

The Thief Saved

by Welcome Detweiler

The sermon tells the story of Theda, a ruthless murderer who was saved through faith in Jesus Christ, and applies the gospel message to the listener's need for salvation.

Duration: 8:58

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Luke 23:43, John 3:16, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 1:7, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 1:5

Topics: "Gods Grace", "Salvation Through Faith"

Description

In this sermon transcript, the story begins with a man named Sita who steals money from a family's box. Afraid of being exposed, he sets fire to the family's hut, killing two of the children and injuring the third. Sita is sentenced to life imprisonment but later receives the death penalty for his heinous crime. Throughout his time in prison, a missionary visits regularly to share the gospel of God's grace, particularly focusing on the story of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Despite his impending execution, Sita finds peace in knowing that his sins are forgiven by God.

Transcript

My good friend, William A. Deans, from Nyankundi, Africa, tells the interesting story of the conversion of an African savage by the name of Theda, who was sent by his chief to collect an overdue fine from a tribesman. After collecting the fine, his friends met him as he was returning with his pockets bulging with the francs. They persuaded him to buy banana beer until very soon the money was all spent.

Instead of returning to the chief, Theda hid, but as days passed, the chief's insistence and his anger increased, and word was sent out that unless Theda brought the money, he would be dragged before the native court and publicly whipped. By borrowing from relatives, by selling his goods, Theda made up most of the amount, and lacked only 50 francs. The day of reckoning approached, and he became desperately.

He must get the 50 francs. Other means failing, he determined to steal the money from a villager whom he knew very well. Upon arriving at the hut, he found that the man and his wife were away at the lake fishing, leaving the four children in the grass hut.

Here at last was a way to get the 50 francs to satisfy the threatening chieftain. Theda asked the children if he might spend the night with them until the parents would return. They seemed to be glad to have the visitor and provided a meal just before going to bed.

Soon the four children were asleep, and this was Theda's chance to invade the family box at the corner of the hut. Carefully, he lifted the lid and found the money at the very bottom of the box. Suddenly, with a startling rattle, a dog bell tumbled over inside the box, and the children were instantly awakened.

What are you doing in our father's box, the oldest girl asked. Theda's threatening reply silenced the children, and they soon dozed off again. Theda had the money, but how could he conceal his theft? The testimony of the children would certainly expose him, and he would be convicted.

What could he do? His sinful, savage heart devised his only course of escape. I must burn the grass hut while the four children are asleep, and all evidence will be destroyed. In a matter of a few minutes, the flames leaked over the dry grass hut, but the three oldest children were awakened by the crackling in the smoke, and crawled out of the burning hut.

Theda knew if they escaped, his crime would be found out, so he took his huge bush knife and knocked them down as they came through the door. Two of them were killed instantly, but the third fled into the banana grove, painfully wounded, and later recovered in a government hospital to testify against Theda for triple murder with theft and arson. A district court sentenced him to life imprisonment, during which time the missionary visited the prison regularly to proclaim the gospel of God's grace.

Of all the simple gospel messages he proclaimed, none created more interest among the prisoners than the story of the cross. They listened breathlessly as the account was given of the Son of God who came from heaven to die in the place of guilty sinners. They were strangely moved as he told them of the crime of thorns which wicked men pressed upon his brow, the shameful spitting, the scourging, the mockery, the nails driven through his hands, the spear like their own African weapon was thrust into his side, and thus the sinless perfect Son of God died as a criminal because he loved guilty sinners who could never be saved apart from his substitutionary death.

Even Theda, the ruthless murderer, was drawn by such an almost unbelievable story of divine love and grace. He asked to have an interview with the missionary to make sure that this message included him. Is it possible that a wicked guilty man like me can be forgiven through the work that Christ accomplished on the cross? The missionary assured him that the message was to whosoever will with no exception.

He reminded him of the dying thief who was also a murderer and was granted paradise because he believed that Christ atoned for his sins. Theda could hardly believe it, but it must be true because God said it, and in simple faith Theda rested his soul for time and for eternity in the finished work of Christ, and then and there the handcuffed prisoner received eternal life. A few weeks later, the Attorney General of the Congo examined the documents in the district court and decided the sentence of life in prison was insufficient to pay for Theda's horrible crime.

He had the authority to overrule the district court in Theda's case, and the new sentence was given to be hanged by the neck until dead. Theda heard the grim sentence, but would not unduly move, for he had the peace of knowing that his past was brought about on God's record book in heaven. On the morning of his execution, he peacefully ate his last meal and asked the missionary to take care of his five children.

His last words were, Tell my children the story of Jesus and the wonderful salvation he offers to whosoever will, for I do want them to meet me in heaven. He calmly went to the gallows, and from there into the presence of God, all because the Lord Jesus Christ paid the debt of his sins when he died on the cross of Calvary. Radio friend, do you know that Christ paid the full price that God demanded for your sin?

Do you know that you too know your sins are blotted out and never be brought up against you? Or, if you will in simple faith rest entirely upon his finished work, you can have the same thing, the same peace that Theda had.

Surely, if Theda could be saved, you can be saved. If Theda can enjoy the peace of God in the face of the gallows, you may enjoy that same peace. If you are still unsaved, the main difference between you and Theda is Theda took Christ as his shelter and hiding place, and you have never done it.

Can't be that an African savage with a hideous record will enjoy heaven for all eternity, while you, a far more respectable citizen with no glaring sins, will be lost for all eternity. I must remind you that unless you, your few and apparently insignificant sins are blotted out by the only method that God will approve, you will be lost, while Theda, with a host of others of his kind, will sing the praises of the great Redeemer in heaven. The record of my sins, as man would judge it, is not as black as Theda's, but I had to be saved exactly in the same way as that cruel black savage of the Congo.

Christ loved me no more and no less than he loved Theda, but having received Christ, Theda has as much right to be in heaven as I do, for he was saved by grace, and so was I. Theda had no chance of getting to heaven by his own conduct or life, neither do I have a chance of getting to heaven on the basis of living a good, honest, sincere Christian life. I look forward to the day when in heaven I shall meet Theda, for I have so many things in common with him. I know that together we shall sing his praises, and perhaps someday, together with Theda, we shall sing together unto him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood.

To him be glory, dominion, and power forever. Amen. May God give you an earnest desire to have all your sins blotted out, so that you too will be ready and fit for God's happy presence in heaven.

Remember that unless your sins are forgiven, you stand no chance of being in heaven. Christ is the only one that can forgive your sins, and if you will trust him and his atoning sacrifice, God's word assures us that the moment you trust him, you will be the possessor of eternal life. May God help you to trust him wherever you are right now.

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