

Guest Preacher - Rev Dr Malcolm Maclean (Retired)

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Date: 21 June 2026

Preacher: Rev. Malcolm Maclean

[0 : 00] I'd like to turn back to the chapter we read there, Luke chapter 23, and we can read verses 39 to 43.

And we indeed justly, for we are receiving a duty ward of our deeds. But this man has done nothing wrong. And he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And he said to him, truly I say to you, today you'll be with me in paradise.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

[2 : 57] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. that was in front of Pilate the crowd that was in front of Pilate wasn't a million strong because not everybody was there but there were about a million Jews in Jerusalem for the Passover feast and if these revolutionaries had had their way well these million Jews had risen up in rebellion but they didn't and this man these two criminals and their leader Barabbas, they had been arrested and sentenced to death very quickly and of course that particular attempted revolt was going on at the same time as the other events we read in the Bible the Bible only focuses on what Jesus was doing but life was obviously going on for lots of other people, everybody else, life was going on and at the time that Jesus and his disciples were preparing for the Passover these men were preparing for a revolution and they got caught and here they are sentenced to death and as they came out to go to their Golgotha the place of execution as they came out they noticed something and something odd where's Barabbas he's not there a few hours before this he's been liberated set free we don't know if these other two knew what happened to Barabbas but probably they heard just the crowd shouting or something to them but if they did know and they had somehow heard that the crowd had chosen Barabbas instead of Jesus well they must have thought that

Jesus was a very bad criminal who would choose somebody instead of Barabbas well that crowd did I'm sorry who would choose somebody instead of Jesus that crowd did but there they are and they must have said these these two other two knew about this they must have said about the person they hadn't met yet Jesus well he must be some bad person and then they had a chance to see him and what's he doing he's struggling along the road unable to carry his cross and they must have wondered hard to tell what goes through a mind of a person being led to crucifixion but here's these two criminals and they've got three quarters of a mile to watch Jesus as he's walking along the road and on every step they get to watch him all they see is weakness it's not too surprising in a sense that when they do get to the cross they start mocking him especially when they saw the sign above his head this is Jesus the king of the Jews

I mean from their perspective initially they had had a real goal at setting up a kingdom whereas this other one that's with them this man called Jesus what has he done they had plotted to get rid of the Roman Empire and get the people to join them in their in their attempt they had failed but they had tried from their perspective and here they are at the cross and what happens when they get to the cross well lots of things happens but I want us to think about four things there's the railing of one of them and then there's the rebuke of the other to his colleague and then there's the request he makes to Jesus and then there's the reassurance he gets from Jesus so the railing of the first one that's mentioned there in verse 39 one of the criminals who were crucified who were hanged railed at him railed is an awful word isn't it you ever had somebody rail at you that's a kind of combination of malice and mockery no sense of sympathy as he looks at this weak man and initially a man who seemed much weaker than himself there's no suggestion that the criminals had any problem carrying their crosses and as he looks at

Jesus and he hears the cries of the crowd about him crying out to Jesus his chief priests and others saying to him save yourself come down from the cross this criminal joins in and his words give the impression that he had some kind of inkling about what the Jews thought about the Messiah of course he's a Jew he'd have had some kind of religious upbringing and therefore he was able to use terminology that was appropriate but he uses it in a way that's sarcastic doesn't he are you not the Christ save yourself enough his perception of what the

[10:39] Christ is able to do is just get us off the cross and back to life sad man isn't he going out of life with a malicious spirit not just despair because there is desperation in his cry but there is a terrible manifestation we might say of the effects of sin in a person's life God but at the end of it even although he's only a couple of yards from his savior he hasn't got the slightest bit of respect for him and when that happened we may have expected the other criminal to say something similar because the other gospel accounts tell us that before this particular stage in the time and the cross took place both of the criminals were deriding the savior but all of a sudden the other one changes his mind and he comes out with this rebuke for his former colleague and says to him do you not fear

God since you are under the same condemnation and we indeed justly for we are receiving a due reward of our deeds maybe he would have had a religious background as well and the astonishing thing here is that he speaks about the fear of God so he must have been sensing in his own inner life this awareness that he has to fear God we're told in the Bible of course maybe this man learned this verse when he was young but it occurs a few times in the Old Testament that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and this man has lived a foolish life but he's now come to the point where he has to start living differently and even although he's only got a few hours left he knows he has to live differently for these few hours and he is starting to be wise and he just tells the other man do you not fear

