

39) One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" 40) But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation. 41) And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42) And he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into your kingdom." 43) And He said to him, "Verily I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

INTRO: In these Wednesday lenten services we have been discussing various contrasts that we have found in people associated with Jesus during His sufferings and death. This week we shall speak of a man who was crucified right next to Jesus. The contrast in this man is that he at first cursed and blasphemed Jesus, but later asked Jesus to remember him when Jesus got to heaven.

I. WE CAN UNDERSTAND HIS INITIAL BEHAVIOR

A. He may have led a life of crime (Greek: evil doer)

1. don't know whether hardened habitual, or first timer
2. many of us have been among tough talkers
3. not unusual to choose someone to pick on

B. Consider the agony of the moment

1. extreme pain of crucifixion
2. not uncommon to hear one curse from pain (hammers in hell)
3. especially from those for whom cursing is a habit
4. v.39 - 'save Thyself and us' from pain? save from hell?
5. probably not thinking beyond the here and now

C. Surrounding influences

1. Mt.27:44 & Mk.15:32 say 'robbers' (plural) reviled Him
2. the two copied the soldiers (v.37)
3. who copied the rulers of the synagogue (v.33)
4. 'those who passed by' = everybody got in on the act

II. SOMETHING CAUSED A DRAMATIC CHANGE (3 guesses)

A. Imminence of death

1. close encounter turns us to think about God (OMG)
2. brings awareness of Judgment, although maybe only subconscious
3. which reminds us of our sins, guilt
- 4...since we are under the same condemnation (v.40) *(continued)*

B. Reflection time (Mark: 3rd hour; darkness 6th to 9th hour; 6 hours?)

1. Jewish (Roman citizens not crucified) acquainted with O.T.
2. realized wickedness of temple leaders who did not fear God (Judas)
3. may have known Messianic prophecies: Psalm 22 "My God..." or Isaiah 53 numbered among transgressors; lamb silent; wounded

C. Immediate presence of Jesus

1. Jesus' forgiveness for His crucifiers
2. Jesus' humble acceptance of unwarranted suffering
3. it took faith to confess sin and Savior publicly from a cross
4. at the moment when **nobody** was speaking up (disciples)

III. JESUS PROCLAIMED TO HIM THE GREATEST ASSURANCE

A. To a penitent malefactor

1. such contrast: blaspheme/confess; impenitent/penitent
2. just as Jesus is treated today: one reviles, another repents; one blasphemes, another confesses; one repents, another is hardened
3. "Jesus remember me **when**" indicates penitence, faith, confidence in a **heavenly** kingdom
4. Matt.14:32-33 Whosoever confesses me before men...deny...

B. There is life after death (soul now; resurrected body/soul later)

1. Jesus promises him an existence **today**; after he dies today
2. soul departs body at moment of death; carried to 'Abraham's bosom'
3. Jesus also: Father, into Thy hands...My spirit
4. Scripture knows only two places for souls after death

C. 'Paradise' is the blessed eternity in the presence of Jesus

1. "today...with **Me** in Paradise"
2. being with Jesus is part of the blessedness
3. 'paradise' is place of pleasure; cp. Garden of Eden
4. few have had such personal assurance; yet all Word is sure

CONCLUSION: This narrative is both a great comfort as well as a serious warning. On the one hand, a dying man's repentant prayer is answered in the affirmative personally by Jesus. But on the other hand, an impenitent man faces death rejecting the Son of God even while that Redeemer is paying for his sins. May none of us ever delay repentance or lose faith, so that we may always be prepared for that unknown hour when we may also enter heaven with Jesus. Amen.