

The Two Thieves at the Cross

by Jesse Barrington

You know you've heard good preaching when the preacher finishes, and he has faded away into the background, and Christ is magnified and exalted. And that's what the Lord just worked through our brother there. I say this with all sincerity. It almost feels like a distraction to get up and preach right now. Because, we just beheld the truths of the glory of Jesus Christ. And those are things we should really ponder upon and let them resonate in our hearts. Thank you, brother. Thank you.

We're going to go before the Lord and ask for His grace once again. He's been very kind to us this morning. Let's ask again. Bow with me.

Oh Father, in the precious name of Jesus we come. Thank You, God. Thank You for answering prayers prayed this morning for the preaching of Your Word. Thank You for working in my heart and I'm sure in the hearts of all of us here. God, continue to apply those truths and work in our midst. Father, we're coming again now to Your Word, and we confess again the need for help. Lord, we'll be looking at a passage we've all read or heard countless times, but would you keep it from being common? That's what we need, God. You to come and bring alive Your Word as I strive by Your grace to be faithful to it; that You would work in every heart. And we pray again for salvation, Lord, for the lost among us, and for greater revelation, assurance, hope, and joy for those who You've granted life to. So, feed us and work through Your Word for Your glory we pray and ask these things, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Beloved, if the Gospel of Jesus Christ ever becomes common to us, we're in a dangerous place. When those things begin to happen, you've started to forget who you once were, who He is, what He's accomplished, and your daily need for grace to be seeing these things. We are going to be in a very familiar passage. If you'll turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 23. We'll start reading in verse 26. We'll read through verse 43. And then we'll focus back on 32-43. Follow along for the reading of God's Word.

"And as they led Him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross to carry behind Jesus. And there followed Him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for Him. But turning to them, Jesus said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin to

say to the mountains, 'fall on us.' And to the hills, 'cover us.' For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?' Two others, who were criminals were led away to be put to death with Him. 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. And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And they cast lots to divide His garments. 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.' The soldiers also mocked Him coming up and offering Him sour wine and saying, 'If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself.' There was also an inscription over Him: 'This is the King of the Jews.' One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save Yourself and us.' But the other rebuked him saying, 'Do you not fear God? Since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly. For we are receiving the due reward of our deeds. But this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said, "Jesus, remember me, when You come into Your Kingdom.' And He (being Jesus) said to Him, 'Truly, I say to you, today, you will be with Me in paradise.'"

God's Predetermined Plan

Here in Luke's account, we have before us three crosses at Golgotha. In verse 33, known as "the skull." From the disciples' perspective, remember they're scattered at this time. From the disciples' perspective, it appears that everything is falling apart. The One they've been following for three years; the One Who they have embraced as Savior and Lord is now impaled to a cross.

But what they fail to see, along with everyone else at this point, is that the predetermined plan of God the Father is being played out just as He planned. Gathered together in this city, Herod, Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, to do whatever the Father's hand had planned and predestined to take place. If you're wondering, that's Acts 4:27-28. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the predetermined, sovereign plan of the Father. This isn't the backup plan. This is the plan. All of human history, orchestrated by the sovereign hand of God, has been working towards this day that we are reading, and particularly, this precise moment.

And rejoice with me that nothing can stay the hand of our sovereign God. What was foretold starting in Genesis 3 immediately after the fall, when God spoke to the serpent, saying, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." It's coming to this head now, the pinnacle of all of human history. All that God was doing in sustaining His people as we read those accounts throughout the Old Testament, and we see God upholding and sustaining His people. Why? That

the line through which He would bring His own Son Jesus Christ for this very purpose is unfolding before us here in chapter 23.

I told you yesterday that Jesus met with the men on the road to Emmaus and opened up the Scriptures to them. How Moses: Genesis through Deuteronomy - the Pentateuch, and the Prophets - the entirety of the Old Testament, pointed to Jesus. I'm not one that says Jesus is in every verse, but I am one that when I read a verse, I say, how does this point back or look to or find its fulfillment in Jesus. This is when God the Father, beloved, will demonstrate His love for His people, through His Son Jesus Christ - the innocent Lamb of God, as Jesus here is numbered among the transgressors. Standing in the criminal's place. The sin of Jesus' people will be laid upon Him. He will suffer and die in their place. What we refer to as substitutionary atonement. The wrath of God, as my brother just preached, will be poured out upon Jesus. It is not the Romans who atone for the sin. It is not their wrath. It is the Father bruising the Son. It is the wrath of God being poured out upon the Son that will atone for the sins of His people. Justice will be satisfied as He bears the wrath of His people, He dies their death.

