

The repentant thief

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth Stone

[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn for our consideration this evening to the verses from verse 39 to verse 43, which we have in the 23rd chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, where we have already read, concerning the story of the repentant criminal who was crucified along with our Lord and Saviour.

I believe it's to be a fact that because the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is so blessed to us, we believe, that we are inclined to think little of the horror of crucifixion.

It was the means of execution which the Romans had installed, as being that which gave the most prolonged agony of any means of execution.

And if any within the Roman Empire could claim that he or she was a Roman citizen, then no matter of what crime that person might be found guilty, he could not be put to death by crucifixion.

Crucifixion was reserved for the very lowest criminals. And it was by such a death that our Lord Jesus himself died.

[1 : 54] And when one sees a woman kneeling a cross around her neck, one can be convinced that she has no real conception of the awful symbol of death by crucifixion on a cross.

And in fact, our word excruciating, of course, speaking of pain as being excruciating pain, that of course is derived from the word of the cross.

Yes, we are to have a picture of our Lord Jesus Christ in his dying moment on the cross of Calvary.

Well, we can gather from what the evangelists tell us, that indeed there were many circumstances surrounding this crucifixion which may which made it the more agonising for our Lord and Savior.

Now, of course, we know that the sufferings of our Lord were essentially the sufferings of his soul.

[3 : 17] As he was to be made sin for us, as our sin was reckoned unto him, and he was to bear its guilt and take highest penalties.

And in addition to that, this appalling and prolonged death of crucifixion, and along with that, other circumstances that, as we suggested, made this even more difficult for our Lord to bear.

We were thinking this morning of how Jesus sought to prepare his disciples for what was to come.

And yet, when the moment came, He was to be able to prepare his disciples for the Lord, and he was to be able to prepare his disciples for the Lord. Then all those, Peter and the rest, who had vowed loyalty to himself and especially Peter, believed that they all, in fear for their own lives, they all forcibly fled.

While he was dying, his military executioners were gambling on his clothes.

[4 : 38] Apparently, some of the perks of those who were charged with the execution of criminals was to have with the clothes of those whom they were executed.

Here he was, crucified, in the face of the hatred of his own people, to whom he had been such a wonderful benefactor, who said he had healed, to whom he had ministered the very work that he received from the fatherhood sentence, whose bed he had led.

And now here he was, dying under the mockery and the scorn of those who also have been best instructed in the scriptures, and also have recognized this man as being, indeed, the anointed of God.

In his dying agony, he was watched from a distance by his mother and his friends, along with a great, proud people, so we need.

And over his cross as he died, were the words of Pilate, in all probability, put in order that he might have a petty revenge on the Jew, who had forced his hands to crucify a man of his innocence, he was utterly convinced.

[6 : 29] He read in verse 23, the Jews were insistent with loud voices, requiring that he must be crucified. The voices of the men and of the chief priests prevailed, and Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required.

And in order to get his revenge on the Jews, then he put on the cross of the Lord, words which he knew the Jews would have hated to read.

This is the king of the Jews. And in his, in the agony of his suffering, words of scorn and rejection and mockery were hurled into his ears.

And is it not a wonder that the Gospel Rogers exercised such restraint when they are proclaiming this sickness?

They tell us in a simplicity that is foretelling in itself the circumstances that surrounded the death of our Lord.

[7 : 45] Now when we come to these verses from 39 to 43, we read of these, these two who were crucified along with the Lord.

Verse 32 we read, and as someone has said this is the most important comma in the whole of Scripture, and there were also two other comma manufacturers led with him to be put to death. And from the first one we have these words, the most important comma in the world. And the first one we have said, if they be Christ, save thyself and us.

Or if we were rendering it more literally, it is this. Are you not the Christ? Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us.

the most important part of this is the voice of unbelief. The voice of unbelief. How strange a thing it is.

[9 : 00] That this man who apparently was guilty of a great crime and who his fellow has acknowledged was dying as dying because of the crime that he had committed.

