you, To find pardon, And a change of heart, Through our Lord Jesus Christ, You may come to him, Whoever you may be, For this man did, Says Spurgeon, Here is a specimen, Of one, Who had gone, To the extreme, Of guilt, And to acknowledge, That he had done so, So he made no excuse, And sought no cloak, For his sin, He was in the hands, Of justice, Confronted with, The death, Doom, And yet, He believed in Jesus, And breathed, A humble prayer to him, And he was, As Spurgeon puts it, Saved on, The spot, As is, The sample, So is the bulk,

Says Spurgeon, Jesus, Saves others, Of like, Kind, Let me therefore, Put it very plainly here, That none may mistake me, None of you, Are excluded, From the infinite mercy, Of Christ, However great, Your iniquity, If you believe, In Jesus, He will save you, Amen, Let us pray, O Lord, Our gracious God, We give you thanks, For the gospel, And its power, To save, To save, We give you thanks, For our robber's plea, And for our redeemer's response, And grant, As we pray, To turn to Jesus, Seeking mercy, Forgiveness, And cleansing, We give thanks, That if we do so,

We have, One, Who is willing, To save, Come to me, And I will give you rest, Continue with us, Part us with your blessing, In Jesus name, Amen, We are going, To close our service, By singing, To God's praise, The words of, Psalm 130, The Scottish Psalter, On page 421, The tune is, Martyrdom, Psalm 130, On page 421, Lord, From the depths, To thee I cried, My voice, Lord, Do thou hear, Unto my supplications voice, Give an attentive ear,

[40 : 14] And the high point, Of course, Is the final stanza, And plenteous redemption, Is ever found with him, And from all his iniquity, He Israel shall redeem, To the praise of God, In conclusion.

Lord, From the depths, To thee I cried, My voice, Lord, Do thou hear, Unto my supplications, Lord, Who shall stand, If thou, O Lord, Should mark iniquity, But yet with thee, Forgiveness, That fear the wicked, Forgiveness, That fear the wicked, I wait for God,

That fear the wicked, That fear the wicked, That fear the wicked, I wait for God, For God, My soul doth wait, For the Lord, My hope is in his word, More than live at, For morning watch, Watch my soul, My soul, Which for the Lord, I say more than they glad to watch, The morning light, To see,

Let Israel open the Lord, For with him, And plentious redemption, Is ever found, With him,
And from all his iniquities, He Israel shall redeem, The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The
love of God the Father, And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,

Remain with us all. Amen.