A Word of Salvation

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Date: 14 May 2023

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0:00] But if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the Gospel according to Luke, Luke chapter 23, page 1065.

Luke chapter 23, and we're going to read again in verse 42. Luke 23 at verse 42.
And he, that is, the thief on the cross, he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Jesus said to him, Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.
Today you will be with me in paradise. As you know, all of our Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, they all exhort us and encourage us in their Gospel to come to the place which is called Calvary.
Come to the place which is called Calvary. Calvary, of course, is where Jesus was crucified outside the ancient city of Jerusalem. Calvary is its Latin name.
[1:21] Golgotha was its Greek name. And both names, Calvary and Golgotha, they both mean the place of the skull. That's what we read there in verse 33.

They came to the place that is called the skull. That was the crucifixion site. And it was called the place of the skull because it was a skull-shaped hill.
But all of our Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, they all exhort us to come to this place called Calvary. Because it's at Calvary that we find three wooden crosses.
And it's at Calvary that we hear this conversation taking place between these three wooden crosses. And this morning I'd like us to consider this conversation.
The conversation between three wooden crosses at Calvary. Because as you know, last Lord's Day we began a seven-part series on the seven sayings or the seven words of Jesus on the cross at Calvary.
[2:21] And we call these seven words the seven crosswords. Seven crosswords from Calvary. Seven crosswords from Calvary.

As I said, my father-in-law enjoys crosswords. And you might enjoy a crossword now and again. But these seven crosswords from Calvary, they're not a puzzle.
They are a picture. They are a picture which presents and portrays to us the glory of the Gospel in the person of Jesus Christ. And last week we considered the first crossword from Calvary, which we read there in verse 34.
It was a word of forgiveness where Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And this morning we're considering the second crossword from Calvary, from verse 43.
It's a word of salvation where Jesus said to the thief on the cross, Today you will be with me in paradise. But you know, in order to appreciate this crossword from Calvary, we need to consider the conversation.
[3:27] We need to listen in to this conversation between the three crosses at Calvary. Because this conversation was between the cross of the sinner, and I've left these things up to help us.

The cross of the sinner, and the cross of the saint, and the cross of the savior. The cross of the sinner, the cross of the saint, and the cross of the savior.
So first of all, we look at the cross of the sinner. The cross of the sinner. Look at verse 39. We're told that one of the criminals who were hanged railed at Jesus saying, Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us. Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us. Now, I don't know about you, but whenever I consider these three wooden crosses at Calvary, I always have in my mind that the cross of the sinner was to the left-hand side of Jesus, and that the cross of the saint was to the right-hand side of Jesus.

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And rightly or wrongly, I think that, because when Jesus said in Matthew chapter 25 that he would separate the sheep from the goats on the day of judgment, he said that he would place his sheep to his right hand, but the goats to his left hand.
[4:52] And, you know, in many ways in my mind, I think, well, it was the man on his left who initiated this conversation between the three crosses at Calvary, where the cross of the sinner, he hurls a hateful word of blasphemy towards the man in the middle, the man on the middle cross, the cross of the Savior.

And the cross of the sinner, he says to Jesus, if you are the Christ, save yourself and us. If you are the Christ, save yourself and us.
But, you know, when you actually consider the context to these three wooden crosses at Calvary, you know, it's hard to believe what you're hearing from this conversation, let alone this cross, because these three men, they're hanging by a thread.
They are hanging over the threshold of eternity, the great eternity that is before them. They're nailed to a Roman cross, and there's no way back.
There's no way out. There's no way of escape. This is their last day on earth. They're not promised tomorrow. There was a time for them all to be born.
[6:02] But this day was their time to die. And you know, what a way to die. To die by the cruel death of crucifixion. And that's the thing about crucifixion.

