



## A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

### Today, You Will Be With Me in Paradise...

### Luke 23:43

Our subject this morning is, **“Today, You Will Be with Me in Paradise: Jesus Second Word from the Cross.”**

During the six hours our Lord Jesus Christ was dying on the cross, He spoke or cried out audibly seven different times. Those seven words or seven sayings have come to be known affectionately by all those who love Jesus as the “Seven Sayings of Our Savior from the Cross.”

Now none of the four gospel accounts contain all seven of the seven words or sayings of our Savior on the cross. You ought not to let that trouble you. The individual gospel writers were moved to include or omit different words or deeds of our Lord according to the literary or spiritual purpose of their own individual accounts. Because each writer was moved by the Spirit of God to focus on a particular idea or theme it makes perfect sense that their accounts would differ in which details they chose to include buttressing their points.

The Gospels of Mark and Matthew for example contain only one of the seven sayings. Matthew and Mark both contain the fourth or middle saying, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

The Gospel of John, on the other hand, contains three completely different sayings, three independent sayings not contained in the other gospels. John, for example, contains Jesus' wonderfully compassionate word regarding the care of His mother. In a marvelous word of mercy and grace, our Lord Jesus in obedience to the fifth commandment made provision for His mother's care even as He was dying on the cross. Lord willing...we'll look at that next Lord's Day. But John also contains two other words. John contains the enigmatic utterance "I thirst" and John contains Jesus' next to last word from the cross, "It is finished". That means that John contains the third, the fifth and the sixth sayings of our Lord Jesus from the cross.

The Gospel of Luke, on the other hand, contains three separate or independent sayings not contained in Matthew, Mark, or John. Luke then contains the first, the second, and the seventh or final saying of our Lord from His cross.

Now in November when I preached last to you, we considered together Jesus' first word from the cross...a word that is contained in the immediate context of the passage into which we are looking into this morning. Jesus' first word from the cross is contained in verse 34 where our He says, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**"

You will remember, I hope, that Jesus cried out to the Father asking Him not to break out in judgment against those who were unjustly crucifying Him. Jesus in a marvelous word of mercy and grace appealed to His Father over and over again to forgive the ignorant hatred of those who conspired together to take away His life.

It is worth noting in that context, I think, that the first three words of Jesus on the cross concerned others. The first word, the one I covered last November, concerned the welfare of His enemies. The second word, the one we'll be looking at this morning, concerned the welfare and life of one of His friends...one who turned to Him in faith in His last few hours on the cross. The third word, the one we'll be looking at next week, concerned the welfare of His own mother according to the flesh. It is addressed both to her and to His cousin John.

Now in contrast to the first three words of Jesus from the cross, His last four words concerned his own person and relationship to the Father. We'll see that...Lord willing...at some point in the future.

Now this morning we will be focusing on the biblical text found in Luke 23:43. Luke puts it this way:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 23:43...**And he said to him, "**Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.**"

These wonderful words constitute the second of Christ's seven sayings or seven words from the cross. Now these seven words or seven sayings of our Savior from the cross are treasured by all those who love Him. They are treasured partially because they are the last seven words the Lord Jesus spoke prior to his death and resurrection. But they are also treasured because of the nature of the words themselves. There are not many words like them recorded in all of human history. In fact, I think it is safe to say that they are unparalleled in all of human history.

We know, from many ancient writers, that the torture of being crucified often drove those subject to it to despair and to blasphemy and cursing. Seneca, the Roman orator and historian who lived during the same century as our Lord once wrote that such men often cursed heaven and earth, the hour of their birth, their judges and executioners and that they often spat in fury on those who looked on. I think you get a sense of how most men reacted to crucifixion when you consider how one of the criminals crucified with Jesus railed against Him.

Not a few of the ancient historians tell us that sometimes the crucifixion squads grew weary of listening to those who were being crucified and climbed upon ladders to gag them or split their tongues so they wouldn't have to listen to them curse. Of course, no such action was necessary with the Lord Jesus. He spoke only sparingly on the cross...but the words that He did speak were words of extraordinary beauty and grace and mercy. And yet for all their extraordinary beauty they cause my heart to be wrung out like a sponge because they cause me to see that even after decades of being His follower His way is not my way. His thoughts are not my thoughts. His thoughts and His ways are as high above my thoughts and my ways as the heavens are above the earth.

When our Lord Jesus was attacked, He did not lash back but forgave. We saw that quite clearly, I think, in our New Testament reading earlier in the service. Look again with me to Luke 23:32.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 23:32**...Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. <sup>33</sup> And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**" And they cast lots to divide his garments.

Jesus was crucified with two men who were thieves or robbers. Luke doesn't use the word "robber" but Matthew and Mark do. Luke uses the more general term "criminals" or "evil-doers".