And if we were to continue reading here in the Gospel of Luke into chapter 24, we would see that three days later, Jesus Christ will rise from the dead conquering sin and death, and through His death, burial, and resurrection offer forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all who will repent and put their faith in Him alone. Jesus Christ accomplishes salvation. He purchases salvation. Think about that. He doesn't purchase a potential salvation. He accomplishes. He redeems a people through the shedding of His own blood. Beloved, the three most important days in all of human history, the Incarnation: the day when God the Son took on flesh and was born of the virgin; the crucifixion which we are reading about here: the day when Jesus Christ stood in the place willfully of guilty sinners as the innocent Lamb to be slaughtered that they may have life; and the resurrection: the day when Jesus would be raised from the dead conquering sin and death. Beloved, we now here sit looking at these things fulfilled, in anticipation of His return. Come, Lord Jesus. Come.

There are two other crosses mentioned in the account and I want to spend our time today considering these two other crosses. The account of the two thieves is a true account. These were two men. This isn't just a parable. These are two men who lived. Two men who were crucified next to Jesus. But in another sense, everyone in this room and everyone in the world for all of human history is in line behind one of these two men; to the right or to the left of Jesus. I want to consider them both and I want to see, first, the warning given, and then the glorious hope shown to guilty sinners.

Work with me starting in v. 32. "Two others who were criminals were led away to be put to death with Him," that's Jesus. There are three crosses. V. 33, "And when they came to the place called 'the skull,' there they crucified Him (being Jesus) and the criminals, one on His right and one on His left.

Luke makes a distinction of Jesus' crucifixion from the other two. Crucifixion is not uncommon at this time. Seeing three people put on crosses at Golgotha is not uncommon at this time. But Luke sees the need to make a distinction and set Jesus' crucifixion apart from all that have come before Him and the two criminals. Why? Because an innocent man is being crucified, and that innocent man is God Incarnate. Immanuel. The Messiah who will take away the sins of His people. Jesus, being full of mercy and compassion, says in v. 34, look with me, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Jesus is not implying innocence here to those who partook in the crucifixion of Him. Those people are responsible and culpable. But what He's stating here is that they are not fully aware of the extent of what they are about to do. They are culpable, but unknowing of the extent of their sin and that they are crucifying the Son of God. At the end of v 34, it says, "And they cast lots to divide His garments." Brother Mack mentioned Messianic psalms. This is Psalm 22:18. A fulfillment pointing, again, to Jesus Christ being the prophesied Messiah.

Then, in v. 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.'" The rulers scoff. The soldiers also mocked Him. Coming up and offering Him sour wine and saying, "if you are the King of the Jews, save Yourself." There was also an inscription over Him. V. 38, "This is the King of the Jews."

Two Possible Responses to Christ

Now in v. 39, we get to one of the thieves. And this is where we're going to pause and consider some things. Beloved, before I start, I want you to know this. There are only two responses to Jesus Christ. They're both before us today in the representation of these two men, who are actual men. But they are representations of the two responses to Christ. Everyone in this room, youngest to oldest, is in line behind one of these two men in how you have responded to Jesus Christ. You fit in one of these two categories here. V. 39, "One of the criminals who were hanged, railed at Him, saying, 'Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us.'" The word "railed" here in the New King James is translated: "blasphemed." And that's the actual word. This criminal blasphemed Jesus. It means to revile, to vilify, to speak evil of. It's an accusatory word. It's almost as if he's saying, "If You are the Christ, then do something." But in a mocking tone, blaspheming Him, not believing He really is the Christ. Know this for sure: Although he says, "if you are the Christ, save

us and Yourself," this is not a man turning to Jesus in faith. This is not a confession of sin. But rather, this is a mocking and reviling of Jesus. This is a man who has lived his entire life devoid of God. Denying any revelation that he has had of God.

