

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 as He died 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 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* are said to be mocking our dying Savior. Yet, when we read the request to be "remembered" in Luke 23:42, we realize that God has sovereignly changed the heart of this one. 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 trial and affliction, and have mercy upon us, even as He did on this undeserving criminal.

Tues/Weds: 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, we hear Christ cry out because of the separation from God which our sins caused Him to experience. Here 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, He spoke of His thirst - a thirst both physical (as a real man suffering in a real body) and spiritual, as He "thirsted" for communion with His Father to be restored after His cry of dereliction (John 19:28).

Next, 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 not only silenced all His foes but caused the very creation itself to bear 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.

Meditate and Pray: How encouraged we should be that Christ took our sin and its punishment and absorbed it fully! His words from the Cross confirm that He indeed carried our sin, bearing up under its infinite weight, because He was God as well as man, vanquishing our sin and all His foes for our salvation. 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.*

Thursday: read Luke 23:44-49 & Acts 7:59. It is very comforting for us that our Savior truly could pay for our sins on the Cross, not only because He was sinless; but also because He was truly man. As the Heidelberg Catechism puts it in Q & A 16:

Why must our Mediator be a true and righteous man? **A.** Because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which has sinned should satisfy for sin. He must be a righteous man because one who himself is a sinner cannot satisfy for others. (Rom. 5:12, 15; 1 Pet. 3:18, Isa. 53:11)

At the same time, it was only God Himself in the person of His Son who could bridge the infinite gap between our race as rebel sinners, and the Most High God, the One who is infinitely dishonored by our rebellion. This is why, time and again, in even His weakest moments of excruciating human suffering and death on the Cross, it is the *Lordship* of our Savior that comes shining through. His life was not taken away from Him as a helpless human victim, He laid that life down as God! To apply the words of A.W. Pink in his book on the 7 Sayings of Christ on the Cross:

"The Lord Jesus died as none other ever did. His life was not taken from Him; He laid it down Himself (John 10:18), 'dismissing His spirit' (Matthew 27:50) and 'delivering up that spirit' (John 19:30), *as One who has full power over His life*. ... The end was now reached. Perfect master of Himself, unconquered by death, He cries with a loud voice of un-exhausted strength, and delivers up His spirit into the hands of His Father, and in this His (divine) uniqueness was manifested. None else ever did this or died thus. His birth was unique. In

‘laying down’ His life, His death was differentiated from all other deaths. He died by an act of His own volition! Who but a Divine Person could have done this?”

Amen! Who indeed! Praise the Lord!

Friday: read Luke 23:46 & Psalm 31:1-4. To appreciate the background to Jesus’ last words on the Cross, we go back to the urgent 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, using words which Christ takes as His own on the Cross, as He says, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” Listen to this quote from John Calvin on Psalm 31:5, well-expressing the sense of utter commitment into God’s hand which this verse expresses:

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 death and His utter trust in His Father’s tender care, let us rejoice that this same peace is being worked into us by His Holy Spirit. We may die peacefully, full of security, because Christ has hallowed even this experience for every believer. 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)