

# Kings Norton Baptist Church

Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2022 10 am

The thief on the cross. (people Jesus met series)

---

Welcome to all

Opening Scripture

Hymn MP 41 At the Name of Jesus

Scripture Isaiah 53 (page 741)

Prayer

Children's talk Barabbas?

Chorus MP 325 I'm special because

Notices Conversion T, HG at 33 WHR,

Sharing / prayer time

Reading Luke 23:26-43 (p.1060)

Hymn MP 755 When I survey the wondrous cross

Sermon The thief on the cross finds grace, before it is too late.

Hymn MP 31 Amazing Grace

Closing Prayer:

Close \_\_\_\_\_



*Welcome and pray*

- Ever had a school reunion? Met up with those in your class and while you reminisce about those playground days you all share what you are doing now? There are those who are not there, or not even

alive. You explain where you are, and maybe speak of those early decisions you made - that have brought you to where you are.

- Crusader children we can see where they are heading > prison

This morning as we continue in our series of people Jesus met; we will look at the thief on the cross, the two thieves. What kind of men were they? What do they have to say to me? Why did one change? Can I see myself there?

*Before we do that let us consider the situation.*

Jesus has come to the climax his three-year ministry and is heading to the cross, to crucifixion, a brutal and humiliating mode of death applied mostly to slaves, disgraced soldiers, foreigners and later Christians.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14750495/>

He was crucified at a place called *Calvary*, or *Golgotha* — *the place of a skull*: His hands and feet were nailed to the cross as it lay upon the ground, and it was then *lifted* up, and fastened into the earth, or into some socket made to receive it. This was a painful and shameful death above any other.

Two criminals

**Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.**

Two robbers, both Matthew and Mark use the word *lestes* 'lace-face' meaning a thief, robber, plunderer or brigand. We don't know any more about the life of these two; although the timing is significant because the notorious Barabbas was due to be crucified as well. It is quite probable that they were his followers. Barabbas, John says **had taken part in a rebellion** John 18:40. Luke records **Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder** 23:19.

It is highly likely those imprisoned along with him had taken part in the insurrection, a confusing and heady mix of zeal, murder, hate, patriotism, and lust of plunder.

They had been rounded up and were now getting their comeuppance as one of the thieves later acknowledges “**we are getting what we deserve**”

Unlike today capital punishment was prescribed for a wide range of crimes, not just for murder. Barabbas was guilty of murder and much else besides.

As Jesus is crucified many look up and hurl insults. “**Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.**” It is the devil's language who had done all he could to stop Jesus going to

the cross, Mark adds **Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.** Mr 15:32, Mt 27:44

So both robbers join with the others and those passing by who hurled insults, they mock this master who cannot help anyone, he cannot help himself they say, he has no power, he's a useless person to follow.

Of the three crosses Jesus was in the middle, Matthew records the two robbers were **one on his left and one on his right.** Matt 27:38

✚ .... It should have been Barabbas in the middle, the ring leader.

But when Pilate has offered to release Jesus - The hostile crowd had **shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!"** x2 John 18:40

How natural it would have been for three of the insurrectionist, perhaps the ring leaders to be hauled up to die publically in such a way. Everyone would have wiped their hands after a good day's work. Now there would be peace in the land again.

But it wasn't wicked evil Barabbas with all his remonstrating - it was Jesus the Holy Son of God.

Now both criminals had a chance to see - at close hand - a radically different master – how would he be in going through the same painful extremity?

They had expected to die with Barabbas. Barabbas Bar-abba = literally, "son of the father," i.e. of the master or teacher. Now they find themselves with one who called God his father and was described by the plaque above his head as Jesus of Nazareth, a King. They could hardly fail to have heard something of his fame as a prophet, or his entry into Jerusalem as a king.

They see the scorn of the people against a King who would not save himself and whose followers did not fight for him, (Joh 18:36). How unlike the many chieftains they had known claiming to be the messiah.

This one next to them did not to hesitate to face bloodshed and death.

When the drugged wine came to dull the sharp pain of the first hours on the cross He refused.

Here was one like a lamb before the slaughter, he - while experiencing the same excruciating pain as they were - is making plans to care for His mother. Here is one speaking words of forgiveness, one who was in charge of his life right up to the end. In His agony he did not depart this world in a pain-filled whimper as he suffocated to death - but gave up his spirit with a loud cry.

2a

*Let us think about the hardness of one criminal...*

**39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"**

The foul mouth of this wicked man spouts out filth, as he fights for his life. Calvin says: we have here an example of furious obstinacy held out to us in this wretched man, since even in the midst of his torments he does not cease fiercely to foam out his blasphemies.

