

THE DYING THIEF IN A NEW LIGHT

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A SERMON
 INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JANUARY 31, 1886,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“But the other answering rebuked him, saying, 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. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”
Luke 23:40-42.

A GREAT many persons, whenever they hear of the conversion of the dying thief, remember that he was saved in the very article of death, and they dwell upon that fact, and that alone. He has always been quoted as a case of salvation at the eleventh hour, and so, indeed, he is. In his case it is proven that as long as a man can repent he can obtain forgiveness. The cross of Christ avails even for a man hanging on a gibbet, and drawing near to his last hour. He who is mighty to save was mighty, even during His own death, to pluck others from the grasp of the destroyer, though they were in the act of expiring.

But that is not everything which the story teaches us, and it is always a pity to look exclusively upon one point, and thus to miss everything else—perhaps miss that which is more important. So often has this been the case that it has produced a sort of revulsion of feeling in certain minds, so that they have been driven in a wrong direction by their wish to protest against what they think to be a common error.

I read the other day that this story of the dying thief ought not to be taken as an encouragement to death-bed repentance. Brethren, if the author meant—and I do not think he did mean—that this ought never to be so used as to lead people to postpone repentance to a dying bed, he spoke correctly. No Christian man could or would use it so injuriously, he must be hopelessly bad who would draw from God's long-suffering an argument for continuing in sin.

I trust, however, that the narrative is not often so used, even by the worst of men, and I feel sure that it will not be so used by any one of you. It cannot be properly turned to such a purpose, it might be used as an encouragement to thieving just as much as to the delay of repentance. I might say, “I may be a thief because this thief was saved,” just as rationally as I might say, “I may put off repentance because this thief was saved when he was about to die.”

The fact is, there is nothing so good but men can pervert it into evil, if they have evil hearts, the justice of God is made a motive for despair, and His mercy an argument for sin. Wicked men will drown themselves in the rivers of truth as readily as in the pools of error. He that has a mind to destroy himself can choke his soul with the Bread of life, or dash himself in pieces against the Rock of ages. There is no doctrine of the grace of God so gracious that graceless men may not turn it into licentiousness.

I venture, however, to say that if I stood by the bedside of a dying man tonight, and I found him anxious about his soul, but fearful that Christ could not save him because repentance had been put off so late, I would certainly quote the dying thief to him, and I would do it with good conscience, and without hesitation. I would tell him that, though he was as near to dying as the thief upon the cross was, yet, if he repented of his sin, and turned his face to Christ believingly, he would find eternal life.

I would do this with all my heart, rejoicing that I had such a story to tell to one at the gates of eternity. I do not think that I would be censured by the Holy Spirit for thus using a narrative which He has Himself recorded—recorded with the foresight that it would be so used. I should feel, at any rate, in my own heart, a sweet conviction that I had treated the subject as I ought to have treated it, and as it was

intended to be used for men *in extremis* whose hearts are turning towards the living God. Oh, yes, poor soul, whatever your age, or whatever the period of life to which you have come, you may now find eternal life by faith in Christ!

*“The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there may you, though vile as he,
Wash all your sins away.”*

Many good people think that they ought to guard the Gospel, but it is never so safe as when it stands out in its own naked majesty. It wants no covering from us. When we protect it with provisos, and guard it with exceptions, and qualify it with observations, it is like David in Saul’s armor, it is hampered and hindered, and you may even hear it cry, “I cannot go with these.” Let the Gospel alone, and it will save, qualify it, and the salt has lost its savor.

I will venture to put it thus to you. I have heard it said that few are ever converted in old age, and this is thought to be a statement which will prove exceedingly arousing and impressive for the young. It certainly wears that appearance, but on the other hand, it is a statement very discouraging to the old. I demur to the frequent repetition of such statements, for I do not find their counterpart in the teaching of our Lord and His apostles. Assuredly our Lord spoke of some who entered the vineyard at the eleventh hour of the day, and among His miracles He not only saved those who were dying, but even raised the dead. Nothing can be concluded from the words of the Lord Jesus against the salvation of men at any hour or age.

I tell you that, in the business of your acceptance with God, through faith in Christ Jesus, it does not matter what age you now are at. The same promise is to every one of you, “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts,” and whether you are in the earliest stage of life, or are within a few hours of eternity, if now you fly for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel, you shall be saved. The Gospel that I preach excludes none on the ground either of age or character. Whoever you may be, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,” is the message we have to deliver to you.

