

Jesus – Your Savior to the End
Luke 23:39-43

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We come to, really, one of the all-time great texts in the Gospels this morning. Jesus has already been beaten and tried and scourged and horribly abused, sentenced to death. He's been nailed to a cross and is hanging there at Golgotha, Calvary, the place of the Skull, in between two criminals. And there He hangs, He is the sinless Son of God, the long-awaited Messiah and the soldiers are mocking Him. They have divided up His clothing and casting lots to see who gets what piece. And they don't seem to be concerned at all about the salvation of their souls or the fact that they are crucifying the Almighty God and Creator of heaven and earth. The Jewish Sanhedrin are mocking Jesus also. They are taunting Him about being the Messiah. The soldiers are taunting Jesus about being a king. Those passing by are wagging their heads as if to say, "You are getting what you deserve, you criminal and imposter." Some have even stopped to watch Jesus die for entertainment purposes. As Isaiah 53:12 prophesied, He would be numbered with transgressors, and so He is. And so please look in your Bibles at Luke 23:39-43, and follow along as I read. The Word of God says:

One of the criminals who were hanging 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 are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

J. C. Ryle wrote of this text, "These verses should be printed in letters of gold. They have probably been the salvation of countless thousands of souls. Multitudes will thank God for all eternity, that the Bible contains the story of the Penitent Thief."

I've extracted three main points from the text, two responses one can have towards Christ, and one favorable response Christ always has towards humble sinners who repent. Let's look at the first of the two responses a person can have to Christ.

I. The Unbeliever's Response to Christ.

Look at Luke 23:39 where we read that one of the criminals who were hanging there was hurling abuse at him saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

First we learn here: The unbelieving man knew he was a sinner, but he felt no remorse. Of course he knew he was a sinner, he was a thief! Matthew tells us he was a robber, he was caught in the act. And being caught in the act, he is suffering the penalty he knew would happen if he did get caught. But he doesn't have any sorrow over his sin. He's not humbled, he's not broken over his sin. He didn't desire to repent of it. He saw yes, he knew he was guilty, yes, and he was sorry he got caught, but not sorry he sinned against God and men. He wanted to go on with his sin but without consequences. Does that describe you? If it does, know it is one of the glaring characteristics of an unbeliever. They know they have sinned, and they don't want to repent of it. They don't want to get caught, they want to continue in sin with impunity, and no consequences. Those who love their sin more than Christ are not Christians, no matter what they say.

Secondly, the unbelieving man was angry at Christ for having to suffer the consequence of his sin. Look at verse 39. One of the criminals was hurling abuse at Jesus. You're thinking, "Jesus? Jesus didn't crucify him, Jesus didn't teach him to steal. What does Jesus have to do with it?" The man was

angry, he was furious, he was hotter than a hornet at Jesus because he had to suffer the consequence of his own sin. He blames Jesus for his own suffering, caused by his own sin! He's like an alcoholic, or a drug addict, who is quick to blame everyone else for his slavery to his sin. "Well, if you wouldn't..." "If I didn't have to..." "It is the pressure of my job, it's my boss!" "You don't know my wife!" No. It's you, and you alone who are responsible for your sin! Each one is tempted, and carried away by their own lusts. No one ever makes you sin. You make you sin. This man knew beforehand the consequences of his thieving. You might compare him to a gambler who goes to Vegas and plunks down a million dollars on the zero green on the roulette wheel. And he spins the wheel, and he loses! Imagine that. He knows beforehand the odds are against him 30:1, but he goes on still, and he loses. Well the unbelieving robber, he didn't bet a million shekels. He put his whole soul on the line. And odds were stacked way against him. He spun the wheel of robbery, it landed on the red "Get Caught." He was tried, sentenced to death, and is now angry at Jesus. What is that? Unbelievers often blame others for their sin. Is that you? You break the law, hoping you don't get caught. You get away with it a few times. Pretty soon, you feel like you deserve to get away with it. And if you get caught, you're angry. "I cheated on my taxes. Some other years before I have, and not gotten caught!" "I broke the speed limit so many other times and never got caught!" "I lied to my boss so many other times and never got caught!" And so you pay huge penalties to the IRS. You are fined for this massive speeding ticket. You get fired from your job. And now, you're mad at the IRS, you're mad at the police, you're mad at your boss. Does that describe you? That is pride. And the attitude of a heart that is free from saving grace.

