

4 Ways We Should Be Like The Thief On The Cross Pleasant Plains 11-11-2018AM NICK ANGEL

- ***READ Luke 18:9-14*** I think it is pretty safe to say that if these two thieves were able to look back on the Biblical account of them hanging beside Jesus that one would be quite jealous of the other. While one simply carries on in his wickedness, the other is quite often used as the proof that baptism is not necessary if one wants to be saved by Jesus. I believe that angle of argumentation is quite weak and doesn't hold much water, but that is simply not within the scope of our considerations this morning. Instead of looking at this penitent thief that hung beside Jesus and how we are different from him, I would like for us to consider how we ought to be more like him.
- While this man might have been where he was because of the consequences of his own actions, we can't ignore that this man made some pretty incredible statements while hanging on his own cross beside Jesus. Instead of only looking at this man with a negative connotation, I think it would be good for us to take some time to look at how we should be more like this man within our own lives. I am of the belief that there are at least four ways in this text that we should be like the thief that hung on a cross beside our Lord. The first way we should be more like this thief begins with this man's realizations about himself.

I. **Take responsibility for my wrongs. (Luke 23:40,41)**

A. This thief was not afraid to admit that he was hanging on the cross justly.

1. Crucifixion on a cross was not something that the Romans took lightly. It was often reserved as the most cruel form of capital punishment not just for the sake of retribution against those who did wrong, but also as a deterrent towards those who might have plans of committing various crimes. It might seem strange that Jesus might have the same fate as a simple thief, but we are not given any information as to the extent of these men's crimes other than that they were thieves.
2. In fact, we would not know the crimes of these men from Luke's account because they are simply referred to as criminals. However, through Matthew and Mark's accounts we come to find out that they were robbers or thieves. **(Matthew 27:44 & Mark 15:27)** Whatever their crimes, it becomes clearly evident that one of these men was fully aware of what he had done and that he was in this situation because of decisions and actions.
3. While the one thief is hurling abuse at Jesus, the other was quick to step in and admit that it was only the two thieves themselves that were worthy of being where they were. This seemingly penitent thief can be seen taking responsibility for his actions by confessing that he was where he belonged. *"And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds."* **(Luke 23:41)** This man realized that he deserved punishment for his actions. He wasn't going to make excuses or brush off his responsibility for his position, and that is an important first step in turning our lives away from sin. It is a step that each of us must take if we want to become what God desires for us to be. We must be willing to take ownership of our actions.

B. We must not ignore the fact that when we sin we, too, are guilty and worthy of death.

1. This thief was being punished for his sins, and we must realize that our sins put us in a place where we too are deserving of punishment. Though God created us to be in fellowship with Him through our holiness and righteousness, our rejection of living holy and righteous lives puts us in a position where we are only deserving of punishment. *"For the wages of sin is death"* is clearly seen and taught by Paul in **Romans 6:23**.
2. While this is a reality, we must recognize that not all people are willing to open their eyes to this reality. There are many people who go through this life completely oblivious to their spiritual condition. They have no willingness to confess their sins or even acknowledge that they have turned their backs upon God. Yet, this isn't a new problem for we see people throughout the Bible being obviously to their sins. We read in **Genesis 6:1-12** that the

people on the earth at that time were just going about their lives doing as they wished without regard for how God viewed their actions. They had no concern for the fact that every intent of their hearts was on evil continually. They gave no care or concern for their earth being filled with violence. They were only concerned with doing as they desired. This type of mentality continued on into the New Testament, and we read in **Romans 1:21-32** that the Gentiles, while they should've been aware of God and His will, they ignored Him and *"became futile in their speculations and their foolish heart was darkened."*

3. These examples simply show us that what the thief on the cross was willing to do something that not all people are willing to do. He was willing to take ownership of his actions. He was willing to consider that what he had done was wrong. He was willing to accept the consequences and not ignore his current situation. As mentioned a moment ago, that is the first step in us changing and become more of what God would have us to be. The thief, though in a tough situation, teaches us this all important lesson through his actions.

II. Be willing to acknowledge Jesus's holiness and righteousness. (Luke 23:41)

A. While acknowledging his own mistakes, this thief also realized that Jesus didn't deserve to be there in that same situation as him.

