

Two Malefactors

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- [0 : 00] The Gospel according to Luke chapter 23. We shall read again from verse 39.
- And one of the malefactors which were hanged reared on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.
- But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Does not thou fear to God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?
- And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, that this man hath done nothing amiss.
- He said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.
- [1 : 30] And we should like to observe and consider the various points of difference that appeared between these two men were here called malefactors.
- That difference, of course, comes out at its focal point in the different attitudes they express concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified between them.
- And we should like to observe and see the same. But before we come to the differences, there are first the similarities. There was little to distinguish them before the time that the one rebukes the other, saying, Does not thou fear God?
- Apparently they had pursued the same course. Hence they are both called malefactors, that is, evildoers.
- But the point of time came when there was the greatest possible difference between them.
- [3 : 28] We find the unusual spectacle of one evildoer rebuking another.
- And not at a time and in circumstances when he could reap no personal benefit from his conduct.
- There are some malefactors, of course, who turn evidence, who turn kings evidence against other malefactors. And that is always with a view to purchasing for themselves acquittal or at least alleviation of their sentence.
- But here, there was nothing like that to motivate the conduct of this man. He was already nailed to the cross.
- There was no possibility of any earthly gain. But the beauty and the glory of his conduct is this, that he has ceased to look to what the earth could give.
- [4 : 45] And is absorbed in contemplation of what heaven may have installed for him.
- Now the first point of difference comes out here in the man saying, Does not thou fear God?
- This man himself was not distinguished for his fear of God, nor his regard of man for man. He was in many respects like the unjust judge who said, Though I fear not God, neither regard man. Yet, I will relieve myself of certain difficulties.
- This man did not fear God, neither did he regard man. He prayed on his fellow teachers.

[5 : 51] He took anything that came his way and was not scrupulous in the methods he adopted for what he had in mind.

But, it is this man who now mentions the fear of God. It is this man who asks his companion, if he were still a stranger to this fear.

And all the evidence of course goes to prove that his companion was dying as he had lived. Fearing not God, nor regarding man.

Now the penitent malefactor was sufficiently well acquainted with the results, the consequences of godly fear.

He knew that he could see plainly that his companion was a stranger to it. He knew well that the malefactor who continued in his attitude of enmity towards the law, was not and could not be under the influence of the fear of the law.

[7 : 26] The fear of God. Here then we have the first principle of true godliness.

The first principle. The fear of the law. Wherever that is lacking, there is and there can be no godliness.

The first response of our nature. To God. When we give him the place that is his in any measure.

The first response we say of our nature is to fear him. Does thou fear God? Does thou fear God? Does not thou fear God? Does thou fear God?

As if he had said, if you did, you wouldn't act the way you act. You wouldn't say the things you say. You don't have the fear of God.

[8 : 35] You don't have the fear of God. You don't have the fear of God. You don't have the fear of God. Now it didn't take long for this principle to work in this man's mind. Of course, he was in unique circumstances.

Circumstances that are unwish for him, other. He was in a position that no other can be in. Nevertheless, we don't take it as something unique on his part.

To be so thoroughly and so suddenly brought under the fear of God. Luke, as you know, is the only one of the evangelists who record this incident.

Others record the fact that Jesus was crucified between two malefactors. But they don't tell us about the penitence of one of them. Luke alone does that.

And it would seem, taking all the accounts we have in the gospel, that the two of them began in the same way. Really not Jesus.

[9 : 45] They came to the cross. They were nailed upon it. And were beside the Son of God. And yet they continued in their attitude of wailing against.

All that is good. All that is pure. All that is of good report. He came to his deathbed in that manner.

And a most uncomfortable and painful deathbed it was, if he may be called that. But the point is this.

All of a sudden, without any outward change in the universe, without any visible means of accomplishing this, we hear from this most unlikely man mention of the fear of God.

What has happened? What brought this about? What brought this about? While the Lord has made, that the Lord may have made use of means that were at hand.

[11 : 08] Means of which we have not told, at least not told of them in the category of means. But whatever the Lord used, we know that this man has been suddenly brought face to face with the majesty of Jehovah.

What a transformation. What a fundamental change. The greatest that can come upon a human being, in this world.

From a rebel, rebel against Jehovah and his laws, he comes to acknowledge and to submit to those laws.

And the Lord has been made to the Lord. Now, without this pure, without these thoughts of God, it is certainly impossible to have the fear of God in one's heart.

