



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

The Suffering Servant, Luke 23:33-43

"The Last Words - I"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] ...words the messianic companionship, compassion, and care. And we are to look at the second and the third of the last words. But before we do, let's begin our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for another opportunity to consider the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for his love for us and we thank Thee for the righteousness and justice of our great God. We thank Thee Lord that Thou has observed all of the requirements of Thine own law and Thy hast satisfied Thyself and our Lord has satisfied Thee through the sufferings that he endured when he died.

And we pray tonight as we consider some of the sayings that he uttered during the hours of his crucifixion that the truths contained within may come home to our understanding so that we may understand and through understanding appreciate in a deeper way all that Thou hast done for us. We commit this hour to Thee and pray that Thou wilt guide and direct each one of us into that which Thou hast for us, each individually. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We come now in earnest to the famous seven sayings at The Skull. And the first three of the seven concern others. The first one, remember in our last study, was a saying that had to do with the enemies of our Lord when Jesus Christ said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Or as we translated it, "Father, let them go for they know not what they do." The next one will have to do with one of his friends, the dying thief, who at the last repented and believed in our Lord Jesus Christ. The third has to do with his mother and with his cousin John. The last four concern him. So out of the seven sayings, which Jesus uttered, the first three have to do with others, the last four have to do with him.

Schilder has said, "He came to God and had no other gods before him, even though God robbed him of everything." The dying thief of whom we shall speak was one of the noblest theologians of Jesus' day. A man who came at the moment of his death to know more than Peter and to see more than the great apostle of the visions, the Apostle John, yet he was a criminal. The reticence of the narrative in connection with the men who have a great deal to do with our Lord's last hours is a very striking thing. The fact that we are told nothing more about this thief but that he was a man who railed up on our Lord Jesus and then at the last turned in faith to him is a very striking fact. I think that if we had been writing the word of God we surely would have put in some means of identification of him. We would like to have heard his origins and we would like to have heard as much about him as we possibly could. But the Bible in page after page is not interested in the little things that we are interested in often, it's rather consumed with this one desire to make plain the significance of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus. And so the narrative is curiously reticent about the background of the dying thief.

Tradition says that the names of these two thieves are on the one hand Zothon on the other Camata. But we cannot be sure about that because there is also other tradition that one of them was named Dismas and another Gestas, and still a third form of the

tradition is that one of was named Titus and the other Dumacus. We can only be sure of this, that there were two thieves there.

Now, we are going to begin with the prophecy, which is fulfilled in the events of this cross, and then we're going to look back at the New Testament account. So first of all will you take your Bibles and turn with me to Isaiah chapter 53, Isaiah chapter 53. And we're going to read again the passage that we have looked at several times in the past. But we want to look at it with a different purpose in mind now. Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 12. Here we read, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great." Now remember this is a prophecy of the suffering servant of Jehovah and we now have reached the climax of it when Isaiah is speaking about the glories of the suffering servant in view of his sufferings. "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great and he shall divide the spoil with the strong because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors and he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors."

There is only one thing that I want particularly to notice and that is the statement, of course I wanted to notice the statement, "he was numbered with the transgressors," because that is a clear reference to the fact that the Messiah is going to die in company with the transgressors. But I want you to notice the statement that follows that, "And he bore the sin of many," because in the Hebrew text at this point this particular verb is antecedent to the verbs that have preceded it which indicates that this is the basis upon which we read in verse 12 in the first clause, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great." In other words, the reason that the Messiah is going to inherit this portion with the great is because he has born the soul of many.

And the last clause, "And made intercession for the transgressors," is connected with that past tense and thus it to is a reference to prayer that takes place before he enters into his inheritance. For that reason the prayer that is referred to in Isaiah chapter 53 verse 12 is not the prayer of our Lord as high priest. The kind of prayer that he is

engaged in now, the continuous ministry of the high priest, but it is the prayer that he offered on the cross before he bore the sin of many. It is specifically a reference to the statement that we looked at last week when Jesus cried out, "Father, let them go for they know not what they do." In other words, the bearing of the sin and offering of the petition is the basis of the sharing of the booty with the great.