The nails and the extremity of pain fail to humble this stubborn man. Although he upbraids Christ his objection is directed against God himself; - as with Adam and Eve it always is - wicked men, when they do not get what they want willingly tear God from heaven. Oh how this criminal reveals to us all the wicked heart of man. No amount of punishment can tame or bend a heart as hard as iron.

■ **Hardened to the last. Deathbed ranting and railing PM Oh who umbrage at the thought of repenting and turning, no never, not me.**

The proud spirit of this criminal would not be humbled x2 even though he was in pain and agony, and in the throws of death.

A proverb says: **Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him.** Pr 27:22

God uses trouble in this life to reveal yourself - to yourself - to humble you. – Even at death's door - even as he is half way out of this world would he look to eternity and seek a Saviour? A Saviour who is right next to him? NO

*But let us see the plea of the other criminal*

In the other of the two criminals there came a change. The midday darkness stealing over the sky awed him, the Divine patience, the silence and meekness of the sufferer touched him. He looked back over his past life, and saw an infinite evil. He looked to the man dying on the cross beside him, and saw an infinite compassion. **Here was one like no other.** This villain had never known such a master, such a king. How unlike his notorious master Barabbas who had done him no good – but instead brought him to his death.

To be forgotten by this king Jesus seems to him now the most terrible of all punishments; to take part in the triumph of his return, the most blessed of all hopes.

**40 the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?"**

2b

He sees that all sin stems from having no the fear of God. It is the fear of God that restrains evil. All around today there's no fear of God, in fact God is dismissed and often mocked. How foolish we have become.

Punishment is hanging over every lawbreaker. And it is a just punishment.

**41 We are punished justly** he said, **for we are getting what our deeds deserve.** If the other thief thought the storm of the cross would soon be over and peace will come – he was greatly mistaken. Pain and suffering here is the tip of the iceberg of the greater pain and endless suffering that is to come.

This penitent thief as he gazed on Christ's holiness - saw his own sin. The true penitents acknowledge the justice of God in the punishment of their sin. God has *done right*, - but *I have done wickedly*.

But.. **this man has done nothing wrong."**

He see Jesus has suffered *wrongfully*. The chief priests wanted him crucified *between* the criminals as one of them, but this thief has more sense than they, and knows he is not *one of them*. **this man has done nothing wrong."**

To Christ he now directs his yearning heartfelt prayer: **42 "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."**

✚ **Here is a prayer of a dying sinner to a dying Saviour.**

Perhaps he never prayed before, and yet now he was heard, - and saved - at the last gasp. While there is life there is hope, and while there is hope there is room for prayer.

We can see his *faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*. He owns him to be King and to have a *kingdom*, and that he was going to that kingdom, that he should have authority in that kingdom, and that as King can make happy those he favoured.

In recognising him as a King of an eternal kingdom - is his confession of sin and *repentance towards God*.

See his humility, he simply requests: *remember me*. He does not pray, *prefer me* but *remember me*, in your mercy remember me. Remember me *at death*, remember me *in the resurrection*."

To which Jesus immediately replies **43 "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."**

Christ here lets him know - and us - that he was going to paradise himself, not to the place of the damned, but to paradise, the place of the blessed. He assures you and I that anyone who is repentant can be sure x2 that when we die we shall go to be with him there.

The happiness of heaven, is to see and be with Christ and share in his Glory.

**I tell you the truth, today**, yes **today** this day, to-night, before to-morrow.

The souls of the those who have turned to Christ alone will the moment we leave this world - be immediately joyfully in the presence of the Lord.

Christ died to purchase the forgiveness of sins for us and to open the way for eternal life in the kingdom of heaven to all penitent believers.

✚ **What a picture of Christ's Grace. His free gift to all who will come!**

This sinner, when just ready to fall into the hands of Satan, was snatched as a brand out of the burning, and made a monument of divine mercy and grace, and Satan was left to roar as a lion disappointed of his prey.

What a wonderful response of divine grace to the humble hearted. These two have been comrades in sin and suffering, and yet one is *saved* and the other *perishes*; Of these two partners in crime *one taken and the other left*.

**Jesus stood in my place**

Our Lord's cross was placed between two lawbreakers that he be treated as a transgressor and *numbered with them*, the worst of them, reviled, reproached, and treated with all the scorn and contempt imaginable.

