

Psalm. 24:1-6 "A 'Death-Bed' Conversion"

For the Children: There have been times when I wanted to buy something at a shop, but I decided that the shop was too crowded. I thought, "I'll leave it a bit longer, when there are less people around." I come back later, and the shop has sold out of the thing that I wanted. Sometimes it is better not to wait. Of course, God's offer of salvation is not something we can buy. Nor does it ever "run out." But it certainly is a very bad idea to wait until later to seek it. There might not be a "later" for you. God says, "*Today* if you hear His Voice, do not harden your hearts..." The Lord knows when people are just trying to use Him for their own selfish reasons. He is full of mercy; but He does not show mercy to those who keep on hating Him. **Questions:** How did the rulers, the soldiers and the criminals mock Jesus? How did He prove them wrong? What is the danger with leaving repentance until later?

Introduction:

First Point: Defiance to the End

- 1) The Foolishness of the Cross: 1 Cor.1:18f explains that the world sees the cross as foolishness. That explains why the "rulers," the soldiers and the thieves – initially, both of them (Mtt.27:44) – sneer, mock and hurl abuse at Christ. The Jews failed to understand Is. 53. The Gentiles could not see how the Son of God could be so weak.
- 2) The Mockery of Hell: God had delivered His Son over to experience the penalty we deserve for our sins – the guilt, the physical and spiritual agony, imprisonment, deprivation of all comforts, alienation from God and man – and the mockery of Satan.
- 3) Unexpected Reactions: The covenant-people of God should have known better. Even the robbers would have known something of the OT. They were "robbers" (Mt.27:44, Mark.15:27), which implies violent crime; and "criminals" (vss.33,39) = "evil-doers." The Romans generally crucified only those who endangered the peace – those guilty of murder or insurrection. They were guilty of these crimes (v.41). We might have expected such men to have sympathy for Jesus, since He was innocent (v.40). However, sinners can only despise Christ unless God changes their heart.
- 4) A Serious Warning: We should learn from this that even covenant-members, even those who hit rock-bottom, will still hate the Gospel unless the Lord changes them. Those who turn from the Lord should not expect that they can simply return to Him when it suits them. The Lord does show mercy to some, but not to those who keep trying to take advantage of Him.

Second Point: Repentance Before the End

- 1) The Gospel Proclaimed: The Lord graciously enabled one thief to repent at the last minute. He did so for the sake of the Gospel, to God's glory. Jesus pointed to the Gospel when He prayed for forgiveness for those who had turned against Him in ignorance (v.34). See also 1 Tim.1:13.
- 2) The Skeptics Proven Wrong: The rulers, soldiers and one of the thieves mock Jesus with the accusation that He can save neither Himself nor anyone else. He endures this mockery as He must do in taking our place. But God does show the error of it, by saving one of the thieves – a man least likely to repent. See v.42. The repentant thief then testifies to Jesus' Kingship – as per the sign above Him on the cross. V.43 is another Gospel proclamation.
- 3) No-one Unsaveable: This shows that God can rescue even the worst of sinners – and He can do so at any time, even at the last moment. That is a comfort to those who care more for sinners than they do for themselves! However, this grace should never be presumed upon. The Lord will show mercy to demonstrate His glory and grace, to benefit His church and to save His elect. But He will show His justice to those who continue to rebel against Him.

Conclusion