

Jesus, Remember Me!

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon emphasizes the power of Jesus' death to take away our burden of guilt and sin, and to open the door to Paradise for us.

Scripture: Matthew 26:26, Luke 23:39, John 1:29, Colossians 3:1, Revelation 22:1

Topics: "Salvation Through Faith", "Mercy Of God"

Description

Richard E. Bieber shares the powerful story of Helen Morrow, a woman burdened by a troubled past and the fear of death, yet anchored in the truth that Jesus had already taken her burdens. Through Helen's example, we are reminded of the two burdens we all face: our sinfulness before a Holy God and the reality of our mortality. Just like the thief on the cross next to Jesus, we are called to acknowledge our guilt, mess, and need for Jesus' mercy by saying, 'Jesus, remember me!' Paradise awaits those who humbly enter through the door opened by Jesus' suffering and death.

Transcript

When Helen Morrow was a little girl, she would crouch in a corner and shake with fear as her drunken stepfather would beat her mother and cover her mother with curses. There would be months of peace in the house, and then it would start again. This went on all through Helen's childhood and youth.

When Helen was grown, she chose to remain in that little Kentucky town, so she could be close to her mother and protect her as best she could, until at last, her mother, weak and weary, came to the end of her sad journey in this world.

Then Helen moved from Kentucky to Detroit and started a new life, which turned out to be quite rocky too. Years went by. Then one day, who should turn up on Helen's doorstep, looking for a place to live but her stepfather, now a broken wreck of a man.

His name was Nerge. And Helen took him in to live with her. When I first met them, Nerge was in a wheelchair, rolling around the flat, as ornery as ever. Helen looked after the old man, and anyone else in the neighborhood who needed help.

She knew her Bible. Passages of scripture would come pouring out of Helen's mouth, as if she had made up the words herself. Helen wasn't the most cheerful soul around, but she had a heart as tender as any on earth.

Every so often I'd look out the window of my study, and here comes Helen, trudging along Toledo Avenue, and right up the steps to the church.

"Oh no! Not today! I don't know if I can handle it, Lord!"

She would plop down in a chair and stare into space with her big sad eyes. Two burdens weighed her down every time she came:

Her troubled past.

The day she would have to die.

"I feel guilty," she would say, "and I'm scared to die." We'd talk for a while. We'd pray. And then Helen would be on her way, leaving behind a blessing straight out of heaven.

Helen Morrow wasn't ashamed to admit that she was scared to die and troubled by her past. But, deep within, she was possessed by a truth which held her like an anchor in a storm:

Helen knew that Jesus had already taken her burden. She also knew that Jesus' death was her doorway to life. That's what kept her going. "Jesus, remember me!"

Helen Morrow saw these two burdens more clearly than anyone I've ever known.

Helen knew that, apart from divine mercy, she carried a burden of uncleanness before a Holy God. We can tell ourselves, "I'm okay, you're okay" forever. That doesn't make us okay in the light of eternity. In ourselves, apart from divine mercy, we're not okay. Far from it.

Helen knew that she was going to die. It was right there in front of her all the time. "One day, I'm going to die....Jesus remember me!" We try not to think about it, but it's there for us too. We're going to die. You're going to die. I'm going to die. And until we have a clear, solid, hopeful answer to these two burdens---our sin....our death---life is a treadmill of futility, no matter how successful we may think we are.

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" 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. but this man has done nothing wrong."

And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Luke 23-39-43

The men hanging on those three crosses looked pretty much alike. Beaten, bruised, bloody, and almost totally naked ... gasping for air as they hung there dying. You could hardly tell them apart by the look of them.

One of those men could be you, or me, or Helen. He had stumbled his way through life, and now it's coming to an end. A burden of guilt weighs down on him as he faces the world beyond.

But here's the amazing thing: this thief looks over at Jesus, hanging next to him, and has hope!

"Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom."

He doesn't make any claims for himself. He doesn't try to justify himself. He doesn't talk about all the bad breaks he had in life. Deep within his soul, this dying thief can see that the one hanging on that cross next to him is not dying an ordinary death. Something supernatural is going on there. Something holy.

