

Title: Christ Alone!
Text: Luke 23: 39-43
Date: January 7, 2024
Place: SGBC, New Jersey

Luke 23: 32: And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. 33: And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. 34: Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. 35: And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. 36: And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, 37: And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. 38: And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39: And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. 40: But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? 41: And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. 42: And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. 43: And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

The Lord Jesus saved this one thief on the cross—*verse 43: And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.* The Lord Jesus saved this man that day. The Lord promised him, “*Verily I say unto thee.*”—the Word gave this man his word. “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise”—the Lord promised this man that very day he would be with Christ in glory, in heaven, in paradise. The Lord Jesus saved that thief that day.

Proposition: In this one sinner we behold how every sinner is saved—we are saved by Christ alone!

No matter who you are, no matter where you are, the way this man was saved is how every sinner is saved. For the sinner who has not yet believed, when Christ draws the lost, this is how they are saved. If a believer has already been called to faith in Christ and has been years in the faith, this is how God saves his saints. Every sinner Christ saves can learn so much from how this thief was saved. Let’s consider this man’s condition and how he was saved.

THIS MAN WAS ONLY A SINNER

This man was only a sinner, nothing more. This man was a condemned criminal hanged on a cross to die. Sinful man rejected this man. Sinful society rejected this man as too great a sinner to live amongst sinners.

But even more serious, in himself, this man was guilty before God. In himself, this man had broken the whole law of God. In Adam, in himself, he was unfit to be accepted of God and live with God amongst God’s people in glory. In himself, this man was a guilty sinner before God and nothing more. That is true of every sinner born of Adam. In Adam, we all sinned and became guilty before God. In ourselves, we are all nothing more than guilty sinners. The very best righteousness of the very best of men comes short of the righteousness God requires.

Romans 3: 22:...There is no difference: 23: For we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Psalms 130: 3: If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

Do you see and confess that you are no different than the thief of the cross? The Spirit of God gave this thief a new heart to know and confess that he was only a sinner. He justified God and confessed he was only a sinner—*verse 40: [he] rebuked [the other thief], saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? 41: And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds*

The due reward for sin is death. Is that what you justly deserve? Do you confess you justly deserve condemnation as the due reward of your deeds? Even your very best deeds? Are you the sinner, only a sinner and nothing more? Here is the good news of the gospel, not only is it true that every child of Adam is a guilty sinner, this is true of each one God the Father elected to save. Christ Jesus the great Physician declared,

Mark 2:17: They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

THIS MAN WAS TOTALLY HELPLESS

This man’s hands and feet were nailed to a cross. This man could not do even one of the things false preachers say sinners must do in order to be saved. This man could not, and did not, do even one work. Yet he was saved that day. That is also true of every sinner God elected to save. It never ceases to be true of every sinner God elected to save. We are totally helpless to contribute one work to our salvation. At the end of his sermon on the mount, the Lord Jesus said,

Matthew 7:21: Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Christ said only those who do the will of my Father shall enter into heaven. He told this man, “Today, thou shalt be with me in paradise.” With his feet and his hands nailed to a cross, this man did the will of the Father.

John 6: 28: Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? 29: Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent...40: And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

Concerning righteousness, the thief on the cross did not work to obtain righteousness, he believed unto righteousness. This man believed on Christ who is the Righteousness of his people. God imputed Christ’s righteousness to this thief through faith in Christ. I am not discrediting good works. Had this man lived many more years he would have done good works as all God’s people do by his grace. But Christ is the Righteousness of God. He cried, “it is finished!” He fulfilled the law for his people and put away our sin. He is the Righteousness of his people. We believe unto righteousness. By God giving us faith by his grace, we believe on Christ and God imputes the righteousness of Christ to us.