If we address to you the longer form of the Gospel, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” this is true of every living man, be his age whatever it may. I am not afraid that this story of the dying and repenting thief, who went straight from the cross to the crown, will be used by you amiss, but if you are wicked enough so to use it, I cannot help it. It will only fulfill that solemn Scripture which says that the Gospel is a savor of death unto death to some, even that very Gospel which is a savor of life unto life to others.

But I do not think, dear friends, that the only specialty about the thief is the lateness of his repentance. So far from being the only point of interest, it is not even the chief point. To some minds, at any rate, other points will be even more remarkable. I want to show you very briefly that there was a specialty in his case as to *the means of his conversion*, secondly, a specialty in *his faith*, thirdly, a specialty in *the result of his faith while he was here below*, and fourthly, a specialty in *the promise won by his faith*—the promise fulfilled to him in Paradise.

I. First, then, I think you ought to notice very carefully, THE SINGULARITY AND SPECIALITY OF THE MEANS BY WHICH THE THIEF WAS CONVERTED.

How do you think it was? Well, we do not know. We cannot tell. It seems to me that the man was an unconverted, impenitent thief when they nailed him to the cross, because one of the Evangelists says, “The *thieves* also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.” I know that this may have been a general statement, and that it is reconcilable with its having been done by one thief only, according to the methods commonly used by critics, but I am not enamored of critics even when they are friendly. I have such respect for revelation that I never in my own mind permit the idea of discrepancies and mistakes, and when the Evangelist says “they” I believe he meant “*they*,” and that both these thieves did at their first crucifixion rail at the Christ with whom they were crucified.

It would appear that by some means or other this thief must have been converted while he was on the cross. Assuredly nobody preached a sermon to him, no evangelistic address was delivered at the foot of his cross, and no meeting was held for special prayer on his account. He does not even seem to have had an instruction, or an invitation, or an expostulation addressed to him, and yet this man became a sincere and accepted believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dwell upon this fact, if you please, and note its practical bearing upon the cases of many around us. There are many among my hearers who have been instructed from their childhood, who have been admonished, and warned, and entreated, and invited, and yet they have not come to Christ, while this man, without any of these advantages, nevertheless believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and found eternal life. O you that have lived under the sound of the Gospel from your childhood, the thief does not comfort you, but he accuses you! What are you doing to abide so long in unbelief? Will you never believe the testimony of divine love? What more shall I say to you? What more can anyone say to you?

What do you think must have converted this poor thief? It strikes me that it may have been—it must have been, the sight of our great Lord and Savior. There was, to begin with, our Savior's wonderful behavior on the road to the cross. Perhaps the robber had mixed up with all sorts of society, but he had never seen a man like this. Never had a cross been carried by a Cross-Bearer of His look and fashion. The robber wondered who this meek and majestic Personage could be. He heard the women weep, and he wondered in himself whether anybody would ever weep for him. He thought that this must be some very singular Person that the people should stand about Him with tears in their eyes.

When he heard that mysterious Sufferer say so solemnly, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for your children," he must have been struck with wonder. When he came to think, in his death-pangs, of the singular look of pity which Jesus cast on the women, and of the self-forgetfulness which gleamed from His eyes, he was smitten with a strange relenting, it was as if an angel had crossed his path, and opened his eyes to a new world, and to a new form of manhood, the likes of which he had never seen before.

He and his companion were coarse, rough fellows, this was a delicately formed and fashioned Being, of superior order to himself, yes, and of superior order to any other of the sons of men. Who could He be? What must He be? Though he could see that He suffered and fainted as He went along, he marked that there was no word of complaining, no note of execration, in return for the reviling cast upon Him. His eyes looked love on those who glared on Him with hate. Surely that march along the Via Dolorosa was the first part of the sermon which God preached to that bad man's heart. It was preached to many others who did not regard its teaching, but upon this man, by God's special grace, it had a softening effect when he came to think over it, and consider it. Was it not a likely and convincing means of grace?

When he saw the Savior surrounded by the Roman soldiery—saw the executioners bring forth the hammers and the nails, and lay Him down upon His back, and drive the nails into His hands and feet, this crucified criminal was startled and astonished as he heard Him say, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." He himself, probably, had met his executioners with a curse, but he heard this man breathe a prayer to the great Father, and as a Jew, as he probably was, he understood what was meant by such a prayer. But it did astound him to hear Jesus pray for his murderers.