He does not alone fear him. He could now assess and appraise his past life.

[12 : 44] He could view things as he had never viewed them before. But the distinguishing factor, the characteristic element in this situation is that he not only assesses and appraises his life differently from what he used to, but that he assesses and appraises it in the light of the divine law.

In the light of God's face. In the light of God's demands and requirements. He not only had a different view of things. That is true of many who never come as far as the penitent malefactor came.

What distinguished his train of thought was this, that it was cherished in the light of God's demands, God's requirements. And hence, he could write of all his life, not only as a miserable failure. But the most important thing is that he could write of all his life, not only as a miserable failure. But as a human being. As a human being.

As a human being. As a human being. This is a human being. In the light of God's life. In the light of God's. The most important thing is that he could write of all his life. As a human being. The most important thing is that he could write of all his life, not only as a miserable failure.

But as one long catalogue. Of sin upon sin. Treasuring it for himself. Right. Against the day of life. And the revelation.

[14 : 01] Of all his life. Of all his life. God's demands. God's demands. God's requirements. And hence. He could write of all his life. Not only as a miserable failure. But as one long catalogue. Of sin upon sin. Treasuring it for himself.

Right. Against the day of wrath. And the revelation. Of the righteous judgment. Of God. Not only was a slight. Useless. Without any profit. But. It was. One. Long. Stream of. Gift. And sin. And now he realized.

That. The God. Whom he was to meet. He had. Flooded. He had. Rebellied against. He had. Turned away from.

[14 : 58] All the days of his life. And. He had. Turned away from. All the days of his life. All the days of his life. And. Perhaps. It wouldn't be too much.

To say. That. The pain. Of his body. With the spikes. Driven. Into his hands. And. Feet. That. Physical pain.

Was nothing. In comparison. With. The. The. The. The. The. The. The. The.

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[15 : 57] The. The. The. The. The. The. The. Even when they were wrapped with physical pain, it was as nothing compared with the pain they had of realizing how much of a fear they had been.

Dougal Buchanan says in one place that he remembers an experience in which he was brought near unto death. And before that experience he says he had been greatly tempted and the temptation had to at degree succeeded.

When he was overtaken with his illness, he says that although he was suffering pain unutterable, it was as nothing compared with the thought of his having so far fallen away from what he ought to have been.

And if that were so in the case of a sin, how much more, at least in one sense, was it and is it so in the case of a malefactor coming face to face with God's righteous judgment on the very verge of eternity.

And he surprised Mark you at the attitude of his companion. Does not thou fear God? As if he had said, are you still continuing in your impenitence and God-defined attitude?

[17 : 58] And we have seen it often happen that when those who were careless concerning the things of the Spirit were brought under the influence, the saving influence of the Spirit, expressing surprise at others that they didn't see things now as they saw him.

It is a great surprise to those who have the fear of God in their heart, and especially when they first come under the power of that principle, to see that others are wholly unconcerned about it.

And that is, as if he had said, does not love fear God. He expresses this thought as if it were a great surprise to them. He is judging, of course, his companion by his own thoughts. And that, of course, is what we always do.

As if he had said, the change that has come over me surely has come over you too. You cannot continue in your attitude of Godlessness in your present circumstances.

Surely no impenitence can go as far as that. That is the way he argues. And probably he thinks, as others are far, that he may be able to influence his companion even at this later.

[19 : 54] He is laid down. But it all goes for nothing. The heart of man is too hard to be influenced, at least to be basically influenced by anything but the almightiness of God.

You have heard of him, of God. You have heard of him about Melanthur and the friend of Luther. When he was converted himself, he says, He thought I could make things so plain to everyone that they couldn't help but make the same charge as I had made myself.

Everything was so plain to him that he thought he could just put it before others in such a way that they also would be influenced by it. But he says, it didn't take me very long to discover that all that was too strong for a young Melanthur.

The heart of man in its enmity to God will not submit to anything but the power of God himself, the irresistible, the invincible power of him that is most high.

The heart of man in his heart is the most high. Does not thou fear God? Dare you appear in his presence, still armed into the teeth against him?

[21 : 42] Why do you age? Why do you imagine vain things? As this is true of people collectively, it is true also of people individually.

The man who prays against God. He imagines vain things. He thinks he'll be able to cast God's bonds from him.

Now nothing could be less, nothing could be more unwise than this, imagining vain things waging against the Lord and his anointed.