1. As the hardened criminal is hurling abuse at Jesus, the penitent criminal not only tells him that he's being foolish for he was where he deserved to be, but he also strongly states that Jesus was the only one present that didn't deserve to be there. *"We indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."* The penitent thief was somehow aware of the fact that Jesus didn't deserve to be there.
2. We are not told exactly what lead this man to this conclusion, but it is possible that the context gives us some clues as to why he spoke like this.
 - a) It could have been that the thief simply observed how Jesus was behaving and concluded that this was a truly righteous man. This conclusion could've especially been reached if the penitent thief had heard Jesus utter the words that are recorded in **Luke 23:34**, *"But Jesus was saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'"*
 - b) However, I would suggest that this man very well might have been aware of who Jesus was far before they found themselves hanging on crosses beside one another. I say this based upon the man's statement to Jesus about remembering him when He came in His kingdom. (**Luke 23:42**) I don't see anything in this text that seems to indicate that this man and Jesus had a deep spiritual conversation about the kingdom. Put that together with the sheer popularity of Jesus, and I don't think it is outside the realm of possibility that this man had knowledge of Jesus's teachings.
3. Regardless of how this man knew about Jesus, we see that this knowledge led him to confess Jesus as being unlike them in the fact that He did not deserve to be on the cross as they did. This confession made by this penitent thief on the cross carries with it very deep and important theological implications that he probably didn't know he was making, but that we must be aware of and willing to confess ourselves.

B. Jesus was willing to unjustly hang on that cross so that we might be spared and given a chance at living a life in His name.

1. This thief acknowledged rightly that Jesus was unworthily hanging on that cross. While the thieves were justly hanging their, Jesus Himself was unjustly hanging on the cross. Yet, as the chosen Lamb of God who had been sent to die for the sins of mankind, it was integral that Jesus die in this manner, unjustly.
2. It is well noted throughout the New Testament and even prophesied in the Old Testament that Jesus was without sin while living on the earth.

- a) *"His grave was assigned with the wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because he had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth."* (Isaiah 53:9)
 - b) *"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* (II Corinthians 5:21)
 - c) *"For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH."* (I Peter 2:22)
 - d) *"and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.'"* (Matthew 3:17)
3. The evidence clearly points to Jesus being free of sin, but why is it so important for us to willfully acknowledge His sinlessness and unworthiness to be crucified not he cross? I'll suggest that the answer to that question lies in our willingness to admit what has been done for us. It lies in our willingness of understand and admit that Jesus suffered so that we might not have to suffer for eternity as punishment for our sins. This unjust suffering of Jesus is what paid the ransom for us to be redeemed so that we might receive an eternal inheritance through His death. **(Hebrews 9:13-15)** If we're not willing to confess what Jesus has done for us then why should we expect for His sacrifice to give us any benefit? The thief might not have been aware of what Jesus was doing for him in unjustly dying, but we ought to be well aware and not allow such a thing to fail to be realized within our own minds.

III. Be willing to defend Jesus from attacks. (Luke 23:39,40)

- A. This thief was willing to defend Jesus from verbal attacks thrown at Him by the other thief.
 - 1. The whole reason we see the penitent thief confessing his own mistakes and acknowledging the righteousness of Jesus was because the other thief was hurling abuse against Jesus. Where the penitent thief was willing to recognize the goodness of Jesus, the other thief would rather join in on the abuse that was being vocally thrown at Jesus. ***"Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!"*** (Luke 23:39)
 - 2. It would've been easy for both thieves to jump in with the soldiers and pile on with the verbal abuse against Jesus, but he was convicted to take the side of Jesus and do what he could to defend His honor. The reality is that this man didn't have anything tangible to gain from defending Jesus. In fact, he could've been setting himself up for some of the same treatment that Jesus was receiving. Yet, he was still willing to put himself out there and stand up for Jesus when others were attacking Him.
- B. We must be willing to defend Jesus because of what He was willing to do to buy us back.
 - 1. If we are able to recognize our sin and what we deserve because of it...if we are able to recognize the righteousness of Jesus and what He was willing to do for us...then it shouldn't be but a logical conclusion for us to be willing to stand up for Jesus, as well. We must be willing to defend Jesus when we find Him being under attack because He first came to our defense.
 - 2. What does this look like?. It might look like us coming to the defense of Jesus and His teachings when those of the world attack Him. When people attack the teachings of Jesus concerning marriage, gender roles, morality, and other issues...what are we going to do? Are we going to speak up and defend Jesus? When we personally might be maligned because of our faith...are we going to cower away and hush up?
 - 3. The reality is that we should never keep quiet and not stand up and defend our faith in Jesus and what He teaches us through His word. Why should this be our mentality? It should be our mentality because of everything that we have seen up to this point. We are sinful people who deserve to die and be tormented in hell forever. Yet, Jesus in His lovingkindness was willing to come to earth and die for us. Therefore, we must be like this penitent thief and stand up for