The Romans invented crucifixion and implemented crucifixion as the most painful form of capital punishment, where they sought to prolong the agony and prolong the anguish of death for their victims.
Those who died by crucifixion were said to die a thousand deaths. But for this cross, the cross of the sinner, it was a sad ending.
Because even with the painful reality and finality of death, there was still no remorse. There was still no repentance. There was no care, and there was no concern for his soul.
Instead, we see that with his dying breath, the cross of the sinner curses Jesus all the way to the grave. If you are the Christ, save yourself and us.
[7:10] And you know, on the surface, it may seem like a very selfless statement. If you are the Christ, save yourself and us. But when you dig deeper, you see there was actually a very selfish selfish and a very shallow statement.

Because the cross of the sinner, he didn't really believe that Jesus could save him or those crucified around him. He didn't believe that Jesus was the Savior at all.
And that's because he had hardened his heart, but he was also a people pleaser. The cross of the sinner was someone who listened to the crowd and lived for the approval of the crowd.
And I say that because when you look and when you listen and when you learn what others said against Jesus, you realize that the cross of the sinner, he just copied the crowd. The crowd at Calvary, he just copied them.
We read there in verse 35 that the Jewish rulers, they're scoffing at the Savior, they're scoffing at the man in the middle, and they're saying, he saved others. Let him save himself if he is the Christ, the chosen of God.
[8:18] And then in verse 36, the Roman soldiers, they step forward to mock the Messiah. And they're saying, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself. And now having listened to the crowd, the crowd at Calvary, and having learned from the crowd at Calvary, the cross of the sinner now launches his attack on the man on the middle cross.

And he says, if you are the Christ, save yourself and us. If you are the Christ, save yourself and us.
And you know, I always go back to this, that the man here, the cross of the sinner, he listened to the crowd.
And he lived for the approval of the crowd. And with his dying breath, he was led by the crowd into hell.
With his dying breath, he was led by the crowd into hell. As you all know, and as parents, we all teach our children that it's a dangerous thing to fall in with the wrong crowd.
And that it's a dangerous thing to follow the crowd. Because it's a dangerous thing to live for the approval of the crowd. It's a dangerous thing to love the applause of the crowd.
[9:38] It's a dangerous thing to listen to the advice of the crowd. Because the crowd will tell you not what you want, not what you need to hear, but what you want to hear.

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The crowd will tell you that life, well, life is just about being a good person with good values and good morals. The crowd will tell you that it's all about loving life and living for the moment and looking after number one.
The crowd will tell you that, well, there's nothing after death. No one goes to hell. Everybody goes to heaven. Everybody becomes a shining star. In the sky.
And yet you look at this cross. And you have to say that this cross is the saddest sinner in the Bible. He's the saddest sinner in the Bible because he was so close to Jesus.
Only feet from Jesus. Only feet from the cross of Jesus. And yet so far from him. Only feet from Jesus and yet so far from him.
[10:45] And you know, I look at some of you this morning and like many of you, he was so close and yet so far. So close and yet so far.

And you know, this man, he reminds me of ignorance. Do you remember ignorance in John Bunyan's classic book, The Pilgrim's Progress?
Ignorance was led all the way to the gate of heaven. He even managed to cross the final river and he was led to the gate of heaven by a man called Vain Hope.
But ignorance, we're told, he didn't get into heaven because he never trusted in the king. He rejected the king. And ignorance, ignorance was then pointed in a different direction.
And John Bunyan writes in his book, The Pilgrim's Progress, then I saw that there was a way to hell even from the gate of heaven.
[11:47] Then I saw that there was a way to hell even from the gate of heaven. And you know, that's what it was like for this man, the cross of the sinner. He was so close to Jesus and yet so far from him.

There was a way to hell even from the gate of heaven. And my friend, I want to say to you this morning, as I've said to you many times before, you make sure or you make sure that you're not like this man.
you make sure that you're not living for the approval of the crowd. You make sure that you're not loving the applause of the crowd. You make sure that you're not listening to the advice of the crowd. You make sure that you're not being led by the lies of the crowd to a lost eternity in hell. And you know me by now. You know that I would never speak to you about hell angrily, but lovingly. Reminding you that there is a heaven to be gained and a hell to be shunned. And you know, I always think of this man and I think, well, ask him.
[13:01] Ask him the question, where is hell? Where is hell? Hell, my friend, is at the end of a Christless life. That's where hell is.