That was a petition the like of which he had never heard, nor even dreamed of. From whose lips could it come but from the lips of a divine being? Such a loving, forgiving, Godlike prayer, proved Him to be the Messiah. Who else had ever prayed so? Certainly not David and the kings of Israel, who, on the contrary, in all honesty and heartiness imprecated the wrath of God upon their enemies. Elijah himself would not have prayed in that fashion, rather would he have called fire from heaven on the centurion and his company. It was a new, strange sound to him. I do not suppose that he appreciated it to the full, but I can well believe that it deeply impressed him, and made him feel that his Fellow-Sufferer was a being about whom there was an exceeding mystery of goodness.

And when the cross was lifted up, that thief hanging on his own cross looked around, and I suppose he could see that inscription written in three languages—"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." If

so, that writing was his little Bible, his New Testament, and he interpreted it by what he knew of the Old Testament. Putting this and that together—that strange Person, incarnate loveliness, all patience and all majesty, that strange prayer, and now this singular inscription, surely he who knew the Old Testament, as I have no doubt he did, would say to himself, “Is this He? Is this truly the King of the Jews? This is He who worked miracles, raised the dead, and said that He was the Son of God, is it all true, and is He really our Messiah?”

Then he would remember the words of the prophet Isaiah, “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief... Surely, he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.” “Why,” he would say to himself, “I never understood that passage in the prophet Esaias before, but it must point to Him. The chastisement of our peace is upon Him. Can this be He who cried in the Psalms—‘they pierced my hands and my feet’”? As he looked at Him again, he felt in his soul, “It must be He. Could there be another so like to Him?” He felt conviction creeping over his spirit. Then he looked again, and he marked how all men down below rejected, and despised, and hissed at Him, and hooted Him, and all this would make the case the more clear. “All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.”

Peradventure, this dying thief read the gospel out of the lips of Christ’s enemies. They said—“He saved others.” “Ah!” thought he, “did He save others? Why should He not save me?” What a grand bit of gospel that was for the dying thief—“He saved others”! I think I could swim to heaven on that plank—“He saved others,” because, if He saved others, He can surely save me.

Thus the very things that the enemies disdainfully threw at Christ would be Gospel to this poor dying man. When it has been my misery to read any of the wretched prints that are sent us out of scorn, in which our Lord is held up to ridicule, I have thought, “Why, perhaps those who read these loathsome blasphemies may, nevertheless, learn the Gospel from them!” You may pick a jewel from a dunghill, and find its radiance undiminished, and you may gather the Gospel from a blasphemous mouth, and it shall be none the less the Gospel of salvation. Peradventure this man learned the Gospel from those who jested at our dying Lord, and so the servants of the devil were unconsciously made to be the servants of Christ.

But, after all, surely that which won him most must have been to look at Jesus again, as He was hanging upon the cruel tree. Possibly nothing about the physical person of Christ would be attractive to him, for His visage was more marred than that of any man, and His form more than the sons of men, but yet there must have been in that blessed face a singular charm. Was it not the very image of perfection?

As I conceive the face of Christ, it was very different from anything that any painter has yet been able to place upon his canvas. It was all goodness, and kindness, and unselfishness, and yet it was a royal face. It was a face of superlative justice and unrivalled tenderness. Righteousness and uprightness sat upon His brow, but infinite pity and goodwill to men had also there taken up their abode. It was a face that would have struck you at once as one by itself, never to be forgotten, never to be fully understood. It was all sorrow, yet all love; all meekness, yet all resolution; all wisdom, yet all simplicity; the face of a child, or an angel, and yet peculiarly the face of a man. Majesty and misery, suffering and sacredness, were therein strangely combined, He was evidently the Lamb of God, and the Son of man.

As the robber looked, he believed. Is it not singular, the very sight of the Master won him? The sight of the Lord in agony, and shame, and death! Scarcely a word, certainly no sermon, no attending worship on the Sabbath, no reading of gracious books, no appeal from mother, or teacher, or friend, but the sight of Jesus won him. I put it down as a very singular thing, a thing for you and for me to recollect, and dwell upon, with quite as much vividness as we do upon the lateness of this robber’s conversion.

