

# A Thief's Confession

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*Luke 23: 33-43.*

## **Seekers for Light.**

*Fourteen Addresses to Edinburgh Students.*

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## **Chapter 5:**

### **A Thief's Confession; or, Faith *versus* Rationalism.**

There is not a more striking instance of grace — the grace of Christ — in all Scripture, than that which is before us this evening, in the case of the dying robber. In all the pages of the Word of God you cannot find anything more touching, or more expressive, of the blessed grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, than the way in which He deals with this man; for every person must admit it was a desperate case. He was a pest on earth, and he certainly was not fit for heaven. His faults nailed him to the tree. He was a man whose history was of such a character, that he was going out of the world in ignominy and shame, a sinner in his sins, to meet God. He was within six hours of his death, and Christ met him, and saved him. Has He met you yet? Has He saved you yet? Perhaps — nobody knows — you may be within six hours, of your death, my friend. Who can tell? I am not a prophet, but I am a physician, and I have in my day seen many a hale man, and known that he has been cut off in less than six hours. Ah, friend! if you have never met that robber's Saviour, if you have never met my Saviour, do not let the few minutes that we shall spend together pass without your coming into contact with Him now.

There is no scene in the history of the world like that which is before us in Luke 23. There is a page in God's Word, and a page in the history of man's world, that stands alone, stands unique, because you have there the death of the only absolutely sinless, spotless, holy Man, by the side of two men who were sinners, and one of them becomes the companion of that sinless Man for eternity. The other got his chance, but missed it. Between these three seen here, each nailed to a cross, there is an immense difference. Of One I can say this — There was no sin in Him; although there was sin on Him. Then I come to the man who had no sin on him, though there was sin in him. And there was the third of these men, who had sin on him, and sin in him. So he died. Ah! do not you be the eternal companion of that third man, I implore you.

You may perhaps say, What do you mean? One of these three had no sin in Him, and yet had sin on Him, when He was nailed to that tree! Yes! that was Jesus. Perfect He was. He was the holy, spotless Man; and the charm of this scene is this, that the thief confesses not only his

own guilt and his own sin, but he makes, if I may say so, a public confession of what his faith is in regard to Christ. "This man hath done nothing amiss" (ver. 41), was his true and blessed asseveration. That man reversed everybody's judgment; that man stood alone that day in his witness, and in his testimony, to Jesus. I did not read the whole of the chapter, but if you glance through what went before, you will find that everybody was against Christ, — Judas, Pilate, Herod, priests, scribes, populace, everybody; there was nobody for Him. Not one solitary soul stood for Him in all that company that day. What a scene! Betrayed by a false friend, denied by true friends, and deserted by all His followers; with the chief priests, who instigated the populace to demand His death, against Him; the governor against Him; the king against Him; the world against Him; everybody against Him!

But, at length, there comes a moment when, at His side, a man — almost entering into the jaws of death — boldly says, He is the sinless, the spotless Man, I will cling to Him. Ah, friends! I do not say I envy the dying thief. I admire him; and, by-and-by in glory, if I can find him out, I shall grip his hand, and say, "Thank you, my brother, you cleared my Saviour's character in the day when everybody was against Him."

It was a wonderful scene. Look at it a little bit You know the Lord had been brought before Pilate who got his chance of receiving Jesus that day, but missed it, like many a man now misses it. The people came up, complaining against the blessed Lord; and when they did so, three times over does Pilate say, "I find no fault in this man; I will therefore chastise him, and let him go." But the people would not let Him go. Urged on by the chief priests and religious elders, they cried, "Crucify him, crucify him." I do not doubt Pilate was anxious to let the Lord go; the more so as, when he is seated on the judgment-seat, he gets a warning from his wife, who says, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man" (Matt. 27: 19). But he did not heed that message; he allowed himself to be over-governed by the clamour of the people. He was just going to let the Lord go, when those who knew his weak point cried out, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend." Do you know who Caesar was? He was the Roman emperor. And who was Pilate? His delegate; and Pilate was dependent upon Caesar; he was supported by the world. And I would like to say this to you, that just in the proportion that you are supported by the world, so are you afraid of it. Thresh that out, and see if it be not the truth. "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend," turned the scale for Pilate. Caesar's friends must side with Caesar, while Jesus' friends must side with Jesus. Everybody sided with Caesar that day, and nobody sided with Jesus. Perhaps, you think, if I had been there, I would have sided with Jesus. Would you? Are you quite sure you have done it now, today? Do you think everybody who knows you intimately knows that you are on Jesus' side. I should be glad if I thought so. Caesar's friends must side with Caesar, and Jesus' friends must side with Jesus, now, as then. Whose side are you on?

