

Sovereign Grace For A Particular Thief

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Bible Text: Luke 23:43
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Let's go to our text together this morning and our text will be found in Luke 23:43.

43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

Let us pray.

Dear heavenly Father, gracious and holy, how just, how merciful, how loving, how much you are to thy people, O Lord. I pray, Lord, that at this hour you would come and visit our souls, that you would indeed speak this text to our souls and that at this hour we would be found with thee in paradise, that you would be pleased to take our minds, our hearts and our thoughts off of self, off the world, away from whatever devices Satan would put in front of us at this hour and, Lord, may you take us to the heavens to see thee reigning, to see thee, Lord, as Lord. Lord, may you give me liberty in this passage, they speak wonderful truths of the depths of thy grace and may it be food for thy people this day as you are pleased to reveal it. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

This passage when I read it and the Lord accompanies it, I either smile or have a smile in my soul. When we come to this passage, we see the depth of grace, we see the sovereignty of his grace, we see how particular grace is, but this morning I want you to understand and I hope you experience how experiential this passage is. I was reading one, I have been for the last couple of weeks, his name is Joseph Hatton. He wrote in the late 1800s over in England and he was writing in one of his sermons about eternal life and what we have in Christ and he wrote in there about just a little comment about how when we talk about life, when Christ mentions life in the Scriptures, it indeed is eternal life; that when we experience life, we are experiencing eternal life. They are one and the same.

I mean, we know that. We know it up here in our minds because to live life in Christ is a deep and a walk with the Lord that nobody or nothing can come into when the Lord takes you and sets you in that place where you see just he and you and him leading you and speaking to you and loving you and nurturing you, but that's eternal life. And as we live in this life and have glimpses of that, I say to you today this passage which we're all very familiar with as we look at the events and the things in the life of this one that the Lord

saved by grace, and I hope it's meaningful. I hope that the Holy Spirit reveals to you the same salvation, this eternal life; that he says to you, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." Today, this hour, that the Lord would take you in your mind, in your heart, in your soul, and in that great communion with the Holy Spirit and with this Triune Lord, he would reveal to you, to me, to those in this room that are his children, what true life is, that eternal life is in Christ and Christ alone that we may have kinship with a thief but at the same time have a great communion with our Lord.

We say those words outwardly, you say, "Oh, who would want to have kinship with a thief?" I pray today as we see things in the thief, that they are something the Holy Spirit reveals to us, our need, our need of the Lord to say to us, "Today at this moment shalt thou be with me in paradise." Because faithful is he that calleth you to that moment, to that time. He will do it. And I guarantee you as much as I stand here on these Scriptures, that you will be willing in the day of his power.

I want to begin today not in Luke's account but in Matthew's. Matthew and Mark's account is basically the same account but I want to go to Matthew's real quick to establish a couple of things, so if you'd turn with me to Matthew 27. In Matthew 27, we read in verse 38, "Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left." Well, isn't that the way it should be? Mark says that it's a fulfillment of the Scriptures that he be numbered with the transgressors. But here we have one on one side and one on the other side as the Lord's hands are outstretched and he has the power of life in one and he has the power of death in the other, and he has the power of eternal life in one and he has the power of eternal damnation in the other, and both thieves, one is representative of one and one is representative of the other. But we don't know that. We don't know that. What we know about them are that there are two thieves, two thieves crucified with him.

Now look at 44. Well, before we get to 44, let's go ahead and read, let's just start at 39. "And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth." I want you to understand that in Mark's account and in Matthew's account we only have the beginning of it. We have the two thieves said the same things as the chief priests, as the same things as the scribes, and the same things of the elders which puts them all in the same boat. The religious men of this world, the thieves of this world, the murderers of this world, are all in the same boat. They all look at religion the same way if they look at it at all. These two thieves listened to what the crowd was saying and they were easily swayed by what was being said and they mocked him and they ridiculed him and they made light of who he said he was just like the religious people in the area. "I mock you, Lord, that you are on that cross finishing salvation for your people." That's what religion does today, modern religion, most of religion. And I'm telling you, the Holy Spirit puts this verse 44 on

record to show us the thieves, the very same thing that what we would call base criminals, what they had to say was the same thing and they were gnashing their teeth and they were just so angry and they reviled against Christ. This is the picture and the understanding that we have of both thieves. Both of them.