Everyone Has Revelation of God

And it's important that we know this: Everyone has had revelation of God. Some through the creation, seeing His divine power, and what revelation they do have of God, Paul says in Romans that they suppress it and reject it and begin to worship the creation rather than the Creator. So, whatever revelation this man has had, now He's standing next to Jesus, but maybe this is the first time, but he's had revelation of God, seeing God's creation, and He has rejected what can be known of God, and as we see here, when he has further revelation, God Incarnate standing next to him, he continues on with his rejection and blaspheming of God. If there is any sincerity in this man, it is one of self-preservation. "Hey, if You are the Christ, then get down and do something." This would be likened to the atheist in the foxhole. Have you heard that before? There's no atheist in a foxhole? Well, we know from Scripture there are truly no atheists. All men know of God, they just suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness. But it's not uncommon for someone who rejects any acknowledgement of God to find themselves situationally in an area where they realize it's out of my control, and in that moment begin to say, "Oh God, help me!" Fully aware though, in their heart, that again, it is self preservation that has nothing to do with who God is, and that the moment God would get them out of the bullets flying over their heads in the foxhole, they would return to the sin that they love. In this situation, God is nothing more than a means to their own end. Again, this is not saving faith, but rather someone who doesn't want the just punishment for their crimes given to them.

Here's an important point with this thief. How does Jesus respond to him? He doesn't. He doesn't respond. I'm reminded in John 2, I think, where it says many believed upon Him, speaking of Jesus, but He did not entrust Himself to them. Why? It says because He knew what was in their heart. You see, Jesus knows the heart of everyone. This man says something. "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." Jesus seeing the reality of his heart doesn't even respond.

The Depravity of the Human Heart

Beloved, something important to take from this text - this is very important, whether you're saved or not to hear. The human heart is so depraved - dead in sin - that men can stand next to Jesus, God Incarnate, and be unmoved from their love of sin and self. Maybe you've heard some people say things like this, "Well, if Jesus is real, if He were to appear to me right now, and maybe do some of those miracles

that we read about or hear about in the Bible, then I would believe in Him." No. You would not believe in Him. Circumstances have never humbled the depraved heart bringing about genuine repentance. There isn't a more dire circumstance than this man is in right now. He is nailed to a tree. In a few moments, some soldiers are going to come by and club his legs and break them so he can no longer breathe. He is gasping for air right now. Death is imminent. Yet, his heart remains calloused, hardened and dark. He is unwilling and he is unable to turn from the sin that he loves. I'll say it again. Circumstance has never brought about repentance and faith. Circumstance brings about worldly sorrow which we read about in 2 Corinthians 7, but never a godly sorrow leading to repentance and salvation.

I've talked to many men who do prison ministry. Men in desperate situations want to talk to people. And often times, they'll listen to you. They'll respond to you. They'll make verbal professions for you. But it proves to be just worldly sorrow. A circumstantial driven humility that never reaches genuine repentance of sin. Why? Because dire circumstances have never ever converted the heart of man. Ever.

Matthew's Account of the Two Thieves

Before we read v. 40 and look at the other thief, will you turn to Matthew 27:44? We will look at Matthew's account of this other thief before we look at Luke's account. Matthew 27:44 It says, "And the robbers (plural) who were crucified with Him (Jesus) also reviled Him in the same way." Robbers - plural. I want to point out that the robbers, the criminals - plural, both - are reviling Jesus in Matthew's account. You've read the story of Luke. You know what's going to happen here. So we have to ask the question before we walk through this: Do we have a contradiction in Scripture? Matthew says the robbers are reviling Him and ends his account there. Luke is going to tell us one is reviling Him. Do we have a contradiction? No. What you have is two different perspectives; two different points; two different goals being written. Matthew is noting at a time when they're on the cross, he is seeing both robbers, criminals reviling, blaspheming Jesus. They're both doing it. Luke is picking up at a different point of time while they're on the cross. He is noting that robber, that criminal, is blaspheming Jesus. But he's going to pick up now what the other criminal is doing.

So if you'll turn back to Luke 23.40. "But the other criminal rebuked him (the first criminal), saying, 'Do you not fear God? Since you're under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly. For we are receiving the due reward for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.'"

Stop for a moment. Matthew's account: Both criminals blaspheming Jesus. Luke's account: A little bit later in time, while they're on the cross, the second

criminal is now rebuking the first criminal for reviling and blaspheming Jesus. And saying, "don't you have any fear of God?" So he equates the blaspheming of Jesus as a demonstration of no fear of God. This is a deity claim to Jesus. You're blaspheming God. Don't you fear God? We're guilty. He's innocent.

What Brings this Change of Heart?

Now think with me, this is glorious here. How is it possible that in an instant to go from reviling and blaspheming Jesus to rebuking someone who is reviling and blaspheming Jesus? Now we've already established with the other criminal circumstance never changes the heart. You go, well, he's in a dire circumstance! That's why! He's going to die! And in his dying moment, because he's going to face death... No. It's not the circumstance.