Third, the unbelieving man participated in Jesus' suffering. Notice, the text says, "He was hurling abuse at Jesus." The word "hurling," as the New American Standard Bible has it and the NIV has it, or "railed against," as the English Standard Version or the King James have it is, literally, "to blaspheme." That's how the New King James has it. To blaspheme, of course, is to speak ill or wrongly of God. Luke specifically uses this word to let us know that he believes that Jesus is God incarnate, and that this thief was blaspheming God, in blaspheming Christ. He [the unbelieving thief] was hurling abuse at Him [Jesus], railing on Him! People, this is why punishment in hell is eternal. In hell, condemned sinners are not turned into saints. They go on sinning still, and worse than ever before. They weep, and they gnash their teeth at Christ. They blame Him, they blaspheme Him, as if it's Jesus' fault they have suffered for their own rebellion against God, and suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. William Burkett in his expository notes on the New Testament says, "From the impenitent thief's reviling of Christ, when he was at the very point of death, and even in the very suburbs of hell, we learn, that neither shame nor pain will change the mind of a resolute sinner. But even then, when he is in the suburbs of hell, he will blaspheme." Do you blame God for your problems? Do you blame God when you suffer? Do you think you deserve better? That Jesus has not dealt with you justly? Then you are almost certainly without Christ.

Fourth, the unbelieving man knew Jesus was the Christ, but only wanted to be saved from the temporary consequences of his sin. He proclaims in anger, "Are you not the Christ?" Now, in the Greek you [can] tell whether there is a supposed "yes" or "no" answer. This is one of those cases where "yes" is presupposed. He's really saying, "You're the Christ, right?" But when he asks the question, he asks it in sarcasm. Though he affirms that Jesus is the Messiah, he won't believe in Jesus as his Messiah. He's like one of those people that says, "Well, yes, I believe that Jesus is the Son of God, born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, was buried and rose again the third day. I believe that. But I'm not going to trust Him. I'm not going to turn from my sins to live for Him. I'm not going to submit to Him as Lord of my life. You've got to be kidding! It'd ruin all my fun!" He wanted salvation, the unrepentant thief did, from the temporary consequences of his sin. He's saying, "Come on, if you're the Christ, get us down from here! Get us down from the cross! I don't like slowly pining away and suffering here. Rescue me from this temporary pain and displeasure!" The sure sign of an unbeliever is a great concern and preoccupation with the things of the world—[being] preoccupied with health and vitamins and exercise and clothing, but not their soul; to be more concerned about getting your coffee than spending time with the Lord; more fearful of cholesterol than the Lord. And if that describes you, you need to fear for your soul.

Fifthly, the unbelieving man wanted Jesus to use His power for selfish ends. In anger, he screams at Christ, "Save yourself and us!" He gives Jesus the command. The command. "I command you. Save me and yourself." He wanted to be saved from being crucified. R. Kent Hughes notes, "Tragically, he expressed no thought of God, no guilt, no repentance, no concern for forgiveness, and ominously, he heard no word from Jesus. No argument, no warning, but only silence as he raged." Unbelievers are not content to just trust Christ. They think they can do better. "You know, if I were God, I would..." You ever heard that one? Well, we're glad you're not. Because right after that is all the things they would use their all-omnipotent power for to serve themselves. I mean, what if God appeared to you in a dream or a vision and said, "Tomorrow morning at 8am, I am going to give you all power for 12 hours." What would you do? Would you say, "Lord, my wisdom, and my knowledge are so finite and small, that I am sure I would mess things up. And so I'm not going to use my power, the power you give me. You go ahead and you be God, and I'll do what you say." Would that be your answer? Or would you lust and grab you know for the "Ring of Power"? Yeah... All night you're awake, thinking, "OK, what can I do with this, what can I do? How am I going to serve myself and accumulate riches and get rid of all [these] things and establish all the things I do like. How am I going to take charge?" The unbeliever thinks they know better than God. Does that describe you? Now I have just held up the mirror of Scripture to you. Do you see an unbeliever or not? If you see yourself in the mirror then you are perishing. But there is hope, there is hope.