Now, remember the two great emphases of the suffering servant of Jehovah have been the sufferings and the glory that should follow. In this verse, Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 12, they are connected together. It's almost as if when you read that text, Isaiah chapter 53 verse 12, you are standing under the cross at Golgotha because those statements seem to reference specifically to the things that are transpiring there. So the king and the prophet now performs his work as priest. He is to suffer and bear the sins of many and he shall do it reckoned as a transgressor. So in that text of Isaiah 53, though the details are not put together, it is suggestive that the Lord Jesus in the bearing of the sins of many shall do it in the company of transgressors.

Now, let's turn back to our passage in Luke chapter 23, and we shall look at his inevitable company both now and forever. Luke chapter 23 verse 33 through verse 43, "And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save Thyself. And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, This is the King of the Jews. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save Thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art

in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

This picture of our Lord hanging between two thieves is a profoundly typical picture. It is typical of men because there are three men here who are an illustration of the three types of men that exist in this universe in which we live. There is on the one hand God's man, the Lord Jesus Christ. Absolutely unique, there has never been another godman and there never will be another godman. On the one side of the godman there is a man who accepts, a man who believes, a man who repents and believes. There is that kind of man in our human existence. And on the other side there is a man who rejects. All classes of men are found here, God's man, the man who accepts, the man who rejects. The picture is also typical of the way of life for it is a beautiful illustration of Ephesians 2, 8, and 9, "For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works let any man should boast."

If there was ever a man who could not perform the so-called works of righteousness, which some people think are necessary for salvation, it is the dying thief. He did not have time to join the church. He didn't have time to get baptized. He didn't have time to sit at the Lord's Supper. He didn't have time to do any kind of good works. The only thing that he could possibly do, the only thing that was left to him to do was to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus who was hanging at his side and that is precisely what he did. And the Lord gave him that promise, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

It also is illustrative of the way of death for the other man who refused to come to our Lord Jesus Christ is an illustration of the fact that if we do not believe in him we shall not see life but the wrath of God shall abide upon us. Sunday school teachers have often

used this as illustrative of the saving work of the Lord Jesus. And many of you, no doubt, have had lessons from Sunday school teachers on the three crosses. And you probably have had your Sunday school teacher put three crosses on a blackboard and then write simple words by them. For example to take the cross, upon which one of the thieves hung, the one who railed upon our Lord Jesus and who did not repent the teacher may have put two little simple words or three simple words by the side of that cross, "In and on," signifying the fact that within the thief who died there was sin because he was a child of Adam.

And furthermore, because he did not believe in our Lord Jesus Christ the guilt of his sin also became his and so sin was in him and sin was on him, trying to signify these aspects of sin. Then turning to the other thief, the teacher may explain that in the case of the thief who did believe, well he was just a sinner as the other thief and so we can put, "In," by him, but because he believed in our Lord Jesus Christ it is evident that Jesus Christ bore his sin. And so by him the teacher puts, "In not on," because the guilt is born by our Lord Jesus. And then coming to our Lord Jesus to explain what happened when he died, the teacher points out that in our Lord Jesus there was no sin. He did no sin. In him there was no sin. And so in his case the teacher writes, "Not in but on," because on him rests the guilt of sinners. And so in this simple little story we have the elements of the saving work of the Lord Jesus. "In and on. In not on. Not in, but on." And so the story of the three crosses is illustrative of many of the facts of man, and facts of the way of life, and facts of the way of death.

