

THE SAVIOUR'S PROMISE

"And 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" Luke 23:42-43.

It was a holiday in Jerusalem some nineteen centuries ago. Great multitudes from out of town thronged the streets of the city. These strangers had come to celebrate the Passover. Rome was going to execute three prisoners that day. She had chosen that particular day because the largest number of spectators possible were desired. She wanted to let her subjects see what it meant to rebel. The procession to Calvary went through the main street of the city so that all might see the criminals and be warned against a similar fate.

As they passed along the crowd fell in behind eager to see the bloody show: Even the priests forgot their dignity and high office and walked along with the rabble mob shouting their imprecations and cruel jests. The centurion marched imperiously ahead; soldiers were on either side of the condemned men and behind them, sometimes roughly pushing the crowd aside, and sometimes with their scourges and their curses urging the three men with the crosses on their backs to get along faster. In the crowd, however, there were a few of the women who had known Jesus and loved Him, and they followed after Him, weeping and wailing. Their tears and their cries were a strange contrast to the curses and blows of the soldiers and the jeers of the spectators.

Just as they were passing out of the gate of the city toward Golgotha, Jesus weakened by the loss of blood through the brutal scourging which He had endured, stumbled and fell under His cross. Seeing that it was impossible for Him to carry it, the soldiers laid hold upon a proselyte Jew from North Africa, Simon of Cyrene, who had come up to celebrate the Passover and was standing in the line of march, and ordered him, much against his will, to take up the cross of Jesus and carry it for Him. We wonder if Simon said anything to Jesus as he walked by His side carrying His cross? And we wonder, too, if Jesus said anything to Simon? Did Simon get a glance from the face of Christ which touched his heart and, before they reached the Place of the Skull, made him glad that he had been able to help Him with His cross? Whether that was so or not, forever afterwards Simon of Cyrene will be a name for those who in this world helped Christ to bear His cross. So the procession passed on, out of the gate of the city, and up the steep hill to the Place of the Skull.

When they reached the well known place of crucifixion, the condemned men were stripped of their clothing. The transverse planks were nailed to the posts, and the doomed men were stretched upon them. Well-hardened to the terrible duty, the soldiers went quickly and methodically about their tasks, driving nails through the hands of the prisoners, and then, drawing up their knees so that their feet were flat against the posts fastened the feet with spikes. Half-way down the post was a peg known as the seat which gave a degree of support to the body; otherwise, the weight of the body would have torn it from the cross.

When they saw Him at length lifted up on His cross between the two robbers, the enemies of Jesus sent up a great shout of exultation, and milling around the cross, coming as near to it as they dared, shaking their fists at Him and making sham obeisance before Him, they mocked the dying King of Grief. "Ha! destroyer of the temple and builder of it in three days, save thyself and come down from the cross!" "He saved others, Himself He cannot save!" "If you are the Christ of God, His Chosen, then why does God not save you?" "You worked great miracles. Now give us one more miracle! Come down from the cross, and we will believe!" Even the soldiers, usually indifferent to the fate of men on the cross, got up from the ground where they were casting lots for His garments and began to mock Him, bowing grotesquely before Him, holding a cup of vinegar up to His lips and then withdrawing it from Him, and shouting, "If you are

the King of the Jews, as you say, why don't you save yourself?"

In the midst of the agony of the cross, a poor, wayward sinner on another cross at Jesus' side, saw in Christ the divine Saviour. When he looked from his cross to Christ, he saw perfect innocence, and that softened his heart. Ceasing to rail and to mock, a new and strange look came over his distorted features. He was silent while the other robber went on taunting and reviling Jesus. Then, breaking his own silence, he called across the body of Jesus to his companion, "Be silent! dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed, justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: But this man hath done nothing amiss." Again he was silent, while the other thief turned from mocking Jesus to taunting him for his past crimes and his present change of heart. Then, turning his head as far as the agony of the cross would permit, he looked toward Jesus and prayed, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." When he thus threw himself upon the mercy of the Lord, Jesus answered, "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise!" Thus our Lord swung open the gates of heaven and the dying robber entered.