Well, maybe the second thief is just more sensitive. Maybe he's got a little bit more of a tender personality. And he reached his breaking point and then it spilled over and he had to address this sin of blaspheming Jesus. No.

Maybe he's more intelligent. And he just began to put together in his own mind all the events that were unfolding, and he came to the conclusion of his own mind, that, oh, this is God now. And I shouldn't be sinning against Him. No.

Maybe he had a better upbringing. Maybe he's Jewish. Maybe his dad and mom told him about a coming Savior and he thought, maybe this is Him? No. No.

The answer to this question, beloved, is deeply important. Let me ask it in another way in another biblical context and see if you can see it. Do you remember Acts 9? In Acts 9 we have Saul, the Pharisee, who will become Paul the Apostle. We have Saul the Pharisee. Listen to verse 1. "Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, on the road to Damascus to imprison anyone belonging to the Way." Jesus. He's got letters in hand. He's on his way. "And if you claim Christ, I'm throwing you in prison with a murderous heart." And by verse 20 of this same chapter, we read this about Saul: "Immediately, Saul proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'" Sounds pretty familiar. Sounds pretty parallel. At one moment, murder in the heart. Imprison anyone who's following that One. And here we are, "He is the Son of God," in the temple.

Repentance

How does one go from here to there? It sounds to me like a change of mind leading to a change of direction in behavior. We call that term repentance. The second thief again, goes from reviling Jesus alongside the other thief, and in an instant says, "Do you not fear God?" But that's not all he said. Look what else he said. He says, "and we are condemned justly." What's he saying? He is agreeing with God regarding his sin. We call that confession. I am guilty. He's finished

making excuses and minimizing his sin. He's no longer blaming anybody else for his sin. He is confessing guiltiness worthy of death.

Can I tell you real quick? One of the most liberating truths of the Gospel is you can stop pretending how bad you were and how much you still struggle. Because what that really is is unbelief in the sufficiency and grace of Jesus Christ. Christians don't have to pretend anymore. I'll tell you this, there's a lot of pretending among the assembly still. And rooted in there is unbelief in the Gospel. What is he doing? He's seeing his sin from God's perspective. More than that even, look what he says here, he also sees the righteousness and sinlessness of Jesus Christ. V. 41, "But this man has done nothing wrong." How did he know that? How is he growing in this revelation and understanding of who Jesus really is? In an instant, this man has gone from hard hearted reviling of Jesus to fearing God, rebuking others who don't, confessing his own sin and confessing the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It was as though he was blind and now he can see. It was as though he was dead but now he's alive spiritually speaking.

I thought about that last night, and I thought, don't we sing a song like that? Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found. Was blind, but now I see. What enabled the wretch to be saved? Amazing grace. What enabled the lost to be found? Amazing grace. And don't miss the last part. What enabled the blind man to see? Amazing grace. You know what this teaches us, beloved? Grace isn't just what saves us from the penalty of our sin, but grace is what awakens us to see our sin and behold the Savior. And grace is what gives us faith to believe and receive forgiveness. All to the glory of God.

The New Birth

What happened to this man? Do you remember in 1 Corinthians 2:14 where Paul says, "the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, because they are spiritually discerned?" He says it's folly to him. He's not able to understand it because it's spiritually discerned. What is Paul teaching? That man from birth is spiritually dead. And even though Jesus Christ has come, died, and resurrected, and even though there is an offer of forgiveness to all who will repent and believe, man is so dead in his sin, he does not see his sin for what it is, and he does not see Christ for Who He is. The Holy Spirit's role is to point us to Christ. And man, in the deadness of his sin, cannot behold these things. He can't understand them. He's unable and he's unwilling. We need the grace of the Holy Spirit to see these things.

What's happened to this man? He's been born again. He has been born again. Can I tell you this, saints? Your testimony, even though you may not be able to point to the hour or the day, is exactly the same. At one time, you were loving sin

and minimizing sin and justifying sin, and blind to the offense of sin against a holy God. And then one day, the sin you once loved, you now detest. The God you once blasphemed, by word and life, you now are being drawn to and loving. When God gives spiritual life, beloved, He draws us to Himself through His Son Jesus Christ. We are awakened by the Spirit, given eyes to see our sin and our need for Jesus and His sufficiency.

