

THE AMAZING FAITH OF THE DYING THIEF

By Elder Wayne Camp

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 27:33-49; Mark 15:22-37; Luke 23:32-43

TEXT: *Luke 23:42-43 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. 43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.*

INTRODUCTION: It is my opinion that the conversion of this dying thief is one of the most amazing conversions found in Scripture. In the most adverse circumstances with some of the most unfavorable influences this man was converted. My subject is, *The Amazing Faith of the Dying Thief.*

I. IT IS AMAZING THAT THIS MAN HAD FAITH AT ALL

A. He had apparently led a life of crime or he would not have been crucified, a punishment that was reserved for the most notorious offenders.

Luke 23:40-41 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

B. Men who lead a life such as he had usually die as they lived.

1. It was the desire of the false prophet Balaam that he might die the death of the righteous. **Numbers 23:10 Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die**

the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!

2. It was not so for most people die just as they lived. ***Psalm 37:37-38 Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. 38 But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off.***

3. Balaam died a violent death along with other wicked men. ***Numbers 31:8 And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.***

C. It is an amazing thing that this man should have the faith to lay hold of Christ in view of the fact that even on the cross he had been sinful rebellion. ***Matthew 27:44 The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Mark 15:32 Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him.***

D. This converted thief is a monument to the gracious regenerating power of the Holy Spirit and the faith that he imparts in regeneration.

1. Regeneration is an act of God, not something a man gets by his own actions.

Ephesians 2:1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

2. Regeneration is a sovereign act of God. ***John 3:8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.***

3. Repentance is a grace given by God. ***Acts 5:31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. Acts 11:18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. 2 Timothy 2:25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.***

4. Faith is a gracious gift of God. ***Philippians 1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake. Acts 18:27 And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace.***

II. CONSIDER ALSO THE AMAZING CIRCUMSTANCES EXISTING WHEN THIS THIEF BELIEVED ON CHRIST

A. The general public in Jerusalem was mocking Christ yet this man believed on him. **Matthew 27:39-40** *And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, 40 And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.*

B. The religious leaders of Israel were all in opposition to Christ yet God was able to bring this man to believe on him. **Matthew 27:41-43** *Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, 42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. 43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.*

C. The political leaders and the military were also against him.

1. Herod had made sport of Christ desiring that he put on a miracle show to please Herod. **Luke 23:6-11** *When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilaean. 7 And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. 8 And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. 9 Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing. 10 And the chief priests and scribes*

stood and vehemently accused him. 11 And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate.

2. Pilate had delivered him up to be crucified after admitting that he was a just man. ***Luke 23:13-25 And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, 14 Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: 15 No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. 16 I will therefore chastise him, and release him. 17 (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) 18 And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: 19 (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) 20 Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. 21 But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. 22 And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go. 23 And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. 24 And Pilate***

gave sentence that it should be as they required. 25 And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.

3. The Roman military were also willingly participating in the mocking and crucifixion of Christ. ***Matthew 27:27-37 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. 28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. 29 And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! 30 And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. 31 And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him. 32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross. 33 And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, 34 They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. 35 And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my***

vesture did they cast lots. 36 And sitting down they watched him there; 37 And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

E. His own fellow in crime, the other thief was joining the others in accusing and mocking Jesus Christ even though he was in the same condemnation. ***Luke 23:39-41 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. 40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.***

III. THE FAITH OF THIS DYING THIEF IS AMAZING WHEN WE CONSIDER WHAT HE WAS PERSONALLY ENDURING DURING THIS PERIOD

A. He was doubtless suffering the same extreme thirst suffered by Jesus Christ, yet he believed on Christ. ***Psalm 22:1515 My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.***

B. He, like Christ, was nailed to a cross and was enduring excruciating pain from that, yet he believed on Jesus Christ. ***John 20:25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.***

C. He had to deal with all the distractions present at the crucifixion, yet he believed on Jesus Christ.

1. The scorn of the general population.
2. The scorn of the religious leaders.
3. The general tumult of the crucifixion.

D. He believed on Jesus Christ even though that Jesus on whom he believed was being cruelly crucified in his very presence.

E. He believed on Jesus Christ even though he had observed the people stripping Jesus naked and nailing him to a cross.

F. He believed on Jesus Christ even though he could doubtless see that Jesus had been brutally whipped before he was nailed to the cross.

G. He believed Jesus was a king with a kingdom even though he was suffering as a lawbreaker. ***Luke 23:42-43 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. 43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.***

H. The amazing faith of the dying thief was blessed beyond what the man had asked.

1. He only asked to be remembered.

2. He was assured that he would be present with Christ in paradise that very day. **Luke 23:43**
And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

IV. WHAT THE AMAZING FAITH OF THIS DYING THIEF CAUSED HIM TO BELIEVE

A. He believed that he was a sinner.
Luke 23:40-41 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.

B. He believed that justice demanded the punishment for sin and that that punishment was rightfully being administered to him and the other thief. **Luke 23:41** ***And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds. Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.***

C. He believed that Jesus was sinless.
“. . . but this man hath done nothing amiss.”

D. He apparently believed that Jesus was the Christ, the anointed of God giving evidence that God had regenerated him.

1. The person who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. **1 John 5:1**

Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God . . .

2. The person who denies that Jesus is the Christ is a liar. ***1 John 2:22 Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.***

3. This thief rebuked the other thief when he made a statement that indicated that he did not believe that Jesus was the Christ. ***Luke 23:39-40 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. 40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?***

E. He believed in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. ***Luke 23:42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.***

F. He believed that Jesus was indeed a king with a kingdom. ***Luke 23:42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.***

G. He believed that Jesus would definitely come into that kingdom. ***when thou comest into thy kingdom.***

H. He definitely believed that there is life beyond this veil of tears.

I. He believed in the death and resurrection of Christ for he knew Jesus would come into his kingdom. ***Luke 23:42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.***

CONCLUSION: I cannot help but marvel at the amazing faith of this dying thief. He had not been to a seminary but he had a pretty fair idea of the doctrine of salvation. Is it not wonderful what God can do in the heart of a sinner when he regenerates him and gives him the faith to lay hold of Jesus Christ?

Elder Wayne Camp is pastor of the Pilgrim's Hope Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, and his sermon is used by permission.