We read that everybody was against Jesus, and, Pilate having condemned Him, He is carried away from that hall — I would not call it of judgment, but of misjudgment; because righteousness and judgment, mercy and truth, had parted company there, they did not kiss each other. They parted company, and He, who was the Truth, was led away to die; Simon, a Cyrenian, bearing His cross. And I do not doubt it was the cross which had been prepared for Barabbas, another robber. That man was condemned to death; his cross was ready; and when the jailers went down to the cell where he was confined, I have no doubt Barabbas thought he was

going to the gibbet; and when he got to the judgment-hall, found the populace a raging mass around the Man he had heard plenty about, and then heard the question put, "Whom will ye that I release unto you, Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?" As robber and Saviour stood side by side, I have not a bit of doubt what was in his mind. The question was put whether they would have Jesus or Barabbas, and I have no doubt Barabbas thought, "Why, of course there will be no doubt about that; they will choose Jesus, not a sinner like me; there will be no chance for a murderer like me. They will not let me go." I think that man was bewildered when he heard the cry go up, "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas" (ver. 18).

Christ is then led down from the hall, the cross is laid upon the Saviour's shoulders, and He goes out to die. Thank God, He did die; and He died for me, I know. I do not know if you know it yet, but He died for sinners. I do not think Barabbas knew what was wrapped up in that death. As He goes out, a number of women weep and bewail Him; but He turns to them, and says, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck" (vers. 28, 29). That is, there is a solemn day of retribution coming; do not suppose that God has forgotten the fact that His Son was murdered. Do you suppose that God forgets that His Son was in this scene, and that the world cast Him out? Has God forgotten that, do you think? No; though, in His patience, He has set His Son on His right hand, and said, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Ps. 110: 1), He is coming again. "Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom," was what the thief said; and come back He will. And so the Lord says, "In that day" — mark, their lips will utter a strange prayer — "they shall begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us" (ver. 3 1). You would scarcely believe that men would appeal to nature to hide them from God; but such will be the case, and what a revelation is this of man?

There are four prayers spoken of in this chapter. The prayer of hatred, "Crucify him" (ver. 21); the prayer of fear, "Mountains, fall on us" (ver. 30); the prayer of love, "Father, forgive them" (ver. 34); and the prayer of faith, "Lord, remember me" (ver. 42). The prayer of hatred has been answered. By-and-by there will come the prayer of fear, "Mountains, fall on us: hills, cover us" (see Rev. 6: 15- 17). Anything to keep men out of the sight of God; anything under the sun to keep them out of the reach of God, and from the wrath of the Lamb. They will put anything in between themselves and God; but all in vain, for, says the Lord here, "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (ver. 31.) What do you understand by that? Who was the green tree? Why, Christ, of course. Sap, life, verdure, and fruit, all were seen in Him; and God, looking down from above, saw that one fruitful green tree, and — as He looked everywhere else — saw what? Dry trees! There are a good many such in this hall tonight, let me tell you. A dry tree is lifeless. Christ was the green tree, ever presenting that freshness and fruit which suit God.

And what do I take out of this figure for myself? That by nature I am a dry tree, and so are you; there is no life in us. Sinners are the dry trees, and a dry tree makes good fuel. What do you mean? you ask. Well, thresh that out, my friends. A dry tree makes good fuel, and that is really what a man in his sins becomes if he go to the lake of fire. "What shall be done in the dry?" is a serious question indeed. I, says the Saviour, the green tree, am passing through all this, — what is to be the lot of the sinner? If the Holy One passed through God's judgment, because He was

bearing the sins of others, what about the sinner in his sins? I appeal to you. If you are a sinner, you will have to meet God, and you will have to answer to God about your sins. Whatever you may be, whatever profession you may make, or do not make, you will have to meet the Lord by-and-by; and there is a solemn question here propounded by the Lord, "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" There was no answer that day; it will have to come.

