

Introduction: We turn once again to the words of Jesus spoken from the depths of His sufferings on the Cross. We especially see the depth of those sufferings during the last three hours of Christ's crucifixion, when He agonized in the darkness of God's wrath, bearing our guilt and the curse due to us for sin – dying in our place. May these notes once again impress on us the great riches of mercy, righteousness and joy which we receive *only because* Christ took our guilt, sinful pollution and bitter misery as His own.

Monday: read Luke 23:42-43 & Psalm 79:8-13. Returning for one further day to the wonderful story of salvation concerning the thief on the Cross, we turn to the words of Psalm 79:8-13, which we sing in hymn # 488:

*Remember not, O God,
The sins of long ago;
In tender mercy visit us,
Distressed and humbled low.*

*O Lord, our Savior, help,
And glorify Thy name;
Deliver us from all our sins,
And take away our shame.*

*In Thy compassion hear
Thy prisoner's plaintive sigh,
And in the greatness of Thy power
Save those about to die.*

*Then, safe within Thy fold,
We will exalt Thy name;
Our thankful hearts with songs of joy
Thy goodness will proclaim.*

The lesson from this Psalm is much the same as the lesson of Luke 23:42-43. Before the thief could ever desire or hope to be remembered by our dying Jesus, the Spirit of God must needs have remembered the thief in his lost condition. Just as the Spirit of God inspired the author of Psalm 79 to *ask* for God to remember him in his suffering and guilt, so we see that only God's remembering to step towards the lost thief can explain the thief in turn asking Jesus to remember him. We see this when we compare the other Gospel accounts of this thief and his partner in their *joint mockery* of Christ. See Mark 15:32 and Matt. 27:44, in which *both thieves* are said to be mocking Jesus on the Cross. Yet, when we read the request to be "remembered" in Luke 23:42, we realize that God has sovereignly changed the heart of one thief. He has "remembered him", just as throughout the Scriptures the first step in redemption is *always* God's remembering those He will save in their lost condition – see Exodus 2:24-25.

Meditate and Pray: Use the above reflection from Psalm 79 to cause you to pray with thankfulness that God has promised to remember your family. May He also remember our nation in these days of pandemic, and have mercy upon us, even as He did on the undeserving thief.

Tues/Weds/Thurs: read Matthew 27:38-51; John 19:28-30 & Luke 23:44-46. Four times Jesus spoke in the darkness which overshadowed the Cross from 12 pm until 3.

First in Matthew 27:46, where we hear Christ cry out because of the separation from God which our sins caused Him to experience. He "descended into hell" to fully experience the separation from God which our fallen nature deserved.

Second, when Christ knew that all things were accomplished in terms of His *suffering the penalty due to us for our sin*, He spoke (as per Psalm 69:21) of His thirst, a thirst both physical (as a real man suffering in a real body) and spiritual, as He "thirsted" for the

righteous communion with His Father to be restored after His cry of dereliction (John 19:28).

Then, conscious of His full victory and accomplishment of all things necessary for our salvation, Christ triumphantly declares, “It is finished” (John 19:30).

Finally, in order that all might be rebuked who had mocked Him as forsaken by God and therefore unable to save Himself (Matthew 27:39-44), Christ shouted with almighty power, “Father into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46). That mighty cry of omnipotent victory not only silenced all His foes but caused the very creation itself to bear its testimony that Christ’s work on the Cross was indeed accepted by the Father – the earthquake proves this, as does the torn curtain in the temple, (more on that curtain tomorrow)!

Meditate and Pray: How encouraged we should be that Christ took the dark despair due to us from the holy and wrathful judgment of God against our sin, and absorbed it fully! Sing about this great transaction by which God the Judge is satisfied and we are redeemed, using the words of hymn # 250:

*Throned upon the awful tree,
Lamb of God, Your grief I see.
Darkness veils Your anguished face;
None its lines of woe can trace.
None can tell what pangs unknown
Hold You silent and alone.*

*Silent through those three dread
hours,
Wrestling with the evil powers,
Left alone with human sin,
Gloom around You and within,
Till the appointed time is nigh,
Til the Lamb of God may die.*

*Hark, that cry that peals aloud
Upward through the whelming cloud!
You, the Father’s only Son,
You, His own anointed One,
You are asking - can it be? -
Why have You forsaken Me?*

*Lord, should fear and anguish roll,
Darkly o’er my sinful soul,
You, who once were thus bereft
That Your own might ne’er be left,
Teach me by that bitter cry
In the gloom to know You nigh.*

Friday: read Luke 23:46 & Psalm 31:1-4. There is an urgency in the opening words of Psalm 31, as David cries out for rescue, affirming that his only hope lies with the Lord. Such a complete dependency, with no one else to turn to, creates the right environment in which David can cast himself upon the Lord in verse 5, words which Christ takes as His own last words on the Cross - as He regally bows His head. Listen to this quote from John Calvin on Psalm 31:5, well-expressing the sense of abandonment to God’s wisdom and will on the part of the Psalmist and even more truly, on the part of our Savior:

No man can possibly commit his life to God with sincerity, but he who considers himself exposed to a thousand deaths, and that his life hangs by a thread, or differs almost

nothing from a breath which passes suddenly away. David being thus at the point of despair, leaves nothing to himself to do but this -- to go on his way, trusting in God as the keeper and governor of his life. (John Calvin on Ps 31:5)

Sat/Sun: As you reflect upon Christ's utter trust in death in His Father's tender care, let us rejoice that this same gift is being worked into us by His Holy Spirit. As my pastor wrote:

"Faith in God vanquishes all of our fears. This is so because by faith we rightly reckon that the God whom we have offended by our sin has been reconciled to us through the person and work of His Son. If the one true and living God is for us, accepting us in His beloved Son, who or what could possibly stand against us? (Bill Harrell)