Now with that being said, turn with me back to our text in Luke 23 and we'll pick up with Luke's account. Luke, of all the Gospels, was the most detailed. He wrote the most detailed. The Holy Spirit revealed the detail of things in his writing and we get a little more in his. So if we start in verse 32, we hear the same thing, "And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left." And here we have the Lord in the midst of two sinners. But isn't that who he came to save? I pray today as we look at the two thieves on the cross, I ask you, what maketh them to differ? I ask you in this room, what makes you to differ from the guy sitting under false doctrine today believing that Christ died for everyone as the other thief will say here in a moment? What makes you different today if you are different? What makes it different that you look at redemption as being particular? That you look at grace as being sovereign? That you look at salvation as being of the Lord's giving and the Lord's alone? What makes us to differ?

As you've read so far, as we've seen in these, there is no difference between these two thieves. Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:15, "This is a faithful saying," understand that, this is a faithful saying, "and worthy of all acceptance," worthy for you to believe it today if the Holy Spirit is willing it; for you to believe "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Paul wrote that. We know about Paul's life. This thief, we know that has been a thief and he's worthy of death, in fact, so badly that he's being crucified. Both of them. The penalty of their death is the worst, most heinous way to die that the Romans could come up with. And we know that, we know that that is their vindictiveness, their anger and what they chose for Christ to be crucified in this way.

Now we go on where the same account Luke has where Christ is being derided, the rulers are deriding him in 35, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself." Then we come to verse 39, "And one of the malefactors," what's interesting about that is "one" of the malefactors, "which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." That's a little universal redemption there, isn't it? Universal atonement there. "Can't you save us all?" Isn't that what salvation is, it's for every man? Isn't that what the chief priests and everybody is hollering, saying, "Save us all. If you're the Son of God, save us all." Isn't that what we hear today that Christ came to save everyone? And this thief somehow found religion here at the last hour, and I say religion, and he looks at the boat that he's in and he says, "Oh, these guys out here call you the Messiah. Save me too! Isn't that what you came for? Isn't that what the Messiah is for?" "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." And he says the same thing that the religious people say.

"But the other," verse 40, but the other thief, "answering rebuked him." We don't get that in the other two Gospels. As I said, Luke and the Holy Spirit puts this on record. In this moment, the other thief who was gnashing on Christ, who had the very same things to say that the religious world had to say, all of a sudden rebuked the one next to him and said,

"Do you not thou fear God?" What? In just moments earlier, you weren't fearing God. We like to point to that. "Well, you said this. You can't be a child of God if you sin this way." And that's how Satan comes to us too. "You've sinned this way and grace can't cover that. Christ didn't die for that kind of sin. You've willingly done these things. You continue to do these things. You continue to say these things." And that's what I ask you: what was it that made a difference? And we preach the sufficiency of Christ, the power of the Holy Ghost to turn one from darkness to light; to give life where there is no life; to bring forth the power of salvation in the soul. And you'll be hard-pressed to find another account like this in the word of God because this thief, we have no understanding of his baptism. We have no religious duties that he's done. We have no prayer that he's offered. We have nothing in him that has warranted to be saved at this hour. He's a thief. He's a criminal.

"Do you not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly." What? What? You've been revealed sin? You believe that you are justly up there? Why? Because the wages of sin is death. You are rightly in the place to be executed because you have sinned.

"We indeed justly." How do you get there? Well, the Scriptures tell us, it's the Holy Spirit that convinces his people of sin. It's the Holy Spirit that says, "Thou art the man." That's what I'm asking you today as we sit in these comfortable chairs and we sit in this place, has the Lord come to you this way? You say, "Well, I'm not as bad as that thief." Well, we'll talk about that. But what we have for us is this thief was revealed to him how bad he was.

"We indeed justly." It is just with God to do what he has done to us, "for we receive the due reward of our deeds." That's what the Holy Spirit testifies to the child of God, "You could not keep God's holy law. You cannot believe without him. You cannot trust without him. You have no salvation without him. You have nothing without him." This thief in the matter of the twinkling of an eye was stripped of himself, stripped of all that he had and all that he was relying on. Remember, both of them said, "If you be the Son of God," both of them, "save us!" Save us. This one is not appealing to be saved, at this moment he's saying, "Listen, I'm guilty." And I'm going to tell you something: only the Holy Spirit can convince you of sin. Oh, you can feel a consciousness and go, "Oh, I did something wrong." When you get in trouble, when you get found out, you might feel bad about something. This is soul work. This is soul work in a child of God who, by the way, has done nothing, nothing to obey his way to heaven. Nothing to work his way to heaven. He's a thief worthy of death.

