

The Seven Words of Christ on the Cross: part 3 of 7

Luke 23:39-43 New American Standard Bible (NASB, 1995)

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” ⁴⁰ But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴² And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” ⁴³ And He said to him, **“Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”**

Introduction

If someone asks me to sum up Christianity, our faith and practice in Christ, with one word, I will choose the word ‘Cross.’ Why the cross? Because that’s where God’s love for humanity was culminated through Christ. Because at the cross Christ paid the wages of our sin once and for all through His own death. At the cross, Christ granted us the forgiveness and reconciliation with God that qualifies us to be in the presence of God forever. Let me say it again: at the cross, Jesus completed our salvation through His own death. We must forever thank God for what Jesus has done for us. We must cherish the cross of Christ.

On the day of Jesus’ crucifixion, both up there on the cross, and down there at the foot of the cross, Satan’s last-ditch effort to thwart God’s salvation plan was at work in full force among the onlookers, the rulers, the soldiers, and even one of the criminals. Through their mouths, Satan repeatedly cried out to Jesus: *Come down from the cross! You don’t deserve to die there! Don’t die there! Save yourself!*

Let me tell you. At the time, no one but Jesus truly understood what was happening in the spiritual realm: atonement was taking place and redemption was being completed. Two criminals were crucified alongside Jesus. One criminal fell into Satan’s scheme and blew up his last chance to be in Heaven. The other, however, received salvation through faith with humble confession. Ah, I love this story.

Today we are going to think about Jesus’ third word on the cross: “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” *You shall be with Me in the presence of God forever.* Isn’t that what we all want to hear? Such sweet words of assurance from the Lord? YES, I LOVE TO HEAR THAT!

Content

I am going to walk you through once again verse by verse in today's text. Please follow along in your bulletin.

Hurling abuse at Him (v. 39): One of the criminals 'hurled abuse at' Jesus. That's the English translation from the original Greek word 'blas-phe-me-o' (βλασφημεω). 'To blaspheme' means to "speak against God, slander, or insult." The word 'to blaspheme' appears 21 times in the entire Bible, and it was never used for humans. Only for God and His name. So, the criminal insulted God when he insulted Jesus by saying the following words out loud:

Are you not the Christ? (v. 39): The more accurate translation would be, "You are the Christ, aren't you?" The man knew who Jesus was. By saying so, the criminal acknowledged affirmatively that Jesus is indeed the Messiah for all. However, I noticed right away in his attitude that he was rather putting Jesus to the test, demanding and rude. I doubt he was genuinely interested in a relationship with the Messiah. He confessed so as to escape his current situation. He was using Jesus blatantly for his personal gain whatever it may be: "Jesus, you can do anything, can't you? Do this for me right now!" Such an attitude and language, the Bible says, are a blasphemy to God. Remember: blasphemy is rooted in the absence of the fear of God. E.g., Taking the name of the LORD in vain (Exodus 20:7). Use other words for expletives.

By the way, the criminal's request was never granted, was it? The lesson, here? Any request to God that was offered in disrespect or any prayer that puts God to the test won't be heard by God. Those who come to Jesus with an ulterior motive will not be saved, either. E.g., some people say that they will wait to accept Jesus until their deathbed. That way, they can enjoy both: all the life's fun and eternal life. You cannot fool God.

Save yourself and us! (v. 39): shouted the criminal. As a matter of fact, on the hill of Calvary that day, the same sentence, "Save yourself," rang several times all day long: People said it (v. 35). So did the rulers (v. 35). So did the soldiers (v. 36). So did the criminal (v. 39): they all shouted, "*If you are the Christ, save yourself! Show yourself! Prove yourself by coming down from the cross! Then, we will believe!*"

Didn't I tell you that it was Satan's cunning scheme to thwart God's salvation plan by having Him come down from the cross? Jesus was at the finish line. His mission was about to be completed culminating at His death. The devil assailed Jesus with blasphemy after blasphemy to derail God's redemption plan for humanity. I bet the temptation for Jesus to prove Himself by coming down from the cross must have been strong! Thank God, He didn't. Had He succumbed to that temptation, God's salvation plan would have surely failed. Jesus knew better.

The other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God...? (v. 40): Literally, it means, "You sure fear God, don't you?" This humble criminal demonstrated the attitude toward God that was quite different from the first criminal, and that was acceptable and

pleasing to the Lord. What was the difference? *Reverence*. Holy reverence of God in words and actions pave our paths to the Lord.

We indeed *are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.*” (v. 41): This man understood who he was (the sinner who deserved death for his deeds) and who Jesus was (the sinless who has done nothing wrong). The man understood what was happening to him and Christ: *I am suffering justly, for I am receiving what I deserve for my deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.*” Inadvertently, he summed up the core of the Gospel: the wages of sin is death and it is to be paid through the sinner’s own death. However, the sinless Savior takes over and pays the wages of sin on their behalf so that they may go free: *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23).

Jesus, remember me when You come into your kingdom (v. 42): The man surely believed in life after death also in God’s kingdom to come. Do you? Jesus replied in verse 43,

Truly, I tell you, today with Me you will be in Paradise (v. 43): Paradise is the place where our spirits go after our physical death. Not everyone, though, gets in there. Consider the first criminal who insulted Jesus. Obviously, he didn’t make it. He went to the other place, called Hell, not Paradise.

The second criminal, however, by acknowledging Jesus as His Savior was received into eternal life. What a difference! All his sins were wiped and washed away with one single confession in Jesus the Messiah. That’s how powerful and simple the Gospel message is! I am going to draw a simple lesson from the second criminal.

A.A.A.: Admit that you are a sinner. **Acknowledge** that you need the Savior who is sinless and who can wash away your sins. **Ask** humbly the Lord to remember you (and He does). That’s it. So simple. For your salvation, God requires nothing of you but faith in Christ. All human qualifications such as status, power, titles, wealth, beauty, and even your own goodness have no place in salvation. Faith is the only necessary condition for salvation! All you need is to believe in Jesus. That’s why even the worst criminal still has a chance to take up the offer of salvation. Listen to the promise of God: *as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name* (John 1:12). Let’s talk a little bit about Paradise.

Paradise (v. 43): The word appears only three times in the Bible, all in the New Testament (Luke 23:43, 2 Corinthians 12:4, Revelation 2:7). It is same as Heaven. It is where the tree of life is. *The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.*’ (Revelation 2:7). Paradise is where Jesus is. It is where God’s throne is. No more sin there. No more pain. No more tears. No more suffering. No more death. Listen to Revelation 21:1-4: *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out*

of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and **He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,** ⁴ **and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”**

That’s where Jesus took the criminal into. So will He those who believe in Jesus’ name.

Conclusion

That day on the hill of the Skull, Satan tried to make sure that Jesus’ death on the cross would never happen. He tried several times and failed. Jesus completed His mission on earth by giving His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). His mission was to save the sinners by paying off the wages of their sin through His own death. In God’s salvation plan, sin and its consequences must be dealt through death. There are two parties here to consider. Jesus and Us. Only one lives. The other must die to pay the wages of sin. Christ the sinless chose to die on our behalf so that we may live. The innocent for the guilty. The sinless for the sinful. The righteous for the unrighteous. All to bring us to God.

Remember A.A.A. for your salvation.

A.A.A.: Admit that you are a sinner. **Acknowledge** Jesus the sinless as your Savior who died to wash away your sins. **Ask** Him to remember you in His kingdom. And He will. Believe in the name of Jesus sincerely, humbly, and in the fear of God. Then, you’re in. His promise is yours: *You will be with Me in Paradise.* Amen.