II. The Believer's Response to Christ

But let's look at the other person being crucified on the other side of Jesus, the believer, the penitent thief, and his response to Christ. While the soldiers, the Sanhedrin, the passers-by heap abuse on Jesus, and while the thief on the other side of Jesus is joining in, while the sins of the world are crushing Jesus to death, the Son of God is in His final moments of life and a voice cries out. A voice from a very unexpected direction. It's from the chest of the criminal being crucified on the other side of Jesus. Look at verse 40. "But the other answered, and rebuking him said, 'Do you not even fear God? Since you are under the same sense of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds but this man has done nothing wrong. And he was saying, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.'" The believing man knew he was a sinner. Just like the unbelieving one. But he felt remorse. He's looking for salvation. He knows he is suffering justly. One of the tell tale signs of the true believer is they have sorrow for their sin. Kent Hughes notes, "Most people live in a foggy world of ambiguity and relativism, falling in love with the dark contours of their lives, convincing themselves their sins are noble, glorious, that their pride is dignity, their unwillingness to forgive, character. No such haze clouded this man's soul." When you sin, does it grieve you? Are you just burdened? Do you just wish you could never sin again? Are you shamed when you come to Christ for the millionth time confessing the same sin over [and over], but you keep coming and you keep confessing, because you know you need forgiveness in Christ, you know that's what Christ tells you to do? You want to be right with God, though you keep failing. This is a very good sign that you are in Christ. For that's what all Christians do.

Secondly, the penitent thief was concerned about eternity. He says to the other thief, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sense of condemnation?" The believing man realizes that he must prepare to meet his Maker! He knows the sabbath is approaching, and he knows that when people are crucified right before the Sabbath they break their legs. He knows he's going to suffer and be dead in moments! He's gonna meet God! And he's concerned about eternity. In this life, he's concerned about the next! Does that describe you? Are you concerned about eternity now? Look at your life right now. Look at your life last week. Look at your life last month. Look at your life the last six months. Could you say with absolute certainty, "Pastor Jack, I'm tellin' ya, I am concerned about eternity. I am constantly doing this, I'm constantly thinking this. I'm constantly expending energy and thought and resources in the things of eternity, because eternity consumes me! I am eternity-focused!" If that's the case, then you are one who loves Christ. Most assuredly.

Third, the believing robber had righteous indignation. Notice that he answers the thief, and [it] says, "rebuking him." He rebuked him, for hurling abuse at Jesus. He has a righteous indignation to defend Christ. The people watching aren't defending him, the soldiers aren't defending him, the Sanhedrin [is] not defending him. Even Jesus' disciples and mother are standing away off. They aren't defending him in public. One man—and one man only—defends Jesus and comes to His rescue. The guy being crucified next to him! The only guy! King David as a youth came to the battlefield and heard Goliath taunt Israel's army and then he said this in 1 Samuel 17:26, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should taunt the armies of the living God?" Then what did he do? He went to the king. He said before King Saul, [he] requested to fight the Giant though he was young. And in verse 36 of that same chapter, "Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God." And after that he went out to face Goliath in the battlefield and verse 45 says, "Then David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with a sword and a spear and a javelin? I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted!'" There is a righteous indignation here! There is a passion to defend the honor of God! This is the badge of every Christian. There is a righteous indignation that wells up in every Christian when Christ is dishonored. You can speak well of me, you can speak ill of my family, you can speak ill of my friends, but you speak ill of my Lord, and there is a seething. It may be under the surface and it may be suppressed with the fruit of the Spirit. But it's there. And if you go through your life not having righteous indignation toward those who dishonor Christ and dishonor His Word, that's not good. But if you're thinking out there, "Man, I know that! There are times I just wanna punch someone." Then you are in good company with the prophets and the apostles and all the saints.