And they drew Jesus out of the city. "And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him." These four words describe the most terrible scene enacted upon earth — "THERE THEY CRUCIFIED Him." The place, a graveyard; the actors, the whole civilised world; the act, the cruellest and most shameful form of death; the victim, God's own beloved Son! The selected spot was a graveyard — Calvary, Golgotha, "the place of a skull." And why there? Had not Jesus talked about life? Had He not raised the dead? Had He not unstopped deaf ears, and given sight to the blind? Had He not done many wonderful miracles? Had He not talked about the Lord of life coming from glory; and had He not spoken about being the Son of God? He had. And why did they take Him there? To insult Him in that graveyard. They use the signs of death on every hand to mock Him who was the Lord of life. They bring Him, who was "the resurrection and the life," to the scene where there is every evidence of death around Him, as much as to say, Let us see if you can avoid death. It was the most solemn mockery. They had crowned Him with thorns, and now they put Him to death.

But see what that death meant as viewed by God. It was this — that He who was Lord of life came into the scene of death that He might bring life to us. As regards the world, it was the violent effort to get rid of God and of His Son. And the world is unchanged today; "There they crucified him" is the declaration of what the world's estimate of Christ is. But, say people nowadays, we have got on a good bit since that day; you are a little bit antiquated in your notions, the world has changed very much since that day. Well, I admit that advance has been made in science; I admit a little advance has been made in art and knowledge too. I am not blind to the progress which has been made in those ways which contribute to men's comfort in this world; but tell me, Are they nearer God? That is the question. Are you nearer God? You know a little more about scientific things than you did some years ago, but are you nearer God? The world was not a baby when it murdered Jesus. It was a full-grown man, if I may say so, when the blessed Saviour was put upon the cross.

Over His head was a superscription, "THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS," written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, the three dominant languages of the earth. What, you ask me, do you mean by the world being a full-grown man? I reply, Whose books do the students of today read? Why, the books of the men who wrote in that age. Their teachers are careful to give them the books of the men of that day; we must turn to the Homers, and the Virgils, and to the philosophers of that age. It is a strange thing; but if I seek ornate sculpture, or marvellous buildings, I am sent back to these past ages to find them. If I talk about monuments, men turn me back to that age. It was the Augustan age of the world. No, no; the world was no babe, but full grown, in the day that it gladly yet calmly set that superscription there, in the three languages of Rome, Greece, and Judah. The religious Jew, the martial Roman, the learned Greek, all three combined, and said, We do not want Jesus; get rid of Him. That was why the crime of Jesus (which really was being just what He was) was written over His cross in Hebrew, Greek,

and Latin. United in evil, "there they crucified him." They gave this blessed One, who was the Son of God — yea, who was God incarnate — a felon's death, and a felon's cross; while by His side hung two malefactors, that the scripture might be fulfilled, "He was reckoned among the transgressors" (Luke 22: 37).

What follows now? The Lord prays a remarkable prayer. There was the prayer of hatred, when the people cried, "Away with him." There is coming by-and-by the prayer of fear. But, mark, here is the prayer of love. I will come to the prayer of faith in a minute or so, but here is the prayer of love, and what was it? "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (ver. 34). Go back to that scene in the memory of your heart for a moment. Do not forget it is the cross of Jesus. I would like to guide you to that scene on Calvary, and point out those three crosses. Look at the One in the middle, look at that blessed One, crowned with thorns, hanging on it, while the soldiers are gambling for His garments beneath His eyes, and His enemies are regaling themselves with the very sight of His death agony. Tell me, who is He on that tree? Over His head is written, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," in the plainest language. That was the full inscription clearly. What was His crime? I repeat, simply being what He was. And who was He? Jehovah, the Saviour, and the King of the Jews. And what was His crime? Not that He did anything wrong, but that He was what He was. And what was He? Jehovah, the Saviour, and the King of the Jews.

The Jews would not have Him, you say. I know that; they refused to have Him. There, however, was the truth; for, you recollect, another scripture tells us that when the chief priests came along they said to Pilate, "Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews" (John 19: 21). You know what Pilate replied, "What I have written I have written" (John 19: 22). Ah, Pilate knew he had written the truth that day; but He was more than the King of the Jews — He was Jehovah the Saviour! Mark, friend, He was not alone a holy, spotless Man; but that Man was the incarnate God — God manifest in the flesh, seen of angels, and preached to the world; but, alas! cast out by the world.