So this dying thief, acknowledging his guilt, the mess he's made of his life, and simply says, "Jesus, remember me."

And what does Jesus do? Jesus allows this man's guilt---all the evil that has collected in his soul and seared his troubled conscience---to flow over into him, Jesus---along with your guilt and my guilt, the guilt of all the phony Christians, the guilt of all the angry Muslims, the guilt of all the arrogant atheists....

All we like sheep have gone astray,

We have turned every one to his own way,

And the Lord has laid on him

The iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

"But wait a minute! What about all the harm this man did, all the lives that were devastated because of him. And now he gets a free ride to Paradise?"

Well, what do you want this man to do to make himself worthy? Could this man ever atone for the evil that he did before the eye of God? How long would it take him to work off his debt? It would take forever, and the debt would still be there.

There is only one way this man can ever come out from beneath his load of guilt before God: God himself, hanging there next to him, takes the burden of this man's guilt, the consequences of this man's sin, and suffers, as this man could never suffer, so that his guilt is drained away and the door is opened for him.

"Today you're going to be with me in Paradise. I've taken your burden upon myself. I'm dying here as if only for you."

What about us? We may think that we're more righteous than that thief. But in God's sight, at this moment each of us is exactly where he was. We're not nearly as "okay" as we think we are. If God caused us to see what he sees when he looks into our souls, we'd go out of our minds!

Unless the Lamb of God takes our burden and dies our death, we're lost.

But he did take our burden and die our death.

"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

"Jesus, remember me!"

And what about the thief on the other side of Jesus, the one who gave him a hard time. Did Jesus die for him?

Of course!

All we like sheep have gone astray,

We have turned every one to his own way,

And the Lord has laid on him

The iniquity of us all.

Jesus took that man's burden too. Died his death too. Opened the door to Paradise for him as well. The question is, will he walk through that open door? Will he ever say, "Jesus, remember me"?

O yes, Paradise is there for him, if only he will humble himself enough to enter it before the door closes.

When we gather in the assembly to eat the bread and drink the wine, remembering our Lord's death, we're right there at the cross, just like those thieves. Before us is a door, opened for us by his suffering and death. And Jesus, now alive from the dead, stands inside the door, waiting.

Waiting for us to see our need. "Jesus remember me! Help me!" So that he can say to us too,

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Paradise. It doesn't matter whether we're dead or alive, on this side or that side of the grave, Paradise begins the instant you allow the burden of guilt and fear that lodges within you---and weighs down your soul more than you may know---to flow out of you into his death. His death, the only receptacle in the universe that can absorb that burden. Picture it. See that stream of evil, sin, trouble, resentment, fear, anger, lust, greed, flowing out of you into his death, which swallows it. It's gone!

And Paradise begins for you the instant you allow his resurrection life to flow into you. His resurrection life, the only power in the universe which can make you whole. Picture it: a River of Living Water, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, down into your heart!

"Jesus, remember me! Help me!" That's all it takes.

And the proof that this has happened to you, that the power of Jesus' cross is really at work in you, is that you will spend the rest of your days on earth, giving thanks to God.

"Thank you, Lord, for setting me free!

Thank you, Father, for this new life!

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for making me whole!"

And when your days are spent in thankfulness to God, you will forgive your brother from your heart. You will be generous. You will be more patient than you have ever been in your life. For the Spirit of the risen Lord Jesus will occupy the throne within your heart, empowering you to live each day to the glory of God.

So when you gather in the assembly to eat the bread and drink the wine, look beyond what your eye sees. Look beyond the ritual act. Listen to his words:

"This is my body given for you.

This is my blood, shed for your sins."

Connect with him! Open yourself up to him! "Jesus, remember me!"

God grant that we may see what Helen Morrow saw when she cried for mercy.

God grant that we may see what that dying thief saw as he hung there next to Jesus.

That the power of his death may flow into us as we say, "Jesus, remember me!"

That he may send us forth as men and women who have risen from the dead to live for God alone.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/richard-e-bieber/jesus-remember-me/>

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