Yet he was aware of the time of Jesus of Nazareth to be the anointment of God. In fact, is it not saying that when we meet with unbelievers and we talk to them about the things of God, it is often remarkable to notice how much of the knowledge of biblical things that they have.

And here was a man, whatever his past life had been, and it may have been one of the continuous crimes we don't know. But here was a man, who knew that this one who was dying alongside him in a time of hopelessness, that this man claimed to be the anointed of God.

He claimed to be the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. But you notice what he is doing. He was doing the very things that unbelieving people constantly do.

Unbelievers so often when they are confronted with Christian things, they make their demands upon God. He talks to people in the world today about the state of the world and to present the things of the Gospel to them.

[10 : 45] And so often they will say this, Well if there is a God, why does he learn the destruction of so much life? Why does he learn so much violence and bloodshed?

Why does he learn this? Why does he thought this? In other words, In other words, if there is a God, and if this God, as you Christians say, is a God of love, so why does he do this?

Why does he stop this? And then this criminal was doing the very thing. He was making demands upon Jesus Christ. If you are, or are you not the Christ?

Well then do something. And this was the voice of unbelief. And this is this insistent here.

Not very much like that of the Pharisees. On how many occasions do you read in the Gospel of Christ that they said again, And what sign do you show unto us that we may believe?

[11 : 56] Jesus and Jesus, you do something that satisfies us. And then we'll believe on you. They were insistent that you should do something that could please them and would satisfy the demands that they were apparently, sincerely but hypocritically making upon you.

And of course, if Jesus had done the things that they demanded, their unbelief would have continued. But here was a man in his very extremity.

who could see that within a few hours he would be dead. And yet he insisted on letting his demands upon this man whom he knew trying to be the Son of God, the Anointed of God.

And then, if that's not true to life and he knows around us, are there not so? Who have been to some, we would say, a merciful escape from death?

Who have been to death? Who have been to death? Who have come back from death's door seeing an event of a severe illness? Or who have escaped a fatal accident on the road? And in spite of it all, in spite of the blessing that they have received, they are still unchanged in heart and mind, and still think that they can make the demands upon God in the very thing that this man knew was doing.

[13 : 33] Persisting in his unbelief. Though, as his fellow was cautioning him, that in a short while he would be in the presence of God, and he continued in his unbelief.

And is it not clear indeed that circumstances, unless they are overruled by the sovereign power of God, may not change a man's mind and his heart.

When circumstances are present, and man is prosperous, then he forgets God. And have we not a nation that has largely following this way at the present of circumstances that are so present, yes, even with unemployment, there are no starving and no we have no bedgers on the street.

The circumstances are so comfortable, that man has forgotten God. And when circumstances become difficult, there may have a resentment against God that should allow circumstances to become difficult.

And do not many in difficult circumstances say, is that God a God of love? In other words, if your God is a God of love, why does he not deliver me from this?

[15 : 02] Why does he not stop this? While some people are prepared, I swear, to reverse it, if you appear ora that in the Southern Re■■■, history willNote race way over destruction, what means of death not the Christ? He knew his prayers and yet instead of accepting it he uses them as an instrument against the Christ of God. Are you not the Christ?

No, do something, save yourself and us. But then his fellow speaks in a different way. The other hearing these words said to him, re-muking him he said, we are not fear of God, seeing thou art in this past same condemnation and we indeed justly. So we receive the new reward of our sins. But this man has done nothing to you, the question that he directed to his fellow, do you not fear God? Do you not fear God? We don't know the background of either of these, but it's apparent that they have some knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth and his claim. And the second one is very concerned and disturbed by the defiant attitude of his son. In fact, in the view of contending death for the book, don't you fear God?

was it not the statement of the psalmist concerning the situation of his day? He said that those origins had not the fear of God before their eyes. They had not the fear of God before their eyes. I remember a Christian doctor in Sutherland saying to me some little while ago that he knew of a lad who had a mother who had a motorcycle and his mother was a widow. And he said to her one day that he would like to die in a spectacular car crash. He would like to die in a spectacular car crash. Poor fellow, because he had not the fear of God before his eyes.

