

Remember Me

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[0 : 00] Would you return with me please to the passage that we read in Luke's Gospel in chapter 23, Luke's Gospel in chapter 23, and reading verses 39 to 43 again, one of the criminals who were hanged, railed at him saying, are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us.

But the other criminal rebuked him saying, do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation, and we indeed justly, for we are receiving the Jude Award of our deeds, that this man has done nothing wrong. And he said, Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom. And he said to him, truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. Well as we prepare our minds and our hearts for coming to the Lord's table tomorrow, I want to focus for a few moments on this very well-known story, a story that we're all familiar with and we've probably heard many sermons on about these three crosses and these three men at Calvary. And as we consider these verses, verses 39 to 43, I hope there'll be an encouragement to each and every one of us. You'll be used to murder us, your intramoderator, that he is able to, he has a gift, and he's very gifted when it comes to alliteration. And he's very good at getting three points all beginning with the same letter. And I thought, well when in Rome you do as the Romans do. And so I have three points all beginning with the letter A. We're looking at the antagonism and then the appeal and finally the assurance. The antagonism, the appeal and finally the assurance. First we have the antagonism.

That's in verse 39 where Luke records the first criminals words of antagonism, the first criminals words of antagonism. At the very beginning of verse 39 we're told a number of things about this man. Luke tells us that he was a criminal.

Matthew and Mark and their accounts both use the Greek word *lesdays*. That word can be translated a thief or a robber or even a political insurrectionist. This man was a problem and a problem that the Romans want to dread off. Luke also tells us that he was hanging or crucified beside Jesus. If you go up to verse 32 you see that these two criminals have been led away at the same time as Jesus.

[2 : 43] Verse 33 we're told they came to the place called the skull and there they were nailed to crosses of wood on either side of Jesus. And Luke tells us that this criminal proceeded to rail against Jesus. The work can also be translated blaspheme. Verse 35 the religious leaders had scoffed at Jesus as he hung on the cross. Verse 36 the Roman soldiers had mocked Jesus as he hung on the cross.

And now in verse 39 this wretched criminal hurls abuse at Jesus as he hangs on the cross. In order to breathe he would have had to push himself up on his nail pierced feet and once he catches that precious breath he uses it to hurl insults at Jesus. The little energy that this man has is used to belittle Jesus. It is used to mock Jesus. It is used to ridicule Jesus. It is really the climax of Jesus' humiliation. Yes he's been mocked by the religious leaders. Yes he's been mocked by the Roman soldiers but here he's mocked by one who's dying the same death that he is dying. And in the second half of verse 39 Luke records what this criminal said to Jesus. He begins by saying aren't you the Christ? Now as we go through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John we see that the Christ was God's anointed and appointed King. The Christ was God's promised deliverer.

The Christ was God's agent of salvation. The Christ was the bringer of blessing. And now this criminal mocks Jesus as he asks the question aren't you the Christ?

He's joining with religious leaders who said in verse 35 if you are the Christ. Joining with Roman soldiers who said in verse 36 if you are the King of the Jews.

This man is full of jokes. He's full of sarcasm and he clearly has no belief that Jesus really is the Christ. But he continues if you are the Christ save yourself and us. Oh he doesn't believe that Jesus is the Christ. Doesn't believe that he is the Son of God. Doesn't believe that he is the promised

Savior.

[5 : 01] But he does lay out the conditions which if met will cause him to believe in Jesus. He says get yourself off that cross and then get me off my cross and once you get yourself off the cross and once you get me off that cross then I'll believe that you are the Christ. This criminal wants Jesus to prove himself in a spectacular fashion. He's like the person who says Jesus if you're there then give me a car. If you're there give me this job. If you're there give me a boyfriend or a girlfriend. If you're there give me a clean bill of health. Jesus I want you to prove that you are who you say that you are. This man doesn't see that Jesus offers a different deliverance. A different salvation. He doesn't see that Jesus is hanging on that cross so that people can be saved from judgment and for eternal life. He's fixated on the present and he only cares about salvation from his cross not salvation from his sins. This man is unconvinced. He's unconcerned.

