

Sermon: Conversion at Calvary

Reading: Luke 23:26-56

Introduction

Today I want to focus our thinking on the miracle that occurs while Jesus is hanging upon the cross.

I don't know if you have ever counted the supernatural events while Jesus was held by cruel nails onto wooden beams forming a cross.

The sun stopped shining and darkness covered the land
There was an earthquake which split rocks and broke open graves
Many saints who had died were given life and they stepped forth from their tombs
The curtain in the Temple was torn, top to bottom.
The way to God has been opened through the torn curtain

But the amazing miracle is the one that happens in the heart of both the centurion and the one of the thieves crucified with Jesus. As Jesus was taking his last breaths and praying forgiveness for those who had murdered Him, hearts were being won and saved from an eternity separated from God. The miracle of the conversion, even on Calvary's Hill

Conversion

When our hearts are converted by faith in God, we change not just emotionally in how we feel towards God, but our eyes are opened spiritually. We see the world in a different way than we once did, our priorities and desires change, our affections redirected from loving the ways of the world towards loving Jesus as my saviour.

Conversion begins in the heart and radiates outward to affect everything we think, say or do. Simply saying I'm converted doesn't mean it is true - real conversion is obvious when a person's life has changed direction, changed allegiance and moves towards worshipping God and less of self. The heart is transformed and this is what happens to the thief and the centurion on Calvary's Hill.

The Gospels

The two thieves crucified either side of Jesus would have heard of his name and the many miracles he performed but this may have been the closest they ever got to see him. What a sight they beheld. A man exhausted from a night of beatings, his back ripped open by the wicked lashes of the lashes, bleeding, exposed and upon his head a crown of thorns. What a pitiful sight

Matthew and Mark's gospels both record how the thieves hurled abuse and insults at Jesus. How wicked mankind can be in their worst of states, even with their dying breaths hurling insults and abuse at Jesus.

As they mocked and cursed him they could hear Jesus praying, 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do'.

Minutes must have felt like hours. As those minutes turned into hours something changed, at least for one of the thieves and the centurion. It was nothing that was seen on the outside, no blinding light, no voice from heaven, no vision but something miraculous, for these two men their hearts were converted.

The Miraculous conversion

The insults and mocking continued against Jesus but now only came from one thief only for the other was now silent. The conversion had taken place and the converted thief rebukes the other and speaks to Jesus for the salvation of his own soul.

Even in the last hour In agony, in exhaustion, Jesus still has love and concern and time for us and he shows this by saving the repentant thief. When the thief asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom, Jesus replies, Today you will be with me in paradise.

What did the thief do to deserve entrance into God's Kingdom?

What works could he do with hands and feet nailed to a cross to earn this salvation?

What was good about him that he should be saved?

The answer to each of these questions is, 'Nothing'

He didn't deserve heaven. He didn't do any good work deserving of heaven. Compared to God's righteous standards there was nothing redeemable in this thief. But the amazing fact is, he was saved - while the other remained in his sins to face judgment of God,

So what happened, what made the difference?

Something happened, something not natural but supernatural a conversion, even in this 11th hour!

5 Steps of the converted heart

This passage from Luke's gospel shows us five simple steps which will open the kingdom of heaven to anyone who asks, what must I do to be saved?

Step 1: The first notable step in the thief repentance was his concern about his companions wickedness in his reviling of Christ as he says to him

“Do you not fear God, he said, since you are under the same sentence?
(Luke 24:40)

Step 2: Follows within the same sentence with his own recognition of his sinful state when he says,

‘We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve...’

Step 3: was an open confession of Christ's innocence

“But this man has done nothing wrong.’

Step 4: Was placing his Faith in Jesus Christ's power and will to save him. He turned to a crucified sufferer and called him Lord declaring that he is a King and has a kingdom

Step 5: Was a prayer in humility asking Jesus to remember him.

Saying to Jesus, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom”

These five steps were covered in a simple prayer declaring faith in God through Jesus sacrifice upon the cross for my sins.

In humility, repentance and total trust upon the mercy and grace of God to forgive. It is so simple to be saved, for Jesus has done everything, all that is required on our part is faith and humility. However sometimes its easier to move a mountain than a heart to become humble and reach out to God who is more willing to save than we are to ever ask!

Our God is mighty to save and such an Amazing grace to set those who recognise their fallen state. This thief was saved in the weakest moment of our Lord's life. And still our Lord had the power to save. Amazing

Hanging in agony upon the cross yet granted the sinners petition and opened to him the gates of his glory - "For today you will be with me in paradise."

Salvation is not by any of our works, good deeds, charitable giving! This is the fruit of our salvation

Salvation is not bought, bargained for, negotiated or bartered for, we cannot earn our salvation

Salvation is not earned, brokered, borrowed, each one of us has the choice and have to decide for ourselves.

The grace of God is a free gift for those who truly repent, trust in Christ in Faith. Jesus has the power to raise each of us at the day of resurrection so we do not have to face the judgment of God but be given the gift of eternal life. As Christians we have a blessed assurance when we will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our salvation - this is the promise of God.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life, those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die'.

God's righteousness in exchange for my sinfulness

Jesus went through the agonies of hell to take upon himself the punishment that should be mine and in exchange for my sins, God bestows upon us the righteousness of Jesus - For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.....

There will be no blessing pronounced on Good Friday

We will take time today reflect on the cost for Jesus to save a sinner like me.