And that's exactly what we see here. This thief now turns to Jesus in faith. Look at v. 42. "And he said, 'Jesus, remember me, when You come into Your Kingdom.'" What is he saying? He acknowledges the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to Who? To Jesus. It's Your Kingdom. Not only that. What is he saying? He's believing that Jesus is able and willing to remember him. Now, he just admitted his guilt. And he didn't minimize it. I'm worthy of death. And he turns to Jesus and he says, "Remember me." He has faith. He's believing a guilty sinner like me can still enter through Him. This is what we call faith. Turning to Jesus for forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Faith to Repent and Believe

It is very important not just to argue over doctrine but for the glory of God to note the order of events. That's important here. The thief did not believe - put his faith in Jesus - and then come alive spiritually speaking. Rather, he was made alive by the grace of God through the Holy Spirit, and granted faith, and then he believed. You say, well, if the Holy Spirit makes us alive, am I to sit and wait then for this life to be given? And the Scriptures speak one command to the unbelieving person. The Bible never tells you to ask to be born again. Did you know that? It says that you must be born again. But it never says ask to be born again.

The Scriptures give you one command. Repent and believe. Repent and believe. You say, well, how will I know if I'm alive? Have you seen your sin? Not the full extent, but have been made aware of it. And have you seen Jesus as able and willing and sufficient to save? If the answer is yes, then come in faith and receive forgiveness of sin. Jesus didn't respond to the first thief, did He? What about the second one? Look at v. 43. Quite possibly the most hope giving verse in all of the Bible for guilty sinners like you and I were or are. "Jesus said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today, you will be with Me in paradise.'" The audacity of such a statement. This isn't fair is it? He's lived his whole life down to his last dying breath in complete and utter rejection of God. He's one of the worst of the worst. How can Jesus turn to this guilty, hell-deserving sinner, who lived his whole life in sin and say, "Today, you will be with me in paradise?" One word: Grace. Grace. Grace. This man's faith demonstrated in looking to Jesus and saying, "Remember me when You enter Your kingdom," has been counted unto this man as righteousness. The moment someone puts their faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, they are

justified. Declared righteous. Paul says in Romans 4:5 that God justifies the ungodly.

Let me ask you this. This thief, next to Jesus on the cross, in and of himself, is he ungodly? You better believe it. He is ungodly. He has done nothing. The only contribution he is bringing to the table with Jesus is sin. That's it. Christ through His death, burial, and resurrection, which He is going to accomplish, and He is so assured of it, that He can say to this man, "Today, you'll be with Me in paradise." And this man receives the freeness of the Gospel through faith and hears the sweetest words, Today, you - the ungodly - will be with Me - the godly, the Holy One - in paradise.

And it's right. Why? Because what happens in faith is what we call double imputation. The guilt and sin of the sinner, the thief, is accredited to Jesus' account. He suffers and dies and atones for that. But there's another imputation. It is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The fulfillment of keeping God's Law is then accredited back to the thief's account. He had a negative and that is wiped out through the blood of Jesus Christ. But he goes to perfect positive through the imputation of Christ's righteousness to him. Therefore, God and Jesus here can look at who is alone to himself ungodly, and through the receiving of this double imputation through faith, he can look at him and say, "You will be with Me." Why? Because he is declared righteous by God through an alien righteousness not his own. It's the righteousness of Christ.

God's Lavish Grace

And beloved, this and this alone is the hope that we have. Here's the beauty of the Gospel. Are you ready? We feel like, as my brother preached, at times we make contributions to our salvation. It's wrong, but we feel like that. We talked about the good day. I had a good day. Surely, God accepts me more today. I had a bad day. Surely God can't accept me like He would on my good day. What have you done in that moment? You've moved your works into the equation of justification. Do you see the error there? The error in our thinking. And my brother's right. If we do that, you'll never have peace of assurance. The arrogance that we think on our good day, that we somehow appease the righteousness of God. Do you realize this?

On the greatest day you've ever had in the living out of your Christlikeness, you've fallen miserably short. You're under unfathomable grace on that day. What's the basis of God's acceptance of you? It's the same basis of God's acceptance of this thief. The shed blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. How much does God accept one who has received the forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ? Kind of accepted? Contractually - oh, I didn't see that

paragraph - accepted? I guess I'll take you? No. Declared righteous. Perfected. Accepted.

