

Coach House Church

BEACONS

THE CRIMINAL

30TH OCTOBER 2020

In Luke chapter 23 we have a detailed account of the two criminals who were crucified beside Jesus. The fact that Jesus died between two criminals is a fulfilment of Isaiah 53:12, where it says that Jesus would be numbered among the transgressors.

One of these men scoffed at Jesus even whilst he himself was dying in agony alongside Him. I imagine that he was a real hard-case of a man, who felt no fear even of death, and was probably the sort of man who would slit someone's throat without a second thought. He would have had no time for messiahs, religion, or anything that didn't somehow profit him personally. In short, he was an evil specimen of a human being, an absolute reprobate. Unfortunately, his kind are not uncommon. And I think there are more of them than ever now.

Then there was the other criminal. But in his case, he appeared to have a rather different attitude of heart than his confederate. Maybe it was that the Holy Spirit was working in his heart during those last hours of his life. He acknowledged his fault and that he was getting what he justly deserved. More importantly, he had a revelation of whom Jesus was and asked Him for mercy. And he received it. It is true that Jesus can save the vilest of people if they will but turn to him. Even in the throes of death Jesus is able to save those who just ask, because that act of asking is an act of faith in Jesus. Nothing else is required. The turning of the heart to Him is the one thing necessary.

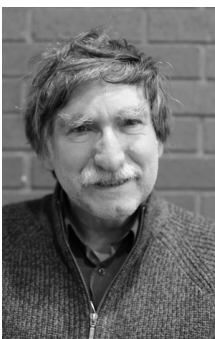
How wonderful it is that to receive forgiveness of sin and salvation from the justly deserved wrath of God, that calling out to Jesus is all that is required. Many of us, who are saved, haven't led the sort of lives that those two men lived. But even the best, the most upright, moral, philanthropic person amongst us is still in the same situation of being sinful. And yes, there are those amongst us who will have been

delivered from lives of evil. Jesus saves to the uttermost, or the gutter-most, as someone put it once.

Whilst this story shows us that salvation is possible up to the point of death, most of us are saved well before this event. The repentant criminal had no opportunity to be baptized or to walk with God, getting to know Him better and growing in sanctification. But the majority of us do have these opportunities. The criminal was saved, snatched from the very brink of a lost eternity, saved as through fire, with nothing to show other than his having turned to Jesus at the last moment. He was undoubtedly very grateful to Jesus when they met in paradise later.

Jesus said that there will be rewards for faithfulness in serving and following Him, which most of us have the opportunity to do. I believe we should seek opportunities to serve Him and to grow in the knowledge of Jesus. We're no more worthy than that criminal was of Jesus's mercy, but He delights to be merciful to those who call on Him. I believe He also gives opportunities for service, even if it perhaps is not in ways we would have chosen or expected. It has been said that we are saved to serve; seek Him for this.

That dying criminal was promised to be with Jesus in paradise. That would have happened as he slipped out of his body as death occurred on the cross. We have that promise too, but we can go to Jesus after lives of faithfulness to Him. That's something to look forward to I believe. And there's also the possibility that we'll find ourselves suddenly in His presence without having died! In either event, let us be faithful to Jesus in what He gives us to do, and in just walking with Him even if we aren't given a particular task. Amen.



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