

Lord, Remember Me

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[0:00] Well friends once again it's a privilege, a joy to be in your midst on this Saturday evening as together we prepare to remember the death of our Lord and Saviour until He comes again.

And we're just going to turn back for a short time this evening to the chapter that we read in the Gospel of Luke and chapter 23. Luke 23. Now I'd like us to consider this section of the thief on the cross. We could perhaps especially focus our thoughts on verse 43. Luke 23, 43.

And he said to him, truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. I'd like to this evening begin by sharing with you a hymn. It's a hymn that was dear to my grandmother. I remember her having it written down and since then I've come to discover just the true meaning of this hymn. It's got a number of verses to it. It's written by John Newton. But I'd like just to read three verses. They're not consecutive versions, but three verses from this hymn. Tis a point I long to know. Often it causes anxious thought. Do I love the Lord or no? Am I His or am I not? When I turn my eyes within all is dark and vain and wild. Filled with unbelief and sin. Can I deem myself a child? If I pray or hear or read, sin is mixed with all

I do. You that love the Lord indeed, tell me, is it so with you? I think friends as we sit here this Saturday evening, it's fair to say that most, if not all of us, can indeed share in the sentiments of John Newton. From time to time in our Christian walk, we find ourselves perhaps even you are in this situation tonight, where you ask yourself that question. Am I His or am I not? We can look within. And as we look within, we can even find ourselves asking that question, have I even been converted at all? As we look at our lives, as we look at the way we live our lives, as we look at the coldness, the lukewarmness of our hearts, we ask that question, how can a Christian be like this? And you know friends, part of the reason for this is that we forget. And for say way that as we thought last night that we forget or we lose sight of the reason that we gather together to worship it, it's also true to say that we can also lose sight of the reality of our salvation. We struggle, we lack assurance. And maybe tonight you find yourself in this self same situation, you find yourself just wading as it were through trickle, you find it difficult to negotiate your way through this world and you keep asking am I His or am I not? And as we have these thoughts, especially as we come to the Lord's table, it's important that we pause. And as we pause, it's important for us to come to the right place. Because in coming to the right place, we come to the right conclusions. Where do we come? Well, of course, we come to the cross. And that's what we're going to do tonight as we leave Gethsemane behind. We're going to journey together to Calvary.

And as we come to Calvary this evening, friends, we're going to just for a short time think about something of the very reason that Jesus experienced what he did in Gethsemane. And also the reason for why he was going to experience what he experienced on Calvary. Because what we have here, friends, is a narrative that assures us. It's a narrative that reminds us of the miraculous power of the grace of God in dealing with sinners like you and sinners like me. And we need reminded.

[5:22] We need reminded of the very nature of the God that we are dealing with. A God who is not like us, but a God who is indeed full of mercy, a God with whom there is plentiful redemption ever found in him. What we see here is something of his power, something of his power in action through interaction.

Interaction specifically with this thief on the cross. Interaction that we see progressing. It's a three-fold interaction or rather an interaction that deals with three aspects of this man's life.

What are they? A state of rebellion, a state of repentance, and then finally a state of reward.

And so friends, here we are on Calvary's hill. Three crosses, two sinners, one saviour, all being put to death. Two men worthy of such a condemnation, one not worthy. Two men for whom the prospect of death itself doesn't even seem to curtail the very reason that they're there. The fact that they are rebels, rebels against society, but ultimately rebels against God. And as we come and as we focus on upon these crosses, as we see these men fighting for their lives, what we see on two of these crosses is the vulgarity of sin itself, the blasphemy of sin, the rebellion of sin. It's the verse 39.

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him saying, are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us. Just look at the tone. One of the criminals railing at Christ bitterly and sarcastically accusing him, using this very last breath in order to, as it were, abuse the saviour beside him. Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us if you are who you say you are.

[8:17] What a desperately sad scene that even as these men are in their final moments in life, in their rebellion, they are pushing back, pushing back, pushing back against God. And I say men plural because both of these men were pushing back against God. We see that in Matthew's account of this in chapter 27 verse 40, he says that the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled in the Robert plural. They were both reviling him. They were both mocking him. They were both scorning him. What a sad end to a chriceless life. What a sad end to a life of unbelief, a life of rebellion, a rebellion that we so often see friends on the deathbed of unbelievers.