Oh, that God in His mercy might convert everybody in this Tabernacle! Oh, that I could have a share in it by the preaching of the word! but I will be equally happy if you get to heaven anyhow, ay, if the Lord should take you there without outward ministries, leading you to Jesus by some simple method such as He adopted with this thief. If you do but get there, He shall have the glory of it, and His poor

servant will be overjoyed! Oh, that you would now look to Jesus, and live! Before your eyes He is set forth, evidently crucified among you. Look to Him and be saved, even at this hour.

II. But now I want you to think with me a little upon THE SPECIALITY OF THIS MAN'S FAITH, for I think it was a very singular faith that this man exerted towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

I greatly question whether the equal and the parallel of the dying thief's faith will be readily found outside the Scriptures, or even in the Scriptures.

Observe that this man believed in Christ *when he literally saw Him dying the death of a felon*, under circumstances of the greatest personal shame. You have never realized what it was to be crucified. None of you could do that, for the sight has never been seen in our day in England. There is not a man or woman here who has ever realized in their own mind the actual death of Christ. It stands beyond us. This man saw it with his own eyes, and for him to call *Him* "Lord" who was hanging on a gibbet, was no small triumph of faith. For him to ask Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom, though he saw Jesus bleeding His life away, and hounded to death, was a splendid act of reliance.

For him to commit his everlasting destiny into the hands of One who was, to all appearance, unable even to preserve His own life, was a noble achievement of faith. I say that this dying thief leads the van in the matter of faith, for what he saw of the circumstances of the Savior was calculated to contradict rather than help his confidence. What he saw was to his hindrance rather than to his help, for he saw our Lord in the very extremity of agony and death, and yet he believed in Him as the King shortly to come into His kingdom.

Recollect, too, that at that moment when the thief believed in Christ, *all the disciples had forsaken Him and fled*. John might be lingering at a little distance, and holy women may have stood farther off, but no one was present bravely to champion the dying Christ. Judas had sold Him, Peter had denied Him, and the rest had forsaken Him, and it was then that the dying thief called Him "Lord" and said, "Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." I call that splendid faith.

Why, some of you do not believe, though you are surrounded with Christian friends—though you are urged on by the testimony of those whom you regard with love, but this man, all alone, comes out, and calls Jesus his Lord! No one else was confessing Christ at that moment, no revival was around him with enthusiastic crowds, he was all by himself as a confessor of his Lord. After our Lord was nailed to the tree, the first to bear witness for Him was this thief. The centurion bore witness afterwards, when our Lord expired, but this thief was a lone confessor, holding on to Christ when nobody would say "Amen" to what he said. Even his fellow thief was mocking at the crucified Savior, so that this man shone as a lone star in the midnight darkness.

O sirs, dare you be Daniels? Dare you stand alone? Would you dare to stand out amidst a ribald crew, and say, "Jesus is my King. I only ask Him to remember me when He comes into His kingdom"? Would you be likely to avow such a faith when priests and scribes, princes and people, were all mocking at the Christ, and deriding Him? Brethren, the dying robber exhibited marvelous faith, and I beg you to think of this the next time you speak of him.

And it seems to me that another point adds splendor to that faith, namely, that *he himself was in extreme torture*. Remember, he was crucified. It was a crucified man trusting in a crucified Christ. Oh, when our frame is racked with torture, when the tenderest nerves are pained, when our body is hung up to die by we know not what great length of torment, then to forget the present and live in the future is a grand achievement of faith! While dying, to turn one's eyes to Another dying at your side, and trust your soul with Him, is very marvelous faith. Blessed thief, because they put you down at the bottom, as one of the least of saints, I think that I must bid you come up higher and take one of the uppermost seats among those who by faith have glorified the Christ of God!

Why, see, dear friends, once more, the specialty of this man's faith was that *he saw so much*, though his eyes had been opened for so short a time! He saw the future world. He was not a believer in annihilation, or in the possibility of a man's not being immortal. He evidently expected to be in another world, and to be in existence when the dying Lord should come into His kingdom. He believed all that,

and it is more than some do nowadays. He also believed that Jesus would have a kingdom, a kingdom after He was dead, a kingdom though He was crucified. He believed that He was winning for Himself a kingdom by those nailed hands and pierced feet.

