

Grace to You :: esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time

Strength for Today

“Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

The circumstances are never too adverse, nor the hour too late, to offer the gospel of Christ to someone.

Jesus was crucified between two criminals (thieves)—one on each side of His cross. At first the two men both joined the onlookers in hurling unbelieving rhetoric at the Lord (Mark 15:32). But one of the thieves obviously had a change of heart as the hours elapsed. He rebuked the other thief by pointing out Jesus' sinlessness (Luke 23:40-41) and then expressed his need of salvation: “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” (v. 42). And Jesus graciously answered the thief's request.

The dying thief's conversion is an extraordinary story. At Calvary there was nothing convincing or favorable about Jesus. From man's vantage point He was dying because He had been completely rejected; even the disciples had deserted Him. Jesus appeared weak, disgraced, and ashamed. When the thief uttered his plea for help, no one was pointing to Jesus and saying, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

Given the circumstances, it is difficult to comprehend how Christ could be concerned with the immediate salvation of a wretched thief who was justly being executed for his crimes. But our Lord cared very much about the destiny of that man's soul. Jesus' desire to see sinners saved was constant, because He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). His concern for the unsaved is the supreme example and motivation to us in reaching out to others.

The thief's salvation is also a clear illustration of the sovereignty of God in redemption. So often the church wants to attribute someone's salvation to human cleverness in presenting a well-crafted message at just the right time and in the most appropriate place. But salvation is always the direct result of God's intervening grace. The sovereign work of God's Spirit, not circumstances, gave the thief a saving understanding about who Jesus was and what His death was accomplishing.

Suggestions for Prayer

Ask God for the courage to reach out with the good news of salvation no matter what the circumstances.

For Further Study

Read John 4:1-42.

- What excuses could Jesus have used for not talking to the woman?
- How did He keep His focus during His conversation with her?

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