He wailed on him. And of course he also had something to say. He had his own contribution to me. If thou be the Son of God, save thy son and us.

He is still taken up with material things or earthly things. The only salvation he can think of is salvation from his present circumstances.

[23 : 14] Salvation from the cross. If he could only get away from that, he would have all that he desired. Save thyself and us. And that is what he means by salvation.

Get us out of this difficulty. Get us out of this difficulty. Get us away from this pain. He is taken up all in. With the things of the body. With the things of time. With things of sense.

So, that is what he means. He doesn't see further than that. And why? Because this field of vision is limited by his own belief. If thou be the Son of God, everything he says, everything he thinks, everything he does, is...

is circumscribed by unbelief. These are the bounds that are set to all his thinking, all his assessment and appraisal of the situation.

Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief.

[24 : 45] Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief.

Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. Unbelief. an event that will not be repeated. The Lord was once offered up, bearing the sins of many. Yet he who was right beside him could see no relationship between the death of Jesus and the abolition of sin.

He abolished sin by the sacrifice of himself, which is a very sobering and solemnizing thought.

It doesn't matter how closely we are brought to the most important transactions. They will be lost to us. They will mean nothing to us, unless our eyes are opened to behold their meaning.

And there is another point of difference, still centering round this fact of the fear of God. The penitent thief had nothing, but what the impenitent one had also.

[26 : 38] That is, from the outside, the circumstances were exactly the same for the one, as they were for the other. No eye could see any difference.

No human eye could see any difference between the two. They were both in exactly the same condition, in exactly the same environment, the same environment, in the identical environment.

Yet one ends up by being penitent, and the other by continuing in impenitence. What then explains the difference between them?

Well, the difference, the explanation of the difference, is not something that is visible to the physical alarm.

The explanation rests much higher than the circumstances themselves. The explanation lies outside of the normal field of observation.

[27 : 53] The explanation rests on as to be sought in Divine Sovereignty.

How is it that the one is impenitent and the other not? Because, of course, the one was enlightened in a way the other was.

Enlightened from above. And this enlightenment bore immediate results.

He is conscious not only of God's righteous judgments. Conscious not only of his deserving.

What has come upon him. That he is but great being, as he had so. But, the essence of the difference, the essence of his enlightenment is this.

[29 : 09] that he is aware. That Jesus of Nazareth is no ordinary criminal.

Yea, there is no criminal at all. And this, it would seem, is what goes straight to his heart. This is what he refers to when he addresses his fellow malefactor.

Does not thou fear God? And God precisely comes to the fourth and in that assessment of the situation. And thou art in the same condemnation with him.

This is what surpasses everything else. This is what surpasses everything else. Not only that he was condemned.

That he, the penitent, and also the impenitent, were both condemned. But that they were in the same condemnation with him.

- [30 : 25] He is conscious of something unusual. He knows that something has transpired and is transpiring.
- For which he cannot find an adequate explanation. Though art in the same condemnation with him. But remember, remember this.
- We indeed receive the due reward of our deeds. There is nothing strange in us being here.
- There is nothing strange in judge justice overtaking us. But, but this man, this man has done nothing else.
- Surely there has been a miscarriage of justice somewhere. Surely there is something peculiar, something awe-inspiring in this situation.
- [31 : 35] We indeed justly. But this man has done nothing amiss. But this man has done nothing amiss. As we had said, don't you feel in your very bones, there is something mysterious going on right now.
- There is something mysterious going on right now. This man has done nothing amiss. And yet, we are in the same condemnation with him.
- And he is in the same condemnation with us. Surely this is a situation that calls for the fear of the Lord.
- What has happened? What has gone wrong? How is it that he who has done nothing amiss is in the same condemnation with us?
- It would seem that his mind is feeling after an explanation. He is confronted with mystery.
- [32 : 49] And of course, this is the greatest mystery which has ever been enacted in this world.
- The greatest mystery. Though a mystery in the biblical sense of the term does not mean something that is in itself incomprehensible. As some would resort to this as a mystery meaning it cannot be understood.
- That is not the meaning of the word mystery in the scripture at all. That is his everyday meaning. Oh, this is a mystery. Something that cannot be explained. But when we talk of the mystery, or the atonement for instance, we do not mean something that is utterly inexplicable.
- We do not refer to it as a mystery because of its depth, and the fact that we cannot comprehend it.
- Although all that is true. But the biblical meaning of the word mystery is something which God has revealed, which could not be known otherwise.
- [34 : 11] It is a mystery. It is something which God has revealed. What this man seems to be feeling after. An explanation for the situation in which he finds himself.
- And governing this explanation of regulating his very desire for an explanation, is the fear of God. What does this mean?
- That this is what it meant. That God the Father, made him to be sin.
- Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us. And no wonder this man, in as it were going out for an explanation, times the whole situation, awesome.
- And he cannot understand how his companion is not conscious of the same atmosphere as he is conscious of it himself.
- [35 : 39] Does not thou hear God? And thou art with the same condemnation with him. We indeed justly. But this man, This man, has done nothing.
- And thus, there was indeed miscarriage of justice in all the earthly tribunals, at which Jesus stood.