I think also it's rather striking that when Jesus Christ came into the world as an infant he lay amid the shepherds, amid the magi, and amid the temple guests. But when he died he hung amid the bandits, and the thieves, and the robbers. They were, in a sense, his inevitable company. Not simply because the Scriptures of the Old Testament say that he was to be numbered with the transgressor, but the Old Testament prophet wrote, he was numbered with the transgressors because it was necessary in the divine

plan that he die in the midst of the bandits, and the thieves, and the robbers. Why did Jesus Christ die amidst the bandits, and the thieves, and the robbers? Why were these men his evitable company? Why didn't he die amide a group of believers? Why didn't he die in the midst of some holy men? Well, God does this to give us a vivid picture of what we are. He does it to humble us. He does it in order for us to realize exactly what kinds of people we are. And if you don't get the point I'll say. You are criminals. That's what you are in the divine economy, you are criminals and we are no better than these thieves who died by the side of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is his way of telling us precisely what we are. And that's why I say it is his inevitable company.

Now, of course, you my have a better of human nature than I have. I used to have a good idea of human nature, until recently, I've been reading in my newspapers. Now, Watergate did not shatter my faith in humanity. But several other things since have shattered my faith in humanity. I must confess I was a little shaken when just a few weeks ago I read on the front pages of our newspaper here and now I've read it in *Time* magazine, and that makes it true [laughter], that some scientists have been found guilty of tampering with the research that they were engaged in at a famous well respected cancer clinic in the northern part of the United States. And I've been told for a number of years that our hope for salvation lay with the scientists. And I must confess that I am deeply disturbed to realize that theses saviors of humanity have some of the characteristics that I have as just a plain old sinner.

Now, that shook me considerably I must admit. But the thing that really shook me more than anything else was the fact the old institution to which I belonged, the Boy Scouts of America, [laughter] have now been found to be sinners too. And not just the ordinary run of the scouts because I knew them, I was one of them, but those men who led us and who told us that we must be mentally awake and morally straight. I have discovered that some of the leaders of the Boy Scouts of America have actually padded the membership roles of the organization. Now, my faith in humanity has been so

shattered that I'm willing now to open my ears to the doctrine of the depravity of man.

[Laughter]

Now coming back to our record, our Lord Jesus has been placed upon the central cross. The crucifixion is ready to begin. There was kind of spray of blood, tearing of flesh, the straining of tendons, and then those three trees so lately planted stand laden with fruit of infinite pain. And it was a bloody and brutal scene, and never forget it. It is God's way, again also, of telling us in a visible way of just what it may mean only in measure for the Son of God to die under the judgment of God. There is hanging on the one side of the man the unrepentant thief. We read in verse 32 and 33, "And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death." And then we read in verse 39, "And one of the malefactors who were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save Thyself and us." We might get the impression from this account in the Gospel of Luke that this one thief who did not believe in our Lord Jesus was the only one who railed at our Lord, the only one who spoke these blasphemous words.

But Matthew gives us a further detail. In chapter 27 and verse 44 we read, "The thieves (plural), the thieves also who were crucified with him cast the same in his teeth." In other words, in the opening moments of our Lord's hanging upon that cross both of these thieves railed at him, insulted him, and blasphemed him in the light of what we know of his character. They made these impossible suggestions, "If thou be the Christ, save Thyself and us." Why he can only save us if he does not save himself, of course. But they, neither one of them at this point, understand exactly what the issues are when Jesus Christ dies.

Now, coming to the repentant thief. And we, from the Mattian account, it's evident that he two also reviled our Lord Jesus. But there came a time when his revilement turned to trust in him. I am going to suggest as I alluded in my introduction, that the hard of this great long bound man was a man a of magnificent mind, of piercing perception, of keen and incisive speech, of noble courage, and brilliant foresight stirred

like the arctic snows beneath the sun as he observed our Lord Jesus Christ being crucified. And I'm going to suggest to you, and I hope I'm able to demonstrate it, that when this man died he had a theological understanding of truth that the apostles at this point did not have. And I'm going to try now to trace the birth, by which he came the new birth; I'm going to try to trace that birth in the "words that he utters.