"And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss." Nothing. There is no sin in this one. How did you know that? It had

to be revealed. How did he know that Christ was without sin? How did he know that Christ was being wronged? The whole world there at that moment was saying, "Crucify him!" and he was too. How did he know that Christ was an innocent lamb? How did he know? And we like to put conditions on man and we say, "Well, you've got to act this way and you've got to do this. In the churches today, you've got to be a Baptist, you've got to be a Methodist. You have to have this kind of baptism. You have to take the Lord's supper. You have to do this." But none of that. This passage reveals to us that Christ is salvation. Christ is. That he is the way, the truth and the life and that no man can come to the Father, not even in the last hour, but by him, through him. That's what we're going to see. There is no other way.

And I hope, I shudder to even say these words because I know how Satan works because he has come to this with me in my life at times with that idea, "Wow, this one got to live his whole life in sin and debauchery and then only at the end he had this confession." Oh, he didn't make a confession, he made nothing. Grace pulled him from the fire. Christ did. And when we have those damnable thoughts that Satan introduces like that, I want to tell you something, it is a great joy and blessing to be revealed Christ in your life; to serve him in the newness of life; to have Christ say these words, "Today at this moment, you'll be with me in paradise."

It's true, "we indeed justly." We do. When we sin, the wages of sin is death but the gift of God, eternal life is in Christ. Eternal life is a gift of God. There is no merit you're going to bring. He's got nothing to offer God. "Look, this is what I've done for you." And I hope you don't either. I hope you don't either.

And now he turns his attention to Christ because there is no other name given under heaven whereby man may be saved. "And he said unto Jesus, Lord." Well, you just reviled on him. You just...that's in the past. He's been delivered from a past. He has a past. It was just minutes earlier. That's the depth of grace. That's the power of God. In the day of the Lord's power his children say, "Lord!" and cry out to him. But they have to be brought to the end of themselves. Where else could he go? "You have the words of eternal life."

"And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." How can a thief make such a petition? On what merit? None. He cries out for mercy. He's been stripped of himself and he cries out for the mercy of the Lord. "Lord, remember me." I don't have a reason for you to remember me, just the depth of your grace and that you save to the uttermost."

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:3, I love this verse, "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed." That's what was happening earlier, right? "And that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." He's saved. He's a child of God. The Lord has raptured his soul. He's taken it over. He has revealed the depth of salvation to him and all he can say is, "Lord, remember me. Remember me."

Sometimes we get caught up in prayer and thinking that there are these formal petitions we're to make to God or to do these things and there is no formal prayer here. It's a prayer which is authored by the Holy Ghost to cry out. He has nowhere to go. The other one doesn't either but do you know what? He's perfectly happy dying mocking Christ. And that chief priest and all those religious people were perfectly happy dying mocking the one and true and living Lord. Without grace, without the Lord's saving, I don't care how religious you are, I don't care what merit you have. And boy, I'm sure if we lined them up here today if they could speak, they would tell us of their merit. Without the salvation of Christ, without the Lord saying to you, "Today, today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

The Psalmist says in Psalm 89:14, "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face." The same verse, justice and judgment, mercy and truth. They are met perfectly in Christ. You see that on display right here. Mercy and judgment and he is glorified in both. Salvation is of the Lord.

Then our text that we'll come and spend the rest of our time in. And Jesus' answer, he doesn't leave his child who's been brought to call out to him, he answers him. "And Jesus said unto him, "I love "Verily," that means of an absolute truth, "I say unto thee." It's an absolute truth. You have no cause to fear what you're in right now. You have no cause to worry about damnation because, "Verily I say unto thee, To day," at this moment, the time. But listen, he was brought to see Christ before he left this world. He saw paradise. He saw his salvation. He saw it in the Lamb. He saw it in Christ. He saw it right then and there. "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." And when that thief closed his eyes when he died and he passed to the life, he realized and was shown eternal life in a greater way. He saw it before he left and he saw it in its totality and its fullness the moment he closed his eyes. That's the depth of salvation.

