

Three Wooden Crosses

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

Luke chapter 23, and we're reading again at verse 42. And boys and girls, you have your answer already.

And he said, that is the thief on the cross, he said, he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

And he said, that is Jesus, Jesus said, Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

Today you will be with me in paradise. As you all know, it's good to read the Bible.

[1 : 05] It's good to read the Bible. It's good to be in the habit of reading the Bible. If you're not in the habit of reading the Bible, I'd encourage you to get into the habit of reading the Bible.

You don't have to read screeds of the Bible, just read a short passage of the Bible. But it's good to be in the habit of reading the Bible. Because the Bible, as you know, it's the Word of God.

The Bible is the only rule to direct us on how we may glorify God and enjoy Him forever. So it's good to read the Bible. But it's also helpful to read good Christian books.

Christian books that exhort us and encourage us and even enable us to love Jesus more deeply and walk with Jesus more closely. But like many people, I'm not a great reader.

I force myself to read. You might find that hard to believe as a minister. But I force myself to read so that I'll grow first and foremost as a Christian. And I want to highlight to you, just as we begin, I want to highlight to you some of the books that I read on holiday.

[2 : 11] And I want to recommend them to you. The first book I want to recommend to you is a book by Tony Merida. It's called Love Your Church. Love Your Church.

And it's all about, it's a book all about being part of a church living within a community. So you can see it's applicable to all of us. It's a brilliant book. And it's so brilliant that, God willing, in September, we're going to begin a study on Sunday evenings based upon the themes that are in this book.

Love Your Church. Another book I read, which it's a small book, it's called Will You Be My Facebook Friend? Will You Be My Facebook Friend?

It's a book by Tim Chester. It's a small, easy-to-read book. That's why I read it. And it highlights all the delights, but also the dangers. The dangers of using social media as a Christian.

So will you be my Facebook friend? But the book I want to recommend to every one of my unconverted friends here and at home this morning is this book by Colin Smith.

[3 : 22] It's a book called Heaven, How I Got Here. Heaven, How I Got Here. And it's a book all about the thief on the cross as he retells the story of his last day in this world.

He tells the story from his own perspective of how a crucified criminal at Calvary received a crown in glory, in the glory of heaven.

Heaven, How I Got Here. And it's a brilliant book. I highly recommend you read it. Again, it's a very, very easy read. That's why I read it. And it will be one that will encourage you.

As someone who is seeking or unconverted or wondering about Christianity, the book will encourage you to be like the thief on the cross and turn to Jesus for salvation.

And you know, my unconverted friend, you don't even have to go out and buy it. I bought it for you. I bought it for you. I thought so highly of this book that I bought each and every one of you a copy of it.

[4 : 29] I loved it so much that I want you to read it. So you have no excuse for not reading it. You can pick up your copy on the way out this morning. So if you class yourself as an unconverted friend, someone who's seeking Jesus, someone who wants to know more about Christianity, and you know who you are, I'm not going to point you out.

I'm not going to hand you the book. But you pick it up. You don't need to tell anybody that you're taking it. You don't need to tell me that you're taking it. You just take it. You just read it.

You just enjoy it. And if you enjoy it, pass it on. Pass it on. Tell somebody else about the thief on the cross. Because that's what I want us to think about this morning.

I want to introduce this book to you this morning, Heaven, How I Got Here. I want to introduce it to you by considering the conversation between these three wooden crosses at Calvary.

Because it was a conversation. A conversation between the cross of the sinner and the cross of the saint. And the middle cross, the cross of the Savior.

[5 : 40] So here we have the cross of the sinner. Here we have the cross of the saint. And here this morning in the middle, we have the cross of the Savior.

So first of all, I want us to go this way. To the cross of the sinner. The cross of the sinner. And we read in verse 39 what the cross of the sinner says.

We're told that one of the criminals who were hanged railed at Jesus saying, Are you not the Christ? Are you not the Christ?

Save yourself and us. Now rightly or wrongly, I always have in my mind that the cross of the sinner is on Jesus' left hand side.

And the cross of the saint, that's what we'll call them this morning. The cross of the saint is on Jesus' right hand side. And I think that because when Jesus said that he would separate the sheep from the goats on the day of judgment, he said that he would place the sheep on his right hand side and the goats on his left hand side.

[6 : 47] And my friend, here this morning is a goat. Here is a goat hanging on the cross of the sinner. Because the conversation between these three wooden crosses, it was all initiated by this man.

And it was initiated by a word of blasphemy from the cross of the sinner, being hurled to the middle cross, the cross of the Savior. And you know, when you listen in to what he's saying, it's hard to believe what he's saying because, well, you look at where they are.