Now that ought to lead us each and every one to ask the question, "**Why was he crucified with criminals?**" The answer I think is found in the Old Testament reading we read earlier from Isaiah. Listen to what Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 53:12.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 53:12**...Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

You see the point of the passage in Isaiah is that He will divide the spoil with the strong...but the reason He will be able to do that is because He was "**numbered with the transgressors**"...that is, He will divide the spoil with the strong because was numbered the criminals and because He made intercession for those same transgressors or criminals.

And just what is it that we find happening here in Luke 23? Jesus is numbered with the transgressors...He is crucified with one on His right and one on His left. He is numbered with the transgressors. But He also intercedes for the transgressors, which includes not just the thieves but those that were crucifying Him unjustly as well. We see that in verse 32 where He pleads, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**"

Now notice with me how the Spirit of God relates through the pen of Luke the various responses of the groups witnessing the crucifixion to Jesus' intercession on their behalf. We see their responses in verses 35-39.

Notice first the response of the common people standing by watching...you see it in the first phrase of verse 35.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 23:35**...And the people stood by, watching...

Now the word "watching" used here is from the Greek word from which we derive the word "theatre"...θεωρέω. It's an unusual word and the point of the word is that the people were watching intently waiting to see what would happen next. The normal meaning of the word would focus on the fact that the crowd stood there gawking at Jesus. But it may very well be that Luke is alluding here to the Psalm 22:7 in the Greek Old Testament where the exact same word θεωρέω is used.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 22:7**...All who see me (that is, all who stand and gawk at me) mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

If Luke is alluding to Psalm 22, he means to imply that the onlookers are not just watching but are also actively engaged in mocking Jesus.

That would make a lot more sense in light of the the next group mentioned in second part of verse 35.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 23:35**...And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"

Now notice the contempt the Jewish leaders have for Jesus. The Greek word used to describe those who scoff at Him is based on the Greek word for nostril and has the idea of someone rolling their head back in derision and contempt showing only the under part of their nose. Notice too, what they say:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 23:35**... "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"

You see the Jewish leaders scoff at the idea that one so helpless could have ever thought to have saved anyone. They mock the compassion Jesus has shown to the poor, and the sick and the infirm. They scorn the very thought of His being considered a Savior. They ridicule the thought that anyone should have ever come to Him in faith. They deride the very thought of His being the chosen Messiah of God.

And you have the same sort of thing in verse 36. Only in verse 36, it is not the Jewish leaders mocking Jesus but the Roman soldiers. They would, of course, have known nothing about a Jewish Messiah but they did know about kings and broken kingdoms and they knew that if someone claimed to be a king they had better be able to back up their claim with power.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 23:36**... The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup> and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

Notice how the text says the Roman soldiers were mocking Him even as they approached Him to give Him sour wine to drink. Some commentators think that their act was an act of compassion. That's because sour wine was the preferred drink of the poorer classes and of soldiers but I find it hard to think that the

soldiers were offering Jesus drink out of compassion especially in light of their mockery. Besides, sour wine tended only to make one thirstier. I think it much more likely that Luke includes their act of giving Jesus sour wine because of its obvious connection to Psalm 69 where David recalls his enemies giving sour wine to drink out of contempt for him.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 69:20**...Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. <sup>21</sup> They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

Now the Roman soldiers tending to the crucifixion based their mockery both on the mockery of others and on the inscription Pilate had ordered to be hung over Jesus head. Luke reminds us what the inscription said.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 23:38**...There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

Now Luke does not tell us that the inscription was written in Latin and Greek and Aramaic. Only John's Gospel tells us that. Nevertheless, because it was written in Latin I can't help but think that that is where the soldiers got their information about Jesus.

Now I want you to think about all that was being said to Jesus and about Jesus. He was being mocked as a Savior who had lost His power to save. He was being ridiculed as a chosen one... a chosen one, forgotten by the very God who had chosen Him. He was being scorned for as a King unwanted by His own people. He was the brunt of the combined scorn of the people, the religious leaders of the country, and even the foreign soldiers occupying the country. Now the reason I

want you to think about all that was being said about Jesus is because starting in verse 39 Luke is going to introduce us to two men who respond to the crucifixion of Jesus in two completely different ways. They hear the same things. They see the same things. They both hear the first word of Jesus from the cross and they respond in two completely different ways.

I am talking, of course, about the two criminals crucified with Jesus. Look with me at verse 39.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 23:39**...One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

It is hard to express to you in English the contempt expressed in the original Greek. In Greek whenever you move a word forward in a sentence, it amplifies its importance. In Greek, the first word out of the criminal's mouth is "not". And the point is that he is screaming at Jesus...railing at Him...blaspheming against Him..."Aren't you the Christ?"