This was intelligent faith, was it not? He believed that Jesus would have a kingdom in which others would share, and therefore he aspired to have his portion in it. But yet he had fit views of himself, and therefore he did not say, “Lord, let me sit at Your right hand,” or, “Let me share in the dainties of Your palace,” but he said only, “Remember me. Think of me. Cast an eye my way. Think of Your poor dying comrade on the cross at Your right hand. Lord, remember me. Remember me.” I see deep humility in the prayer, and yet a sweet, joyous, confident exaltation of the Christ at the time when the Christ was in His deepest humiliation.

Oh, dear sirs, if any of you have thought of this dying thief only as one who put off repentance, I want you now to think of him as one that did greatly and grandly believe in Christ, and oh, that you would do the same! Oh, that you would put a great confidence in my great Lord! Never did a poor sinner trust Christ too much. There was never a case of a guilty one, who believed that Jesus could forgive him, and afterwards found that He could not—who believed that Jesus could save him on the spot, and then woke up to find that it was a delusion. No, plunge into this river of confidence in Christ. The waters are waters to swim in, not to drown in.

Never did a soul perish that glorified Christ by a living, loving faith in Him. Come, then, with all your sin, whatever it may be, with all your deep depression of spirit, with all your agony of conscience. Come along with you, and grasp my Lord and Master with both the hands of your faith, and He shall be yours, and you shall be His.

*“Turn to Christ your longing eyes,
View His bloody sacrifice:
See in Him your sins forgiven;
Pardon, holiness, and heaven;
Glorify the King of kings,
Take the peace the Gospel brings.”*

I think that I have shown you something special in the means of the thief’s conversion and in his faith in our dying Lord.

III. But now, thirdly, as God shall help me, I wish to show you another specialty, namely, in THE RESULT OF HIS FAITH.

Oh, I have heard people say, “Well, you see, the dying thief was converted, but then he was not baptized. He never went to communion, and never joined the church!” He could not do either, and that which God Himself renders impossible to us He does not demand of us. He was nailed to a cross, how could he be baptized? But he did a great deal more than that, for if he could not carry out the outward signs, he most manifestly exhibited the things which they signified, which, in his condition, was better still.

This dying thief first of all confessed the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is the very essence of baptism. He confessed Christ. Did he not acknowledge Him to his fellow thief? It was as open a confession as he could make it. Did he not acknowledge Christ before all that were gathered around the cross who were within hearing? It was as public a confession as he could possibly cause it to be. Yet certain cowardly fellows claim to be Christians, though they have never confessed Christ to a single person, and then they quote this poor thief as an excuse. Are they nailed to a cross? Are they dying in agony? Oh no, and yet they talk as if they could claim the exemption which these circumstances would give them. What a dishonest piece of business!

The fact is, that our Lord requires an open confession as well as a secret faith, and if you will not render it, there is no promise of salvation for you, but a threat of being denied at the last. The apostle puts it, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” It is stated in another place this way—“He that

believeth and is baptized shall be saved”—that is Christ’s way of making the confession of Him. If there be a true faith, there must be a declaration of it. If you are candles, and God has lit you, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

Soldiers of Christ must, like her Majesty’s soldiers, wear their regimentals, and if they are ashamed of their regimentals, they ought to be drummed out of the regiment. They are not honest soldiers who refuse to march in rank with their comrades. The very least thing that the Lord Jesus Christ can expect of us is that we do confess Him to the best of our power. If you are nailed up to a cross, I will not invite you to be baptized. If you are fastened up to a tree to die, I will not ask you to come into this pulpit and declare your faith, for you cannot. But you are required to do what you can do, namely, to make as distinct and open an avowal of the Lord Jesus Christ as may be suitable in your present condition.

I believe that many Christian people get into a deal of trouble through not being honest in their convictions. For instance, if a man goes into a workshop, or a soldier into a barracks, and if he does not fly his flag from the first, it will be very difficult for him to run it up afterwards. But if he immediately and boldly lets them know, “I am a Christian man, and there are certain things that I cannot do to please you, and certain other things that I cannot help doing, though they displease you”—when that is clearly understood, after a while the singularity of the thing will be gone, and the man will be let alone, but if he is a little sneaky, and thinks that he is going to please the world and please Christ too, he is in for a rough time, let him depend upon it. His life will be that of a toad under a harrow, or a fox in a dog kennel, if he tries the way of compromise. That will never do.

