

The Robber Saved Luke 23:39-43

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the transformative power of grace as exemplified in the story of the repentant robber on the cross, emphasizing faith and immediate salvation through Christ.

Scripture: Luke 23:39

Topics: "Grace", "Salvation"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the profound love and compassion of Jesus, who, even in His suffering, fully engaged with the sorrows of others. He contrasts the repentant robber, who recognized his guilt and sought grace, with the unrepentant thief, illustrating the human heart's enmity towards God. Darby highlights that true faith is rooted in the recognition of Christ's perfectness and the assurance of salvation through His atoning work. The sermon underscores that access to God is granted through Christ, who has removed the veil, allowing believers to enter into His presence with confidence. Ultimately, the message is one of hope, emphasizing that even in the last moments of life, faith in Christ can lead to immediate salvation.

Transcript

We do not find, except during the three hours of darkness on the cross, that by any sorrow, weariness, or trial, the Lord Jesus was ever hindered from entering into the sorrow of others. None could put Him in a place, except when working out atonement, where He did not enter into human suffering: such unweariness of love do we see in Christ. Still He was light; and the more we look into His history, the more comes out the terribleness of the heart of man. It was never manifested till then. There are amiable natures and unamiable natures; but we never learn what the heart of man is till then. The thing that tries the human heart is, What is its object? not, What are its mere natural qualities? "There is none that seeketh after God." Man saw no beauty in Christ. There is nothing in the heart that looks at the Lord so as to find in Him an object and a delight. There is no root till the conscience is reached; there may be attraction, but until the conscience is in the presence and sight of God, nothing is done; it is like the morning dew which passes away. "The same is he which heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it, yet hath he not root in himself."

Wherever the conscience is reached by God, there is some sense of goodness. Fear and terror may predominate, but there is attraction, and the heart cannot let it go. Faith always gets both: God is love, and yet He reaches the conscience. There is that which reaches the conscience, and that which inspires

confidence, when the eye is on Christ.

On the authority of Christ Himself we have the certainty of salvation, that is, the Christian state; and no other suits the Christian. It is the only real Christian state which the word of God owns. The condition of the Christian is the effect of the work of Christ. It is not that there is no conflict, but that Another has taken my responsibility. My place before God is not the effect of what I have done, but of what Christ has done. Christ is the ground on which I stand before God: if it be so, what has He done for us? He died for our sins; then they must be put away. He is the Judge, but He cannot judge what He has put away. That we might walk with God in peace, He has sent the One who is to be the judge first to be the Saviour. Confidence is connected with righteousness now.

91 In the history of the robbers we have both sides.

In the other malefactor taunting Christ, we see how the heart of man is enmity to God. It was the triumph for the moment of the first man and of Satan too. It is sad to think what our hearts are if left to themselves. When the heart is let out, where will it stop? Satan is over us. Here then we have the triumph of the wickedness of man over the goodness of God. We cannot get rid of Satan's power yet; we may bind it in a sense. The heart of man cannot bear the presence of God. There is not a vanity, not a bit of dress or money, that has not more power over the heart of man than all that Christ has done or is. You never yet found a man enjoying himself who would hear of Christ. The world would not have Him when He came in grace, nor would it now; but it must have Him when He comes in judgment. Take the majority of people in this city, and suppose them let into heaven! They would get out as fast as they could.

In the repentant robber, on the other hand, we see grace. He was crucified on a gibbet; but no matter, gibbet or no gibbet, when God and the soul meet, we have the simple and immense fact that the soul is brought at once into His presence. When God has dealt with the conscience, we make no more promises for the future. Unlike the naughty child that says, "I'll be better to-morrow," the soul confesses sin to-day. "Dost thou not fear God?" is the word, not "Are you not ashamed of being a thief? "

Have you ever been brought into God's presence? "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom." If you have not been consciously in God's presence, wisdom has not begun for you. Before Christ you must be, and you must be there in truth: the difference is whether you are before Christ in the fulness of His grace, or before Him in judgment. "We indeed justly." He did not say that the world was guilty, but that he was the guilty one; it is not simply that sin is sin, but that I am a sinner. His thought is that he himself is justly there. It is a personal thing, not merely that God is holy, nor merely that the world is guilty, but that you are guilty.