I. The Man Who Wanted To Be Saved.

He was a malefactor or lawless man. He was guilty of crimes against society and was paying the price of his sin. God had been ruled out of his life. His mind was warped and his heart was defiled.

He was a dying man, hanging upon a tree, life ebbing from his body. He had put off the matter of his salvation a long time. He had lived a God-less and a Christ-less life. Death was just a few minutes away, and yet he desired to enter heaven.

He was a lost man. He was not lost because he had sinned against society, or had robbed his fellowmen, or had killed others, or was dying a shameful death upon a cross. He was lost because he had rejected the only Saviour.

II. How He Was Not Saved.

He was not saved by promising the Lord to live a better life. For him there was no escape from death; therefore, he did not go through the foolish procedure of saying, "Lord, if I get down from this cross, I'm going to live a better life." That sort of a promise usually is not worth the snap of your finger.

He was not saved by enumerating a list of his good deeds. Many lost sinners will interrupt a testimony about the saving power of Christ in order to tell what fine persons they are by enumerating a long list of the works of the flesh. But this robber did not do this. If he had any good works, he did not mention them. He certainly did not get into the family of God by any works of righteousness or by any years of service. He had no chance at all to serve Christ because he did before sun down. And yet, we must remember that he was saved.

He was not saved by joining a church, by being baptized, or by partaking of the Lord's Supper, for he never did any of these things.

III. How He Was Saved.

1. He Acknowledged the Deity of Christ.

He had heard Jesus talk with the Father. He had seen the marvelous and

beautiful spirit of the Saviour. He heard Him pray for the men who nailed Him to the cross. Therefore, this poor dying thief acknowledged the deity of Christ. He turned unto Christ and appealed unto Him, saying, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom."

2. He Acknowledged His Sin.

He knew that he was a sinner. He confessed that he was a sinner. He recognized the justice of the penalty which he was enduring. He repented of his sin.

3. He Accepted Jesus Christ As His Saviour.

His sublime faith was expressed in his prayer, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom." How marvelous an expression of faith that was—faith in the Person of Christ, faith in the Power of Christ, and faith in the Mercy of Christ.

When he accepted Christ as his substitute, the doors of heaven swung wide open, and he received salvation and entered into life eternal.

This man had nothing to commend him to the favor of the Lord. He was a hardened sinner. He stood upon a pin-point of time. His past was dark, his future was hopeless, and there was only one ray of hope and light and this he received. He had nothing but faith in Christ and that is all he needed to obtain salvation and to be admitted into heaven. There is only one way to heaven and that is the way the penitent thief travelled. There is only one gate into heaven, and that is the one through which the penitent thief entered, the gate of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That gate is opened today for those who will enter. Christ will accept and save the soul of any person who will trust Him. The Saviour of the souls of men made a prompt, personal, positive, and pleasing promise to him who prayed, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom", namely, "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise." This glorious promise of the Saviour indicates that He can forgive the sin of the past, bless the life of the present, and promise every blessing needed for the future. This personal, prompt, positive, and pleasing promise is made to all who will turn to Christ and accept Him as their personal Saviour.

During the Civil War a soldier was shot to pieces. Another stopped and placed water on his head. "What more can I do?" he asked. In reply the soldier said, "I would have you write a letter to my father which I shall sign." This he did. The request was that the letter should be taken to the father if the living soldier survived. The war was over and the letter was taken to the great Judge's home, the father of the dead soldier. The soldier who carried the letter was in rags and the servant refused to admit him. He waited until the Judge came out. He was pushed to one side, the Judge thinking him to be only a beggar. The Judge was shown his son's signature, and it was then that he threw his arms about the soldier and asked him into his house saying, "You may have anything my money can buy and what my influence can procure." It was the name of the son that unlocked the heart of the Judge and opened the door of his home to the soldier. This is true in our case. It is the name of Jesus that opens the heart of God and the door of Heaven to us.