Now you ought to know that Luke tells this story a bit differently than Matthew or Mark. Matthew and Mark say both of the thieves railed against Him.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 27:44**...And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

But Luke tells the story differently. Look at verse 40.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 23:40**...But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

Now there are two ways to explain the difference. One way is see the word “robbers” as just another class of people and to say that what Matthew and Mark meant is that every classification of people watching the crucifixion mocked Jesus. It wasn’t just the soldiers that mocked Jesus. It wasn’t just the Jewish rulers that mocked Jesus. It wasn’t just those standing by watching that mocked Jesus, but even the convicted thieves hanging on the cross with Jesus mocked Him. You see if you take this view you are focusing on the classes of people mocking and not just every individual. I think that makes sense. Still, I think there is a better explanation. I think both criminals starting out mocking Jesus along with the crowds and the Jewish officials and the soldiers. And then I think one of them changed his mind. Look again at verses 40 and 41.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 23:40**...But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

The thing I want you to see is that this criminal saw both the truth about himself and about Jesus. You see his question directed toward the other criminal was, “Man, how can you keep after Him the way you are. Don’t you see we are under the same condemnation...but we deserve what we are getting because of what we have done. This man, however, has done nothing to deserve His punishment.”

You know at the beginning of the Institutes John Calvin writes that for a man to grow spiritually, he must understand the truth about himself and about God. This criminal did just that. He saw himself for what he was...a guilty lawbreaker. And he saw Jesus as something radically different.

Of course, my question is, "What changed His mind?"

From the text itself, I don't hardly see how there can be but one answer. It seems to me that the thing that changed this condemned criminal's mind was Jesus' first word from the cross..."Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." You see the text won't really let come to any other conclusion because the text doesn't tell us anything Jesus did or said.

I think...this criminal looked at the combined mockery, scorn and hatred Jesus faced.

I think...he looked at the placard over Jesus' head.

I think...he heard the word "king" and the word "Christ" being tossed about.

I think...he looked at his own response to his own crucifixion and to the hatred and bitterness swelling up in his heart and then he heard Jesus say, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" and the Spirit of God took the words of Jesus and drove home the truth of the reality of who Jesus was and what Jesus was doing on the cross.

I think...he thought to himself, "You know everything they are saying about Him is true. He is the Messiah. He is the Savior of the world. He is the rightful King of the Jews and though I do not understand all that that means I know that He is more than just a man and I want him to know that I believe Him."

I think that because of what the man actually says next in verse 42.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 23:42**...And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

"Jesus, remember me..."

Now he knew perfectly well that Jesus was going to die. But the man believed there was life after death. And at that moment he believed Jesus would hold an exalted position after death. He wasn't exactly sure how that would work out. He wasn't exactly sure what would happen to him but he believed that being remembered by Jesus would be a good thing. You can tell that from his use of the word "when" in the Greek. You see what the man says literally is "Jesus, whenever, you come in or into you kingdom...remember me."

Now the part about the kingdom can be understood one of two ways. It can mean, "Jesus when you finally arrive in your kingdom...remember me" or it can mean, "Jesus, when you come again in your kingdom...remember me."

Either way I think the man knew being identified with Jesus meant life after death. Yes, I believe that is what the man thought. I think S. Lewis Johnson has it right when he says at this particular moment the thief on the cross was the best theologian on the planet. He knew more and understood more about Jesus than the Apostle Peter or the Apostle John or all the other apostles put together.

And then the dying thief on the cross heard this response.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 23:43**...And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

You see Jesus is saying, "My kingdom is almost here. You wonder when I'll come in my kingdom. My kingdom is almost obtained. It will be obtained today and then you will be with me in Paradise."

Now I suspect there are those among us that wonder, "Why didn't He use the word...heaven?"

I think he used the word "paradise" on purpose because there was another paradise and another tree where all was lost. And here you have a tree and on that tree is being regained the paradise of God.

You see Jesus in His atoning work is turning the falloff mankind on its head and is saying, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

Now there are religious groups, the Jehovah's Witnesses for example, that take that word "today" and put it in a different place and wind up saying something like this, "I am saying to you today, You will be with me in Paradise." By doing so they making Jesus to say, "I am talking about this with you today...but you'll be with me in Paradise later on." What a ridiculous thing to do with the grammar. You see in the context Jesus is answering the question, "When will you come into your kingdom?" And he is saying, "Today you will be with me in Paradise...before the sun goes down today."

What a marvelous comfort that is. You see this man, this criminal, watched Jesus die, watched Jesus other words and waited for the end of the day and found himself looking into the loving eyes of the Lord Jesus.

Now because that is true...I have a word from the Lord for you...I say that knowing that there are no doubt a number of you whose sins are weighing heavy on your souls...your life is hard...you don't have all the friends that you want...your life isn't going just like you'd like...and times are difficult. I know that's true...I suppose it's true for everyone of us. But we have this sure and certain promise that when we come to Jesus He will remember us. It's not just us remembering Him. He remembers us and he guards over us all the days of our lives and when we close our eyes in death we will be in His presence straightway.

On that day we will be with Him we will be with Him in Paradise and you know that hope...that hope strengthens us when times are difficult...when we are lonely or when we're sad or when we're sick or when we're dying. It is a word that will sustain us now, and in death, and beyond when we stand in the company of just men made perfect and until that day I ask you to remember Jesus second word, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise."

Let's pray.