Four. The believing man understood that he was suffering the just penalty of his sins. He rebukes the unbelieving thief, saying, we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds. I mean, we're getting what we deserve. We knew we were stealing, we knew it was wrong, we knew what would happen if we got caught, we got caught! Now we're suffering? Why are you mad at him? We deserve it? This too is the mark of a truly repentant heart. When saving grace enters into a man's soul he is more aware than anyone that he deserves hell, judgment, the wrath of God. And to think that this criminal surely before this time was unbelieving and lost is astonishing! It shows us what anybody who's been a Christian for a while has seen. That when God's grace enters in, there is an instantaneous change of heart. The person is radically changed. Burkett notes, "Oh, how powerful must that grace be which wrought such a change in an instant in a heart which had been hardening in sin so many years. Oh the powerful efficacy and adorable freeness of a heart-changing grace of God in this vile person. It moved him to see his own sin to confess the justice of his punishment to justify Christ's innocence. To reprove his fellow companion. To pray to a crucified Christ and to intercede with him. Not for present deliverance from death but for a place in Christ's kingdom. And that all happened because of grace." Do you believe you are a guilty sinner? Mark this well, there is no one who thinks they are good who will enter the Kingdom of God. Self-righteousness, thoughts of your own good works, earning God's favor, you know, your good deeds outweighing your bad deeds. Trusting in that time you went forward and you prayed the sinner's prayer so you can know you are saved because of what you did. These are all signs of the black plague of unbelief. Of self-trust and self-righteousness. The believer with David feels in his heart as David did: "Against You and You only have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight. So You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge."

Fifth. The believing man professed and comforted Jesus. I mean, you could just see Him there, hanging, you know, there's the thief on the one side who's hurling abuse at Jesus. Jesus is in the middle, the thief's on the other side, and this repentant thief has to look towards Jesus, past Jesus to the other guy. On the other side of Jesus. And he rebukes the guy! Rebukes him in public before all. He declares, "Listen pal, you're getting what you deserve! And I'm getting what I deserve." He comes to Jesus' defense and is the only one who comforts Christ in the moment of His death. The guy being crucified next to Him. He says, "Don't you even fear God?" Is there any doubt about this man's heart being transformed by grace? The true believer will publicly declare his allegiance to Jesus. It starts with baptism and carries on the rest of his life. When no one else came to Jesus' defense, when no

one else would comfort him, the repentant thief did. And he did it in front of the whole crowd. The multitude of passers-by, the entire Jewish Sanhedrin, and even His mother and Mary and the disciples were scurrying around the perimeter. His heart was instantly knit to Jesus'. He sought to give Him glory.

Sixth. The believing thief knew Jesus was innocent. I mean, he said to the unbelieving thief in the presence of all, "But this man has done nothing wrong!" It's what Pilate already said at least five times and Herod once! He was innocent. And this man believed he was innocent, that he was suffering as innocent. And of course, the Sanhedrin were jealous of Jesus' popularity, they feared that if Jesus got into power and got on the favor of Rome, Rome would oust them. They would be out of their position and Jesus would then take control of their political machine. And so they used the Romans to execute Him. By paying Judas to betray Him. By trying Him secretly. By viciously accusing Him. By riling up the people so that they asked for Jesus' death and for a notorious criminal, Barabbas, to go free. A Christian is one that believes Jesus was innocent. The sinless Son of God. That He was the spotless lamb, that He bore our sins in His perfect body upon the cross. To make perfect atonement for sin. And that's why death had no power over Jesus. It's why He rose from the dead, because it had no grip on Him because he was sinless. It's what all Christians believe. Is that what you believe?

