

The Thief's Perspective from the Cross



"To day thou shalt be with me in paradise"

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Knowing that my hour of death was getting closer and closer, I had heard the words of the Master and was still in unbelief and shock. Saying it as he did, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,” Jesus’ manner of speech, his words—their clarity, directness, authority, power, justice, compassion, and mercy—convinced me of my abject poverty as a human being, not materially but spiritually.

In spite of what many would say years later, I was there and his words were directed towards me and the other thief. They were not directed towards the unrepentant clerics, soldiers or curiosity seekers. My crime had not been in the coveting of things but in human trafficking, a form of kidnapping punishable by death under God’s law.

His Holy Spirit led me to the conclusion that even though we were on display before the whole world as human objects of the basest, vilest, and most pitiable sort, my past errors in judgment had led me to ultimately see my condition as only God could see me. . . And this after my cruel words of derision had been cast rashly, impulsively, foolishly, and unjustly in the Saviors' face. As foretold, Jesus was indeed crucified between the transgressors; I the chiefest.

On display at this seemingly inconspicuous moment in man's history, I was confronted with the vanity, arrogance, conceitedness, ruthlessness, emptiness, pride, jealousy, and condescension—everything contemptible in the human condition, in all of its ugliness, contrasted with the humility, mercy and grace I witnessed in the Lord's eyes.

Realizing my own worthlessness, I sensed that I too was being crucified in my soul and being granted a second chance at life, even though my demise was imminent. It was as though the Lord had asked me the question, 'Who do you say that I am?' I was able to answer this elusive human inquiry by saying, 'You are indeed the Christ, the Son of God.' I continued, 'without you, Lord, I can do nothing.'

The physical pain I was experiencing could not be compared to the loneliness, rejection, hatred, and forsaking Jesus endured for me and those he had created and blessed with a moral conscience; although many looking on had revealed to me, they did not possess one.

I had come to realize that the forgiveness Jesus offered me could never be appropriated by those who were not grateful of his sacrifice, his words, and who he is. I am speaking of unrepentant sinners. Jesus would never extend forgiveness towards those who were thankless, unrepentant, nor showed no sorrow for their sin. I realized repentance is not a human quality I or anyone else alive is capable of cultivating. It is miraculous. It is not of this world. It is independent of men. It is a gift revealing the work of Christ's Holy Spirit within.

Before I started making the decisions that led me down an irretrievable path, I had seen John and his baptism of repentance. This is why John's ministry was of God! While John's ministry was significant in that the Holy Spirit produced the fruit of repentance, it could not produce regeneration and authentic change from within. Only when I asked Jesus to come into my life

and live within me, did I realize the power of Christ and his imputed righteousness, to convert the sinner.

Not able to endure the pile of derision the other thief was heaping on the Savior, I rebuked him by saying, “Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.”

For the three of us, sensing that our time left on this earth was ebbing away, I could no longer hold it in. In every ounce of effort and strength I could muster, and fighting through my own insecurities, uttered in my quivering voice of unrestrained emotion, “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Just before slipping into a state of unconsciousness from the unbearable pain my body had been racked with, the Savior’s words flooded my soul. I will never forget his words of peace. He actually told his Father to forgive me. I realized at that moment, Jesus the Christ, was the only conduit through which all good things flowed. Just before giving up the ghost, my Lord encouraged me with these words, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” In these, he made me realize ‘not my will, but his will would be accomplished in me in spite of who and what I was.’