

The Other Thief on a Cross

By Kent Heaton

When the Romans crucified Jesus, they compounded His shame by crucifying the Lord between two criminals. They were probably the same class of robber as Barabbas (Matt. 27:16-26; Mark 15:7-15; Luke 23:18; John 18:40). Matthew writes that as the people blasphemed the dying Savior the two “robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing” (Matt. 27:44). The humiliation Jesus suffered in the manner of His death was orchestrated to bring about the greatest shame. The whole world was screaming at Him and reviling Him. Then the Lord spoke through broken and parched lips, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

The words of Jesus struck a chord in one of the robbers; but it did not help the heart of the other robber who shouted to Christ, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us” (Luke 23:39). The tone of the robber was one of blasphemy and while he pled for Christ to save Himself and the other thief, he really only had concern about himself. There was no faith in the miracle of Jesus from this criminal. Until his dying breath the man would hold hatred close and spew only words of loathing towards Jesus.

Roman law had placed the two robbers at Golgotha for good cause. The other thief acknowledged that while Jesus had done nothing to deserve what He bore; his companion and he well deserved everything they were getting. He replied, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:40-41). The boast of the braggart criminal was proudly shouted for all to hear but the penitent thief knew he was in the presence of the Christ. Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:42-43). One thief went to Paradise and one thief went to a place of torment.

In Luke 16 Jesus tells the story of Lazarus and the rich man who both died but found themselves in very different circumstances. We can read the story of the two thieves in a similar manner: “And being in torments in Hades, [the boastful thief] lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off and [the penitent thief] in his bosom” (Luke 16:23). The robber who blasphemed the Lord saw Jesus die but his own death would not come about until the soldiers broke his legs (John 19:32). The Lord would not hear his scream on earth but would shortly hear his cry for mercy after death. As the wicked thief passed to torment he realized the one who was crucified with him was the only hope he had. The penitent thief would be carried by angels to the bosom of Abraham. Was there a similar conversation between the tormented criminal and the Lord in Hades? We are left to wonder.

The two thieves represent the nature of man. Some men see Jesus for who He is and understand that eternal life can only come from asking for mercy – “remember me.” Most people are filled with indignation and die with blasphemy on their lips in rejecting the only hope given to man. They live for themselves and die for themselves. In death the crucified Jesus will no longer be a Savior but the risen Judge. “He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). The thief was surprised when he awoke in torment. Will you be surprised?

Yield Right of Way

“...Submitting to one another in the fear of God.” (Eph. 5:21) “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” (1 Pet. 5:5)

Driving down a country road, I came to a very narrow bridge. In front of the bridge, a sign was posted: "Yield." Seeing no oncoming cars, I continued across the bridge and to my destination. On my way back, I came to the same one-lane bridge, now from the other direction. To my surprise, I saw another "Yield" sign posted. Curious, I thought. I'm sure there was one positioned on the other side. When I reached the other side of the bridge, I looked back. Sure enough, yield signs had been placed at both ends of the bridge. Drivers from both directions were requested to give the other the right-of-way. It was a reasonable and gracious way of preventing a head-on collision.

When the Bible commands Christians to "be subject to one another" (Eph. 5:21), it is simply a reasonable and gracious command to let the other have the right-of-way and avoid interpersonal head-on collisions. (From Stephen P. Beck)

Taste Berry

"...Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Eph. 5:20)

In Africa there is a fruit called the "taste berry." It is so called because it changes a person's taste so that everything eaten tastes sweet and pleasant. Sour fruit, even if eaten several hours after the taste berry, becomes sweet and delicious.

Gratitude is the "taste berry" of Christianity. When our hearts are filled with gratitude, nothing that God sends seems unpleasant to us. Sorrowing heart, sweeten your grief with gratitude. Burdened soul, lighten your burden by singing God's praises. Disappointed one, dispel your loneliness by making others grateful. Sick one, grow strong in your soul, thanking God that He loves you enough to chasten you.

Keep the "taste berry" of gratitude in your hearts, and it will do for you what the taste berry of Africa does for one's taste. (From Bible Illustrator)

A Moments Wisdom

- He who holds the ladder is as bad as the thief on it.
- If you wish your merit to be known, acknowledge the merits of other people.
- He who sacrifices his conscience to his ambition, burns a painting to obtain the ashes.
- From our ancestors comes our name, but from our virtues comes our honor.
- It is easier to swallow angry words before speaking them, than to have to eat them afterwards.
- Whoever fears to submit any question to the test of free discussion, loves his own opinion more than the truth
- When a dove begins to associate with crows, its feathers remain white, but its heart grows black.
- Beauty, unaccompanied by virtue, is a flower without perfume.
- A bad workman blames his tools and materials.
- He who boasts of his knowledge advertises his ignorance.
- A book that is shut is a block.
- To a quick question, give a slow answer.
- Look before you leap, for snakes among sweet flowers often creep.