Seventh. The believing man knew Jesus was not only the Christ, but Savior, Redeemer and maybe even God. He says, "Do you not even fear God?" And you could say, "Well, maybe he's talking about the fear of God after death and Jesus was the prophet or Messiah." And he does say, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." Now, think about this. This implies a lot of things. One, that that man should have feared God and not blasphemed Christ. That in blaspheming Christ, he was blaspheming God. That Jesus, though He was about to die, was going to be alive and was going to be a King, and was going to have a Kingdom. As Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 53:2-3, "He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon him, no appearance that we should be attracted to him. He was despised and forsaken of man, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, and like one from whom many men hid their face. He was despised and we did not esteem him." Jesus was hideous. His face was marred more than any man, as the other Psalms says. Bloodied, battered, head to foot... He was going to die. And yet, this thief, calls out to Jesus for salvation. He believes Jesus was the Messiah, no doubt. That's why he said, "Don't you even fear God?" He believed Jesus could save him from his sins, and the Jewish Scriptures were clear, right? Who was the Savior? God. Isaiah 49:26 says, "I, the LORD (Yahweh), am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob." Isaiah 43:11 says, "I, even I, am the LORD (Yahweh), and there is no Savior besides Me." That's just two verses. There are many others like that. Which means, that if this man knew his Scriptures at all, he would know that the only Redeemer, the only Savior of Israel was God. And yet, he cries out to [whom] for salvation? Jesus. Jesus declared to the Jewish leaders in John 8:23-24, "You are from below, I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world. Therefore I say to you, that you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." Now when Jesus says you believe that I am He, the 'he' is added. You can cross that out of your Bible. It's really, "unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins." That's what He says. And it may be that the repentant thief didn't have all the theological dots connected about the deity of Christ, but one thing is for certain, he cried out to Him in his moment of need. Have you done that? At the very least, he believed Jesus was the Messiah, the King of Israel, because he goes on to say, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." He knew Jesus was a king, he knew Jesus was going to have a kingdom, and that it was going to be established after both he and Jesus died. So now we've held up the mirror of Scripture so that you can see what a Christian looks like—a believer. Do you see yourself in the mirror? Now if you're saying, well, "Absolutely yes." Then praise God. If you're thinking, "Well, I hope so, but I'm not sure..." or, if you're thinking, "No, I'm not a Christian," well I have some good news for you.

III. Christ's Response to Everyone Who Believes.

Our third point. Christ's response to everyone who believes. One man is angry at Jesus. One man is

not. One man abuses Jesus. The other man comforts and defends Him. One man blames Jesus for his suffering, the other man blames himself. One man is looking for physical deliverance, [but] the other man is looking for spiritual, eternal deliverance. And the two men being crucified on either side of Jesus represent, really, every person on the face of the world. The globe, every one who has ever lived, everybody in this room fits the profile of one of these two people. Every one of us here this morning is like one of those two people. As Bunyan said, “we’re either on the path to the City of Destruction, or we’re on the path to the Celestial City.” We’re on one of those two paths—everyone in this room, everyone in the world. The angry, blame-shifting, self-serving, proud blasphemer is headed for the City of Destruction. The humble, broken thief, who fears God, is concerned about eternity, who defends and comforts Christ in the presence of all and asks to be remembered, [he] is heading to the Celestial City. And having asked to be remembered, look at verse 43: “And he said to him, ‘Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’” That is amazing. I wonder if I could preach a whole sermon on that verse. I am telling you I could many times over. The word “paradise” is used three times in the New Testament. It’s a synonym of heaven. It’s used here, again in 2 Corinthians 12:4, where Paul talks about being caught up into the third heaven, the first being the atmosphere, the second heaven being where the stars are (outer space), and the third the abode of God. It’s also used in Revelation 2:7 where Christ promises the believers in the church of Ephesus to eat of the tree of life if they are faithful. The tree of life, of course, is in heaven according to Revelation 22, so Paradise is a reference to heaven. There is so much here in this one line of Scripture, I wish I had time to bring more of it out. But let me just point out six quick things. It’s not as much as the eight I just did on the believer, [and just] a little bit more than the five I did for the unbeliever.

One. Jesus, though suffering far greater pain than either of the two robbers, is still looking to save sinners. “Truly, I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise.” Jesus is almost dead. He is mangled, horribly abused, is going to give up His spirit in just a moment. His life is at an end. And though His pain is astronomical, and though He is bearing the sins of the world upon Him, at that very moment, He still has time to listen to the request of a humble sinner! Though He will not use His power to save Himself, He’s willing to use it to save the criminal next to Him! And Jesus is still eager to save criminals who are even far from Him. He hears and listens to the call of humble, broken, repentant sinners.