Come out. Show your colors. Let it be known who you are, and what you are, and although your course will not be smooth, it will certainly be not half so rough as if you tried to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds—a very difficult piece of business that.

This man came out, then and there, and made as open an avowal of his faith in Christ as was possible.

The next thing he did was to rebuke his fellow sinner. He spoke to him in answer to the ribaldry with which he had assailed our Lord. I do not know what the unconverted convict had been blasphemously saying, but his converted comrade spoke very honestly to him. “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.”

It is more than ever needful in these days that believers in Christ should not allow sin to go unrebuked, and yet a great many of them do so. Do you not know that a person who is silent when a wrong thing is said or done may become a participator in the sin? If you do not rebuke sin—I mean, of course, on all fit occasions, and in a proper spirit—your silence will give consent to the sin, and you will be an aider and abettor in it.

A man who saw a robbery, and who did not cry, “Stop thief!” would be thought to be in league with the thief, and the man who can hear swearing, or see impurity, and never utter a word of protest may well question whether he is right himself. Our “other men’s sins” make up a great item in our personal guilt unless we in anywise rebuke them. This our Lord expects us to do. The dying thief did it, and did it with all his heart, and therein far exceeded large numbers of those who hold their heads high in the church.

Next, *the dying thief made a full confession of his guilt.* He said to him who was hanged with him, “Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? *And we indeed justly.*” Not many words, but what a world of meaning was in them—“we indeed justly.” “You and I are dying for our crimes,” said he, “and we deserve to die.”

When a man is willing to confess that he deserves the wrath of God—that he deserves the suffering which his sin has brought upon him—there is evidence of sincerity in him. In this man’s case, his repentance glittered like a holy tear in the eye of his faith, so that his faith was bejeweled with the drops of his penitence. As I have often told you, I suspect the faith which is not born as a twin with repentance,

but there is no room for suspicion in the case of this penitent confessor. I pray God that you and I may have such a thorough work as this in our own hearts as the result of our faith.

Then, see, *this dying thief defends his Lord right manfully*. He says, “We indeed justly, but this man hath done nothing amiss.” Was not that beautifully said? He did not say, “This Man does not deserve to die,” but “This man hath done nothing amiss.” He means that He is perfectly innocent. He does not even say, “He has done nothing wicked,” but he even asserts that He has not acted unwisely or indiscreetly—“This man hath done nothing amiss.”

This is a glorious testimony of a dying man to one who was numbered with the transgressors, and was being put to death because His enemies falsely accused Him. Beloved, I only pray that you and I may bear as good a witness to our Lord as this thief did. He outruns us all. We need not think much of the coming of his conversion late in life, we may far rather consider how blessed was the testimony which he bore for his Lord when it was most needed. When all other voices were silent, one suffering penitent spoke out, and said—“This man hath done nothing amiss.”

See, again, another mark of this man’s faith. He prays, and *his prayer is directed to Jesus*. “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” True faith is always praying faith. “Behold, he prayeth,” is one of the surest tests of the new birth. Oh, friends, may we abound in prayer, for thus we shall prove that our faith in Jesus Christ is what it ought to be! This converted robber opened his mouth wide in prayer, he prayed with great confidence as to the coming kingdom, and he sought that kingdom first, even to the exclusion of all else. He might have asked for life, or for ease from pain, but he prefers the kingdom, and this is a high mark of grace.

In addition to thus praying, you will see that *he adores and worships Jesus*, for he says, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” The petition is worded as if he felt, “Only let Christ think of me, and it is enough. Let Him but remember me, and the thought of His mind will be effectual for everything that I shall need in the world to come.” This is to impute Godhead to Christ. If a man can cast his all upon the mere memory of a person, he must have a very high esteem of that person.

If to be remembered by the Lord Jesus is all that this man asks, or desires, he pays to the Lord great honor. I think that there was about his prayer a worship equal to the eternal hallelujahs of cherubim and seraphim. There was in it a glorification of his Lord which is not excelled even by the endless symphonies of angelic spirits who surround the throne. Thief, thou hast well done!

Oh, that some penitent spirit here might be helped thus to believe, thus to confess, thus to defend his Master, thus to adore, thus to worship, and then the age of the convert would be a matter of the smallest imaginable consequence.