A rebellion that can be one of the ugliest sites to behold. We've seen that in history, not just in biblical history, but we see that in more recent history, the 18th century French writer Voltaire, he was one who famously despised the Lord Jesus Christ. He despised the Lord Jesus so much that he said of Jesus, curse the wretch. Doesn't that sound a shiver down your spine?

And then he went on to say in his pride, in 20 years Christianity will be no more. My single hand will destroy the edifice it took for 12 apostles to rear. In other words, I have the power to get rid of Christianity in one foul swoop. Isn't that solemn?

You know, friends, he died in such a state. The woman who nursed him, who attended to Voltaire on his deathbed, said this, she said, for all the wealth in Europe, I would not see another infidel die. She couldn't bear to see the ugliness of the death of an unregenerate man again.

That's what we see here. That even as these men are fighting for their lives, they are effectively crying out, we are not going to have this King Jesus rule over us.

[11:08] Even as we come to the final moments in this war, we don't need him. But although this is a particularly ugly sight to behold, we have to focus. We have to remember there are three crosses here.

And although two of these crosses bear two particularly ugly scenes on one of those crosses, we see something that is far from ugly. In fact, on that cross, what we see is one who is unmeasured in his beauty, a beauty that shows forth the fact that even for these mocking criminals, where there is life, there is hope. Remember that. If you're not a Christian here tonight and you are in the twilight years of your life, where there is life, there is hope. It's not too late. It's never too late. The one who tells you it's too late is a devil. He doesn't want you to come to Christ. He wants to keep you where you are. He wants you to have just as ugly a death as the thieves on the cross or at least one of the thieves on the cross. That's what he wants for you.

But not Jesus. Not Jesus. Because as we see these thieves mocking and blaspheming, as we see them using all of their remaining energy upon bringing to shame the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we see something else. We see that the scene changes. And that's why it's good tonight for us to come before a passage just like this, as we tonight struggle with our doubts and our fears as Christians, as perhaps those who are not Christians. That's why it's good for us to focus in upon this scene to see a scene that changes. Where there is life, there is hope.

Because if we see the ugliness of the sin of these men, we see all the more unfolding before our very eyes, a picture of the reality of the matchless mercy of Christ, the greatness of his grace. A grace that tonight brings you here to this place. A greatness and a grace that we see very quickly, just like that, changes the whole dynamic on Calvary's hill. Because two sinners and a Savior, all of a sudden, become a sinner, a seeking sinner, and a Savior, which brings us to our second point.

Because although we see rebellion, because although we see the ugliness of sin, because although we see a scene that is almost unretrievable, in the very next breath, we see a scene that is overshadowed by repentance. A man who's at one minute throwing abuse at Jesus begins instead to stand up for Jesus, verse 40. But the other rebuked him saying, this is in response to the other criminal who's just been mocking and jeering at Jesus if he's God save himself and us with him. But the other 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 due reward of our deeds.

[15:41] But this man has done nothing wrong. What's happened? What has just taken place in the ugliness of the scene that has just been unraveling before our very eyes? What's happened?

Well, two things we notice. We notice that in a complete change of direction, this ruthless rebel, firstly, what does he do? He acknowledges who Jesus is. And after acknowledging who Jesus is, he then goes on to acknowledge who he himself is in the light of Jesus.

Do you not fear God? We deserve what we're getting. He doesn't. What we're receiving now is our just reward. What he's receiving is not his. These are the thoughts of a changed mind and heart.

And skeptic in us might say, well, it stands to reason he's dying. He's giving up hope. He's tired of joining in with the mocking and the jeering. He's got nowhere else to go. Of course, he's going to come to Jesus and ask for Jesus to help. Of course, he's going to acknowledge who Jesus is. This is what you call an emergency prayer. It's not a prayer of faith. It's just a prayer of one who wants to get himself out of a tight spot. He'll try anything.

But I don't think it is that kind of prayer. That kind of prayer is the prayer of remorse. What we hear see is not remorse. Remorse is very particular in the way it manifests itself on us because people who are full of remorse, firstly, they'll do all that they can to prevent themselves being found out. That is the greatest worry. Not what they've done, not what we've done because we've all had that spirit of remorse. We don't count ourselves out of that. It's not that we were sorry about hurting someone else. We're sorry about getting found out. And when we do get found out, the spirit of remorse then goes on to blame someone else. I did this because of X, Y and Z.