Hell is at the end of a Christless life. But that's why we preach the gospel. That's why we present to people good news. That's why we remind people about the cross in the middle and the man on the middle cross because there is a heaven to be gained and a hell to be shunned.
So we see the cross of the sinner, but then we turn to Jesus as right and we see the cross of the saint. The cross of the saint is the cross of the saint. Look at verse 39 again.
We read that one of the criminals who were hanged reeled 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.
[14:13] Now some of you will remember last year, probably around, I think it was August time last year, I purchased for you and I promoted to you a book called Heaven, How I Got Here.

Heaven, How I Got Here. It's a book by Colin Smith. He used all the gospel narratives to form this perspective of the cross of the saint. Where the thief on the cross, in the book, he retells the story as a saint now in heaven.
And he tells the story of how a crucified criminal at Calvary received a crown in heaven. Heaven, How I Got Here. It's a brilliant book. I highly recommend you read it and reread it.
And if you've never read it, you can pick up a copy at the door, free to take home. Read it. Read it and reread it. Because it's an easy read. That's why I like it so much.
But it's a book that exhorts you and encourages you to be like this man. To be like the cross of the saint who turns to Jesus for salvation.

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[15:20] Because, you know, it's Jesus who transformed the cross of the sinner into the cross of the saint. And the first evidence of his transformation was when the cross of the saint, he rebukes, not Jesus, but the cross of the sinner.

The cross of the saint rebukes the cross of the sinner. And he rebukes him for his blasphemy. And he says, as we read there, verse 39 and 40, Do you not fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?
Do you not care that you're about to die? Do you not care, do you not realize that you're just about to meet your maker and stand before God? Do you not realize that you're about to stand before the judgment of God?
Do you not fear God, he says, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And you know, what's obvious is that the cross of the saint, he didn't care what the crowd thought.
He wasn't listening to the crowd. He wasn't loving the applause of the crowd. He wasn't living for the approval of the crowd. He wasn't even being led by the crowd and what the crowd had to say. No, like it is for many people, the prospect of death made this man realize the importance of salvation.
[16:38] The prospect of death made him think about eternity. Because now, at the end of his life, this man is thinking, I've wasted my life.

I've wasted my life trying to live up to people's expectations. I've wasted my life worrying about what other people have to say about me. But now, as Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, that worry could not add to him one hour of his life.
The cross of the saint, you know, he knows he's a sinner. Ironically, the cross of the sinner didn't think he was a sinner at all. But the cross of the saint, he knows that he's a sinner.
He knows he's a hell-deserving sinner and he acknowledges before Jesus that he's a hell-deserving sinner receiving the due punishment he deserves. He knows that he deserves torture in this life and torment in the next.
What's more is that he knows that the man on the middle cross is innocent. He confesses, we are receiving the due reward of our deeds.
[17:51] But this man, this man has done nothing wrong. This man has done nothing amiss. And you know, I'm sure that the cross of the saint, he had heard all about this man on the middle cross.

Because everyone had heard about Jesus of Nazareth. Everyone had heard about the miracle worker from Galilee who went around cleansing lepers and healing the sick and raising the dead. Everyone had heard even about the false accusations and the false allegations made against the man on the middle cross. But you know, the cross of this saint here, he would have also heard for himself that this man was the most loving man that ever lived.
He had been hanging beside Jesus for a number of hours. And he had heard Jesus praying, praying for his enemies. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.
And this man here on this cross, he's thinking, I need forgiveness. I need forgiveness. He'd heard about Jesus and he'd heard about the forgiveness of Jesus.
[19:09] Just like you've heard about Jesus and you've heard about the forgiveness of Jesus. Because whether you were brought up in a Christian home or going to church and Sunday school or not even at all, you've heard about this Galilean miracle worker and his messages.