But there was no miscarriage of judgment, in the tribunal of heaven. And it is there it was decided, that he who knew no sin, should be made sin.

From the eternal tribunal, it is a work of justice and judgment, and mercy and peace.

From the point of view of earthly tribunals, both heralds and pilots, it is the greatest miscarriage of justice, of which history informs us.

[36 : 56] Because both judges, affirmed, unequivocally, that this man had done, no wrong, I find, no fault.

Yet, he is condemned, to the most shameful, the most painful, death, he mentioned her.

At what great a miscarriage of justice could there be, than the judge, declaring, that he found no fault in the prisoner, and at the same time, condemning him, to an ignominious, and painful death.

No great a miscarriage of justice is conceivable. Thou art in the same condemnation with him, but, we justly, for this man has done nothing, Amis.

that his thoughts both in relation to God, to the law of God, to the requirements of that law, and, his relation, to Christ Jesus, crucified, are basically different, to that of his companion.

[38 : 27] The penitent thief, the penitent malefactor, sees things, entirely different. How many things? All things.

All things are made new. Why? Because he has new life. And in this life, he sees things differently.

He sees everything differently. And therefore he cannot but, rebuke his companion. This is the way he began. But he went further. He spoke to the other malefactor.

But he spoke to more. He spoke to more. He spoke to Jesus himself. When he had spoken as it were on behalf of Jesus, saying, this man has done nothing a miss.

Then he speaks to him. He directs his speech to the one in whom he was supremely interested.

[39 : 42] Pray. Not for a temporal deliverance. Not to be saved from the agony of the cross.

But praying that the Lord would remember. Remember me. When thou art come into or in thy kingdom.

Lord, remember me. That is all I want. As we had said, if thou wilt remember me, everything else will take care of itself.

Give me but a word. That thou wilt remember me. And then the agony of the cross. The physical pain endured.

All must disappear. Give me but this hope. That thou wilt remember me. And then it doesn't matter what happens.

[40 : 50] Here or hereafter. If thou wilt remember me, all will be well. This is all he sought. But in that he sought all.

And he wasn't denied. That of which he asked. He wasn't denied. He assured us.

That the Lord would remember him. And that he would be with him. That very day. In paradise. He has no more to ask.

Here ends his prayer. This is a man who has prayed but one prayer. As far as we know. But the consequences of that prayer.

Eternity will not exhaust. This is all he wanted. Remember me. When thou art come into thy kingdom.

[41 : 49] And this is enough. Now in considering this. Which we are not considering just now. The prayer. That prayer.

That prayer. Eternity will not exhaust. The prayer. Let us remember the order. In which this man makes known.

The transformation. Which has occurred in his experience. He first speaks of the fear of God. He then speaks of.

The sinlessness of Jesus. And he then prays. To the same Jesus' sake. Lord.

Lord. Lord. Remember me. Let us pray. O gracious one. Do thou remember us. For the favor thou bearest to thy know. And we pray thee. To put thy fear in our heart. As a principle of life.

[42 : 47] For the fear of the Lord. For the fear of the Lord. Is. The principle of life. To depart from the ways of death. And we pray. For all. For all. For the fear of the Lord.

Is. The principle of life. To depart from the ways of death. ways of death. It pleased it to enlighten us in the knowledge of that great and glorious and unique transaction, accomplished once and for all on the hill called Calvary, when he knew no sin was made sin, that they might be made the righteousness of God in heaven.

Lift upon us the light of thy countenance and take away all our sins for the Redeemer's sake. Amen. Psalm 106.

Psalm 106. Psalm 106.