He's unbelieving. He's unconverted. This man is a lost man. This man is a man who dies as he lived hardened and blinded to the glory and the beauty and the majesty the altogether loveliness of the one whom he's dying beside. Now friends it's important that we focus on this first man because I think there's often a danger that we immediately focus on the second criminal and the theme of 11th hour conversions. Now I'm not denying for one minute that people can be converted on it on their deathbed and not denying the reality of the poem between the saddle on the ground was mercy sought and mercy found but I want us to remember friends that this man here in verse 39 is dying right beside the Savior of the world and he can only respond to him with bitterness and contempt. This man is on the brink of a lost eternity and it doesn't move him one bit and that is the sad and the solemn reality that many find out to the eternal cost. They console themselves with the thought they'll get right with Jesus later. They console themselves with the thought that they'll have some sort of deathbed conversion 11th hour conversion. They console themselves with the thought that they'll live by their own rules, they'll have their fun, they'll do everything that they want to in life and there will always be time for them to come to Jesus. They console themselves with the thought that they'll get serious about Jesus and serious about salvation at a later date and then they find out to their horror that it's too late that that date never actually came. So many who say later to Jesus find that later never came. They may not have been given a quiet deathbed on which to come to Jesus or like this man they may find themselves able to be presented with Jesus as he is presented in the gospel and yet they waste that final opportunity and I'm not speaking hypothetically because I meet people and murder meets people and the elders meet people and you're with them as they're passing from time to eternity and they do nothing. My friend if you are conscious today of the Lord wrestling with you, if you are conscious of Him speaking to you, if you are conscious of Him calling you to Himself, I would urge you friend not to waste that opportunity. It might be your last. The Lord says in His word, my spirit will not always contend with a man. There comes a point when the Lord says enough the time for grace is past. My friend you might not be in this building next week. I might not be behind my pulpit next week. If you are conscious of the Lord wrestling with you then I would urge you friend not to waste that final opportunity. This brings us second though to the appeal verses 40 to 42 where

Luke records the second criminal's words of appeal. Verses 40 to 41 we hear the rebuke of the second criminal. We can begin by noting that he rebuke his companion. Matthew tells us in his gospel that both criminals, the two of them have been mocking Jesus, blaspheming Jesus, railing against Jesus but now this man's had a change of heart and we can hear what he says. He begins, do you not fear God? The second criminal now fears God. He knows that God has power over life and death. He knows that God is sovereign over heaven and over hell. He knows that it is a fearful thing, an awesome thing to fall into the hands of the living God and now he says to his companion on the brink of eternity as the jaws of the underworld are opening up to us. Are you still so unconcerned, unconvicted and unbelieving when it comes to your eternal soul? He goes on since you were under the same sentence of condemnation and we indeed justly for we are receiving the reward of our deeds. This man knows he's under condemnation. He knows that he's under Rome's condemnation. He knows that he's under God's condemnation and he knows that he is deserving of both. He is a sinner who deserves to die and he carries on but this man has done nothing wrong. If you look at verse four, we see that Pilate speaks to the chief priest and says I find no guilt in this man. Verse 14 Pilate says I didn't find this man guilty of any of your charges. Verse 15 Pilate reports to the crowd that Herod had found that nothing deserving of death had been done by Jesus. Verse 22 Pilate himself claims I have found in him no guilt deserving of death and now we

hear this criminal also declaring and testifying to the fact that Jesus is innocent. He literally says this man has done nothing improper. Nothing out of place. He is righteous. He is blameless. He is crimeless. He is flawless. He is the one who has done all things well. But this criminals not finished as he goes on to make the last request of his life in verse 42. He begins by saying Jesus. Now as you go through Luke's gospel you see that Jesus is referred to again and again and again as Lord, as teacher, as master. He's never referred to really by his own first name not even by Peter, James and John. This is one of the few times where he's actually called by his first name and how appropriate it is because you know that the name Jesus means the Lord says the Lord is salvation and this criminal knows that he needs salvation. He knows that he needs the Lord to save him and he says Jesus remember me. That is the simplicity of this man's faith. Remember me he may not have much but he has the root of the matter. He knows that his whole eternal destiny hangs on Jesus. He doesn't have confessions of faith memorised. He's not been baptized. He's not received the Lord's supper. He's done no good works. He can't make any restitution for what he has done. All he can say is Jesus please remember me. Jesus please act for my good. Jesus please call my name to mind and he goes on when you come into your kingdom. This is right up there with Peter's confession. You are the Christ and the Son of God. This is right up there with Thomas's confession. You are my Lord and you are my God. This man has seen this Jesus being crucified. He's seen Jesus at his weakest, at his most helpless, at his most vulnerable and yet this man sees Jesus to be a king and he believes that not even the curse of death of crucifixion is going to destroy this king or his kingdom. His great hope and his great longing is that he will be gathered with this king's people. That's all he wants. Now how did this criminal have come to have this great faith? Well if you look at verse 34 he's heard Jesus praying Father forgive them. Maybe it was that. He's also heard the testimony of the religious leaders and the Roman soldiers who have mockingly spoken of [14:06] Jesus being the Christ and King of the Jews in verses 35 and 36. And not only that he's read the evangelistic tract that Pilate himself had placed above Jesus head in verse 38 that proclaimed in three languages this is the king of the Jews. He had seen all these things and heard all these things but you know friends his unbelieving unconverted, unconvinced, unconcerned companion had also seen and heard all these things. And so all we can say is that a miracle of grace has taken place in this man's life. You remember what Jesus says in John chapter 6? No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. No one.

