

Lessons from the Thief on the Cross

In Luke's Gospel account we are given more details than in the other accounts about the two thieves that were crucified with Jesus. The other Gospel accounts only tell us that two thieves were crucified with Jesus, and that they both reviled and insulted Him. Only Luke give us more insight into one of the thieves who later cried out in faith to Jesus. We know that God always has a reason for including something in His word, so we know that nothing is there by accident. Here are some lessons we can learn from this incident, and some reasons why it is included in the Gospel account: **1.)** It shows fulfillment of prophecy; **2.)** It shows that salvation is not by good works, but by faith in Jesus Christ alone; **3.)** It shows that it is never too late to accept Christ, as long as a person is still alive and in their right mind.

- **Matthew 27:38 & 44-45** "Then there were **two thieves crucified with Him**, one on the right hand, and another on the left." "The thieves also, which were crucified with Him, were casting the same insults at Him. Now from **the sixth hour** there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour."
- **Mark 15:25** "And **it was the third hour**, and they crucified Him."

The Jews began their day at 6:00 am, approximately sunrise, and called it the first hour. The third hour would be 9:00 am, the sixth hour would be noon, etc. Jesus and the two thieves were crucified beginning at 9:00 am, and it is not until the sixth hour, or twelve noon that the second thief has a change of heart and believes in Jesus. He must have seen how Jesus spoke and acted on the cross, and noticed how different He was from anyone else who had ever been crucified. So, he began the morning by insulting Jesus along with the other thief, but by three hours later, he had changed his mind.

- **Luke 23:32-43** "And two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. And when they came to the place called *The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.....Now there was also an inscription (sign) above Him, written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, 'THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.' And one of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, 'Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!' But the other answered, and rebuking him said, 'Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.' And he was saying to Jesus, '**Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!**' And Jesus said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.'"

* The hill outside Jerusalem that was shaped like a skull. The Latin for "skull" is calvarius, where we get the name Calvary. The Hebrew name is Golgotha, which also means skull.

1. **It shows fulfillment of prophecy** - The Gospel accounts tell us about the two thieves, because it was prophesied about the Christ (Messiah) over 700 years before it happened, by the prophet Isaiah. God spoke through Isaiah telling us about His Servant, the Messiah (Isaiah 52:13 -53:12), and one of the things He said was that the Messiah would be "numbered with the transgressors," or counted in with thieves and evildoers (malefactors).
 - **Mark 15:27-28** "And with Him they crucified two thieves; the one on His right hand, and the other on His left. And **the Scripture was fulfilled**, which says, 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.'"
 - **Isaiah 53:12** ".....because He has poured out His soul unto death; and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

2. **It shows that salvation is not by good works, but by faith in Jesus Christ alone** - The thief had no time to do any good works, not even be baptized, and yet Jesus promised him that he would be with Him in Paradise that very day. The thief did not fully understand who Jesus was or what He was doing, but he acknowledged Him by recognizing that Jesus had done no wrong, and by calling him Lord (Romans 10:9-10 " ...If you shall confess with your mouth that Jesus is LORD, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved"). Of course Jesus had not yet risen from the dead, but the thief did not have to understand that. He was not required to understand the deity of Christ, or the whole plan of salvation, or know how many prophecies had been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. The thief was not required to get down from the cross and be baptized, or participate in any rituals or ordinances, or do any other religious work or good deed. **He just recognized Jesus as the Messiah, and cried out to Him for mercy, and he was immediately saved!** The sad thing is that Jesus, as He hung there on the cross, was paying the price for the sins of both thieves, but only the one availed himself of God's mercy and received forgiveness and eternal life.
- **Titus 3:5** "NOT by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us; by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit."
 - **Colossians 2:13-14** "And you, being dead in your sins, has He made alive together with Him (Jesus), having forgiven you all your trespasses, **canceled out** the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, **nailing it to His cross.**"
 - **Romans 10:13** "For whoever shall **CALL upon the name of the Lord** shall be saved."
 - **Ephesians 2:8-9** "For by grace **you are SAVED by faith**, and that **NOT** of yourselves, it is the gift of God: **NOT BY WORKS**, lest anyone should boast."

GRACE means unmerited or undeserved favor - **being accepted and LOVED by God** when we have done NOTHING and CAN DO NOTHING to EARN or DESERVE it. **Mercy** is the other side of the coin, so to speak. **Mercy is NOT receiving the punishment for our sins** that we DO deserve. God is able to extend His mercy to us, because Jesus took our punishment on the cross, and canceled out the record of our sins.

