

NOTES FROM TIM SHENTON'S SERMON- Sunday 29th September 2024 am

TITLE: "The time, the place, the person"

TEXT: Luke 23 verses 32-43

Scripture references from the ESV

Luke 23:32 - 43 Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. ³⁵ And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

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, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Here are three individuals who have led three different lives. They are headed for three different destinations – hell, paradise and a seat at the right hand of God. Before us are:

- two sinners and one Saviour; two robbers and one Redeemer; two criminals and one Christ

Yet it is not the criminals who are getting all the abuse, though they are the ones who deserve it. They had stolen and cheated, making the lives of others a misery, and are being justly punished for their life of crime.

It is the man in the middle who is being mocked, insulted and abused even in death. Yet he has done nothing but good in his life, and, even on the cross, has sought forgiveness (**v34**) for those who have put him there. In the course of his life on earth, he has:

- Cast out demons from those who were possessed. Once living in darkness and desperation, he gave them back their normal life

- Raised back to life the son of a widow. He gave him back to his mother, rather than calling him to follow
- Healed the lame so that they could run and play with their children, giving them back to their family
- Healed the blind, giving them back the ability to see colours, faces and beauty
- Healed the deaf giving them back the ability to listen to music and join in conversations

Is it not extraordinary that this man is the one being abused?

The people chose to have Barabbas (a murderer and insurrectionist) released instead of Christ, and now they follow this up by pouring out their venom on the one truly good man. They have turned good into bad and bad into good. It is no wonder that Peter will later describe Jesus Christ as: **a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious** (1 Peter 1:3).

As we consider Jesus Christ, there are three aspects in **vv42-43** that bring particular hope:

1. **The time.** Jesus tells the thief that it is **today**, in just a few hours, that he will be with him in paradise. Following his clear repentance (**vv40-42**), he does not have to wait till tomorrow. Jesus knew that the Roman soldiers would break the legs of those crucified and bring about an earlier death. He does not have to wait even a few days or till the day of judgement or when Christ returns in glory. It will be today! What is more, there is nothing for him to do apart from die. He does not have to be baptised, take the Lord's Supper, become a church member or carry out good works. There is no hanging around in some spiritual waiting room.

Today you will be with me in paradise

This gives such hope to every Christian. We are all dying – even the longest life is a lingering death. However, the moment we close our eyes in death is the moment we open them in heaven. If, today, you are a Christian and only have a few hours left to live, then remember these words of Jesus: **Today you will be with me in Paradise.**

If you are **not** a Christian, then bear in mind that **today** is the day of salvation, not tomorrow, for tomorrow may never come. An example of this on a grand scale comes from D L Moody, the great American evangelist. He said he made the greatest mistake of his life the night of October 8, 1871, when the great Chicago fire nearly destroyed the entire city. Hundreds died, including some who earlier had been in Moody's congregation.

That evening he had preached from the text **'What then shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ'** and he concluded his gospel message that night by saying, **'I wish you would take this text home with you and turn it over in your minds during the week, and next Sunday we will come to Calvary and the cross and we will decide what to do with Jesus of Nazareth.'** Little did anyone in attendance know that these words would be the last ever heard in that huge arena, for even as Moody closed the service, the great Chicago fire was already burning and many were about to die.

Twenty-two years later, on the anniversary of the great fire, he said, 'I have never dared to give a congregation a week to think of their salvation since the fire ... I have never seen that congregation again. I have hard work to keep back the tears today. I have looked over this congregation, and not a single one is here that I preached to that night ... I never will meet those people again until I meet them in another world.

- But I want to tell you of one lesson I learned that night, which I have never forgotten, and that is, when I preach, to press Christ upon the people then and there ... I would rather have that right hand cut off than to give a congregation now a week to decide what to do with Jesus.'

Now is the day of salvation (2Cor 6:2). Do not wait until you have heard 50 sermons or attended church for a year. You do not need that interview with the pastor. Do this now without delay.

Your eternal soul is at stake, so echo the words of the repentant criminal:

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Then you will hear the same reply:

Today you will be with me in paradise

- 2. The place.** Paradise is everything this world is not. Here we experience pain, tears, heartbreak, toil, divorce, widowhood, abuse and death – the list is endless. On the news we hear of wars, persecution, murder, crime and disaster.
- Heaven is the absence of everything bad, replaced by everything that is good. It is the very opposite of hell.

We read in Revelation 21:4 **He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."**

The repentant thief will find what he has never known: peace, joy, love, unity, health and life.

- 3. The person.** Why is paradise paradise? Certainly, it offers all that has been mentioned so far but all of that is of little importance compared to the two words 'with me'.

The overriding reason for wanting to go to heaven is because Jesus our Saviour is there. In heaven we shall see him as he really is, in all of his glory. We shall know him fully and love him perfectly. There will be no veil, no ignorance, no shadows and no sin to hide him.

We shall see him who loved us, died for us, has forgiven us, prayed for us, provided for us,

We shall see him who has never forsaken us.

He is the reason we want to go to paradise.

If you are not in love with Jesus now, why would you want to go the heaven later? If it is for any other reason (for peace or joy perhaps) than because you love and long for Jesus Christ, then you might want to question whether you are truly saved. Perhaps you are in love with church, with service or with ministry rather than in love with Jesus?

The apostle Paul was able to say: **For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.** (Phil 1:21). He would gain more of his Saviour in dying. Is that true for you?

Jesus Christ is our all in all.

He is our peace, redemption, holiness, righteousness.

He is our Saviour, our life and light, our shepherd and God.

Jesus Christ is our paradise.

Remember these three points:

- a) **Paradise is only a prayer away.** The thief prayed: **Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.** He was a hell-bound sinner, but with that prayer he became a heaven-bound saint.
- b) **Jesus Christ can save anyone:** There is no one who is too far gone this side of death. Even the man who lived a life of crime and was justly crucified could be saved.
- c) **It is never too late:** Jesus reached out and saved this criminal who was just hours from hell. Perhaps you have been a churchgoer all your life but you do not love Jesus, having never experienced conversion. Cry out to him now and hear his reply: **Today you will be with me in paradise.**

Ask yourself which of the two criminals you are most like.

- Are you more like the one who insulted Jesus with his dying breath?
- Are you more like the one who confessed the kingship of Jesus before the world?

Consider this:

One sinner was saved that no sinner might despair, but only one, that no sinner might presume. (J C Ryle)

To all who come to him, Jesus says:

Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise

Above all else, paradise is to be with Jesus