Jesus as Isaiah said speaking 700 years before **he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors.** Isa 53:12

✚ **Jesus becomes the criminal - to save the criminal. He who had no sin - became sin - so that you and I can have the righteousness of God.**

Christ's prayer for his enemies: **Father, forgive them.** As soon as ever he was fastened to the cross, he prayed this prayer, as Isaiah went on to say: **he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.** Isa 53:12

**"Father, forgive them,** not only these, but all who will repent and believe the gospel".

Christ was crucified between two thieves. Both were guilty before God, two criminals, two sinners, like you and I. Now the cross of Christ is to some a *savour of life leading to life*, to others of *death leading to death*. To them that perish it is foolishness, but to them that are saved it is the power of God.

These two criminals are a picture of all people. Everyone who has ever lived is either the thief on the right - or the thief on the left. Before a Holy God all are lawbreakers and have violated God's perfect law.

Do not split the world into good people and bad people, there are no 'good' people. Sin is hidden in every heart, God sees it and calls it out, Jesus said the sin of adultery shows first in the heart. To have hatred is as if to commit murder. No-one has loved God and loved our neighbor as we should. No-one. ALL of US are law breakers, guilty before God and deserving of his wrath. Without Christ's intervention all we can do is await the inevitable just judgment which will come to all people when you leave this world.

The question is what will you do about it? There are three ways:

1. You could try to make up for it and do certain things that you think will appease – and please God. That is the religious man or woman.
2. You could be unconcerned; deny there is a problem - deny I need to do anything - and remain as you are. That is the way of the first thief.
3. Or you could have a change of heart, see the seriousness of your position before God, realise that you could at any time depart this world and be brought to judgment and therefore see it's an urgent business. Then immediately like the second thief call out to the Lord, and that means now - while you still can, yes now.

✚ **To Jesus, the one who stands between the living and the dead.**

God the father accepted this offering up of Christ life for his sin - Here now is the one way of rescue.

- Like those firemen who pulled the crashed pilot out of the plane moments before the train bearing down on him brought complete destruction.

**Jesus can pull you away from eternal death and bring you to eternal life!**

Turn to Christ before it is too late. Give up your ways, and he will immediately x2 receive you. Do not let the message of these two criminals pass you by. Do not put off repentance until your death-bed. Don't play Russian roulette with your life hoping to find mercy on that day. You won't find it!

**Some of you should something happen this afternoon, tonight, are not ready**

You are at a great advantage over this thief. He never had before any offer of Christ until his last moment. Now his actions are recorded to show all of us the power of Christ's grace. This is what Christ can do.

This is salvation by Christ's free grace. There's no baptism, he did go off and try and be good. He is not religious, he called out to Jesus in trust and belief.

4a

✚ **Same start - Two endings, two destinies**

One thief was to leave this troubled world and enter a far worse storm of judgment and then hell.

The other left this troubled world - for paradise

- Airlift from Kabul, imagine the scene turmoil distress, fear misery chaos and then the wonderful release as the transport plane lifts up off the runway – all that is left behind.

✚ **Same start - Two endings, I wonder if they were at school together?**

- Pacing back and forth in his prison cell, Leo D'Arcangelo was deeply disturbed. Who wouldn't be, facing what was ahead of him?
- As a boy of eleven, he had picked a lady's handbag on a crowded tram. That was the start. Five years of stealing followed before his first arrest at sixteen in a Philadelphia department store. Shortly after release he started mainlining heroin. Then began the seemingly endless arrests: use and possession of drugs, picking pockets, jumping bail.
- As he paced his cell he noticed a few lines crudely scrawled on the wall
- "When you come to the end of your journey and this trouble is racked in your mind, and there seems no other way out than by just mourning, turn to Jesus, for it is Him that you must find."
- This started him thinking. "This is the end of my journey. What have I got to show for it? Nothing except a lousy past and a worse future.
- "Jesus, I need Your help. I've made a mess of my life and this is the end of the journey, and all the crying isn't going to change my past. Jesus, if You can change my life, please do it. Help me make tomorrow different.

- Now suddenly for the first time Leo felt hope and not despair.

God holds your life and your eternal destiny in his hands. - but depending on what you do now with Jesus - he will switch from one destiny one to another as he did with this thief.

✚ **Have you switched? Repented? Turned to the Lord as this thief did?**

I was wondering what title to give this sermon, should it be 'at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, or 'the last chance' or 'Christ's power and readiness to save' or 'find Grace – before it is too late' - Yes they all fit - all are true.

I hope like this thief they are true for you, everyone here. \_\_\_\_\_END

4b