

A CONVERSION

The situation

Jesus the Christ, the Son of God is crucified between two thieves as if he were the chief criminal as prophesied in Isaiah 53.12 (The sinless one numbered one of three, as a criminal).

The place

Golgotha(Aramaic) - The place of the skull (Kranium)- Calvary in Latin.

-A place of death. The very opposite place from where Jesus (the Prince of life) should rightly be!

However a trial, that was a travesty of justice, had brought him here by God's hand of providence for a great purpose. To be a sacrifice, a sin bearer for all who would believe in him.

The people

- The 'two thieves' were crucified with him (these were common deaths) but only one death (Jesus') was a vicarious (one for another) death. They were bandits-highwaymen(who would rob travelers on their journeys)

- 'The people' of Jerusalem (the citizens)/ The rulers(the governor's)/ The soldiers(the armed forces)/ The chief priests(the religious community)- representatives of all society.

What they said

The people- 'stood beholding' (note: it is possible to look at Christ and remain unsaved, just scornful. Aware of him but not saved by him). 'derided him' 'He saved others; Let him save himself if he be Christ, the chosen of God'

The soldiers- 'mocked him' 'if thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself'

The chief priests- (we find out from Matt 27.33-48) 'He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross and we will believe him. He trusted in God let him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God.' (note: they assumed that his will was to come down from the cross. This was wrong- wrong assumptions often lay at the heart of unbelief)

We find also the two thieves mocked in the same way 'in his teeth'- blatantly 'in his face' you may say today.

What both these thieves initially showed about themselves by their words and deeds.

-They were violent lawbreakers with no regard for God's law (Thou shalt not steal)

-They were selfish and proud

-They were hard hearted, even up to this point, with no contrition or remorse.

-They were unbelievers (that Christ was King or that He could save)

-They had no fear of God or his judgments.

But one of them was changed! Luke 23.40(Converted)

-Surely a work of God, as all conversions are.

-We don't know what specifically caused the change of heart, only to say it was as if a blindfold had been removed from his eyes and heart. Was it the Lord saying 'forgive them'? Was it the sign above Jesus' head? Was it the grace he saw in Jesus, how he bore the cruelty with love. Whatever it was, he now had true knowledge, belief and trust. The whole crucifixion was like a sermon that was heard by this thief, one which resulted in his conversion.

-All of a sudden he saw Jesus for who He was

-He came to his senses like the prodigal.

-He realized sin must be punished and that he was guilty before God, therefore men should fear God; 'Dost not thou fear God..we[are condemned] justly for we receive due reward of our deeds'

-He realized Jesus was innocent, sinless, but was being caused to suffer by God for a reason.

-He believed there would be a judgment.

-He knew there would be an afterlife with Jesus reigning as King; 'Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom'.

This was a prayer, essentially saying 'save me'

-It was a prayer of faith.

-It was humble. He asked merely a remembrance of a changed heart.

-It was fervent. Mean't from the heart, truly sincere.

Jesus said "Ye shall know them by their fruits". That is, know who is true. Was this man truly changed?

He was to be dead shortly, what works(fruits) could he show? He couldn't even move! Only his lips.

The answer is, he preached a sermon! A short one admittedly, but a good one (v40-41). Better to be short and true than long and false like some.

What was the answer to the man's prayer

'Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.'

-He received salvation of soul.

What is the morse code for S.O.S? ... _ _ _ ...

It is the universal code to save when in distress. It stands for SAVE OUR SOULS!

This man used the spiritual distress call. This is what we must do.

He is known as the penitent thief. This should be our name too, for we've all stolen from God- our hearts and lives. We've all been unbelievers and mockers.

-He was promised Paradise. This is the Gospel- paradise lost in Eden/ paradise gained in heaven.

It was promised not tomorrow but today. As soon as death comes so does comfort and heaven (like Lazarus in the parable). God gives much more than we can hope for.

A warning

This thief shows us that 'deathbed' conversions are possible. However it also teaches that they are rare.

- The other thief died in his sins. He believed the Enemy's counsel "It's too late, curse God and die"

- But it wasn't too late, there's always hope in this life. Christ will receive you even though you started out cursing.

However the truth is this penitent thief was saved 'yet so as by fire' 1Col 3.15

-We don't know how old he was but we know he had a wasted life until this point. Come while young, otherwise you'll look back on wasted years, "the years that the locust hath eaten' Joel 2.25

-The key word with this man is 'Today'. "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" Heb 3.7-8. "behold, now, is the day of salvation" 2 Cor 6.2. This man came as soon as he saw, without delay. So don't delay, don't leave it too late. Remember this- True repentance is never too late, but late repentance is seldom true! This man was given a rare opportunity, but usually death comes as a relative surprise. A person may always feel they have more time until it's too late.

Conclusion- Isaiah 53.12

Jesus Christ was numbered with the sinners, that we may be with the saints.

- This thief was crucified with Christ, but he didn't share the burden (his was a common death), but benefited from Christ's death. He had his burden removed.

- He saw his sins put on Christ, who suffered like no other taking the spiritual punishment for his people.

- We should be crucified with Christ also. Die to our old life of sin and be reborn to a new life of salvation and service.

- One died IN SIN

- One died TO SIN

- One died FOR SIN.

One a reprobate,

One a repenter,

One a redeemer.

There's only one Redeemer. But which of the others will you be? All humanity will be before Christ, on that day of judgment, as all society at the cross. The angels will separate those who have put their faith in Christ, and have his righteousness, from those who haven't and are therefore unrighteous Matt 13.41.

Which will you be? On Christ's right or on His left? Saved, like the penitent thief, or eternally lost, like the other?