And first of all, I want you notice the statement made in verse 40, the first statement that he made. After one of the thieves says, "If thou be the Christ, save Thyself and us." Something has happened. This man has become so impressed by the Lord Jesus and some other things that may have transpired in connection with that suffering event that he turns to the friend and rebukes him and says, "Dost not thou fear God seeing thou art in the same condemnation? Dost not thou fear God?"

Now, the Bible tells us very plainly that, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." It is evident that something has begun to happen in the heart of the dying thief. It is evident in the light of the fact that he now has this fear of God that he has been the object of some manifestation of the grace of God. I am going to call it, because it's evident that he comes to faith, I'm going to call it efficacious grace. Life begins to stir through the efficacious grace of the Holy Spirit and he is brought to a state of the fear of God. That's the first step in his new birth. And secondly he says in verse 41, "And we indeed justly," now if the fear of God has been awakened in his heart, in verse 40, in verse 41 his conscience has now begun to be awakened.

And when you have these two things, these two great eternities, the fear of God and the conscience of man awake, then you have a man on his way to acceptance of our Lord Jesus Christ. Like Iago said of Othello, "He has a daily beauty that makes me ugly." Evidently it was something about our Lord Jesus that convinced this man that he not only was guilty but justly guilty and in our Lord's case he was not, for that's the third step in this man's coming to new birth. We read, "And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds but this man hath done nothing amidst: To see God and to fear God

is important. To have a since of an awakened conscious is important. To see God and God's justice is important.

But then to see the holiness of our Lord Jesus Christ is to indicate that he is not far from the kingdom of God. For it seems to me if we were to look at this man theologically when we read that he now has been awakened to fear of God, his conscious has been awakened, he now senses the holiness of Lord Jesus and is willing to condemn himself in the light that holiness, that he has come to repentance. For that is precisely what repentance is. He has had a change of mind with reference to himself and with reference to God as manifest in Christ. And now out of the repentance that has taken place in his heart he expresses his faith in the words that he offers to the Lord Jesus. Now, do not forget that the expression of the faith is the product of something that all ready transpired. And so when he turns to the Lord Jesus on the middle of the crosses and says, "Jesus, remember me thou comest into Thy kingdom," he has all ready come to faith and he expresses in this marvelous statement which I want to analyze now.

The fourth step in his coming to birth is that word "Jesus" and what it reveals. Now, I want you to notice that throughout this section we have had a number of things said about the Lord. For example, in verse 35, the rulers derided him saying, "He saved others let him save himself. If he be the Messiah, the chosen of God," so they have banded about the term Messiah and chosen of god. Then in verse 37 the soldiers had said, "If you be the King of the Jews, save Thyself." So it is evident that the term, "King of the Jews" has also been expressed. And he has looked at the superscription has said, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." And so there has been a great deal of information stated about our Lord Jesus both in the vocal words as well as the superscription. Evidently this man listening, seeing the superscription, comes to a deeper experience. He regards Jesus Christ as almighty God.

Now, I know that that text in verse 42 says, "Jesus remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom." If you have the Authorized Version your text reads, "And he

said unto Jesus, 'Lord remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom.'" But if you should happen to have a more up to date modern translation the chances are that the term Lord has been changed to Jesus because the more ancient manuscripts have, instead of Lord, have Jesus.

Now, if I were simply an expositor seeking to make a point I would prefer the term Lord because it would be very evident from this that he has recognized the dignity of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. But I'm not going to surrender my point because the term Jesus in the light of the context here means essentially the same thing. He has come to a recognition of our Lord as God. And I want to show you how that is true because you see he heard all of these statements about him, evidently, and he turns to Jesus and he says, "Jesus, remember me."

Now that means, of course, do something for me when you come in your kingdom. As a matter of fact, that means do something for me eternally because it is obviously that that is what is upon his mind. He knows that he is under divine condemnation and therefore he is headed for judgment. And thus, he recognizes that within the power of the man who hangs on the center cross within his power is the power to do something about his eternal state. And so he says, "Jesus remember me." And the fact that he can use the term remember concerning the Lord Jesus is evidence. It seems to me that he saw him as the Son of God, he saw him as king, he saw him as divine. And I want to stop here and point out what that really meant. We are so often servants or children of our age that we fail to recognize what tremendous implications this had, and also what a tremendous statement this was in the light of the beliefs of those who stood around the cross, and also the others who were living at the time.