[18 : 04] To all these sins. And as you learned And we all go through death in the same way.

And so today there are those, and we can see it through their reckless driving on the road, that they have no conception of the fact that to die is to come into the presence of God.

It says, do we not ourselves travel through the great things of life? Do we not underestimate the benefit that we have even today that we are in the land of the living?

I remember reading in Jonathan Edwards just recently, and he said, how different we would be, how different men would be, generally, if they had no confidence whatsoever in a tomorrow.

If we know the expectation that we have, that indeed though we may not accept it, yes, that there will be a tomorrow and next week and the next year. We often hear, don't we, on radio and television, oh, we'll be back at the same time next week.

[19 : 47] What a false confidence we have, in circumstances over which we have no control whatsoever. And men somehow are deluding themselves, as whether they are living or whether they are dying, that they have nothing to fear, not knowing it, that indeed we are every one of us answerable unto God.

And to die is to come into his presence, either prepared or utterly unprepared. And so the second one of these two is disturbed by this intimate attitude of the first one.

In fact, do you not feel God? And that's a question for every one of us in our community. Do you feel God in the sense of, do you accept all that the Scripture of Peace has invited?

And the necessity that every one of us will one day appear, prepared or unprepared, in the presence of Almighty God.

The second one, though, he confessed that they were both suffering justly for their sins.

[21 : 22] The second one, although we shall see later, he had faith, yet he trembled for the sake of the prospect of dying and having to do with God himself.

But he confessed that while they were dying justly, he said, we are really receiving the due reward of our sins.

But this man, the one dying between us, this man has done nothing amiss. What the testimony of Jesus Christ was born by this man?

Now, no doubt, Calvary as a case of execution, would normally, when criminals who have been crucified, would have been filled with the filthiest blasphemy of those who are crying out in their agony.

But this man noticed that the one who was dying alongside him, from his mouth came all only words of grace, words of love, and he had said just a little before, Father, forgive us.

[22 : 42] For they know not what they do.

And this man, no doubt, had been hearing these things. And no doubt, had been hearing these things. And no doubt, had been the keenly bearing, the quiet, patient suffering of Jesus Christ alongside him.

And he, like Pilate, and like Herod, and indeed like Judas before him, bore testimony to the fact that he was a perfectly innocent man.

Pilate, weak but brutal. He was in a dilemma. He knew in his conscience that the man alive before him was perfectly innocent with regard to Roman law.

And he was seeking to release him. He was convinced that he was utterly innocent. And Judas, you know what Judas did.

[23 : 52] He took the money first and also betrayed him. And then he went back in the depths of remorse. And went back and slung down the money that he had received.

And come back and he betrayed innocent blood. And the depths of remorse he never repented, of course. And the depths of remorse he went and destroyed himself.

He knew that he betrayed innocent blood. And here was this dying criminal who asked his testimony to the innocent of Jesus Christ.

This man has done nothing in this. There is no report of what the first replied to the second when he was childed for his outburst.

To then, thirdly, we have the plea that this second one made to the Lord.

[25 : 06] He said in all simplicity, Lord, Lord Jesus, remember me when I come into thy kingdom.

What a contrast to the outburst of the other ones. He noticed no demands made upon Jesus Christ, not only the simplest, but the simplest, the humblest thing that he could utter.

Lord, remember me. And notice he wasn't merely that. But he spoke of Jesus Christ as coming into a future kingdom.

Could any man have looked less like a king than Jesus of Nazareth, dying apparently helplessly and hopelessly at the mercy of his enemies?

Could anyone have been in a more kingly position than his? The one who had confessed and professed that God was his Father, that he had come from God.

[26 : 24] But he had been brought to a position of crying out, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? His followers, all his followers had forsaken him.

And the very God to whom he professed to belong, even if God by his own words had forsaken him. So how could he be a king at all?

And yet, this man was convinced that Jesus Christ was going to have in some way that he couldn't have understood.