"This man hath done nothing amiss." He would guarantee the whole life of Christ - it contrariwise was a divine revelation to the soul. Who is there that is a Christian that would not lay down his life for this? "This man hath done nothing amiss." It was a divine revelation of the perfectness of Christ's Person. Could your soul answer for Christ in that way? Here is a man who does so when everybody is deserting Jesus: here is divine faith that He was perfectly sinless: his eye is opened, his heart brought to the consciousness of it. It is not only that he has the fear of God, but he sees the perfectness of Jesus. Heaven was opened when Christ came out for public service; there never was a man before of whom God could say, "That is all I want." Has your heart echoed, and said, "That is all I want"? Nowhere else can the heart so rest when we see the evil around, and the imperfections even of saints. His mind, having got hold of Christ, finds rest in Him. All around is a wide waste of waters, the heart would get wearied, but it turns to Him; and what a rest!

Things would be unbearable but for this, but the heart, when it turns there, enters its sanctuary.

92 "Remember me," said the converted robber. What sign was there that Jesus was Christ the Lord? There was not a cloud on this man's heart, because he was divinely taught. One heart recognises that He is Lord in spite of everything. Pilate had washed his hands before all the people, and given Him up to the Jews; He was denied by one of His disciples, betrayed by another. Everything was against it. "Lord, remember me"; without a sign, the robber owns Him - how bright to faith! This man had no time to grow, or serve, or walk; but there was thorough conversion, full faith, a sense of what the Messiah was, and belief in His coming in His kingdom. Faith in itself is always certain; it may lead us to doubt about other things, but it is always absolutely certain. The believer has set to his seal that God is true; he does not say, "Perhaps He is true." Wherever I receive it as the word of God, I receive it with absolute certainty; if it be not so, I do not receive it as the word of God at all.

"Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." His whole concern was that Christ should remember him. We see in him boldness with a bold sinner, lowliness as to himself, a sense of the perfectness of Jesus and the knowledge that He would come in His kingdom. Happy are we if we are in the state of this robber! If you were in suffering, in trial, is it the only thing you would care about, that Christ should remember you?

Another thing is Christ's answer to him: "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." The character of Luke is to bring in present blessing. Before ever the kingdom came, he would go straight to paradise. Faith never looks at my heart, but at the object God reveals. When brought to the consciousness of what I am, my eye rests on Christ Himself. When the thief looks to Christ, he has Christ's answer. The rest given to our souls is the positive answer of God. We have the positive declaration that this robber, taken up for his crimes, was that day absolutely fit for paradise; so perfect is the work of Christ. Observe this robber, and the woman that was a sinner, how they understand Christ, because they want a Saviour! When I come to God with Christ in my hand (like Abel with his lamb), God says to me, "You are righteous." By faith I see Jesus is sitting on the right hand of the majesty on high; when did He go there? "When he had by himself purged our sins." Then I know my sins are purged before God. There is no progress here, no such thing as being fitted for heaven. Growth there ought to be in us, if left here, progress in likeness to Christ; but it is never in Scripture connected with fitness for heaven: Christ is my title. There is growth, but it is never treated as our fitness. This robber was fit for paradise at once; he went there, any way, that day; I suppose he was fit for it, since he was fit to be with Christ! Suppose I were to make all the progress the most blessed saint ever made, could I say I was fit thus for Christ? God forbid! yet I am fit. Death for the believer is simply that he has done with all that is mortal and sinful.

93 How little the outside is the truth! The Jews sent soldiers to break their legs: how little they thought they were sending the robber straight to heaven, to be the first companion (there were Old Testament saints, of course) that followed the blessed Lord!

It would be well for us if we were as close to Christ as that poor robber. When the veil was rent, the whole thing was changed. The Old Testament was a declaration that man could not go to God in the light: God did not come out, and man could not go in. The gospel says that God did come out, and man can go in. "We have boldness to enter into the holiest through the blood of Jesus." If sin is there, how can I enter into the holiest? I am in Christ, not in the flesh. Our sins He bore; we have died with Him, and should enter into the holiest. Access is free, the veil being rent; we are accepted in the Beloved. Until the work was done, He did not give up the ghost. Now, as a present thing, we have boldness to enter into the holiest. Are you

there? The veil is rent; you cannot have God afar off. There is no more a veil; we are before the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. So full and complete is the revelation, that I see God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ, the witness of salvation accomplished. The glory is in the face of the One who bore my sins. In the presence of the absolute light and righteousness of God you must stand, or you cannot stand at all. The world may blind your eyes, but there is no veil on the presence of God.

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