Here are these three wooden crosses. Three men being crucified on Roman crosses. They're hanging over the threshold of eternity.

This is their last day on earth. They're certainly not promised tomorrow. And for each of them, they all know that there was a time to be born. But this was their time to die.

And what a way to die. To die by crucifixion. To die by having your hands and feet nailed to a piece of wood.

[7 : 58] To die not by bleeding to death, but by suffocation. What a way to die. To die by crucifixion. And yet the cross of the sinner, we're told in Scripture that he remained a sinner.

He remained a sinner because he refused to seek salvation from the middle cross. The cross of the Savior. And you know, it was a sad ending for the cross of the sinner.

That even in the face of death, there was no remorse. There was no repentance. There was no care or concern for his soul. Instead, with his dying breath, he blasphemes all the way to the grave.

All the way to the grave. He says, if you are the Christ. If you are the Christ, save yourself. And us. And you know, his statement did not only show the hardness of his heart.

But it also showed that he was a people pleaser. He listened to the crowd. He lived for the approval of men. And I say that because, you know, when we look at what others said about Jesus, the cross of the sinner just copies them.

[9 : 16] He copies exactly what they said. He just followed the crowd that were gathered at Calvary. He followed the crowd because we're told in verse 35 that the people stood by watching.

But the rulers, the Jewish rulers, they scoffed at Jesus saying, he saved others. Let him save himself if he is the Christ, the chosen of God. Then the Roman soldiers, they also step forward.

And they throw in what they have to say. They throw in and say, well, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself. And so then after hearing the Jewish rulers, after hearing the Roman soldiers, after hearing them hurl all their insults at the center cross, the cross of the sinner adds his tuppence worth too.

If you are the Christ, save yourself and us. And you know, my friend, the cross of the sinner, he listened to the crowd. He lived for the approval of others to the point that even with his dying breath, he followed this crowd into hell.

He followed the crowd into hell. And you know, my unconverted friend, I need not remind you, it is a dangerous thing to follow the crowd into hell.

[10 : 36] It's a dangerous thing to live for the approval of other people, to live for the approval of the crowd. It's a dangerous thing to love the applause of the crowd.

It's a dangerous thing to listen to the advice of the crowd, because the crowd will always tell you that it's all okay. Life is just about being a good person.

It's all about loving life and living for the moment and looking after number one. It's all about me. The crowd will tell you that there's nothing after death.

No one really goes to hell. Everyone goes to heaven. Everyone becomes a bright shining star in the sky. My friend, it's a dangerous thing to live for the approval of the crowd, to love the applause of the crowd, to listen to the advice of the crowd, and be led by the crowd into hell.

My friend, you know, when we look at the cross of the sinner, when you look at this cross to the left-hand side of Jesus, we should look at the cross, this cross, and see that it reminds us of one question.

[11 : 52] Where is hell? Where is hell? Because, you know, for the cross of the sinner, hell was at the end of a Christless life.

Hell was at the end of a Christless life. Do you know, my unconverted friend, you make sure that you're not like this man. This isn't news to you.

You've never, it's not that you've never heard me saying this before, but 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 crowd to an eternity in hell. My friend, you make sure that you don't waste one moment longer outside of Christ.

Because where is hell? You ask this man, where is hell? Ask him. Let's ask him. Where is hell, my friend?

[12 : 55] Hell is at the end of a Christless life. That's what he'll tell us. Where is hell? Hell is at the end of a Christless life.

And I'm not ashamed to remind you about that. You know fine that my longing for you all is that you will not be like this man.

That you will not be like the cross of the sinner. But that you will be like the cross of the saint. So let's consider the cross of the saint.

We see him secondly. Look at verse 40. We're told that the cross of the saint, that the other, he 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 you know, although it would only be speculation, the cross of the saint, this man over here, the cross of the saint, he could have been a friend of the cross, of the sinner.

[14 : 02] They could have known one another. They could have even committed crimes together. That's maybe why they were being crucified on the same day. They might even have shared a prison cell in their final moments.

They could have been together in life. But there was one thing sure about them. There was going to be a great separation between them at death.

And that was first evidenced by the fact that the cross of the saint, the cross of the saint, this man here, he rebukes the cross of the sinner. And he rebukes him for his blasphemy. And he says, do you not fear God?

Do you not fear God? Do you not fear God since we are under the same sentence of condemnation? Don't you care you're about to die? Do you not realize that very shortly you're going to meet your maker?

Do you not fear the judgment of God? Do you not fear God since you are under the same condemnation of death? And the cross of the saint, he rebukes the cross of the sinner.