In another gospel we read, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1: 14). Here then I find this Man, who was hung upon that tree, crowned with thorns, to be God. And, friends, you have to meet Him. Who hung on that tree? God! And you have to meet Him yet. Oh! you say, He was a man. I know it, and love to own it. And what kind of a man? The thief shall tell you presently. But, mark you, He who was there was God. I will tell you what it is; when the truth of that fact enters a man's soul, it becomes light. And that poor dying thief by His side got light. Whenever the thief got to know who was by his side, it was light in his soul, and it made a wonderful revolution in his history.

But listen to this prayer, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." His enemies have done their work, — and now see the perfection of Jesus, in grace. At the moment when His enemies have done their worst, — spit in His face, smitten Him with a rod, preferred a robber to Him, crowned Him with thorns. and nailed Him to a tree, — then was fulfilled the scripture, "He was numbered with the transgressors." Then, I suppose, there was a little hush in the crowd, and His voice was heard. Listen to it, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." It was the prayer of perfect love, and I have no doubt it was answered, in the second and third chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, when Peter came in the power of the Spirit, and

preached so effectually. I do not doubt that then the intercessory prayer of the Saviour was blessedly answered. What I want you to notice here is the perfection of the love of the Saviour as He prays for His murderers, and this prayer goes up, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." I believe, as these words fell upon the ears of that dying thief, they came, if I may say so, as a flash of light to his soul, and he became conscious that the One beside him, on the cross, was closely linked with God. Whether he was clear that He was God, I do not say exactly; but manifestly at this moment he got the light that Jesus was the Son of God. That he learned from the words, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Amazing scene! The man who is dying in his sins, hears this sinless, spotless Man positively praying for His murderers! I believe that was the moment when the rays of blessed, divine light entered his soul, and the man became conscious that God's Son was being crucified by his side. Evidently there was some time for him and others to think, for "the people stood beholding" we read (Luke 23: 35).

Now mark what follows, and observe the contrast between the infidelity and rationalism of man's mind, and the simple faith of this dying thief. Look at the different classes of people who come out here, because what is before us in this scene is just a sample of what is all around us today. I am not surprised that there is infidelity and rationalism in the world today. You have the seed and germ of it all in the scene before us. "And the rulers also with them derided him, saying," tauntingly and jeeringly, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he be the Christ, the chosen of God." That little word "if" has the whole root of infidelity in it. Ah! my friends, you are here tonight with a good many "ifs" in your mind. You are in bad company. The rulers were doing terrible work that day; they were the leaders, and they headed a countless host of unbelievers and doubters, stretching from their day to that in which you live. "He saved others." They did not doubt that; they could not deny it They knew of many deeds of beneficence, and they gave witness to them. I mean to give witness tonight too. He has saved me — has He saved you? "He saved others; let him save himself, if he be the Christ, the chosen of God." Is He the chosen of your heart? That is the question now. God had chosen Him; but they did not believe Him.

How, they asked, if He be the "chosen of God," does It come about that He is crowned with thorns, and gibbeted with malefactors? "Let him save himself, if he be the Christ." Eternal damnation stalks behind that little word "if." The heart full of "ifs" is not full of faith. That "if" is a terrible word; there is want of faith in it And there are many people who have a large number of "ifs" to answer for — they have really no faith. They are certain of nothing, except that they cannot be certain about anything. Thank God, there are no "ifs" in my faith; I am perfectly well aware by whom I am saved, and who He is, and what He is, and what He has done for me. Faith is the most positive thing in the world. Rationalism is just like a bat in the sunlight, and you know what the bat does then? The more light it gets, the more dumfounded it becomes. You know the bat goes out in the dark; it can only flit easily about in the evening, when the light is gone, and that is where many are today. The bats of infidelity and rationalism are abroad in myriads, and everybody has got at some time into their company. I was among them at one time, but I did not like their company.

Let us go further. "And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, *If* thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself." Again this awful *if*. They wanted Him to prove that He was the King of the Jews by saving himself. But He would not do that; He would not save Himself, just that He might be able to save others like you and me. Unbelief doubted, faith accepted, then, as now, the superscription, "This is the King of the Jews."