Do you realize this? You cannot improve on God's acceptance of you in justification. You can't improve on it. And you can't take away from it. Do you know why? It was never based on your performance in the first place. It's based on the performance of Another. Do you know how freeing that is? Do you know how liberating that is? To know that my righteousness is not my own. Now, the fear that many people have - Don mentioned it; we talked about it yesterday with the sister - if the Gospel is really this free and if my justification has nothing to do with my works, won't people continue in sin that grace may abound then? Yes, unless they're born again. The failure to realize that under the umbrella of salvation comes the justification through the atoning death of Jesus Christ, but in there also comes regeneration. The transformation, the re-creating, the making of a new person whose heart's been changed, and no longer loves sin, but is still tempted by it, but loves Jesus Christ. And can't continue in sin because they've been born of God. Don't ever be afraid to speak and proclaim and herald and shout the freeness of justification through faith in Jesus Christ. If out of fear that they'll take it and run with it in sin, you will taint the Gospel. We feel like maybe we've got to add something to that works thing or they're going to be running out sinning. No. You don't.

Your job is not to change that Gospel. Your job is like a waiter, to take it and deliver it without spilling it. That's your job. And when the Holy Spirit comes, like we see with this thief on the cross, and changes hearts, and awakens them to sin, and grants them faith, and they receive it, and they are declared righteous, but they've been changed, and now they live to glorify the One Who has made them righteous, not to earn favor. Big difference. Big difference. We are saved wholly of grace.

Some Final Exhortations

Let me end with about three or four exhortations now. Although you may not remember the hour or the day that you repented and believed, you need to know it is because God caused you to be born again. You say why is that important? Because I listen to so many people give their testimony, and it's not wrong to mention your circumstances in your testimony. God does save us in very difficult circumstances often. But never give glory to your circumstances. Give glory where glory is due. You may have lost your job, you may have lost your wife, your husband, your kids, your whatever, you may have been laying in a gutter, OK. But that has never changed anyone's heart. It is the grace of God through the Holy Spirit in that situation that awakens you to your sin and your need for a Savior and

the sufficiency of Jesus. So be careful in your testimony. Speak of circumstance. Amen. But give glory to God for His regenerating work in your heart.

Some of us have fallen into unbelief. Maybe regarding yourself or an unsaved family member or friend. Just the other day I was praying with my wife and I confessed to the Lord that I had stopped praying for one of my unsaved family members. It almost felt like he had gone too far beyond the grace of God. And I was reminded the grace of God runs deeper than any of our sins. And I began to pray in faith for God to save him, like He did this last-breath thief on the cross. Don't stop praying for unsaved family members. And maybe you think you've gone so far that God couldn't save you, but what a testimony we have of the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

A Warning

A warning: Although God did save the thief at the moment of his death, literally, his dying breaths, this is the only account in Scripture that we have of what we might call a deathbed conversion. To presume I'll get right with God one day, is wrong. Because what the Bible warns you about is the callousness of sin and hardening of the heart. To say, just like the thief, I'll wait till I've lived out my life of sin in this world, and then I'll turn to God right before I die, just like the thief will. And I would warn you and say to you, do not presume, because we have one example in Scripture. That's hope giving when you're sitting next to a loved one who has rejected God all their life, and you can turn here and say repent and believe and you shall be saved. But to presume upon this is the wrong understanding of this text.

Finally, and my brother preached on this, so I'll try not to. He did a much better job on this. I, too, see so many Christians wandering around without assurance and one of the greatest evidences is this: They have no joy in their life. What they've done is they've tied their joy to their performance, rather than to Jesus. And because the greatest day we'll ever have falls short and is need of grace, they lack joy daily because they see their sin and see how short they fall, even as a born again Christian. Beloved, our joy should be tied to the resurrected Savior Who sits at the right hand of the Father as our Advocate. That is my source of joy. You say, again, won't that make me then not worry about growing in holiness? No. Because as you are seeing the love of God in Christ towards you daily, again and again, you are constrained to stop living for yourself and to live for Him. A revelation of the Gospel produces holiness. Grace, Titus tells us, produces holiness bringing salvation and teaching them to renounce ungodliness. What drives that in people? Grace. Our joy is tied to Christ's finished work. Not our performance.

Let's pray. Father, in the name of Jesus, and for the glory of Jesus and the joy of Your people, and God, for the salvation maybe of some, would You work through the truth of Jesus Christ and the hope we see that it's all of grace. Accomplish Your purposes in each of our hearts. We ask and pray in the name of Christ, Amen.