[15 : 06] The cross of the saint, the amazing thing about this man, he's heard everything that the crowd has said, but he's not listening to the advice of the crowd. He's not loving the applause of the crowd.

He's not living for the approval of the crowd. He's not being led by anyone in the crowd. Because the grace of God is now at work in his heart. The grace of God is now at work in his life.

And like it is for many people, it was probably the prospect of death that made him realize the importance of salvation. Because now at the end of his life, on the threshold of eternity, he looks back and he thinks, I've wasted it.

I've wasted my life living up to people's expectations, worrying about what other people think and say about me. Maybe even at one time in his life, this man might have worried about coming out on the side of Christ.

He saw other people coming, I'm sure of it. But you know, now all that worry, as Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, all that worry about other people couldn't add an hour to his life.

[16 : 23] And you know, the thing is, the cross of the saint, he knew that he was a sinner. He knew that he was a sinner. Ironically, the cross of the sinner didn't think he was a sinner at all.

But the cross of the saint, he knew well that he was a hell-deserving sinner. In fact, he acknowledges that he was a hell-deserving sinner because he says to his friend, he says he's receiving what he deserves.

He knows he deserves death. He knows he deserves punishment. In hell for a sin. He knows he deserves torture in this life and torment in the next.

But what's more is that he knows the man on the middle cross is innocent. That's what he says in verse 41.

We are receiving the due reward of our deeds. And justly, he says, but this man has done nothing amiss. This man has done nothing amiss.

[17 : 24] And you know, at this point, the thief on the cross, he doesn't, he doesn't call the man on the middle cross Jesus. He doesn't call him Lord. He just says, this man, this man hath done nothing amiss.

And of course, the cross of the saint, he would have heard all about this man on the middle cross. He would have heard all about him. Everyone had heard about Jesus, the man of Galilee.

They would have heard about the miracle worker and how he cleansed lepers and raised the dead and healed the sick. They would have heard about even the false accusations that were being made against this man on the middle cross.

They may even have heard what Pilate did in washing his hands from Jesus. But you know, he would have also discovered that this man was the most loving man who ever lived.

What kind of man prays for his enemies after being crucified by them? What kind of man says, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?

[18 : 34] What kind of man? Only the God man, the most loving man who ever lived. The man who said, greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

And you know, the cross of the saint, this man here, he would have heard all about the man on the middle cross. Just like you, my unconverted friend. You've heard all about the man on the middle cross.

And you're so similar to him, aren't you? And you know it. Because like this man here, the cross of the saint, like him, you fear God.

Like him, you respect the church. Like him, you read the Bible, or you believe the Bible at least. You enjoy the gospel. You enjoy the company of Christians.

Like him, you know you have a past. We all have a past. Like him, you know that you're a hell-deserving sinner. Like him, you know that Jesus, the man on the middle cross, is a sinless Savior.

[19 : 43] Like him, you know that this Jesus is the most loving man who ever lived, and that he's more than willing to forgive you, and cleanse you, and make you his. He's more than willing to change your punishment into paradise.

But there's a difference here. You're very similar to him, but there's still a difference between you. Because despite knowing who you are, and who Jesus is, despite knowing that you're a sinner, and Jesus is a Savior, you seem to do nothing about it.

Now, I don't know, maybe you've been converted since I was on holiday. Maybe you've committed your life to Jesus. Maybe you've come out on the side of the Lord. I hope that's the case.

But if not, the reality is you're going from week to week, Sunday to Sunday, month to month, year to year. And I'll say it in the same sorry condition.

The same sorry condition. But this dying thief, he gives you a prayer. Doesn't he? He gives you a prayer that you can copy and claim for yourself.

[21 : 06] If you don't know what to say to Jesus, here's a prayer to copy and claim for yourself. Verse 42, he said, boys and girls, what did he say? Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And these words, they are what made this man here.

They're what made him a sinner, from a sinner to a saint. They're words that changed his life and gave him eternal life. But notice, it wasn't an eloquent prayer.

It wasn't an extended prayer. But it was an earnest prayer. An earnest prayer, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Wasn't eloquent, wasn't extended, but it was earnest. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And you know, that's all that's required.

[22 : 11] An earnest prayer is what's required. An earnest plea for mercy is what's required. You go to other parts of the Gospels and we see there the experience of another sinner who became a saint.

And his prayer, although he could see the Pharisee in front of him praying for ages, his prayer wasn't eloquent. His prayer wasn't extended. No, his prayer was earnest.

Because all he could do was say, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

And what did Jesus say? I tell you, that man on his knees before God, he went home justified. He went home righteous.