IV. Now, the last remark is this, There was something very special about the dying thief as to OUR LORD’S WORDS TO HIM ABOUT THE WORLD TO COME.

He said to him, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” He only asked the Lord to remember him, but he obtained this surprising answer, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

In some respects I envy this dying thief, for this reason—that when the Lord pardoned me, and pardoned the most of you, who are present, He did not give us a place in paradise that same day. We are not yet come to the rest which is promised to us. No, you are waiting here. Some of you have been waiting very long. It is thirty years with many of us. It is forty years, it is fifty years, with many others since the Lord blotted out your sins, and yet you are not with Him in paradise.

There is a dear member of this church who, I suppose, has known the Lord for seventy-five years, and she is still with us, having long passed the ninetieth year of her age. The Lord did not admit her to paradise on the day of her conversion. He did not take any one of us from nature to grace, and from grace to glory, in a day. We have had to wait a good while. There is something for us to do in the wilderness, and so we are kept out of the heavenly garden.

I remember that Mr. Baxter said that he was not in a hurry to be gone to heaven, and a friend called upon Dr. John Owen, who had been writing about the glory of Christ, and asked him what he thought of going to heaven. That great divine replied, “I am longing to be there.” “Why,” said the other, “I have

just spoken to holy Mr. Baxter, and he says that he would prefer to be here, since he thinks that he can be more useful on earth.” “Oh!” said Dr. Owen, “my brother Baxter is always full of practical godliness, but for all that I cannot say that I am at all desirous to linger in this mortal state. I would rather be gone.”

Each of these men seems to me to have been the half of Paul. Paul was made up of the two, for he was desirous to depart, but he was willing to remain because it was needful for the people. We would put both together, and like Paul, have a strong desire to depart and to be with Christ, and yet be willing to wait if we can do service to our Lord and to His church. Still, I think he has the best of it that is converted, and enters heaven the same night.

This robber breakfasted with the devil, but he dined with Christ on earth, and supped with Him in paradise. This was short work, but blessed work. What a host of troubles he escaped! What a world of temptation he missed! What an evil world he quitted! He was just born, like a lamb dropped in the field, and then he was lifted into the Shepherd’s bosom straight away. I do not remember the Lord ever saying this to anybody else. I dare say it may have happened that souls have been converted and have gone home at once, but I never heard of anybody that had such an assurance from Christ as this man had, “Verily, I say unto thee,” such a personal assurance, “Verily I say unto *thee*, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” Dying thief, you were favored above many, “to be with Christ, which is far better,” and to be with Him so soon!

Why is it that our Lord does not thus imparadise all of us at once? It is because there is something for us to do on earth. My brethren, are you doing it? *Are you doing it?* Some good people are still on earth, but why? But why? What is the use of them? I cannot make it out. If they are indeed the Lord’s people, what are they here for? They get up in the morning and eat their breakfast, and in due course eat their dinner, and their supper, and go to bed and sleep, at a proper hour they get up the next morning, and do the same as on the previous day. Is this living for Jesus? Is this life? It does not come to much. Can this be the life of God in man?

Oh, Christian people, do justify your Lord in keeping you waiting here! How can you justify Him but by serving Him to the utmost of your power? The Lord help you to do so! Why, you owe as much to Him as the dying thief! I know I owe a great deal more. What a mercy it is to have been converted while you were yet a boy, to be brought to the Savior while you were yet a girl! What a debt of obligation young Christians owe to the Lord!

And if this poor thief crammed a life full of testimony into a few minutes, ought not you and I, who are spared, for years after conversion, to perform good service for our Lord? Come; let us wake up if we have been asleep! Let us begin to live if we have been half dead. May the Spirit of God make something of us yet, so that we may go as industrious servants from the labors of the vineyard to the pleasures of the paradise! To our once crucified Lord be glory forever and ever! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—LUKE 23:27-49

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—872, 285, 548, 288

Mr. Spurgeon begs to salute the readers of the sermons with tidings of his speedy return to the pulpit of the Tabernacle. Through the goodness of God he feels greatly refreshed by his rest in a genial climate, and trusts that he may begin on the first Sabbath of February a long season of earnest ministry. He begs to thank thousands of friends for generous help rendered to the College and the Orphanage during his absence, and to entreat their renewed prayers for a blessing on those works, and on these weekly sermons.

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