3. **To show that it is never to late to accept Christ, as long as a person is still alive and in their right mind** - You should never, never put off accepting Christ as your Savior until a later date, thinking, "I'll have my fun first, while I'm young, and I can always accept Christ and be saved when I'm old." You never know what will happen to you, or when you will die, or how much opportunity there will be to come to Christ before you die. You also do not know whether you will become senile or get Alzheimer's Disease, and will not have the power to make a rational choice any more. **God does indeed extend His mercy to anyone who wants to be saved, even in their very last breath, but don't ever presume on His mercy** and deliberately put off giving your life to Jesus, hoping to accept Him at the last minute.

Jesus told a parable about workers in a vineyard, and the main point of the parable is that those **who came in at the very last** received the same wages as those who had worked all day. Jesus told this parable to show that **God gives His salvation equally** to those who receive Jesus at a young age and serve Him all their lives, and to those who receive Him at the "eleventh hour," and have little or no time to work for Him. There will be rewards in heaven (I Corinthians 3:11-15) for faithful service to the Lord, for those who have served Him all their lives, but **the same gift of salvation and eternal life is given to ALL who receive Jesus as their Savior**, no matter at what point in their life they come to Him.

- **Matthew 20:1-15** "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. And when he had

agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour (9:00 am) and saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and to those he said, 'You too go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And so they went. Again he came out about the sixth hour and the ninth hour (noon and 3:00 pm), and did the same thing. And about the eleventh hour (5:00 pm) he went, and found others standing; and he said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day long?' They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You too go into the vineyard.' And when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.' And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. And when those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; and they also received each one a denarius. And when they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and **you have made them equal to us** who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.' But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way, but **I wish to give to this last man the same as to you**. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?'"

LOCATION of PARADISE - No one's soul or spirit could **go directly into the presence of God BEFORE JESUS opened the way**. God could not open the way to heaven **until Jesus paid for the sins of the world**, and that is what the veil (curtain) in the temple being torn in two from top to bottom symbolizes - God opening the way into His presence. Then, after His resurrection, **Jesus went first with a glorified resurrection BODY** into the presence of God the Father, because **Christ is the "firstfruits"** of the resurrection and **"firstborn from the dead"** (Colossians 1:18, I Corinthians 15:20). See also John 14:1-6, Hebrews 11:32-40, Hebrews 9:8-14, Hebrews 10:19-23 - **Jesus had to go FIRST and PREPARE the WAY for us to come into the Father's presence**. Therefore, Jesus went into Hades for the three days between His death and His resurrection (Matthew 12:40) and, after His resurrection, took out all the spirits (souls) of **those who had died believing God and trusting in Him**, and took them up to heaven (Ephesians 4:8-10). Hades is the place of the dead, located in the center of the earth. It is called **Hades** (Greek) in the New Testament, and **Sheol** (Hebrew) in the Old Testament. Hades was divided into two parts: (1) a place of **torment for the unbelievers**; and (2) a place called "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:19-31) which was a place of **comfort for Believers**. When Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "Truly, I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise," He was referring to Abraham's Bosom. Then, three days later, after His own bodily resurrection, Jesus emptied out Paradise, and brought all of those saints to heaven.

- **Ephesians 4:8-10** "Therefore He says, 'When He (Jesus) ascended on high He LED CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE, and gave gifts to men.' Now this, 'He ascended' - what does it mean but that He also **FIRST DESCENDED** into the **LOWER PARTS OF THE EARTH?**"
- **Matthew 27:51** "And behold, the veil of the temple was rent (torn) in two from the top to the bottom...."

The only ones left in Hades NOW are unbelievers, those who died rejecting Christ, and for them it is a place of torment. Their spirits are waiting for the resurrection and Judgment Day, when they will be reunited with their resurrected bodies, and after the judgment, thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15). **Hades is NOT Purgatory!** The teaching of a purgatory, where one can somehow atone for ones sins (or "purge" them away), is a **MAN-MADE doctrine**, an invention of the Roman Catholic popes to enslave people to that religious system. **Purgatory is not found anywhere in the word of God**. Before Jesus' death and resurrection, Believers did not go directly into the presence of God when they died. Now, **the**

spirits and souls of ALL believers in Christ go directly and immediately to heaven (II Corinthians 5:6-8), and there they wait for the resurrection of their BODIES.