He went home forgiven. He went home cleansed. God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And you know, my unconverted friend, that's all that's required. God, let's stop making this gospel complicated.

[23 : 14] Let's stop putting barriers in front of ourselves every step of the way. No, no, no. Jesus makes it plain and simple. It's not an extended prayer.

It's not an eloquent prayer. No, it's an earnest prayer for salvation. An earnest prayer for salvation when you come to the man on the middle cross.

So, let's consider this cross, the cross of the Savior. We see the cross of the sinner. Ask him, where is hell? At the end of a Christless life.

We come to the cross of the saint. Ask him what he said. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. But how did Jesus respond? We see the cross of the Savior.

Look at verse 42 again. The cross of the saint says, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And he, Jesus, said to him, truly, I say to you, today, you will be with me in paradise.

[24 : 19] Truly, I say to you, today, you will be with me in paradise. And you know, in that moment when this thief turned to the cross of the Savior for salvation, I'm sure there was a pause.

And maybe he wondered in his mind, having just prayed, maybe he wondered, well, how is Jesus going to respond to my request?

this man knew that he didn't deserve forgiveness. He knew that he didn't deserve mercy or grace or the love of God. But Jesus' response to him, Jesus' response to his earnest prayer was exceedingly, abundantly, above all, more than he could ask or even think.

today, said Jesus. What a word to hear. This man had no more days. He didn't have tomorrow.

So, Jesus says, today, you will be with me in paradise. Today, you will be with me in paradise. You know, my unconverted friend, you may wonder, you might wonder, how will Jesus respond to me?

[25 : 40] How will Jesus respond to me when I come to him? When I come to him seeking mercy and forgiveness? You may wonder what he will do with your request of salvation.

Maybe you've been asking for many years. Maybe you've just been asking and asking and asking and asking. But have you been earnestly asking?

And if you have been asking, surely you need to remember that Jesus promises, when you ask, you shall receive. And you know, you might wonder what Jesus will do with your request.

Because, like this man, you know that you don't deserve mercy or forgiveness or the love of God. But the wonder of the cross of the Savior is that when you come to him, when you come to him confessing your sin, when you come to him and commit your life to him, saying, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.

You know, Jesus gives you the promise of assurance. The promise of assurance. Because he says there in verse 43, truly or assuredly, today you will be with me in paradise.

[26 : 59] And that little word, truly or assuredly, it's very important. Jesus says, have no doubt in what I'm saying to you. Do not doubt this promise.

Truly, assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise. And you know, what a promise. What a promise that on the threshold of eternity, this sinner who had reached his last day and his last opportunity in this world, the sinner became a saint.

And he's told by Jesus, of all people, he's told by Jesus, the man of Galilee, the son of God, he's told, today you will be with me in paradise.

And you know, what Jesus literally says there is, today you will walk with me in the garden. Today you will walk with me in the garden. Not tomorrow, but today. Because death will not win the victory.

Sin will not overcome you. The grave will not leave its sting upon you. Today you will walk with me in the garden in heaven. Today you will be with me in paradise.

[28 : 13] And you know, you know, for the crowd looking on, the crowd looking on, they would have thought that the cross of the saint just died the same way as the cross of the sinner.

They would have probably thought that this man here went to hell like the other guy. But Scripture tells us he didn't. And there's a reason for that.

You know, it reminds us that we should never make a judgment on someone's soul. Even in their final moments, we should never make a judgment on someone's soul.

because the thing is, we are not the judge. I'm not the judge. No, no, Jesus is the judge. And it's before him that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

And you know, you never know. You never know what's going on in someone's heart on the threshold of eternity. You never know. hope. That's why the gospel is a great message and gives to us a glorious hope.

[29 : 23] And you know, my unconverted friend, this conversation between three wooden crosses, it's reminding you very simply this morning and reassuring you, I hope, that you're not beyond hope.

You're not beyond redemption. You're not beyond the pale. You're not too late. You're not too far gone because like it was for this man, the hope of the gospel will be held out to you until your dying breath.

The hope of the gospel will be held out to you to the very end. Because the eleventh hour is still an hour of opportunity.

The eleventh hour is still an hour of opportunity. But I want to say to you that 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. And as we see in this chapter, it wasn't even on a deathbed.

[30 : 33] It was on a Roman cross. You know, it was my good friend J.C. Ryle. He's a great friend. He once said, few are ever saved on their deathbeds.

One thief on the cross was saved that none should despair. But He says, only one that none should presume.

One thief on the cross was saved that none should despair, but only one that none would presume.