God and one sign of a person starting to fear God is that he's aware of his sins that's what this man does doesn't he he confesses his sin they deserve to be there for what they've done because who knows what they did in their attempted uprising but he says they were there and deserved to be there although it is important to note that he does use the plural for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds and perhaps he was just thinking about his life all these years he had lived and what he had done and where the path of life had brought him and he just realizes well I'm here under the sentence passed by

Pilate but I'm on a journey to get another sentence and the other sentence is not just from Pilate it's going to be from God he's aware that his life is going to be reviewed and what's he going to say to the God of heaven what can he say about his life in any form of mitigation nothing and therefore he says to his former partner by implication he says to him I now fear God and you know we can waste a lot of time speculating what caused this change in his life and it's all speculation because we're not told what brought it but we do know why it happened it's brought about by what you could call the secret work of the

Holy Spirit and he worked in this man's heart he was working in his heart but he didn't look like he was working in his heart he was working in his heart as he was watching Jesus go along the road to the cross he was working in his heart when these three of them were nailed to each of their crosses he was working in his heart even when he was making all these shared comments to Jesus that are offensive and he just worked and there at Calvary this malicious man was enlightened and of course that's very encouraging isn't it because it does tell us that enlightenment can happen anywhere there's no human on earth and there'll be no human in heaven who arranged how they were enlightened it's all been done by God and therefore that means it can happen anywhere in the most what to our minds may be the most ridiculous of places it can happen and this man experience tells us also that it can happen very quickly how long did it take this man to come to this persuasion there hasn't been an hour since he started the walk to the cross and yet on that journey he's become a new man wonderful transformation and of course it means that you can't despair of anyone

[18:23] God is his own time and when he works he works maybe it's just imagination maybe this man's parents Jews prayed that their boy would be in heaven and if they lived to see it they'd have seen him living a terrible life but here if they had made that prayer their prayer is answered and in this rebuke of course he testified to the saviour's sinlessness this man has done nothing wrong he's probably never seen

Jesus do anything until he got to the cross all he's seen of Jesus is him stumbling along the road with the cross and then coming to the cross and he may have heard Jesus pray for the soldiers as they were nailed into the cross but of course it was a rowdy scene not easy to hear things but anyway as he looks at Jesus he becomes aware that this man is just totally different of who else could we say that such a person has done nothing wrong there's only one individual we can say that of and that's the saviour himself and this man now had that perception it's amazing where our eyes can be opened spiritually and there at Calvary this man's eyes were opened to the perfection of Jesus and I suppose the question comes to us do we regard

Jesus as perfect sinless but his rebuke had no effect as far as we know and then he returns to Jesus and makes this wonderful request Jesus remember me when you come to your kingdom and the best way to look at that is just to go through it Jesus Jesus what a wonderful name isn't it this man probably would not have known the reason why Jesus had it although he would know what his name meant because it wasn't it was a common name it's basically the name

Joshua but you would know what the name meant but here in its Greek form and Luke when he was writing this letter surely he would say to himself as he composed it my readers will marvel at the the appropriate use by this man of this most beautiful name Jesus the savior of sinner and as he proceeds with this request we can say a lot in a sentence can't we and this man certainly says a lot he says to remember me when you come into your kingdom well he believes that

Jesus is going somewhere anybody else that died under Roman rule on a cross with the words the king of something they went nowhere this was Rome's way of showing contempt on them the king of whatever it was they imagined that they were going to be a ruler and Rome put them in their place but Jesus it was totally different he was going somewhere he was going to a kingdom after death and this man recognized that in this kingdom ahead of him ahead of Jesus that is that Jesus had the authority of who could be in it and he realized that while there was no place for him now in the empire of

[24 : 22] Rome there could be a place for him in the kingdom of Jesus and an incredible insight that he realized that he could have life with Jesus in this future kingdom how much he knew about it who can say that's a marvelous request this weak man who could hardly carry his cross this criminal recognized that shortly he would have the authority to announce who could come into his kingdom very personal remember me you know nobody else has remembered him have they

I mean Luke doesn't know what his name is he's not like Simon of Cyrene whose name is given to us so this man an unknown man died an unknown death that he said to Jesus remember me and Jesus doesn't forget those who make that prayer maybe the man was looking at a day of judgment maybe he realized what was later written that after death is a judgment and as he thought about what's going to happen to him when he breathes his last he just says Jesus remember me a great request in a real sense he's realizing it he's realizing standing sitting below them on the ground where the soldiers representing the authority of

