

**Subject: *Entering Heaven from the Doorstep of Hell***

**Scripture: *Luke 23:32-43***

Jesus died at a place called Calvary (vs. 33, the place of a skull) and He did not die alone. He died on a cross between two other men. The word “malefactors” means evildoers. The same word was used of Barabbas. These men were thugs, men who stole for a living, and they were being executed for their crimes. Luke includes a part of the story not found in the other gospels. One of the two thieves was saved and the other was lost. At the end of John Bunyan’s book, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, he shows there is a way to Hell near to the gates of Heaven. Judas is proof of that. He betrayed Christ with a kiss and sealed his eternal doom. Judas was a man who kissed the door to Heaven and went to Hell. But there is the opposite truth pictured at Calvary. Here was a man who was saved at the very doorstep of Hell and taken to Heaven the same day. It is a beautiful picture of God’s gift of salvation.

***Ephesians 2:8-9**<sup>8</sup> For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:<sup>9</sup> Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

**WE SEE GOD’S AMAZING GRACE**

Grace means God’s unmerited or undeserved favor. “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.”

**God’s grace brought him to the right place at the right time**

This man could have been crucified anywhere and at anytime. It was God’s grace that allowed him to die on Calvary beside the Savior that day. This man had lived his life far away from God. He had probably not gone to a place of worship. He probably had never seen or heard Jesus in his lifetime. He was probably a career criminal and now he was paying the price. Like all criminals, he had to carry his own cross to the place of crucifixion. It was called Calvary, the place of a skull. Then his hands and feet were nailed and he was lifted up on the cross to die. He would never walk again. He would die on that very day on that spot. But by God’s grace he was close enough to see and hear Jesus and close enough to ask Jesus to save Him. By God’s grace he had enough time to be saved. Jesus suffered on the cross for six hours (from 9:00 am until 3:00 pm). By God’s grace he had one last opportunity to trust the Lord.

**God’s grace opened his eyes and changed his heart.** Matthew and Mark tell us that at first both men insulted Jesus. ***Matthew 27:41-44**<sup>41</sup> Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.<sup>44</sup> The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.* But as time went along, one man had a change of heart. The mocking turned into a confession of his own guilt and need. He feared God (vs. 40). “Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.” The Lord opened this man’s eyes to understand his own sinfulness and certain judgment, the sinless character of Christ, that Jesus is Lord, Christ’s ability to save him, and His future kingdom. How could he comprehend all that? The Holy Spirit taught him and convinced him in a few short hours. This is a case of spiritual awakening. What caused him to turn to Christ? He heard Jesus pray, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (vs. 34). He heard the crowd taunt Him, “He saved others, let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God” (vs. 35). Maybe he read the sign above the cross which said, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (vs. 38). Maybe he noticed the calm assurance of

Jesus who was silent before his enemies. This dying thief knew he was a sinner and he knew that Jesus could save Him. That's the grace of God at work.

You may be thinking, "I'm not a thief like that man." Maybe you're not. But all of us have broken God's law. And if we have broken one law we are guilty of all. **James 2:10** *For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.* **Romans 3:10** *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.* **Romans 3:23** *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;* Just like that dying thief, as sinners we are far away from God. But grace brings us near. God is working to change your heart by His grace. Don't fight against Him. **James 4:6** *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.*

### **WE SEE A SINNER'S FAITH**

This man was not only a great example of a sinner; he was a great example of a believer.

#### **He believed that Jesus could help him**

For once he realized that he was totally helpless. He knew he needed the Lord's help. And he believed Jesus had the power to help him. Jesus didn't look like a king who had a kingdom. He didn't look like He could help anybody. In spite of what He saw, He believed.

#### **He asked Jesus to save him**

He didn't know very much about Jesus, but He trusted Jesus, and that's what you must do. "Remember me" was a call for help. He couldn't use his hands or his feet, but he could still use his heart and his mouth. He believed with his heart and confessed with his mouth, just like the Scripture says: **Romans 10:10** *For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.* As far as we know, this man was the only one to ask Jesus to save him that day.

When he called out to Jesus, He was ready to save him. **John 6:37** *him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.* **Romans 10:13** *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.* He will save you the moment you trust Him. Some folks know a lot more about Jesus than this man knew, and yet they are not saved. We're not saved by knowing things about Jesus. We're saved by trusting Jesus. What good will it do if you know all there is to know about Him and die without trusting Him?

Somebody may ask: what about repentance? This man repented. He knew he was a sinner who deserved condemnation (vs. 40-41). He didn't care what the other thief thought about him. He didn't care what the crowd thought about him. He just knew that he was a sinner in need of a Savior.

### **WE SEE GOD'S FREE GIFT OF SALVATION**

Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. Here in His final hours on the cross He saved a lost soul. How did this man know He was saved? He had the Lord's word on it. As far as we know, these were the only words Jesus ever spoke to this man: "Verily I say unto you, today you will be with me in paradise" (vs. 43).

#### **Salvation is God's gift with no strings attached**

When Jesus saved this poor man He showed us that salvation is a free gift. This was not an unusual case, but the way Jesus treats every person that trusts Him. It is not based on anything we do. Jesus shot down two false ideas that people have. One idea is that you have to do something first (improve yourself or become religious) before He will save you. The

other is that you have to do something after you are saved to keep your salvation. This man did neither. You can't do anything to earn salvation, and you can't do anything to keep your salvation. It's a free gift and it's all by God's grace.

Salvation is God's gift that lasts forever

Salvation is eternal life and an eternal home in heaven with Jesus. ***Romans 6:23*** *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* When a Christian dies, we are just like that dying thief, "absent from the body and present with the Lord." Salvation is more than a place called Heaven. It is being with our wonderful Savior. ***John 14:2-3*** <sup>2</sup> *In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.* <sup>3</sup> *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.* This man received the gift that all believers receive.

Some people may think they can put off salvation till their deathbed and then ask Jesus to save them. What's wrong with that? First of all, you don't know if you will have a deathbed, whether you will have time, or whether you will be in your right mind. You should remember there were two thieves crucified with Jesus. One died in his sins and with a hard heart. He went out into eternity lost and without a Savior. How do you know if your heart won't get hard toward God? That's why the Bible says, "Now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation."

You could be on the doorstep of Hell, and by the grace of God you can ask Jesus to save you. You can pray just like that thief, "Lord, remember me."