

A “Worthless” Thief

INTRODUCTION:

1. Today I want to talk to you about a thief, that some might have called him a “worthless” thief, that hung on a cross next to Jesus our Savior.
2. You may have heard a lot of sermons about this “thief on the cross,” one or two maybe from me, but I hope that you will hear me out.
3. I want to talk about this thief and what happened to him on the cross because it has a lot of important things to say to us.
 - A. It is unfortunate this example of **great victory** in the realm of the spiritual battle for souls has become such a negative for those who would preach the truth.
 - B. For, as many of you know, whenever God’s plan of salvation is presented, this thief is thrown up by others as “proof” that people do not have to be baptized to be saved, even though Jesus’ commanded it.
 - C. Sadly, this controversy causes both sides to miss a real lesson being taught here.
4. Despite the controversy that has arisen around this man, I want to consider this extraordinary situation and the wonderful truth it teaches us about Christ and His love for His **rebellious creation**.
5. But to do that it is important to understand these things in light of people’s view of life and the world today, during which time I hope you will bear with me.

BODY:

I. We have mixed up the price tags!

- A. Illustration: Many years ago, some people broke into a department store and stole nothing! What they did instead was switch a whole bunch of price tags.
 1. In stores back then most every individual piece of merchandise had its own price tags.
 - a. Back in the day, as you would say, there were no barcodes, no barcode scanners, etc.
 - b. The price was placed on each item with a tag or a sticker, and checkers had to look at each item’s price and key it’s price into their “register” which would add up your bill.
 2. With that in mind you begin to see the humor of switching the price tags. For, what those who broke in did was to take a nice set of golf clubs and put something like a \$5.00 price tag on it, while a baseball cap might have a \$1,500 price tag!
 3. The amazing part, however, is that the next morning the store operated for 4 hours before anyone noticed! Checkers were keying in outrageous prices without any thought of it!
- B. It is hard to believe something like this could happen today, but it does!
 1. It does not happen at Wal-Mart, etc., because we have advanced far beyond that old way of doing things.
 2. Despite our electronic advancements, we live in a society that has a distorted value system, that has “switched the price tags!” And sadly, day after day few ever seem to notice!
 3. The cheapest and basest things are treated as our greatest possessions.
 - a. We glorify fame received from pretending to be someone you are not in front of a camera ...no matter what kinds of things you do in front of that camera.
 - b. We worship hitting and catching a ball, or dribbling and throwing one in a hoop, or carry one over a goal line. And most do so with far more enthusiasm than they have in approaching anything else!
 - c. We have put on a pedestal the basest of human desires and passions, even dedicating a month of our calendar year in their celebration.
 - d. We spend billions pampering and building up our bodies while our eternal souls housed within them are allowed to wither away into ruin!
 4. That which has true and lasting value is rejected and thrown out as worthless.
 - a. Leisure is valued far more than is a good day’s work.
 - b. We slaughter our precious children in mass in the name of “women’s rights” and “pro-choice.”

- c. Biblical morals and values, and those who adhere to them, are trashed by the “media” as bigoted, hateful, and destructive, while the despicable deeds and crimes of the immoral are dismissed and even justified.
- C. Why are the price tags so mixed up? Because we do not know who we are, where we are going, or what is required to get there.
- 1. We have been convinced that we are a product of blind chance, that we came from nothing, that we are returning to nothing, and therefore have no destiny, purpose, or duty.
 - 2. Because people have rejected God, “every man does what is right in his own eyes” (Jdg. 17:6).
 - a. This is the path of the foolish (Psa. 14:1 – “The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good.”).
 - b. We as a people have traded truth for a lie only to be left to wallow in the mire of our moral degradation (Rom. 1:21-25, 28-32).
 - i. People want to reject God and the Bible, believing none of it is true, believing life will be so much better if all would do so.
 - ii. But in doing so they have proven His words true.
 - 1) Acceptance of sin and perversion has not made life better.
 - 2) Look around you. The world’s acceptance of sin has led to more and more corruption, dishonesty, distrust, hatred, violence, the destruction of the family, and the devaluing of human life itself!
- D. Satan’s success has affected me...and maybe you.
- 1. What prevails today it seems is more often than not an “us against them,” a “righteous against the unrighteous,” mentality that affects our lives.
 - a. Of course, there is a battle for our eternal souls going on—a war if you will being waged behind the scenes that is infinitely greater than we realize.
 - b. The problem, however, is that values get mixed up in war. And I feel that has happened to me far more than I would like to admit.
 - c. The physical hostility that the world shows toward me and what I know to be the truth often translates into dislike and disgust with them to the point that the value of their souls gets lost. They become nothing more than “worthless thieves” to me.
 - d. And that mentality creeps into my worldview and affects my view of sinners and my efforts in general to save souls.
 - 2. Fortunately, this is **man’s** value system and **not God’s!**

II. A “Worthless” Thief:

- A. This man was crucified with Jesus because he *deserved* it (Matthew 27:33-44).
- 1. His legacy: **He was a thief that took what belonged to others!** (Matt. 27:38)
 - a. This man chose to apply his mind and body **to taking other peoples’ stuff** with no regard for their effort spent to gain these things or for their needs.
 - b. This man made his **living** from **sin** that **harmed other people**.
 - c. Here is a man whose **thievery** rose to the point that **he was being crucified for it!**
 - i. The state had tried him and determined that he was a criminal deserving punishment, which was to be death by hanging on a cross.
 - ii. I do not know how much or what you had to steal to be crucified for it, but I do know crucifying thieves was not the norm for Roman law!
 - iii. Therefore, some have suggested that maybe he not only robbed people’s things, but robbed them of their health as well, like those that robbed the man in the “Good Samaritan.” And that is very likely!
 - iv. Others suggest that he may have robbed and used what he gained for seditious reasons, like to finance rebellion against the Roman government.
 - v. Whatever it was, it was bad enough to receive the death penalty.