Concerning holiness, God declares in Hebrews 12:14 that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Without holiness no man shall enter into the kingdom of God. Yet Christ told this man, “Today, thou shalt be with me in paradise.” With his feet and his hands nailed to a cross, this man had the Holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. Christ is that Holiness. Christ was formed in his heart. Christ said the heart is “sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26: 18). That is why after declaring we must have holiness without which no man shall see the Lord, the next word in Hebrews 12: 15 is “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God.” This man looked to Christ! I am not discrediting holiness. Follow after holiness. But “of God is Christ made unto us Sanctification” (1 Cor 1: 30). Christ is the Holiness of the new heart, “Christ in you the hope of glory” (Col 1: 27).

Concerning knowledge of doctrine, this man had not been taught a great degree of doctrine. But this man knew the one thing needful. He knew Christ. Knowing Christ we know all. Christ is Salvation. I am not discrediting our need to be taught true doctrine. We need true knowledge. Had this man come down off the cross and been taught many more days, he would have believed all true doctrine. That is so because he did the will of the Father, he believed Christ. Christ said,

John 7:17: If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or *whether* I speak of myself.

When a sinner believes on Christ then he shall believe all true, scriptural doctrine. But as fatal as it is to reject true doctrine, it is just as fatal to make certain degrees of knowledge necessary for salvation. We must know Christ! Christ said, “I am the Truth!” (Jn 14: 6). “Of God is Christ made unto us Wisdom” (1 Cor 1: 30).

Philippians 3:8: Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ,

1 John 5:20: And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

This man believed on Christ. He cast all his care on Christ. He said in verse 23: *...but this man hath done nothing amiss. 42: And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.* He believed Christ had done nothing amiss. Christ is the sinless Substitute of his people. He willingly was made sin for his people that he might make us the righteousness of God in him but Christ himself knew no sin. This thief owned Christ as his Lord, as Messiah, as King of kings and Lord of lords. He believed Christ had a kingdom not of this world. He believed that Christ is the Son of God, eternal, whose kingdom is spiritual. So the thief asked Christ to remember him when he came into his kingdom.

THIS MAN WAS SAVED BY CHRIST ALONE

Christ himself is salvation. Of God are you in Christ Jesus who of God is made unto us. Christ is made Wisdom unto us. Christ is made Righteousness unto us. Christ is made Holiness unto us. Christ is made Redemption unto us.

Christ said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man cometh to the Father but by me” (Jn 14: 6). Christ declared to Nicodemus that sinners are saved by looking to Christ—looking to Christ is believing on Christ. The only thing this thief had was Christ. But having Christ he had all.

Salvation never becomes more or less than Christ himself.

Every sinner saved by the grace of God is given exactly what this thief had. We are given faith in Christ. Each one given faith knows what this thief knew. He knew he was the sinner and he knew Christ was the Son of God, the Savior.

Consider the confessions of our brethren. Here is Peter’s confession:

Matthew 16: 16: And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17: And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

John 6: 68: Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. 69: And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

Nathaniel's confession:

John 1: 49: Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

The Samaritan woman at the well:

John 4: 29: Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?

Thomas' confession:

John 20: 28: And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

The Ethiopian eunuch:

Acts 8: 37: And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest [be baptized]. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

This thief was a dying man. Moments from leaving this life and entering eternity, Christ saved him. Sometimes people think it is too late for them or too late for a loved one. It was not too late for the thief on the cross. Sinner, it is not too late for you. "Today is the day of salvation. If you will hear his voice, today..." (2 Cor 6: 2; Heb 3: 7, 15; Heb 4: 7).

This man confessed his own sin (Lu 23:40-41). He declared Christ to be sinless (Lu 23:41). This thief exhibited great faith (Lu 23:42). He confessed Christ to be Lord of his kingdom (Lu 23:42). The thief cast all his care on Christ (Lu 23:42). He received an immediate answer from Christ—*Luke 23: 43: And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.* There is no such thing as purgatory; that is a way for false religion to make money off sinners. The apostle Paul said, "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor 5: 8). Christ is Righteousness. He is the Life!

John 6:47: Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

John 11: 25: Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: 26: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? 27: She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

Amen!