Rome that they had now reached the limits of their authority but he was addressing one whom he now knew would have authority in the future Lord remember me he ever made that prayer or one like it what answer did he get the reassurance he was given because it's more an assurance isn't it if it was just going to be assurance Jesus could have said to him yes I'll remember you and just left it there but he didn't do that did he he said today you'll be with me in paradise what does that answer tell us about

Jesus well it tells us he's in control of time doesn't it none of us can say with any certainty about any event what will happen at it but Jesus can he said to him today you will be with me in paradise the Jewish day ends at sunset it's now about ten o'clock there's eight hours to go before sunset part of the process was that the soldiers would come and make sure the victims had died there's Jesus saying to this man isn't he before six o'clock you're going to be with me in paradise what an amazing statement today you'll be there and this would have been a help to Jesus himself wouldn't it as he looked at this man the first convert of the cross hanging there beside him and of course Jesus says to him today you'll be with me who are we going to be with in heaven if we're going to get to heaven for everyone in heaven is going to be with

[30 : 26] Jesus how the spatial terms work there we don't know yet but we'll find out when we get there but we'll be with Jesus with her beside her and this man Jesus says to him you'll be with me not at the edge of the big crowd the number that no one can count not in the far distance but with me close and he points out to this man that heaven is a paradise the word paradise just means

garden heaven is like a garden we've seen these

I don't mean the kind of gardens we have outside our houses but these big gardens that you see somewhere estates designed beautiful heaven is like that this word paradise later became used in the garden of Eden just to stress his beauty and orderliness and perfection place of calm a place of pleasure a place where there's no weeds this man's life had been marked by weeds that Jesus promised him a place in paradise a marvelous end to this man how can we apply this to ourselves we know the hymn don't we the dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day and there may I so bad as he wash draw my sins away we can copy this man he becomes our teacher if we had met him the day before the last man on earth to imitate meet him on this occasion the perfect man to imitate he tells us what faith is simple faith successful faith

Lord remember me that's faith isn't it he tells us what repentance is we deserve what we're going to get repentance has no excuses doesn't blame the circumstances just says I'm guilty and that's what this man did tell the teacher to us in faith and repentance of course this is an example of what Jesus himself said and I wonder how we'd have thought he meant when he said it if we had heard it for the first time when he announced it he said if I be lifted up I'll draw all kinds of men to me well there he is lifted up on the cross what kind of man is he going to draw to himself well here he is in the divine wisdom in the divine goodness and the divine power this man was given this wonderful honour and in heaven if there is interaction there about the past we'll all be queuing up to speak to this man just to ask him what was it like to be on the cross beside

Jesus and of course he saw him an answer an example isn't he what Jesus said him that comes to me I will never cast out and of course that promise has got a double negative him that cometh to me I will never no never cast out and this man came and he wasn't cast out he was embraced immediately by the saviour just going to close with this quotation that a man said which I think sums it up this great sinner laid on Christ the weight of his soul the weight of his sins the weight of his eternity and Christ accepted the burden shall we pray

Lord we give you thanks for the grace of the saviour your word tells us that that grace though he was rich yet he became poor that we through his poverty might become rich that criminal became a wealthy man we thank you Lord for the grace that you show that man is just a picture of ourselves we may not have done outwardly what he did but in our hearts there is sin and we have to do with our sin what he did with his confess it and trust in Christ help us

[37 : 32] Lord to do it for your own name's sake amen we can conclude by singing psalm 130 from the Scottish Psalter psalm 130 on page 421 you can sing the whole psalm Lord from the depths to thee I cried my voice Lord do thou hear and to my supplications voice give an attentive ear the whole psalm verse Ancient's voice give an attentive ear.

Lord, who shall stand at the Lord, O Lord, to slug in liberty, but yet with thee, Forgiveness is a fear that may as fear.

I wait for God, my soul, the great, my hope is in His word.

More than they die, for more, more, more, my soul waits for the Lord.

I say, Lord, I may not do what the morning light to see.

[40 : 30] Let Israel open the Lord, for with Him mercy's fear.

I bless the earth, sweetest John, It's ever far within.

And from all its denigities, Israel shall redeem.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Amen.

[41 : 59] Thank you.