But he was coming into the possession of the kingdom. Lord, may man were made. Could he have said anything that was less self-assertive?

In all simplicity, Lord, remember me. It is possible, of course, that in the Lord's overruling providence, knowing something of the claims of Christ concerning himself, and seeing the title that Pilate had put over Jesus' cross for revenge, that he had seen it and believed that indeed, that here was a man who was truly the King of the Jews, that he was coming into a future kingdom.

[28 : 03] And indeed, from what Jesus said to him, he didn't care to rebuke him for or correct him for his misunderstanding, but rather completely accepted his plea.

And so we would suggest that he had taken the words which Pilate had put up for a very bad motive, that he had seen through them and taken them as indeed the imperfect truth.

And then in response to this simple plea, Jesus said to him, Amen, Lord, truly I say unto thee, Today, thou shalt be with me in paradise.

With what cursed calm and with what thinly authority, the Lord Jesus spoke to this distressed man, and he gave him all that he could have desired to heal.

But that very day, he was to be with Christ in the paradise. There's no report of what the man himself responded.

[29 : 37] He didn't need, did he? He didn't need any more. He had heard all that he could have desired to hear.

And may we suggest that his fear of entering into the presence of God, his fear of death had gone as he rested upon the truth of the promise of Jesus Christ.

Now, there are those that have sought to pervert what Jesus said and to say that the promise was made today, that at some future times, and according to the Roman Church, of course, through purgatory and the rest.

But the promise that Jesus gave to this man was a promise that related to being in paradise with him that same day. And our Lord was giving this man an unqualified promise of his eternal well-being.

He wasn't delivered from his crucifixion. He wasn't delivered from execution by crucifixion.

[30 : 59] And yet he had the promise of his eternal well-being in his last moments on earth. And I would suggest that in no place in Scripture, neither from the Apostles or from any other, is there a greater affirmation of saving faith than we have from this man.

What religious opportunities or privileges he had, that we know nothing, that here is a man who in the most adverse circumstances casts all his hope upon the crucified and dying Jesus Christ in the confident expectation that here is a future king and he wants to be with him in his kingdom.

And so the Lord Jesus gave him a promise which was the perfect comfort for a dying man. Would any of us dare to say that there are any other words that we would like to hear in our dying Lord's splendor?

A promise from the case of the kings of the earth themselves, to say, Today thou shalt be with me. Now the danger, I might say, I'll use that expression.

The danger of thinking about this narrative is that our attention should be diverted from the Son of Jesus Christ himself to either of these two, particularly the repentant one.

[32 : 54] But let's make no mistake about it. It is the Christ on the cross who is the central character in this transaction. He was no criminal himself. He was there.

He was there because he was there, you're thinking this morning, of his own free will. He was giving up himself utterly and completely in acts of worship to his Father. He was giving up himself as the perfect substitute for his people. And Christ Jesus is central here. The first one says, the first one was insisting that Christ should save himself from the cross, that he should come down from the cross and save the others. But hence it was necessary that Christ should remain on the cross and should die in order that there must be salvation, not only for this man, but for any man. Without death, without the death that the sinner substitutes, there can be no possibility, whatsoever, of forgiveness for even one sin. It was necessary that the Son of God should take upon his human flesh and die in the sinner's place and on the sinner's behalf in order that salvation might be secured.

So how wrong, how utterly wrong was the man who insisted that Christ should deliver himself from the cross and deliver the others at the same time. How utterly mistaken. And as far as we can gather from the scripture, the man died, still making these demands upon God in utter hopelessness.

And unrepentant. And also we have the mystery of these two men dying with insane circumstances. One of them confessing that they were both criminals who were dying because they had violated Roman justice. And one was saved and the other appears to have gone out of this world into a lost eternity. Unrepentant.

Unrepentant. And we would say, of course, in the light of the rest of the scripture, that one was told in the Lord was working in the heart of one to bring him unto himself. And the other was left to himself, to the due reward of his death. And that the Lord Jesus revealed himself unto one and not to the others.