You've heard about the man on the middle cross and his preaching and his parables. You've heard about his cross and you've heard about his crown. You've heard about this Jesus and you know that despite 2,000 years of church history, people are still following him today.
And you have to wonder why. Why are they following the man on the middle cross? Because he's faithful and he's forgiving.
That's why we follow him. He's faithful and he's forgiving. And that's what this man discovered. He hung only feet from this faithful and forgiving Savior and he couldn't stay silent.
He discovered that he was able to forgive his sins. And he thinks, I need to speak to him. I need to talk to him. I need to ask him for forgiveness. But he doesn't know what to say.
[20:24] How do I speak to this man on the middle cross? What do I say to him? So all he says, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And you know, my friend, that's what made this man from a sinner to a saint. They're words that changed his life and gave him the gift of eternal life.

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They're words that transformed his punishment into paradise. And all he did was ask. All he did was ask.
Because that was the promise of the man on the middle cross. Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you shall find. knock and the door will be opened to you.
And you know, my unconverted friend here or at home this morning, the cross of the saint, he gives you a prayer. A prayer that you can copy and claim and confess for yourself.
[21:27] And notice it wasn't an eloquent prayer. Notice it wasn't an extensive prayer. But it was an earnest prayer. It was an earnest prayer where he came to Jesus empty and earnestly asking, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

And you know, that's all that's required. That you come to the man on the middle cross, not with your eloquence, not with your extended prayers, but you come to him in your emptiness.
That you come to him with empty hands and you come to him with earnestness of heart, saying three words, the three words we taught to the children.
Jesus, remember me. Jesus, remember me. Jesus, remember me. And Jesus says, today, you will be with me in paradise.
And so we've considered this conversation the cross of the sinner, the cross of the saint. And then we come lastly to the man in the middle. The man on the middle is the cross of the Savior.
[22:45] The cross of the Savior. Verse 43, Jesus said to him, truly, I say to you, today, you will be with me in paradise.

Do you know, I'm sure that the thief on the cross, when he finally plucked up the courage to ask for forgiveness, and he turned to Jesus in his emptiness and his earnestness and said, Jesus, remember me.
I'm sure when he finished those words, he wondered, how is Jesus going to react? How is Jesus going to respond to my request? Maybe he thought, like many of you think, I'm not good enough. I've done wrong. I'm a blasphemer. I'm a sinner. I'm not good enough. Or maybe this man thought, like many of you think, I don't know enough.
Now this man probably never read the Bible, never went to Sunday school, didn't have Christian parents, didn't attend church. I don't know enough.
[23:53] But maybe he thought, like many of you think, I haven't done enough. I haven't attended church enough in my life to be saved.

I've never been baptized. I've never sat at the Lord's table. I've never done enough. But you know, as we said before, it's not about being good enough.
It's not about knowing enough. It's not about doing enough. It's not about being worthy enough because none of us, none of us, none of us will ever be good enough or know enough or do enough or worthy enough.
That's why Christianity is all about appreciating the man in the middle. It's all about accepting the man in the middle. And it's all about asking the man in the middle to save you.
Christianity is all about appreciating Jesus and accepting Jesus and asking Jesus to save you. And when this man came to Jesus in his emptiness and his earnestness, how does Jesus react?
[25:05] How does Jesus respond? Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. the most precious words that that man had ever heard in his life.

Truly, assuredly, verily, I say to you, man who is going to die today, today you will be with me in paradise.
Today you will walk with me in the garden. Today your hell will be changed to heaven. Today you will be with me in paradise. You know, what a promise.
What a promise that on the threshold of eternity, the eleventh hour of his life, with his dying breath and his last opportunity, this man turns to Jesus to ask for forgiveness.
And that's all he did. All he did was ask. And my friend, that's all you need to do. You may wonder how Jesus will react. You may wonder how Jesus will respond when you come to him in your emptiness and your earnestness of heart, seeking forgiveness.
[26:16] But you know, this conversation between these three wooden crosses, it ought to remind you and reassure to each and every one of you, you are not beyond hope.

