

# The Thief

by John Sung

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*The sermon highlights the story of the thief on the cross, who repented and trusted in Jesus for salvation, demonstrating the power of faith and the love of Jesus.*

**Scripture:** Luke 23:39

**Topics:** "Redemption", "Faith in Christ"

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## Description

John Sung preaches about the profound transformation of the thief on the cross, who, amidst mockery and despair, recognized Jesus as Lord and defended Him when no one else would. This thief's confession and faith in Jesus' kingdom highlight the depth of God's grace, as he was promised paradise despite his past sins. Sung emphasizes that while many disciples fled in fear, this thief displayed remarkable faith and discernment, understanding Jesus' true identity and mission. The sermon reflects on the nature of repentance and the assurance of salvation, illustrating that even the greatest sinners can find redemption through Christ. Sung's personal testimony of his own transformation reinforces the message of hope and forgiveness.

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## Transcript

Luke 23:39

Though our text has only five verses, every verse is most precious.

Vs. 39. "And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, if thou be Christ, save thyself and us."

Here is a most perfect-loving Savior, hanging on a cross. When He was on earth how gently loving He was. Who could be so perfect like Him?

Tonight we see the Son of God nailed to the cross. No one knows that. That day Jesus had carried the heaviest cross up the path to Golgotha. He stumbled and fell. A soldier lashed Him. He got up to carry the same clumsy cross. He plodded on. No body knew His sorrows. The beloved Son of God came to earth to be killed at last. He carried the cross. He forged ahead. A band of women followed this Savior who had cast out devils, who never uttered a bad word. They followed Him, being led to the crucifixion. But no one knew He was going to die for our sins.

Then the soldiers led Jesus up the hill of Golgotha. They nailed His two saving hands on the cross. Who knew? He who trudged up and down for the Truth --- his two feet bringing salvation wherever he went, were also nailed to the cross. Who knew? He who never thought a bad thought, in whose mind was only the plan of saving souls, wore a crown of thorns. Who knew this?

Many disciples, including the most beloved John, and those who were fed with miracle bread, ran away. The soldiers nailed Him. The leaders ridiculed Him. No one knew why the Lord was crucified. No one dared to confess Jesus as Savior and from among the crucified prisoners, there was one who mocked Jesus. It is said, "When a bird is about to die, its cry is mournful." Many people, whose hearts are hardened against believing the Lord, repent when they approach their last. Now this robber not only did not repent, but also mocked the Lord. Those women who loved the Lord stood afar. All railed on the Lord. Who dared to confess Christ? Thank the Lord! When all forsook Him, there was one thief who confessed the Lord.

Vs. 40. "But the other answering rebuked him, saying, dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?"

This thief testified for Jesus while hanging on the cross. He defended the Lord. He answered back and rebuked the other thief. When we look at this thief we feel mighty guilty. For are we not all blind followers? When others say nay, so say we nay. At that hour, no one feared God. But this thief feared God. Alas! To this day we still do not fear God. We daringly commit sin. The Wonderful Savior had changed this thief. In the hour of total opposition to the Lord, this thief spoke out against them for his Lord.

Vs. 41. "And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss."

We smoke with our lips. Our eyes look at things unseemly. We cheat in examinations. We regard money more than life. Our ears are open to evil talk. We hate in our hearts. We covet. We are sordid. Our feet run unclean paths. Our bodies are covered with sins worthy of death. But nobody knows he is worthy of death. When the Holy Spirit illuminates, we shall see all these immediately. May the Holy Spirit move us to know that we all deserve to die, but this man Jesus --- He never did any wrong.

The disciples had fled. Jesus' own loved ones, relatives and friends, none of them dared to say a word for the Lord. Rather they heard others say Jesus deserved to die. Not one ever dared to speak up for Jesus, except one thief. When we look at this thief we are convicted of our worthiness of death. He was braver than the disciples our Lord loved. He clearly knew Jesus to be His Savior.