No one came to Jesus on their own. They came drawn by the Father. And now we can see that the Father has drawn this criminal to Jesus so that he can say Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom. A divine sovereign miracle has taken place even on the slopes of Golgotha, even on the cross of this crucified man. Well friends as we look at this second criminal we can really see the evidences of a conversion experience. This man's concerned over his companion's soul as he asks don't you fear God. This man acknowledges his own guilt and the fact that he himself deserves to die. This man confesses Jesus to be innocent, to be righteous, to be blameless, to be holy and this man sees that Jesus is an eternal King with an imperishable kingdom that not even death and hell can destroy. And he cries out that this Jesus would save him, that this Jesus would remember him, that this Jesus would act for his good. And today friend I want to ask do you share the faith of this man? Are you confident friend that all you need for eternity, all you need as you face death, all you need as you prepare for the final judgment is for Jesus to remember you? That's all. Have you appealed to Jesus friend saying there is nothing that I have done, nothing that I am doing, nothing that I can possibly do that would qualify me for your kingdom. But would you please remember me? Are you able to say with the hymn writer Jesus thou art the sinner's friend as such I look to thee now in the fullness of thy love oh Lord remember me, remember thy pure word of grace, remember Calvary's tree, remember all I dine groans and then remember me, thou wondrous advocate with God I yield my soul to thee while thou art pleading on the throne dear Lord remember me and when I close my eyes and death and human help shall flee then then my dear redeeming God oh then remember me. Friend have you appealed to Jesus? This brings us third and finally to the assurance in verse 43.

Here Luke records Jesus words of assurance. Now remember what we've seen in verses 39 to 42. We've heard the antagonism of the first criminal verse 39. He said if you are the Christ save yourself and us. We've heard the appeal of the second criminal in verses 40 and 42. Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom and now Jesus assures this man in verse 43. Jesus assures this man that he's not going to forget him. Listen to what he says. Truly I say to you

that Jesus uses this phrase six times in Luke's gospel and now Jesus uses it as he speaks to this dying man. He's saying to him I've got something very important to say to you something very solemn to say to you something I want you to hold on to till your very last breath something that is important something that is true truly truly I say to you you will be in paradise. Now many would have looked at this dying man and they would have said to him you rejected the way of God in your life and now you'll go to hell in your death you've wasted your life you're a right off but not Jesus. He tells this man that he'll be in paradise so our paradise is used to refer to the gardens of Israel's kings. We see it being used in 2 Chronicles 33 and the soul of Solomon chapter 4. It's also used to describe the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve enjoyed the provision of God the protection of God the presence of God in Genesis 2. It's also used to describe the wonderful environment the new creation in which God's redeemed people will live in Isaiah 51 and Ezekiel 20. It's also used by the Apostle Paul as he speaks about being caught up in a heavenly experience in 2 Corinthians 12 and finally it's used by John in Revelation 7 as he speaks about the environment that those who have remained faithful to the end will inhabit. Paradise is the glorious realm where the righteous are gathered where the people of God are gathered and that is what Jesus is promising this criminal. He is the Savior who is able to save and who is willing to save to the uttermost. Think of the unworthiness of this criminal. Think of his lack of promise, his lack of potential, his lack of pedigree. The world looked at this man and said that this man's getting what he deserves and he would have agreed with their assessment.