"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, *If* thou be Christ, save thyself and us." You would not have thought that the poor fellow would have talked in that strain; you would not have thought a man in his serious position, in the jaws of death as it were, would have railed in such a manner. Another scripture tells us that both the malefactors did it (Mark 15: 32). I do not doubt both of them were hardened enough to mock at the Saviour; they did not, you will notice, taunt each other; they both, however, twitted Christ. Why, there is not a man that does not hate Christ at the bottom of his heart to begin with. Even a dying robber, just going to drop into a lost eternity, will spend his last breath in abusing Christ. But note this, Christ will spend His last breath in praying for those who have abused Him. If sin leads a man to abuse Christ, He in the goodness of His heart, spends His last breath praying for His murderers; and I think that was what wrought the great change in the heart of one dying thief, while the other dying wretch, untouched by grace, and abiding in unbelief, says, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." There was, alas! no faith in him towards Christ.

At this moment a charming scene takes place, under the most difficult circumstances. When everything was against Christ, and when there was every reason why he should not believe in Jesus, the other thief comes out in a magnificent way. It is quite evident that the Spirit of God works in him, as he is heard speaking to his neighbour. Three hours ago you might have heard him railing against the Saviour. But what has happened? Light has come into his heart. I would like you, my friend, to get light into your heart. I cannot give it to you; I can only say, that when light comes into a man's soul, he learns himself, and he learns to know God. If you do not know God, it is because you have not got light. He turns, and mark what he says: "But the other answering rebuked him" (ver. 40). It is not a godless man rebuking a godless man. No, it is a godly man now rebuking the godless. That man was converted, I have no doubt. Oh! you say, I do not believe in sudden conversion. I will tell you why; because you are not converted yourself. An unconverted man never believes in sudden conversion; and more, I never knew a converted man yet that was not converted suddenly. When light gets into a man's soul, he is a changed man at once. Here was this dying thief, who had been cursing and blaspheming the Saviour just a little while back, he hears the prayer of the Lord, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," and the man is changed — converted! Do not you tell me he was not converted then. If he was not converted then, he was never at any other time; but he went to Paradise that day, mark that! Be certain of this, that the prayer of Christ was light to his soul. He recognised that he had God's Son by his side, yea, before his eyes. Others may gibe and jeer, but he looks into the face of God incarnate, into the face of Jesus, and sees grace, kindness, perfect love, and forgiveness there; and, as he listens to that prayer, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," a wonderful change takes place in him. The Holy Ghost works in him, and presently, when his neighbour again breaks out abusing Jesus, he turns and says, "Dost not thou fear God?" (ver. 40.) Ah! you say, what a pretty fellow to talk that way. My dear friend, it is the man that is converted who can talk; and the reason why you cannot talk, is because you are not converted.

The moment you are converted, your lips will soon be urged to talk, and your feet to walk in the way of righteousness.

Take a good look at that thief! See the change in him. He is now bold for God, and fearless of man. "The wicked flee," says Scripture, "when no man pursueth; but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Prov. 28: 1). And here is a man with that kind of character. Until now he was such a pest that his fellows had to get rid of him; but now, touched and changed by grace, he turns round and says to his neighbour, "Dost not thou fear God?" It is a fine thing when a man fears God. Perhaps you do not fear God. Well, I know what the Psalmist says of the man who does not. "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes" (Ps. 36: 1). There was no fear of God in my heart for many a day, but at length, like this thief, I found out that it is a wonderfully blessed moment when a man begins to fear God. It is not cringing fear I mean, but the sense of what is due to God. "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments" (Ps. 112: 1).

Do you know what is the fear of the Lord? I find it well described in a sevenfold way by the wisest man that ever lived — except Jesus — Solomon. He says,

(1) "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;" and by way of antithesis he adds, "but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1: 7). You know where you are, my friend; I do not know. But you know your company, and your companions will tell you where you are. I will read it again, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Then, again,

(2) "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (Prov. 8: 13). The thief was getting into his proper place, and approaching the beginning of knowledge, as he showed his hate of evil. I go a little further, and I find,

(3) "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9: 10). The thief was set for this, and is getting on, you see. I go still a little further,

(4) "The fear of the Lord prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened" (Prov. 10: 27). The two thieves illustrate that. One was cut off for ever, the other passed into eternal blessedness. Again I read,

(5) "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death" (Prov. 14: 27). The believing thief proved that also. And now I read,

(6) "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom" (Prov. 15: 33). That the thief illustrates too, as he gives it to his neighbour. There is only one more, and it reads thus,

(7) "The fear of the Lord tendeth to life; and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil" (Prov. 19: 23). That the thief fully entered into, as he passed that day into Paradise. I tell you what it is, it would be well for you to get into the company of that thief who had the fear of the Lord.

"Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?" was a wonderful query, coupled as it was with, "and we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds." What genuine repentance is there manifested! He took God's part against himself. You are a dying man, and I too, and we are justly punished. The man who is divinely converted always condemns himself. "We indeed justly" is the language of real repentance. When we are not right ourselves we never employ "we." We can then use the word "you." This man, divinely taught, says, "We indeed justly;" and then, conscious of the glory of the One who hung by his side, sinless but suffering, adds, "but this man hath done nothing amiss."

It was a very striking confession. The world heard it, God heard it, Satan heard it, and tonight you hear it. Do you think he was a fool or a wise man? Nay! he was a wise man; and the man who is not his companion is a fool. You say, That is bold. It is true; it is right. That man was right, and every man, who is unbelieving, is wrong. That repentant thief accepts the judgment of God upon him, condemns himself, and clears the character of Christ, when all had condemned Him. His life had been a sinful one, and he owns it, saying, I have sinned, and I am getting what I deserve; and then boldly confesses his faith in Jesus. "This man hath done nothing amiss," is his triumphant allegation. He says to his neighbour, so to speak, "YOU AND I NEVER DID A RIGHT THING, BUT HERE IS A MAN WHO NEVER DID A WRONG ONE. He is dying, but I am going to cleave to Him. I reverse the world's verdict. Judge and jury, I reverse your verdict. You declared Him to be a 'malefactor' (John 18: 30), you adjudged 'He is guilty of death' (Matt. 26: 66); I declare, This MAN HATH DONE NOTHING AMISS." Thank God for the bold, true, glorious confession of that dying malefactor on the cross beside Jesus.

That dying thief changed his company at that moment He fell in line with God, and His servants, in rich appreciation of Christ There was a moment when a strange man by the side of Jordan saw coming to him another Man, and from the Baptist's lips came the exclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." It was Jesus; and, as John baptized Him, the heavens were opened, and another voice was heard, saying, "This it my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3: 17). On the mount of transfiguration, again, the heavens were opened, the Father declared, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." The thief heard Him, and confessed His worth. Even out of the mouths of His enemies the confession of His excellence was made. When the servants of the high priest were sent to take Him, they returned, saying, "Never man spake like this man!" And Pilate, three times, as we have seen, declared, "I find no fault in him." But "he, who knew no sin, was made sin for us." There was no sin in Him, and yet He was made sin for us. The fact was this — in the moment when the poor thief discovered the perfection of Jesus, his sins were shifted on to Jesus, and He bore them, and blotted them out.

I ask you, Is not the testimony of this recent convert beautiful? "This man hath done nothing amiss." What think you of the testimony of the dying thief? He confesses his own sin, and judges it too, and at the same moment gets a glimpse of, and proclaims the glories of the Saviour's character, "This man hath done nothing amiss." Grand old thief! Ah! my friends, in the way of faith, there is nothing like this in the world's history. This man, in the very jaws of death himself, and when every possible evidence was against Christ, discovers His worth, and proclaims alike His excellences, His Lordship, and His Kingly rights, saying, as it were, I will guarantee His life, I will guarantee His character, I will guarantee His history, I will go bail for

His perfection — He has done nothing amiss. He is Lord and King, and although He is dying now, He will rise and come in His kingdom. Splendid testimony of faith!

The next moment he says, "Lord, remember me when thou comest in (*not* into) thy kingdom." I know Thou art dying, but I know Thou art the King. Thou art going out of the scene, but Thou wilt come back again. Remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom. That is all the length his faith got then; but mark the Lord's answer, "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." Oh! look at the Saviour's grace to the man who confides in Him. That other thief, hand and glove with the world, was railing against Him — infidelity, rationalism, and reason were working in all save one, as they stood, or hung, taunting Him to save Himself, if He were the Christ, and if He were the King. The poor thief sees that He is a King; sees that He is the Christ the Son of God, and then owns that He is his Lord!

