

Not Him, the Other Guy

The Thief on the Cross

(Luke 23:39-42)

- Introduction:
1. When I say “the cross,” who immediately comes to mind?
 2. Of course, most people would say, “Jesus,” but I’m not talking about him, I’m talking about the other guys.
 3. The cross of Jesus is the central event in human history.
 4. In this moment the fate of all humanity who ever lived and ever will live was affected.
 5. Yet is it not strange that this unparalleled event would be cluttered with peripheral information about the deaths of two irrelevant thieves?
 6. Why waste ink on them, when the most significant event in history is taking place?
 7. Ills. Of the Wright brothers’ telegraph.
 8. Maybe there is purpose for the information supplied about these thieves, and their deaths aren’t as insignificant as we might think.

I. The Third Man Died in Sin – The Limit of God’s Love

- A. (Luke 23:39).
- B. This man, even in the face of death, remained hardened.
- C. The “gnashing of teeth” doesn’t always mean pain but could also mean anger.
 1. (Acts 7:54).
 2. (Luke 13:28).
- D. People can become hardened by sin.
 1. (Hebrews 3:13).
 2. (Ephesians 4:19).
 3. (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).
- E. (Hebrews 9:27).
- F. The impenitent thief on the cross demonstrates for us the limit of God’s love.
 1. (Matthew 7:13-14, 21-23).
 2. (Hebrews 10:26-31).

II. The Second Man Died to Sin – The Scope of God’s Love

- A. (Luke 23:40-42).
- B. Can I say this before we discuss what I believe is the real reason this thief’s death is recorded...
 1. The information God revealed about the penitent thief was not intended to be a polemic platform on whether one should or should not obey the Lord’s command to be baptized.
 2. I have preached on the “thief on the cross” without mentioning the baptism controversy and have been heavily criticized and attacked.

3. But let's go ahead and discuss the thief's salvation.
 - a. (Mark 2:10).
 - b. (Hebrews 9:16-17).
 - c. The reason this thief wasn't baptized is the same reason Adam, Abraham and Moses weren't baptized – they weren't commanded to be.
- C. There is nothing like death to bring a man face to face with eternity and our own mortality.
 1. Don't discount "deathbed" repentance.
 2. Ills. Of woman in Michigan.
- D. (2 Corinthians 7:10).
- E. (Psalm 51:17).
- F. The death of the penitent thief teaches us the scope of God's love.
 1. It is a message to all of us who struggle with guilt for wasting so much of our lives in sin.
 2. It speaks to those of us who have waited much too long to surrender our lives to Jesus.
 3. It speaks to all who have little more to offer to God than an apology. The thief's cross announces that God is a God of grace and forgiveness!

III. The First Man Died for Sin – The Depth of God's Love

- A. Jesus was not the victim of circumstances, a helpless martyr caught up in a plan gone awry.
- B. He was a willing participant (John 10:17-18).
- C. Jesus was born for this day (Revelation 13:8).
- D. His death was a death to redeem others from the grip of sin (Luke 23:34).
 1. (Isaiah 53:6).
 2. (2 Corinthians 5:21).
 3. (2 Corinthians 8:9).
 4. (1 Peter 2:24).
- E. Jesus' death on the cross teaches us the depth of God's love.

- Conclusion:
1. There has only been one sinless man who ever lived...He alone died for sin.
 2. That leaves us with only two options.
 - a. We can die to sin and have eternal life in Heaven.
 - b. We can die in sin and suffer eternal condemnation.
 3. The choice is yours.