[18:30] But that's not the spirit of repentance. Because the spirit of repentance, those who have the true spirit of repentance, they own their sin. They take responsibility for their own sin. And not only that, they view it in the light of who God is. That's what this man is doing. Do you not fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds. But this man, he has done nothing wrong.

Friend, the unrepentant heart doesn't view sin in these terms. And you know, this is made so clear in the actions of the other, the other criminal and the actions of the crowd, the ones who are deflecting their own unrighteousness by ridiculing Christ's righteousness. That's such a common tactic as it not. Deflection. How can God be a God of love and mercy if he does this? And so what we do is we let charge the door of God. We abdicate any kind of responsibility or cells for our own sinful actions. But not the true spirit of repentance. And that's what we see in this criminal in a very short space of time. And please, please be encouraged by this this evening, if you are not a Christian.

And you have perhaps in your own mind been seeking the Lord for decade after decade, take heart that in a very short space of time, we see this criminal coming such a long way. That is the power of the gospel. I love that word that's used for the Holy Spirit, Numa. It's a really descriptive word, Numa. That's where we get pneumatic thrill, pneumatic thrill. And we know what a pneumatic thrill does. It bears through rock and it parts what nothing else can part. But we cannot part without bare hand. And that's the way the Holy Spirit is. Holy Spirit is like a pneumatic thrill breaking through the hardest of hearts. And that's what's happened here on Calvary Hill.

That's the power of the gospel. A power that not only has this man completely changed direction in terms of how he views himself and God, but more than that. Just think about what he's doing.

A man who is publicly professing and confessing his faith in God for all to see and hear.

[21:41] This man who one moment he had been sharing and blaspheming God with, he has now come off aside from. And now he has aligned himself with the very God he was blaspheming in the first place.

That's a miracle. That's the majesty. That's the wonder of grace. That's the power of God's Holy Spirit. He speaks these words for others to hear. What's happened to this man? He's changed.

He's different. This criminal that we chose to have crucified. But even more than that, even more than that, we see in this repentant rebel, a man who is seeking relationship. Look at verse 42. And he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. In other words, I don't want this to be the only encounter I ever have with you.

I want to be with you. I want you to remember me not only now, but for all eternity. I cannot bear the thought of being separate from you. Remember me. Remember me. And friend, is that not the deepest desire of every single Christian gathered in here tonight? Yes, we know that we don't walk with God as we ought. Yes, we know we stumble and we fail. We falter. We wonder. We doubt.

All of the above, but deep within us, very core of our being. Is there not that longing and that desire that come what may we want to be with Jesus? That's supposing whatever is stripped from us in this world that please Lord, don't take from me my faith. That's the true child of God.

[23:52] That's what we see here with this man, a man who's longing after a relationship with him, a relationship that will never end. And so he's saying, I see myself for who I am, a sinner.

I see you Lord for who you are a savior, my savior, my Lord, my God, I want to be with you always.

And how does Jesus respond? This is what makes God so different from you and I. How would your eye respond? Well, is it not through that we might be inclined by nature to say, well, sorry, you've had your chance. You've heard so many people. You've robbed them. You've ruined their lives. You've broken the law and now you will face your penalty. You're not worthy of salvation.

That ship is past. It's time for you to suffer. That's the way we treat people, isn't it? That's our idea of justice. But that's not God's idea of justice. At least not where there's life.

Because where there's life, there's hope. We see that, do we not? And this takes us to a final point when this repentant rebel makes his request.

[25 : 45] We see that instead of showing this man resistance as we might do, what does the Lord do? As he himself gasps upon that cross fighting against the infirmities of his flesh in the same way as the other men were. What does he do? And you know when we're low in body, when we're low in body, we're low in mind. That's true. When we struggle with physical ailments, we find that our mind can come down with it and perhaps we don't think clearly. And perhaps we find it difficult to think spiritually. We find it difficult to read and to pray and all of these different things. And so we might think for Jesus, he can't be bothered to invest in this man at this point yet. He had a job to do. Let's get this over with. Let's drink this cup. But this man's request is tied up in this cup.

And so he says to him, truly, I say to you, today, you will be with me in paradise. So instead of showing resistance, he offers reward. Today, you will be with me where I am going. You are going.

There is no doubt. I will give you the desire of your heart because I can see this is your heart's desire. I know what you've done. I know why you're here. I know what you've been but not now.