Vs. 42. "And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou come into thy kingdom."

Many who followed the Lord for three years had now melted away. They dared not confess Jesus. This thief heard only one sentence of Jesus' prayer --- Father! Forgive them for they know not what they do. On the cross, he confessed Jesus his Lord. He knew Jesus would rise up, He saw Jesus take over His Kingdom. Which disciple ever had such discernment? They could see only the kingdom of the present. They fought for prime minister, to sit one on the right and the other on the left. No one knew Jesus would come again. Only this thief knew Jesus is Savior, is crucified for us. To this day there are those who disbelieve Jesus' second coming. This thief in the hour of Jesus' agony saw what others did not see, believed what others did not believe.

Today, the world says, "seeing is believing." Not that thief. What he asked for was that his soul might be saved. Many seek only the salvation of the body. He prayed for one thing, that Jesus would remember him. He did not ask Jesus then to save him, but when His kingdom comes.

When I read this passage, I wept, because my faith is less than the thief's. The Lord can save the greatest of sinners, but no body knew this, except the thief.

I met a man at Chia Hsing. He said to me, "My sins are too great. I'm afraid I won't be saved." I asked him why? He replied, "I so hated a man that I set fire to his house, 87 were burnt to death." I answered, "If you truly repent, the Lord can save you."

There was a regiment commander in Tientsin. He had killed many people with a rifle. Once he would not pay for his rickshaw fare. The rickshaw puller chased to demand his fare. He pulled out his pistol to kill him. Although the rickshaw man entreated him sorrowfully, he was killed nevertheless. This regiment commander realizing his great sin was afraid he couldn't be saved. I said, "If you repent, the Lord can save you." Now, he is a preacher in Shantung. No more a regiment commander.

Vs. 43. "And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Jesus promised the thief on the cross. ---Today I will save you.--- This was more than he asked. At Passover, at the trial, on the way to Golgotha, at the time of His crucifixion, this thief was a death-deserving culprit. Now, he is saved! Some say. "I think I am saved." We have heard the Gospel for many years, and yet we don't know if we are saved or not. That thief in one day found salvation! Jesus said to him, "You will be with me in paradise." This means "You and I". Three words tell of a close relationship. Jesus was like saying. "Your sin is upon me, my life is for you".

Paradise' door was shut when Adam and Eve sinned. The cherubims guarded it. No one could enter it. Now, the first one to enter is not a great doctor. or a teacher, but a thief. Jesus preached three years on earth. He brought back a thief. Wonderful? A closest disciple on the other hand went to hell. This is what is meant by "the first shall be last, and the last first." Adam sinned, was expelled from Paradise. A death-bound thief to enter Paradise? Yes, because Jesus took over his load of sin.

I've lived a robber's life for years. A lying mouth, I cheated my parents. With a thief's eyes I looked at money. I loved filthy novels. Twice a week I went to the cinema. My ears were robber's ears. I loved to hear slanders. My hands were robber's hands. I was a pilferer. A robber's heart: I wanted to be a government officer. I had morbid hatred of others. From USA I helped to bring my big brother to College. Not brilliant, I had to coach him. In return I made him my cook. I sometimes assaulted him,

Once on a wintry night, I shuffled him out of the house. Though he kept knocking I refused to open. I let him in the next morning. His cheeks were blue. He said, "You are not like a younger brother. I said, "What elder and younger brother?" That day he refused to eat a thing. He spat blood that night. Whenever I see my elder brother I'm reminded of my sin.

But one night in 1927, I confessed my sins before the Lord. Midnight I saw a light. Jesus appeared, His hands and feet with nail prints. Tears in His eyes, He said, "Little child, your sins are forgiven." Thank the Lord, I was the saved robber that night.

My father was pastor for 40 years. His salary was \$20 a month. So I would never to death become a preacher.

Now, if I preach not the Gospel, woe is me!

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