

Subject: God's Grace at Calvary

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 called "malefactors" (evildoers or bad actors). 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. One of the two thieves was saved and the other was lost. This part of the crucifixion account is found only in Luke. Here was a man who was rescued from the pit of Hell and taken to paradise with Christ. It is a beautiful picture of God's saving grace.

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

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

1. God's grace brought him to the right place

This is a wonderful example of God's providence, how He works in all the details of life to accomplish His purpose. This man could have been crucified anywhere at any time. One writer said, "The thief was a career criminal, and Roman law had condemned him to die on a cross. Sovereign grace placed him on the same hill as the Savior, where he watched the Lord of glory die for his sins." It is likely that this man 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. By God's grace he had an opportunity to be saved. Jesus suffered on the cross for six hours (from 9:00 am until 3:00 pm), just enough time for this man to be saved.

2. God's grace opened his eyes

Matthew and Mark tell us that at first both men insulted Jesus.

Matthew 27:41-44 ⁴¹ Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, ⁴² 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. ⁴³ He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. ⁴⁴ 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 and the perfect character of Christ. He understood that Jesus is Lord and He had a kingdom. How could he understand that? The Holy Spirit opened his eyes and convinced him. This is a wonderful example of spiritual awakening. What caused him to turn to Christ? It was not just a feeling, but it was the truth He saw and heard. He heard Jesus pray, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (vs. 34). He knew he needed forgiveness. He heard the crowd taunt Him, "He saved others, let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God" (vs. 35). He knew he

needed to be saved. He may have read the sign above the cross which said, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (vs. 38). 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. God’s grace opened his eyes and his heart to that.

You may be thinking, “I’m not a thief like that man.” Maybe you’re not exactly like him, but you are like him in many ways. Like him, you have broken God’s law. And if you have broken one law you 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 the thief, God must open our spiritual eyes.

3. God’s grace changed his heart

We see the evidence of a changed man. He demonstrated real repentance and saving faith. He turned from mocking Christ to defending Him. He admitted his guilt and confessed that he deserved his cross as a just punishment. He said that Christ was guiltless. At the same time he was a humble man with real faith in Christ because he said, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

He believed that Jesus could help him. He realized that he was totally helpless and he believed Christ had the power 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 that Jesus is Lord. This shows he had forsaken himself and surrendered to Christ.

Romans 10:10 *For with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

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 and surrendering our life to Him.

4. God’s grace gave him assurance and hope

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. This is not an unusual case, but the way Christ treats every person that trusts Him. Salvation is not based on any good things we do or any sins we may not do. Salvation is the free gift of God’s grace.

This man is a trophy of God's grace. His salvation is an example of salvation by grace. He was saved in the last hours of his life, so why couldn't a person just wait until the time of their death and then call on the Lord to save them?

First of all, you don't know if you will have an opportunity like this man.

Second, you don't know if your heart will be humble and soft like this man.

There were two thieves, but only one of them was saved.

One man was saved so that all men may have hope, but only one man was saved so that none should presume. Don't presume that you can be saved anytime you want. Today is the day of salvation. Repent of your sin and surrender your life to Christ now while you can.