[20 : 09] He has absolutely nothing to offer to God. He's not going to become an elder in the church, not going to become a deacon in the church, not going to become a missionary for the early church. He's not going to be able to give a tithe of his income to the church, not even going to be able to give a cup of cold water to someone who's suffering. He's not going to be able to pray an eloquent prayer at the prayer meeting. He has absolutely nothing. And yet he receives a place in Paradise. That's mercy. That's grace. That's Jesus one way love. That is his goodness to the undeserving. But he goes on and he says you will be in Paradise with me. Sometimes we can tend to read Jesus words as you will be in Paradise with me. The emphasis on Paradise. But the reality is Jesus is saying you will be in Paradise with me. That's the emphasis. Being with Jesus is the definition of

Paradise. You remember what Paul says in Philippians 1. He says his desire is to depart and be with Christ which is far better. Jesus is the hope of heaven. He is the promise of heaven. He is the reward of heaven. He is the glory of heaven. He is the joy of heaven. John Piper writes if you could have heaven with no sickness and with all the friends you ever had on earth and all the food you ever liked and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed and all the natural beauties you ever saw all the physical pleasures you ever tasted and no human conflict or any natural disasters could you be satisfied with heaven if Christ were not there. Christ did not die to forgive sinners who go on treasuring anything above seen and savoring God and people who would be happy in heaven if Christ were not there will not be there. The Gospel is not a way to get people to heaven. It is a way to get people to God. That's quite a solemn thought but a glorious thought. The Gospel is not a way to get people out of hell into heaven.

It's a way of getting people from being under the condemnation of God to being under the smile of God. And here Jesus says to this man not only will I remember you, not only will you be admitted into paradise but I will take you to be with me forever. And don't you love the way that Jesus says verse 43 today you will be with me in paradise. What a promise. That morning this criminal had breakfasted with the devil on earth and that night he sucked with Christ in glory. That morning this man had stood before the bar of earthly justice and was found guilty and condemned and that night he stood before the bar of divine justice and was acquitted. That morning this man had gone outside the gates of Jerusalem to the jeers of the onlookers and that night the gates of paradise opened wide to this man and the angel sang with great rejoicing as this prodigal son came home into the father's house with an elder brother greater than the one that we read often Luke 15 an elder brother whose name is Jesus who is there willing to bring all his people before the father and his says to his father how can I return unless my brothers are with me. This man had a savior who had died just a few hours before him and was waiting on the other side ready to introduce him to his heavenly father. I find it an amazing image and I sometimes wonder and it's pure speculation but I sometimes wonder was this man the very first trophy that Jesus presented to his father that when he stands before his father his work of redemption accomplished and complete he brings this man

before his father and his father says with him I am well pleased but note also how nothing is said to the first criminal only this fearful silence perhaps Jesus gave him one final pity and gaze but there's no word for him no promise for him no comfort for him no hope for him only silence you know friends Jesus didn't need to speak to the second criminal this man clearly had faith and that faith was enough but

Jesus spoke to him to assure him. See Jesus wants his people to be confident of their place and standing in him. Jesus wants his people to be assured and secure in their faith. Jesus wants his people to know the joy of being loved and accepted in him and that is why he says to this man as he breathes his last truly I say to you today you will be with me in paradise you know so many people struggle with assurance so many people struggle with believing that Jesus has really accepted them and perhaps there are some here today perhaps there's someone here today and you're really wrestling with assurance you're wondering is this gospel is this salvation is this Jesus really for me and my friend if you have that problem if you have that concern then look at verse 42 have you cried out Jesus remember me have you cried out Jesus I need you to save me have you appealed to Jesus my friend and if you have if you have appealed to him then verse 43 is his word of assurance to you you will be with me in paradise there's nothing more I can't make it more simple murder can't make it more simple your your elders can't make it more simple if you have appealed to Jesus his word of assurance is for you what an encouragement that should be what a comfort that should be what an assurance for every trembling heart that should be that Jesus won't forget those who ask him to remember them he won't well as we close let's listen to these words from Jeff Thomas who says in Christ you are ready you are as ready this moment sitting in that chair is the moment you die you are as ready as if you had served and suffered for Christ as Paul had through his 30 years you are as ready for a glorious entrance into heaven as anyone whose faith is in Christ if your faith I love this image if your faith is as thin as a spider's thread as long as it is lodged in Christ you are safe it is not great faith that makes us ready for heaven it is a great Savior who saves us our salvation depends not on our good works but on God's delight with the Lord Jesus and his perfect work for Jesus's sake God washes us and takes us to himself it is his joy to open heaven for all of us what an assurance friends that today if your faith is as thin as a spider's thread if that little thread is lodged in Christ you are safe and if your faith is lodged in him then there is no other place you should be tomorrow then at his table saying come and I will tell you what he has done for my soul