Secondly. Jesus gives the believing man hope, saying, “Truly, I say to you...” and notice, He doesn’t merely say, “I say to you.” That would be good enough. He says, “Truly...” He makes it emphatic to encourage this man. Now Jesus is encouraging the penitent thief. To bless the penitent robber. To assure the penitent robber. He gives the believing thief strong encouragement of salvation and He gives it to everyone else who [is] willing to believe in Him. The same thing, “Truly, truly...” If you believe in Me, you will receive the gift of life. Jesus promises it so many times, it’s all the way through the Scriptures, if you believe in Christ, you will be saved. “If you confess with your mouth, Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9 NASB). And notice, not only does he give every believer hope. He promises immediate salvation from hell. He says, “Today.” Today. Notice, there’s no soul sleep. There’s no “annihilationism,” that once you die, you’re just gone forever. And there’s no Roman Catholic purgatory either. But today, today you, criminal, you guilty sinner, you, thief, will be with Me in heaven. That’s what He tells him. J. C. Ryle said, “No one ever received such a strong assurance of his own forgiveness than this man.” And he was a thief. A guilty thief. Sentenced to death.

Four. Jesus promises to be with the believing man after death. He says, “You shall be with me.” Jesus, of course, would be in heaven. Now, we might wonder, “Well, where is heaven anyways? You know, is heaven, uh, up there in the atmosphere, or beyond the universe?” I don’t know, it’s in some sort of spiritual realm. The Bible doesn’t tell us. But we know this. Heaven is wherever Jesus is. The moment the believer’s life is over, Luke seems to indicate He is met by angels—holy and majestic and smiling. Think about it. You die, and then the moment of death, your eyes open to see smiling, angelic faces—in the spiritual realm, with your spiritual eyes. And maybe other believers are standing in the

background smiling, and other angels grinning with joy...can you see it? But as wonderful as that is, it's not heaven yet, because you're looking around for a person. There's a person you're looking for. And you've never seen Him, though you love Him. And you look at the angels, and they know what you're thinking, because you're thinking the same thing everybody else has thought who they escorted to that person. And then they answer your question before you ask, "Yes, the King desires to have you in His presence." And you are startled, wondering, "I wonder if angels can read minds?" But he continues, "Jesus desires that you stand in His presence blameless with great joy!" and you begin to move without effort, you see the throne, and the myriads of angels, ten thousands time ten thousands, and saints of all the ages. And there's a Temple, and in that Temple there's a Throne, and as you approach you see a Man walking in your direction. But not just a man—God clothed in human flesh. And He is smiling, and He is walking towards you, faster, and the angels let you go. And you run to Christ. [Emphatic expression]. Now you are in heaven. "Today," Jesus tells the repentant thief, "you will be with Me, in Paradise."

Five. Jesus saves the believing man by grace through faith and not by works. I mean, the man was a criminal! The man just came to Christ! He didn't have a big history of good works, a synagogue attendance, [or] faithful, you know, sacrificial offerings. His good works didn't outweigh his bad. Yes, he did a couple good works. He rebuked the thief, confessed Christ, came to His defense, comforted Jesus, admitted his guilt, asked to be remembered... But listen, the man wasn't saved by his good works. Paul says in Romans 3:23-24, "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you have been saved, by faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one should boast." Titus 3:5 says, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." Oh, one of my favorites, 2 Timothy 1:9, "Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." A person is not saved by works. And what's great about the penitent thief, is he teaches us that. He teaches us that beyond a shadow of a doubt. The guy got in by the skin of his teeth! Are you trusting in your works? Are you trusting in your church attendance? Are you trusting in your Bible knowledge? Are you trusting in your giving? Are you trusting in any thing you do, your baptism, what you have done, that you prayed the sinner's prayer? Any thing of you? Are you trusting in you? Or are you trusting in Christ? If you are trusting in any of the things you have done or intend to do, you are this moment fallen from grace. But grace is still within reach. If you're willing to strive to enter in through the narrow gate. To strip off all your good deeds and all your good works and just get through, you and you alone. And say, and believe:

Not the labors of my hands, can fulfill Thy laws command
Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow
All for sin could not atone, Thou must save and Thou alone
Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the Cross I cling
Naked come to Thee for dress, helpless look to Thee for grace
Foul, I to the fountain fly, wash me Savior ere I die
While I draw this fleeting breath, when my eyes shall close in death
When I soar to worlds unknown, see Thee on Thy judgment throne
Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee

That, people, is what gets you in the gate. And if that is the cry of your heart, then you have what it takes to be saved. Nothing.

Six. Jesus demonstrates that today is the day of salvation. Disaster struck the Japanese fishing village of Ruishi in 1896. A huge wave, caused by a tsunami, killed 700 of the 800 residents. The village then was rebuilt, and in order to prevent the same thing from happening, they constructed a huge, steel re-

enforced concrete wall 30 feet high. On March 11th of this year, when another earthquake struck, and another tsunami wave came, it blew down the wall. The entire village and the residents were wiped out. Only a few escaped. And one fisherman, who with his wife seeing the wave coming, ran as fast as they could up the hill and barely escaped. He said, "We had complete trust in the wall to save us! It was huge, it was thick and they said it would save us! And now everyone is dead, and our whole village is gone." The entire village, again, was wiped out. And all those people perished. Most of them, maybe even all of them, without Christ. There is nothing we can do. There are no works, that we can do, to stave off the judgment of God. Christ must save, and Christ alone. Some who don't want to turn from their sins might look at the salvation of the penitent thief and think, "Well, you know what, since Jesus is so gracious and since He's so benevolent, I'm just going to live my life for sin and Satan, and at the very end I'll turn to Him and repent and get in the door." Burkett writes, "One was saved that none might despair. But only one that none might presume." Don't presume upon the grace of God and don't think you can make God save you when you want. God tells you, "Today is the day of salvation." If you pass it up today, you may never receive another chance again. The famous astronomer Copernicus wrote, "I do not ask for the grace that you gave Saint Paul, nor can I dare to ask for the grace that you granted Saint Peter, but the mercy which you did show the dying robber, that mercy show me." After an evangelistic meeting years ago, a young man approached the preacher. And he looked very concerned, and the evangelist saw the worry in this young man's face. And he asked, "Young man, are you ready to die?" "No," he said, "I'm not ready. But I hope to be ready to die someday. It gives me hope when I hope the thief that was crucified next to Jesus." "Which one," asked the evangelist? The young man looked startled, and then said, "Oh, I forgot. There were two, weren't there?" "Yes," said the evangelist. "One went after having died and perished in hell. The other trusted in Jesus and was saved forever. Which thief are you?" Pray with me...

Father, we come before You marveling at Your grace in this text as we see Jesus even with His dying breath reaching out to save sinners. How amazing that is, to see Him on the cross in so much pain and so much agony, being abused, being mocked, being scorned and rejected. And yet, with His ears open to the cry of any penitent, repentant sinner. Father, I think of the thief next to Him, and how that man was a criminal. He was a robber, he was suffering the just consequence of his sin. And yet, because he humbled himself, and he called out to Christ, Jesus quickly, without hesitation, gave him strong assurance that, that very day, that criminal would be in Paradise with Him. Father, I know there are people here this morning who have not yet repented of their sins. They know they are living in sin, they know they are living contrary to Your Word, and Father, I pray that you would grant them repentance now. I pray that they would not wait a moment longer and presume upon your grace one more minute. I pray that they would cry out and place their faith in Christ and in Christ alone, bringing nothing in their hands, but faith in Jesus. And Father, may You save them. And for the rest of us, may we remember that Christ is still that same Savior. And though He is on the throne, He is near to all who call upon Him in truth. So may we tell other people about Him, that they, too, may receive the free gift of eternal life. We pray this in Your name, Amen.