



"The Possibility of Paradise" (Luke 23:26-43)

Danny Hodges TS2405

I. THE TEXT

vv.27-31 The green tree refers to the tremendous blessings that have been poured out through Jesus.

* Isa. 61:1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,
2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor

* Despite such grace being poured out, they crucify Him. If that's how they respond now, what will happen at the time of the end?

v.35 Had He saved Himself, He could not have saved others.

vv.36-37 Their estimate of a king was from Rome's point of view. They were accustomed to king's who subdued, conquered, & ruled over people. Here is a king who came to die for people.

* John 10: 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

v.38 John 19: 20 Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.

v.42 What a simple request

v.43 WHAT AN AMAZING RESPONSE!

II. LESSONS FROM THE TEXT

* There are four men who bear a cross in this story, and each has a lesson for us

A. Man Number One: Jesus

* Prior to the cross Jesus suffered tremendous emotional stress, evidenced by the sweat mixed with blood in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was abandoned by his closest friends, beaten at his first trial (Sanhedrin). He then was forced to walk more than 2.5 miles between the sites of His three trials (Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod, and back to Pilate). He was flogged at Pilate's command, a legal preliminary before every Roman crucifixion. The usual instrument was a short whip (called a flagellum) with several single or braided leather thongs of variable lengths, in which small iron balls or sharp pieces of sheep bones were tied at intervals. The person to be flogged was stripped of their clothing, their hands and feet tied to an upright post. The back, buttocks, and legs were flogged by either two soldiers at one time, or by one who alternated positions. The severity of the scourging was intended to weaken the victim to a state just short of collapse or death.

As the soldiers repeatedly struck the victim's back, the iron balls would cause deep contusions, and the leather thongs and sheep bones would cut into the skin and tissues. Pain and blood loss generally set the stage for circulatory shock. Even before the crucifixion, Jesus' physical condition was at least serious and possibly critical.

Although the Romans did not invent crucifixion, they perfected it as a form of torture and capital punishment that was designed to produce a slow death with maximum pain and suffering.

It was customary for the condemned person to carry their cross from the flogging post to the site of crucifixion outside the city walls. A soldier carried a sign on which the person's name and crime were displayed. This was meant to be a deterrent to others committing the same crime. This sign would later be placed at the top of the cross.

At the site of execution, the victim was given a bitter drink of wine mixed with myrrh (gall) as a mild analgesic. Jesus refused this drink. The hands were then nailed or tied to the cross bar (the Romans preferred nails). The nails were driven through the wrists and the feet. The nails through the feet would crush or sever nerves that as a result sent excruciating bolts of fiery pain in both arms.

To prolong the ordeal, a wooden block was placed on the cross by which the victim was able to push up and breathe. Otherwise, they would suffocate very quickly.

Just breathing was a challenge for the victim, beyond all the incredible pain.

Muscle cramps hindered respiration even further. Every breath caused the body pain to increase.

The length of survival ranged from three to four hours to three to four days, usually related to the severity of the scourging.

* Jesus' attention is not on Himself or His suffering, but on those inflicting Him with that suffering, on those hurling vicious insults at Him.

* The Bible records seven things Jesus said while on the cross. Do you know what the first was?

- Father forgive them

- Col.1: 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,
14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

- II Cor.5: 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- Isa.53: 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

* Jesus died for the very ones who put Him on that cross. And he did so in order that their sins might be forgiven, and that they might have peace with God. It is His desire that everyone be forgiven through the cross, yet it is a choice that every individual must make personally.

* John 1: 11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

B. Man Number Two: Simon of Cyrene

* Being from Cyrene, he was probably a black man. Cyrene is present day Libya. He had traveled over 800 miles from Africa to celebrate Passover. But just like the eunuch from Ethiopia, he had not found only religion

* This cross came upon Simon with no prior warning. It was an unwelcome cross a forced cross. But this forced cross would bring him face to face with the Savior, and the result was his salvation.

* Mark 15: 21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, ***the father of Alexander and Rufus***, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

* Rom. 16: 13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.

* How many of you have come to Christ through a "forced cross?"

C. Man Number Three: The Thief Who Refused Christ

* One would think that someone experiencing this much pain, and staring death in the face would cry out for mercy. But this man, despite his circumstances, the witness of the Christ, and now the witness of the second thief, hardened his heart, and sealed his fate.

* There are people who will not repent, no matter how bad things get in their life (Rev.9:20-21; 16:8-9). The Prodigal finally came to his senses, but this thief never does.

D. Man Number Four: The Repentant Thief

* He had at first joined with the other thief in mocking Jesus.

- Matt.27: 44 In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

* Obviously this man had a change of heart while on the cross. Jesus wanted both of these men to be saved, but only one was

- II Peter 3: He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

* This man knew that he deserved the punishment he was receiving, so the only thing he could do was call out for mercy. And because his heart was humbled, that is exactly what he received!

* Jesus promised him paradise. Salvation is by grace through faith, apart from works. No purgatory, soul sleep, Jesus did not suffer the fires of hell
- Ephesians 2:8-9; Col.2:13; Romans 3:21-24,28; 4:1-8; 8:1-4; II Cor.5:21.

* Paradise is a real place!

- As soon as a believer leaves his body at death, he wakes up in paradise!
- Was Abraham's bosom a part of paradise? Luke 16; I Peter 3:19; Eph.4:7.

It is now my belief that Jesus' spirit went to sheol, the preached to the spirits in prison, then he immediately ascended to the presence of the Father, leading all those captive in His train with Him. Three days later His spirit returned to His body, and He rose bodily from the grave.

- The apostle Paul says that paradise is where the third heaven is (see II Cor.12:2-4).

- Rev.2: 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

- The word comes from a Persian word which means garden. That gives us a really good clue! Paradise is the place God originally intended man to live and to live there forever! See Gen.2:8-9, 16-17 3:21-24. God banished man from paradise after he sinned, but through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, our hope of paradise is restored (Gen.3:15).

CONCLUSION

* Eccl.3:11 tells us that God has set eternity in our hearts. God wants us to spend eternity with Him in Paradise. The way to Paradise is through Jesus.

* Rev.21:4

* The possibility of paradise is not dependent on whether or not paradise is real. The possibility of paradise depends solely on what I do with Jesus Christ.