My unconverted friend, deathbed conversions are very rare. So don't presume that you'll have one. No, far better for you to come to Christ now than to wait until your deathbed.

Far better for you to come to Christ today than wait until the eleventh hour of your life. Far better for you to come to the man on the middle cross this morning seeking salvation.

[31 : 43] And far better for you to come right now and today, because tomorrow is not promised. The Bible says to us, now is the accepted time.

Today is the day of salvation. Now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation. And you know, my friend, it was the cross of the Savior. And with this I'll close.

It was the cross of the Savior that made the difference between the cross of the sinner and the cross of the saint. And yet the cross of the sinner and the cross of the saint, they were the same distance from the cross of the Savior.

They hung only feet from him. and both of them were on the threshold of eternity. Both of them needed forgiveness. Both of them had the same offer of salvation held out to them.

Both of them heard Jesus praying. But one scorned Jesus. The other sought Jesus. One blasphemed Jesus.

[32 : 54] The other begged Jesus for mercy. One rejected Jesus. The other said very simply to him, Jesus, remember me.

Remember me. Dear my friend, the cross of the Savior is the difference between the cross of the sinner and the cross of the saint. The cross of the Savior is the difference between eternal death and eternal life.

The cross of the Savior is the difference between being lost and being saved. the cross of the Savior, as you well know, is the difference between eternity in hell and an eternity with Jesus in heaven.

That's why I want you to read this book. Heaven, how I got here. Heaven, how I got here. Because for the cross of the saint, he discovered that the cross of the Savior makes all the difference.

The cross of the Savior makes all the difference. And my prayer is that he will make a difference in your life for time and for eternity.

[34 : 20] May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for the cross, the cross of Jesus Christ, that he makes the difference not only in life, but also in death, that he gives to us the promise of eternal life.

He gives to us the hope of heaven. He gives to us the assurance of forgiveness of sins, and to be presented faultless before thy glory with exceeding joy.

And Lord, we pray that thy word this morning would find lodgment in our heart, that we would take it to heart, that we would follow in the footsteps of the thief on the cross, and see the way to heaven, that Jesus is the way, he is the truth, and the life, and that no man comes to the Father except through him.

Lord, help us to come to the man on the middle cross, pleading and praying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Oh, Lord, that thou wouldest forgive us, hear us, we pray, answer us in accordance with thy grace and in thy mercy, and Lord, go before 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 in Psalm 17. Psalm 17, it's in the Scottish Psalter, page 217.

[35 : 59] Before we sing, we're going to get the answers. Don't sigh, Daniel. So, it's Psalm 17, page 217, in the Scottish Psalter.

So, boys and girls, question one, who was crucified and where? So, who was over here?

The cross of the sinner. Who was over here? The cross of the saint. And who was the man in the middle?

The cross of the Savior. Jesus was the man in the middle. What did the thief, this man here, what did he say? What did the thief say to Jesus?

Do you remember? Yeah, well done. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And what did Jesus say? What did Jesus say to this man?

[37 : 01] Do you remember? Today you will be with me in paradise. Isn't that a great promise? The man wasn't promised tomorrow.

So, Jesus said, no, today. Today you'll be with me in paradise. Well done. I think David will get you sweets at the door. But you're staying for tea and coffee afterwards anyway.

So, you'll get them then. So, we're singing Psalm 17. We're singing verse 5, down to the verse mark 9, and then the last verse, verse 15. Psalm 17.

It's a wonderful prayer. For the psalmist, he says in verse 5, Hold up my goings, Lord me guide, in those thy paths divine, so that my footsteps may not slide out of those ways of thine.

I called, have on thee, O God, because thou wilt me hear, and thou mayst hearken to my speech, to me incline thine ear. So, we're singing verses 5 to 9, and then verse 15, the last verse of the psalm, where it is in many ways the experience of the thief on the cross.

[38 : 09] But as for me, I thine own face in righteousness will see, and with thy likeness when I wake, I satisfied shall be.

What a wonderful promise that the thief was given. So, Psalm 17, verses 5 to 9, and then the last verse, verse 15. And we'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise. O, damn that my going stormy night, in love thy past delight, so that my curse is made void of sight.

June All those grace of life, I call and I'll be your heart, Behold, some will be here, The love is hard to do my speech, To me and my line here, Thy wondrous love, In kindness show, The love of my right love,

Tis there that runs Ecologie from those, Chattoe on his test shine, At the ample of the lyne King, in thy wings shadely close, From you oppressors come us, in our God's deadly foes.

But us for me, by thine own face, in righteousness we'll see.

[41 : 26] And with thy light, yes, when I be, I satisfy shall be.

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 forevermore. Amen.