2. If that were not enough, this man used his dying breath to revile and blaspheme the sinless Son of God who had come to earth to bring God's grace and salvation (Matt. 27:44 – "The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.")!
 - a. He sided with those passing by who were calling on Jesus in the name of being God's Son to come down from the cross and give up the very purpose He was here to fulfill as God's Son—to die for our sins (27:39-40).
 - b. In reviling Jesus this man sided with the chief priests and scribes, who hated Jesus and were responsible for the mock trial that condemned Him, and were here tempting Jesus to walk away from the one and only act that could save mankind, including this thief, from their sin! (27:41-43).
 - c. They were doing the work of Satan!
 3. So, from a purely pragmatic point of view, this man was the ultimate, three-strikes and you are out, loser!
 - a. Many would likely have seen him as what we might call a "waste of space."
 - b. Many may have viewed his end as "getting what he deserved."
 - c. Others may have thought "good riddance!"
 - d. Even from a *spiritual perspective* he seems like a loser—a hardened, hopeless case.
- B. With Jesus, however, things are different (Luke 23:39-43 – "One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!"⁴⁰ But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?⁴¹ And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.⁴² And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!⁴³ And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."").
1. While the world saw a worthless thief, Jesus saw something else.
 - a. Sure, Jesus saw a man who had spent his life in selfish, harmful living, a man who was getting what he deserved in earthly justice. God knows our lives and our sin.
 - b. But Jesus also saw a man who had a change of heart while hanging on that cross (Luke 23:40-42).
 - c. One minute this robber is reviling Jesus, the next he is rebuking his fellow robber for continuing to revile Jesus.
 - i. I do not know what it was that swayed him. It is not revealed per-se. But I know this thief hung on a cross **next to God who had become flesh**.
 - ii. So, whatever it was...
 - 1) He now saw the justice of their punishment in contrast to the innocence of Jesus (Lk. 23:40-41).
 - 2) He now perceived that Christ's death would not impede his coming kingdom and requested to be remembered by Jesus when He came in His kingdom (Lk. 23:42).
 - iii. These changes continue to be key elements in salvation today through Christ.
 - 1) One must come to realize the ugliness and depravity of one's own sin and desire Christ and his grace to address it!
 - 2) For, no one can be convinced to respond to Jesus as the Messiah until that person is convinced and convicted of being a sinner in need of salvation.
 2. Here is the clincher! Jesus granted this "worthless thief" eternal life (Lk. 23:43 – "And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.")!
 - a. He offered eternal salvation to this man, this crucified criminal, who had nothing to offer Jesus but a lot of sin and disgrace upon his family and the Lord.
 - b. Unlike others saved by Jesus' grace, he would soon be dead and had no time, no energy, no work to promise to give to Jesus' cause. He was unlike even...
 - i. The adulterous Samaritan woman who could go and tell others of Jesus' works (John 4).

- ii. Zacchaeus, the hated tax collector, who could provide money, time, and an abundance of contacts for Jesus.
 - iii. Paul, the chief of sinners and persecutor and murderer of God's people who could offer a life of service and suffering to Jesus.
 - c. This thief had nothing but his most recent faith that Jesus was God's Christ and King.
 - d. Yet, Jesus granted his request, promising him eternal life that would begin by being with Jesus that very day in Paradise!
3. Jesus saw the *value of the man* as a *man*...not as a thief (Mt 16:26 – “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”).
- a. Jesus' saving this man was not to throw a monkey wrench in the study of whether baptism is essential for salvation, because God had made that perfectly clear.
 - i. In baptism is when sins are washed away (Acts 22:16 – “Now why do you delay? Get up and **be baptized, and wash away your sins**, calling on His name.”).
 - ii. In baptism one is saved (1 Pet. 3:21 – “Corresponding to that, **baptism now saves you**—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”).
 - iii. In baptism one enters Christ, is buried with Christ, and is raised to newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4 – “Or do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized into Christ** Jesus have been baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we have been **buried with Him through baptism into death**, so that **as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.**”).
 - b. Instead, by saving of this man Jesus **put the price tag back where it should be** and reminded us of the value He places on every soul, even the most sinful (1 Tim. 1:15-16 – “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, **that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**, among whom **I am foremost of all.** ¹⁶ Yet for this reason I found mercy, **so that in me** as the foremost, **Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example** for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”)!

CONCLUSION:

1. Jesus saving this *seemingly worthless thief* was about how God values every person because they are a person—one created in the very image of God possessing an eternal soul (Gen. 1:26-27).
2. God values you, even if you have done bad things like this thief, or Saul of Tarsus, or like all the rest who “have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23) and earned the wages of death (Rom. 6:23).
3. Jesus is calling you today saying, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28-30).
4. Will you come to Jesus in faith, obeying His will in R-C-Bp that you might receive forgiveness of your sins and be given the wonderful treasures of salvation and hope of eternal life in His grace?