I verily believe that men nowadays have not a thousandth part of the faith which that poor thief had. He trusted Jesus when every possible evidence why He should be trusted was gone — He was dying, refused of man, and forsaken of God, yet then it was the thief confided in Him. We have all the evidence about the Lord Jesus Christ — that He is risen from the dead, has passed into glory, and is thus accepted of God. This the Holy Ghost has come down to tell us, and we have, for the assurance of our faith, all that is given us in the Scriptures. The dying robber, touched by grace, and wrought on by the Holy Spirit, says, "Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom," at a moment when all this was unrevealed. Will you, my friend, trust that blessed Saviour, and give Him the confidence of your heart? Notice now the Lord's answer, "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." The dying believer got the assurance of present salvation. And observe this, ye who are fond of ritual, he was never baptized, and he never took the Lord's Supper either. And where did he go without either? To paradise that day. How do I know? Because Christ said he should, — "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." It was that day, not the day after, not tomorrow, but that day. Such is grace; and such the reward of faith.

Now see what follows immediately after this. The Lord Jesus was forsaken of God. You do not get that account in the Gospel by Luke, but we read that "it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour" (ver. 44). Up to this point you have the human side of the cross. From the sixth hour to the ninth hour there was darkness over the land, and in that darkness do you know what took place? The sun refused to yield his light that day — darkness shrouded the sun, while the Saviour was in that darkness taking up with God the whole question of man's sin. He had said to the thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise," and here comes the moment when the Saviour bears sins, is made sin, suffered for sin, and died for sinners, so that, the work being completed, the thief can go there. The redemption work of Jesus is the ground and basis of all blessing on the one hand, while the work of the Holy Ghost in the soul of the thief is evident on the other, as he first trusted, and then boldly bore testimony to Christ. I do not know if there is a man here who would bear such a testimony. There, first of all, you see the work of the Spirit of God in him, and then you see the atonement, which the blessed Lord came to make, wrought and completed, so that he could be righteously saved. One scripture says, "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin;" while another says, "He came to bear the sins of many;" and yet another, "The Lord hath laid upon him the iniquities of us all." He bore in His

body, at that moment, the sins of many, and, as the result of bearing the sins of many, He is forsaken of God, and then He cries out, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

What a cry is that which comes from the dying Saviour! Listen to it. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" If you cannot give an answer, I can. He was forsaken, blessed be His name, that I might be accepted. And that is what every heart in this hall who knows Him says. He bore the judgment of my sin, because "he was made sin, who knew no sin." I said just now there was no sin on the thief, though there was sin in him. How is this? His sins were laid on Christ; they were taken off the poor thief who trusted Him. I now see the poor thief's sins borne by the thief's substitute. Though that dying thief was, in himself, what he was, the atoning efficacy of the blood of Christ is laid to his credit, and the work of the Saviour, in atoning for that robber's sins, is effectual. "Today," says Jesus, "thou shalt be with me in paradise." He gets the knowledge of his eternal safety. He is the first trophy of the Redeemer's sacrifice. The sins of the thief are laid upon the Saviour, and He atones for them, and for ever puts them away.

With what unspeakable interest did all heaven that day watch that scene, when heaven's Lord becomes man's Saviour, and dies! And who is the first trophy of redeeming grace? It is a poor dying thief — it is this poor robber. Oh! it was a wonderful scene, as heaven looked down upon that cross, and watched what the result would be. And when the Shepherd came home, what had he got? He had got the lost sheep truly on His shoulders, and He brought him in, the trophy of His victory. And now I ask, Are you not going to let that Saviour save you? He would not save Himself; but He saved the dying thief. And in grace I can say, He has saved me. Will you not trust Him? The dying thief trusted Him; I trust Him; and, oh! I implore. you to trust Him. Take one look at that cross. See Jesus there for you. Well wrote the poet -

"There, from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?"

Did He die for me? Faith replies, He died for me. Sinner, He gave Himself for you. The poor thief as he prayed, "Remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom," thought of blessing in a far-distant day — for the Lord has not yet come in His kingdom; but perfect love replied, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

The first man turned out of an earthly paradise was a poor thief, his name was Adam; and the first man who enters the heavenly paradise through Jesus was a poor thief Grace is a wonderful thing, and it was by God's sovereign grace that the robber was brought into paradise that day. He tasted it for a few hours on earth, and then unhinderedly for ever. I have tasted grace — will you not taste it? I implore you to receive that Saviour. Believe Him, and then go forth and confess Him.