[36 : 09] Unrepentant. But friends, we can never, we can never use or misuse the teaching of scripture concerning election as an excuse for unbelief.

Unrepentant. Unrepentant. And the promise of God is that if we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved. And it is not for anyone to start from the other end and to ask ourselves, am I elect or am I not elect?

Unrepentant. And the promise of God is that if we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Unrepentant. And the promise that if we do, we shall be saved. And the assurance that if we do not believe, we shall be lost.

Unrepentant. These two men were dying in similar circumstances. They both heard, they both heard the words of the Lord Jesus. And one accepted them. And one rejected them.

UnrepentantDRer. And one of us. And true credit them. And resumed these things as a littleGE word of unrepentant or a little number of unrepentant. It cannot not be saved. Most things before the whole power came above him and brought his walk into pieces of truth and put away what lives that this world has ever seen. How long was it? A matter of an hour or two?

[37 : 44] What grace of God in Jesus Christ was shown to this man who apparently had wasted his life previously, who was a convicted criminal and our Lord in his grace, at such just the end of his life, we might say just the final end of his life, just the end of his life. He's accepted. Can you notice?

You notice that even though his life of height was so short, he begins to show an interest in the condition of his fellow.

Does not doubt feel God? And is it not one of the essential marks of a Christian person that he's concerned with the eternal welfare of his fellow?

A man who says he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, who says he professes that faith in Jesus Christ is deliverance from all the punishment of hell, and is not concerned about the unbelievers in his family amongst his friends and acquaintances, that man is denying his sight.

And here was one who in the brief moments that were given unto him, He showed a concern for the defiant attitude of his fellow. Dost thou not fear God?

[39 : 24] me too. Further on there are those who having some knowledge of what is related here, who in their unbelief speak about, well, is there not such a thing as an eleventh-hour repentance?

Yes, but friends, none of us must trade on this. None of us must abuse this. Someone has said widely that one man was saved at the end of his life, this man.

One man was saved at the end of his life, that none should despair. But only one that none should presume.

Where else in Scripture do we find any man or woman believing at the end of his or her life? I'm not aware that there is any.

It's this one. And are we going to have such control of our circumstances that we will know when our last moment has come?

[40 : 37] Are you not acquainted with instances of those who have appeared to be in good health and have taken away in a matter of minutes?

And are we not all inclined to wish, hopefully, though having no control of it whatsoever, that there will be a tomorrow and a tomorrow and another time?

And is it not part of the stratagem of Satan to get those who are interested in the things of salvation to postpone further consideration to a more convenient season?

And how many are there who have gone to a lost eternity? And how many are there who have gone to a lost eternity? Who have yet had some interest in the things of Jesus Christ and of eternity? But they have abused the tomorrow that never came.

And so the lesson here is indeed that today is the day of salvation. As Paul said to the Philippians, believe, believe now, that was the insistence of course, believe now of the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved now.

[41 : 53] And he did believe that he was saved. May I just close with what you've told us of General Stonewall Jackson, a distinguished Christian soldier in the Confederate Army in the American war between the states.

And the tragedy of his end was this, that he was shot by some of his own men in mistake for the enemy. And when he had been struck and he was taken to the stairs and his wife was called, and she said to him, do you know what the doctors say when you must very soon be in heaven?

And he said, do you not feel willing to acquiesce in God's allotment? If you will, you go today. He looked her full in the face and said with difficulty, I prefer it.

And again, I prefer it. So she said to him, well before this day closes you will be with the blessed Saviour in his glory. And he replied, I will be an infinite gainer to be so translated.

What was it the Apostle Paul said? To be with Christ is far better. And this repentant, robber, violent man that he'd been, he died with these comforting words in his ear.

[43 : 29] Today thou shalt be with me in paradise. Amen. May the Lord bless his word to us. Let us pray.

Amen. May the Lord bless his word to us. Let us pray. May the Lord bless his word to us. Let us pray.