Jesus when those around us might seek to speak negatively about Him. If we are not willing to do such a thing then confess Jesus then He makes it very clear that He won't be willing to confess us. **(Luke 12:8,9)** The penitent thief was willing to confess Jesus, and for that Jesus was willing to give Him hope even in his most dire situation of hanging on that cross.

IV. Long to be a part of Jesus's kingdom. (Luke 23:42,43)

A. This man knew of Jesus's kingdom and desired greatly to be a part of it.

1. Remember that we don't know exactly what all this penitent thief knew about Jesus, but this request that he makes of our Lord as they both hung on crosses I believe tells us that this man was at least somewhat aware of Jesus and what He was doing while on the earth. If we remember back to John's teachings concerning Jesus then we know that John taught of there being the kingdom of heaven that was at hand. **(Matthew 3:2)** Additionally, John taught that the one who was coming after him would be someone mightier than he who would do many amazing and great things. **(Matthew 3:11)** Could it be that this man was one of those who had not just heard the teachings of John but was also a man who had been baptized by him? I definitely don't think this is outside the realm of possibility considering the evidence.
2. Yet regardless, the main point I would like for us to take away is the fact that this man was not so fixated on his current circumstances that he gave no attention to what was more important such as what was going to happen beyond this life. This seems to be why the last thing this thief said to Jesus focused on his desire for Jesus to remember him when He comes again in His kingdom. **(Luke 23:42)** The man didn't desire for deliverance from this current circumstance, but he wanted what he must have perceived as being something much greater in being a part of Jesus's kingdom over which He would rule.

B. We must be willing to make our citizenship in heaven the focus of our lives.

1. The vast majority of us find ourselves in completely different circumstances than the penitent thief. We might rejoice and thank God for such a reality, but on the other hand our good fortune can cause us to not value our citizenship in Jesus's kingdom as we ought to. We can so enjoy this life that our main focus is on making it as great as it can be. Or it could be that we get so enthralled in this world and everything that comes with it that we fail to give constant consideration to our heavenly citizenship, our citizenship in that kingdom that the thief desired for Jesus to allow him to be a part of.
2. Therefore, we must always keep in mind the words of Paul that can be found in **Philippians 3:17-21**. We are to follow his godly example of making sure that we value our portion in the kingdom above everything else. There are many in this life who profess a love for Jesus and His things, but they live with a worldly focus by setting their minds on earthly things. **(Philippians 3:19)** It is Paul's admonition that we remember that what we eagerly desire for is the realization of our hope in our heavenly citizenship. We are most invested in being prepared for that day when we will be transformed into a glorified body that will no longer feel pain nor sorrow. We wait for that day when we too can be with Jesus in Paradise. **(Luke 23:43)**

This penitent thief that we might often look at with disdain for how he is often used to teach a misguided doctrine is actually a character that we can learn so much from. This man who could've been mad at the world and who could've lashed out at Jesus is a man that showed us tremendous faith when all else seemed lost. His willingness to be accountable for his actions, to acknowledge Jesus for who He is, to defend Jesus from attacks, and to put his hope in Jesus's kingdom serves as a strong example of just how we ought to approach our mistakes, Jesus, His sacrifice, and His kingdom. May God help us to be more like this thief on the cross in those ways that showed his great faith.