

FATHER, FORGIVE THEM

By John Greene

SCRIPTURE

Luke 23:35-46

[35] And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." [36] The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, [37] and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" [38] Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." [39] One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" [40] But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? [41] And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." [42] And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" [43] And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." [44] It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, [45] because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. [46] And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." Having said this, He breathed His last.

OBSERVATION

Verses 1-23: Dr. Luke gives his account of the events surrounding our Lord's Cross.

Verses 24-33: Christ has embraced the hateful words of His own chosen people, the mockery of so-called trials before the High Priest, Herod and now Pilate, the cruel beating from Pilate that tore His back to shreds, and finally the rejection of His people calling for His crucifixion. In all He has endured to this point, His words have been all but nil, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 53:7— *"As a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."* Christ has taken all that has come to Him as from His Father. He has fulfilled the prophecy of His own words to the Father in eternity past when the plan of redemption was laid out: Hebrews 10:7— *"Then I said, Behold, here I am, coming to do Your will, O God, to fulfill what is written of Me in the volume of the Book."*

Verses 34-38: Our Lord is on His cross in excruciating pain. He's been beaten unmercifully till His back is in shreds; a cruel crown of thorns punctures His scalp; He's dehydrated from blood and fluid loss; His hands (really wrists) and feet are impaled with spikes to affix His body to a rough wooden cross. He hangs maybe three feet from the ground, naked, directly in front of a merciless, mocking crowd.

Everything to raise up anger, resentment and hatred has been hurled at Him from the very type of people He is dying to save from a burning eternal hell. Yet in the midst of this hatred and rejection there is only one prayer coming from the lips of Christ, and the tense of the verb is present tense meaning Jesus keeps praying this over and over again: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Verses 39-43: Hanging beside Christ are two thieves. In our account “one of the thieves” hurls abuse at Christ, mocking Him and His claim of Godhood. Though he is in terrible pain, yet he joins in the blasphemy. But that’s not the full story. Matthew and Mark tell us in their parallel accounts of the cross that BOTH thieves were doing that. Both of them. For an unspecified time both thieves, though in unimaginable pain and suffering, are overwhelmed by Lucifer to fall in with the crowd, but in Luke’s account at some point one of the thieves falls silent.

At a certain point, as his friend continues to hurl abuse on Christ, the thief who had fallen silent suddenly changes his attitude and rebukes his friend for doing what he himself had been doing. In the midst of intense agony and unimaginable pain, a totally degenerate man, a thief of huge proportions enough to warrant the death penalty, has a life-changing event in his soul...and he makes a 180 in his attitude toward Jesus.

OBEDIENCE

Have you considered that activity of God in your life during these days of the coronavirus? Maybe you’ve wondered where God is with this craziness all around you. Maybe you’ve wondered if God loves you enough to save you from the virus, by keeping you healthy. Does God love you enough to provide for you and your family in the midst of financial disaster experienced by so many?

If I may, I want to turn our eyes back to the thief on the cross next to Christ who at first hurled insults on Christ but then abruptly stopped, and then in the midst of his physical pain called out to Christ to save him and give him a home in heaven. First of all understand this: the salvation of that singular thief whose heart was as hard as a rock one minute and cursing the Son of God, was suddenly soft and broken over his sinful, wicked life, to the point that he cried out to Christ before the cursing crowd: “*Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!*” In other words, “*Save me! When I die, I ask You that I might open my eyes in heaven with my Creator and with You, God’s Son.*” And Luke 23:43 says, “*And Jesus answered him, Truly I tell you, TODAY you shall be with Me in Paradise.*”

What happened between verse 39 and verse 40? I’ll tell you: a divine sovereign miracle happened. The next thing similar to this type of event in scripture is Paul on the Damascus Road. Paul hated Jesus and all who followed Him and believed Him to be God’s Savior. Paul had papers authorizing him to arrest and jail and even execute those who followed Christ. But while on his way to Damascus with papers in his hand, God invades his life, slams him to the dirt, blinds him and saves him. That’s how salvation

works, beloved. Salvation is a miracle of God, initiated by God. It's not always as dramatic as Paul's conversion, but sometimes it is still today. Here's how Paul described his salvation in 1 Timothy 1:13, *"Though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and was shamefully and outrageously and aggressively insulting to Christ, nevertheless, I obtained MERCY."*

In these days of uncertainty and fear and worry, when doubt seeks to take you over, remember, if you've been saved, God has shown you mercy by coming after you and saving you, and He has not forgotten you or where you are in these days. Just as He has taken care of you till today, He will be faithful to watch over you and keep you till He brings you home to heaven. Be still and see the salvation of the Lord in your life.

PRAYER

Ask God to keep you and guide you and provide for you, because just like the thief He saved, He has shown you He loves you and He cares.