David said in Psalm 35:3, if you've ever read that Psalm, it's a very searching Psalm. He's very much persecuted and he's crying out for the Lord to save him from the persecutions of his enemies. In Psalm 35:3, he says, "Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." David was brought in the midst of his enemies and this is what I pray for you and I today, in the midst of our enemies, in the midst of the hatred of this world, we've seen that on display, in the midst of the hatred of anything righteous in the Lord, the hatred of our Lord, oh Lord, in the midst of these enemies, in the midst of Satan saying these things to me that my sin is so bad that I can't be saved, Lord, in the midst of the world tearing me away from you and all the things that the world offers, oh Lord, say unto me, say unto my soul, I am thy salvation. I am thy salvation. Make it personal, Lord.

We love to hear that the Lord has his church. We love to hear that the Lord saves his people. We love to hear that the Lord has an elect remnant. But we have to hear that we're one of them and we have to hear it over and over because sin will mar us every day of our life and the only salvation from that sin, that's the thing, he saw Christ, he heard Christ, he saw everything and there was a confession made but it wasn't good enough. He had to hear from his Lord that salvation was for him. "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

And here we see the Lord who saves to the uttermost and this is life eternal. This. When the Lord speaks it to your soul, when we live here, we have to experience Christ in this way, in a way where we hear him and not the noise. He has to speak to us, "This is eternal life. You are a stranger and pilgrim here. This isn't life for the child of God." "And this is life eternal that they might know thee," the only true God. Oh Lord, make us to know him in this hour and the hour to come. Make us to know him when we leave this place. "And Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." That's eternal life and it's just not a head knowledge, it's a feeling presence. It's experiential. It's experiencing Christ in the soul, to hear that voice, to know, "I am thy salvation."

Paul said it in Colossians 1:13, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." You've been translated into the kingdom. That's why he said, "Lord, remember when you comest into thy kingdom." Have you been brought into that kingdom? Has the Lord revealed to you what Paul said, be translated into the kingdom of his dear Son? Do you have that unity? Do you have that union? Do you have that communion? I know I ask this a lot because I think it's vitally necessary to live in this life with the Lord's presence and knowing the Lord's presence and feeling and living the Lord's presence as it being different than what the world has. And I pray and I hope the power of the Holy Ghost comes so powerfully that you experience that.

Let's come back to read the text here in a moment but let's go over to 1 Corinthians 6 real quick. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6, beginning in verse 9, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" I hope you know that. Salvation is not universal. It is not for all men. Many there that day perished. Many that day are burning in hell or in hell. Many that day that persecuted and crucified Christ are in eternal damnation today.

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves." Did you hear that? Nor thieves. You say, "Well, Paul, what about this one, he's a thief?" But Paul's not talking...well, we'll go on.

"Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers," aren't they revilers? "Nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." And then Paul says something miraculous and I do mean miraculous because it shows you the depth of grace, and on the other side of the sword, the religious man comes here and he goes, "Oh no, I'm not. I've never been one of them."

"And such were some of you." Been covetous. Been a thief. Been a reviler. And all of this roll call of sin, such were some of you.

But what made the difference? But now you are washed by the blood of the Lamb. Nothing but the blood of Jesus. "But ye are sanctified." You are made holy in that way of holiness that we talked about last week.

"You are justified," because the Lord has said you are not guilty and the Lord has said it. He has set you free from the condemnation of that sin.

"But ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." That's the difference. Is salvation not in Christ and Christ alone? It's all in him: sanctification, washing, justification all in the name of the Lord Jesus. How great is this salvation?

Paul said in Hebrews 7:25, "Wherefore he is able," I love that, I love it, "he is able." I say, "Lord, I'm not able. This is a tough life, it is tough warring against sin, against my old nature. It seems to get the upper hand a lot."

"He is able also to save them to the uttermost," I hope you saw that today, "that come unto God by him," and that thief came no other way but by Christ drawing him to him in the very last moments of his life, "seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Christ liveth and reigneth today to make intercession for his people.

Our text one more time, may the Lord preach it to our souls as he is pleased to bring it with power, "And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Dear heavenly Father, may you add thy power and thy clarity for the glory of thee and for thy name's sake. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.