

Never Late

“Today you will be with me in paradise”

Ἐγὼ ἂν ἴθι

Seven Words From the Cross

Luke 23:32-43

In the coming weeks, I will study with you the seven sayings of Jesus on the cross. The cross, for us a symbol of Christian faith, was an unpleasant instrument used to execute criminals. In fact, the early church did not use it as their symbol. Every time I look at a cross, it reminds me of the death of Jesus and his victory, the death of sin and Christ's victory over death. As the lyrics of the hymn “Beneath the Cross of Jesus” say: **the cross is the “place where heaven's love and heaven's justice meet.”** (Elizabeth C. Clephane)

Seven Words from the cross. While hanging on the cross, Jesus spoke. These are the last words of Jesus before he died. We all take very seriously the last words of a dying person, a family member, a friend, or a close person, right? How much we should pay attention to Jesus' words? They are treasured by believers as **the Seven Words from the Cross**, or **the Sayings of Jesus on the cross**. You may think that these are just the words of a man who is dying in the most horrible way. I don't think so. In these sayings, we hear Jesus opening his heart to us and to his Father. We hear words of sorrow and comfort, words of pain and encouragement, words of purpose and love.

1. ***"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." Luke 23:34***
2. ***"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Luke 23:43***
3. ***Jesus said to his mother: "Woman, this is your son." Then he said to the disciple: "This is your mother." John 19:26-27***
4. ***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34***
5. ***"I thirst." John 19:28***

6. ***"It is finished;"***

and he bowed his head and handed over the spirit. John 19:30

7. ***"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Luke 23:46***

Last Sunday Badveli Kevin covered the fifth saying: the thirst of Jesus.

Today we will take the second saying:

**"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43
ESV)**

In his first saying, Jesus prayed to his Father for the forgiveness of those who didn't know what were they doing. **How considerate is our Lord.** Even in his greatest pain, he prayed and asked for forgiveness for the people who were blind and could see the truth. His prayer **declared guilt and offered forgiveness at the same time.**

As Jesus prayed this prayer, both criminals were crucified next to him. They witnessed what had happened to him and they heard his prayer.

Jesus' Second Saying narrows its focus **to one single needy sinner**, a criminal crucified next to him. Does Jesus care for the whole world? Jesus not only cares the whole world but he sees each individual, you and me. Jesus is on the cross. In his pain and agony, he pays attention to these two individuals who were intentionally crucified next to him. The authorities wanted to humiliate Jesus. The man on whom they could not find any criminal charges was executed next to criminals.

Yet, this event was also the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. The particular prophecy that was being fulfilled is recorded in **Isaiah 53** where, among many other predictions, the prophet declared that the coming **Suffering Servant** of the Lord was he who **"was numbered with the transgressors."**

We read in Isaiah: **"and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."**(Isaiah 53:12b)

Who were those crucified next to him?

What we know is that they were criminals, and it looks like they knew each other well.

Common things between the two criminals:

-Both were in pain. **“Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.”** (v32)

-Both heard Jesus praying, **“Father forgive them.”** (v34)

-Both saw how the soldiers and the people humiliated Jesus. (v35-36)

-Both saw what was written over the head of Jesus: **“This is the King of the Jews.”**(v38)

-Both were criminals and guilty of a crime. **“And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds.”** (v41)

-Both wanted to be saved.

How? What does it mean to be saved?

How about their differences?

-One of the Criminals:

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” (Luke 23:39 ESV)

He declares that Jesus is the Christ. If that is true, “Save yourself and save us.” Let us define the word save: “Do something, stop this pain and horrible crucifixion and take us down.” “Give me life man, give me life...”

We face this today as well. I mentioned before that we use prayer in the same way we use a **“spare wheel.”** We will go to prayer when all options are finished. We will go to God when we are in pain and suffering. The man is on the cross. Anything is OK just to be saved. Let me tell you something, God is ready to listen to us any time. But watch out how you approach God. This thief, wanted to be saved. I don't see any guilt for his sins. This man did not have the spirit of

brokenness, guilt, penitence, or humility. He was ready to call Jesus by any name just to save his skin.

We treat Jesus this way even today. We live a life without any relationship with him. We live a life where God is not our God. Then suddenly in our pain and suffering we remember that we can approach God for help. Let me tell you, God is ready to listen to you cry out even then. But, how do you approach him? How genuine is your approach?

-The Second Criminal

But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴²And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” (Luke 23:40-42ESV)

What do we see here?

Notice that the man didn't ask Jesus to stop his pain, although he would have been in excruciating pain on the cross. He said, **“Jesus, remember me.”** Why?

He wanted more than saving his skin. I see some points here:

1. It seems he knew about Jesus. He had either seen him before personally, or someone had told him. He calls Him by name.
2. He acknowledged the kingship of Jesus. **“Your kingdom.”**
3. He feared God. God was real to him. He says to his friend: **“Do you not fear God?”** Strange, he is a criminal like the other man, yet he knew something about God, about respecting who God is. About having awe towards God.
4. He admitted they were criminals, but not Jesus. **“We are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”**
5. He did not just admit, but accepted punishment: **Do you not fear God, since you (we) are under the same sentence of condemnation (Justly)? ⁴¹And we indeed**

justly... Let me give Message translation: **You're getting the same as him. We deserve this...**

6. He acknowledged that Jesus was righteous. "but this man done nothing wrong..."

7. He asked Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom, so he knew Jesus was Israel's long awaited **Messiah** who was to be their king.

I read this: *Both* thieves wanted to be saved from death. But O how differently they sought their salvation:

1) "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

2) "Jesus, remember when you come into your kingdom!" There is an infinite qualitative difference between "Save me!" and "Save me!" (John Piper)

Application:

1. The invitation is open to everyone.

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

This Word from the Cross reminds us that the worst sinner may be saved. Jesus accepted the other man in paradise. Paradise is a Persian word means a **walled garden**. When a Persian king wanted to honor someone he would walk with the person in the garden. The King would be a "**companion of the garden**".

How beautiful is this picture. Jesus is not just accepting this man; he is saying "TODAY you will be with me as my companion." The invitation is open to all.

2. It's never late for anyone to be saved.

How tragic is that only one asked to be with Jesus. It is never too late to ask.

Let me warn you. It is never late, but all invitations have a limited time on this earth. It can be too late when one keeps postponing the invitation of the Lord. No one knows what happens next in our life. **The time of decision came to both.** But only one of them responded. The other lost the invitation. It was now or never.

As James Russell Lowell put it:

"Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide, In the strife of Truth and Falsehood, for the good or evil side; Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight, Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right, And the choice goes by forever 'twixt that darkness and that light."

"Today you will be with me in paradise." You know why? Because the man asked that day. That day became TODAY. Today is God's day. Do not postpone your surrender to him.

Today do not harden you heart

3. The man was saved simply by asking the Lord to save him. In the words of his request, there's the implication that he felt and confessed his need of salvation; he believed the Lord could and would save him and he committed himself to the Lord and trusted him to save him **For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13).**

The Bible says in Acts 16:31, **"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."**

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer, the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives. (To God be the Glory)

Why do you postpone accepting the invitation?

Someone once said that the story of the dying thieves was recorded so that no one need despair, and also as a dire warning to presume on God's mercy by delaying trusting in Christ.