Your heart is changed and I will give you what you want. And that's what the Lord essentially does. We find it tempting, of course, to accuse God again of being so cruel and allowing people to go to a lost eternity to hell itself. But of course, the Lord is just giving us our heart's desire if we don't want to have a relationship with God in this world through Christ. Why on earth would we want a relationship with Him for all eternity? It makes no sense. You don't want me in this world. That's fine. But you're not going to have me in eternity. I will give you your heart's desire and that's what he does here for this common criminal. Today, you will be with me in paradise. I will give you the desire of your heart for that is the very reason that I am hanging on this tree. I am hanging here for a sinner just like you. There is no sin too great.

And today, we're going to paradise together, never to part again. Isn't that something, friend? Isn't that the wonder of the cross? Paradise, of course, being heaven.

[29 : 12] Words used for paradise is used elsewhere for the garden of Eden. That place of inexpressible beauty and peace where the lion and the lamb will lay down together.

That place where there will be sinless union and communion with God and one another. A place that is unlike Eden because it's a place where sin can never enter in. Perhaps it's Eden restored, a true paradise. Isn't that a thought, a glorious thought for you and me tonight as we look around us in the darkness of this world and we're going to be thinking about darkness tomorrow as we're so discouraged and afraid that we lay hold of the fact that what he says to us today to you and to me if we're in Christ, truly I say to you, you will be with me in paradise.

Might not be today, might not be tomorrow, but you will be with me in paradise. You may have anxieties, you may have fears, you may have doubts. Your feet might even have slipped from the way that it should be on. I think there's no might about it. We know that for all of us gathered here that is the case, that is the reality. But if your heart's desire and that's that's the crux of the matter, as Thomas said at the beginning, if your heart's desire more than anything else is to be in a relationship with me, you will be whether you're a criminal or a crofter.

Be assured you will be with me in paradise. Is that your heart's desire tonight? The Bible tells us that the natural man hates the things of God. And so if your heart's desire, although that desire, we know it is overshadowed at times by our own selfish will and our own selfish ways. But if deep down our heart's desire is truly to be in relationship with him, be assured you will be with him in paradise because those who seek will find. Or let me put it another way, those who are truly seeking have already found. I began with that hymn of John Newton.

His friend Daniel Herbert wrote a response to that hymn and I want to read it to you. He said this, is this the point you long to know? The point is settled in my view.

[32 : 20] For if you want to love your God, it proves he first loved you. I want to know Christ died for me.

I want to feel the zeal within. I want to know Christ's precious blood was shed to wash away my sin. I want to feel more love to Christ if we all want that. I want more liberty and prayer, but when I looked within my heart it almost drive me to despair. So where I want like this is found, I think I may be bold to say that God has fixed within my heart what hell can never take away.

However small thy grace appears, there's plenty in my living head. These wants you feel, my Christian friend, were never found amongst the dead. God is saying to you tonight friend, if you have these desires you're not what you want to be, but neither are you what you want swear. The same grace that touched this criminal has touched you and because of this God is saying to you, I will remember you.

But until then, until that time when you join with me in the saints in paradise, he says, I want you to do something. I want you to remember me every day in your life, undoubtedly.

But I want you to remember me in a special way, yet a simple way, the way that I have shown you in my word, to come and to do this in remembrance of me, to come to the table of my children, and to enjoy a foretaste of what is to come, of being united together around the family table with your brothers and sisters in Christ as one body, with your eyes firmly fixed upon the head, her father, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so if you love the Lord, your place is at his table.

[35 : 02] Come, remember him because he has remembered you. Let us pray. We give thanks, O Lord, for the blessing of the knowledge that you're a God who has not dealt with us according to our sins when we come and put our trust in you, that even as we saw tonight that you are a God of mercy, we know that we are not called to leave the matters of our soul to our deathbed. But yet we give thanks that for any here tonight who are yet to profess your name publicly, who are perhaps coming to the end of life's journey, that there is still time to publicly remember the one who has publicly remembered them.

And so we pray for any of our dear brothers or sisters who are struggling to take this step of faith or help them, we pray, grandant to them the strength that they need to come, because it is not until we step out of the boat that truly we will walk on water, but to do so we need to keep our eyes firmly fixed upon you. Go with us then we pray, part us with your blessing and forgive us for Jesus' sake. Amen.