You are not beyond redemption. You are not beyond the pale. You are not too late. And you're not too far gone.

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I've heard so many people say all these statements to me. I'm beyond redemption. I'm beyond the pale. I'm too far gone. I'm too late. But you know, like it was for this man, the hope of the gospel will be held out to you until your dying breath.
because the eleventh hour is still an hour of opportunity. The eleventh hour is still an hour of opportunity.
But I'm sure I've said this to you before. The Bible is very clear. Deathbed conversions don't happen often. In fact, deathbed conversions are very rare. There's only one deathbed conversion in the Bible.
[27:22] And it wasn't on a deathbed. It was here on a Roman cross. My good friend J.C. Ryle always has a good word to say.

He said, Few are ever saved on their deathbeds. One thief on the cross was saved that none should despair but only one that none should presume.
One thief on the cross was saved that none should despair but only one that none should presume. My friend, deathbed conversions are rare so don't presume that you'll have one.
Far better for you to come to Christ now than wait until your deathbed. Far better for you to come to Christ today than to stall it until the eleventh hour of your life.
Far better for you to come to the man on the middle cross seeking and asking for salvation before death will leave you and judgment will find you and eternity will hold you.
[28:31] Far better for you to come to this man now today because as the Bible says so clearly now is the accepted time.

Today is the day of salvation. salvation. Now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation.
And so as we leave this conversation between the three crosses at Calvary we see very simply that the cross of the Savior he is the one who makes all the difference between the cross of the sinner and the cross of the saint.
And that's because as you know the cross of the Savior he is the difference between eternal life and eternal death. The cross of the Savior is the difference between being saved and being lost.
The cross of the Savior is the difference between an eternity in heaven and an eternity in hell. You know my unconverted friend the cross of the Savior he makes all the difference.
He makes all the difference. As I've asked you before what difference is the cross of the Savior making in your life?
[29:57] What difference is the cross of the Savior making in your life? Because when you come to this Jesus and say to him as this man said Jesus remember me he will respond to you with that promise of eternal life.

Today you will be with me in paradise. Well may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Now let us pray. O Lord our gracious God we give thanks to thee for Calvary for bringing us back to the foot of the cross and realizing that there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved other than the name of the man on the middle cross the name of Jesus.
Help us to come to him. Help us to ask for forgiveness. Help us to keep coming to him realizing that without him we can do nothing but that with him all things are possible.
Bless us Lord we pray that thy seed the seed of God's word would find root in people's hearts today that they would be like the man on the cross of the saint turning to Jesus for salvation.
Lord do us good we pray go before us and keep us for we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake Amen. Well we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning we're going to sing the words of Psalm 16 Psalm 16 it's in the Sing Psalms version on page 17 Psalm 16 Psalm 16 we're singing from verse 8 down to the end of the psalm Psalm 16 page 17 in the blue psalm book and we sang earlier from Psalm 22 which is the psalm of the cross and Psalm 16 is the psalm of the empty tomb it speaks very clearly about the empty tomb the resurrection of Jesus and the promise of eternal life and in many ways when you look at the the last verse this is what the thief on the cross was promised by Jesus he was promised you have made known to me the path of life divine bliss shall I know at your right hand joy from your face will shine so we're singing
[32:44] Psalm 16 from verse 8 down to the end of the psalm and we'll stand to sing if you're able to God's praise before me constantly I set the Lord alone because he is at my right hand I'll not be overthrown therefore my heart is glad my tongue with joy will sing my body too will rest secure in hope in hope unwavering for you will not allow my soul in death to stay nor will you leave your holy to see the tombs decay you have made known to me the path of life divine this shall

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I know what your right hand joy from your faith will shine the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen Jeez

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