Now, the Lord Jesus has been condemned by the court, he has been condemned by the high priest, he has been condemned by the mob, he has been condemned by his friends but the faith of this man reverses the judgment of the court. It reverses the judgment of the mob, it reverses the judgment of the friends of our Lord who fled from the scene of

the crucifixion and reversing all of these things this dying thief, in the midst of that crowd of people who were mocking and jeering, this dying thief sees the Messiah's majesty and appeals to him and says, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom. I know you're a king. I know you can do something for me."

Now others, when they look at the cross of our Lord Jesus, say, "He died in desolation. He died in dereliction." But this man sees the majesty of a God who reigns from a tree. He has come to repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And I think this is true repentance and true faith. And so the man who was unwilling a few moments before is now willing to receive from our Lord Jesus the promise of everlasting presence with him. Now, that is precisely what efficacious grace does in the work of regeneration. It makes a man who was at one time unwilling, it makes him willing and that has been operative in the case of this dying thief.

Now, before we go on I want to cite a statement from another fellow who also believed in the depravity of men, his name is John. And John Calvin writes these words, "How clear was the vision of the eyes which do not see in death life, in ruin majesty, in shame glory, in defeat victory, in slavery royalty. I question," Calvin continues, "if ever since the world began there has been so bright an example of faith."

Now, it is evident to me then that it is not at all wrong for us to say that this dying thief was one of the noblest theologians of Jesus' day. But lest you think the evidence is not sufficient to support that I want to move on to the other things that he says. He said, "Jesus remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom." Now, if you think about that for just a moment you will see that not only does he see that he has not only come to the fear of God in a sense of his own conscious and a sense of the holiness of Christ, and he has not only come to such a conviction of the majesty of the Lord that he can appeal to him to do something for him, but he knows that there is life after death. He says, "Remember me when thou comest in Thy kingdom." He saw the certainty of life after

death and he fearlessly faced the shadows because he felt that Jesus of Nazareth might do something for him.

Sixth, well you notice that he says, "Remember me when you come in your kingdom." He does not say, "Remember me if you come." He says, "Remember me when you come." In the Greek text, in my opinion, the text says, "Remember me whenever you come into your kingdom." Regardless of what kind of construction we place upon that indefinite relative it is evident that this man has the certainty of our Lord coming into his kingdom. So he sees that true blessedness is not to be taken down from the cross to this life as the other thief has said, "If thou be the Christ save Thyself and us." Get down off of your cross and come up and take us down from this cross." This man sees that true blessedness is not to come down from this cross physically. But true blessedness is to pass into the life beyond in the company of our Lord Jesus Christ, to stay there throughout all eternity, and so he has come also to further tremendous understanding of spiritual things.

And finally, he said remember me when thou comest in Thy kingdom. Some of the texts have "into," some of the texts have "in." The sense is not a great deal different in either case. If he said, "Remember me when you come in your kingdom," he is asking that our Lord Jesus when he come in his magnificent glory to establish his kingdom upon the earth that he will give him a place in that kingdom. So he asks place in the messianic realm and he saw the fact that the Messiah was going to come and he was going to establish his kingdom. He sensed that it may be suffering now but it is going to be glory thereafter. And this is the one thing that the apostles did not at this time grasp. They were totally confused by the promises of the Old Testament, which spoke of the glory of the Son of God, and yet in spite of those promises of glory he seemed to be going to the sufferings of the cross. But this man has come to an understanding of the relationship between the two. It is sufferings first and it is then glory. And that's why I say that this man, at the moment that he died, is a man that understands more than Peter and sees

more than John. In fact, I would not be unwilling to say he is the first of all Christian theologians at the moment of his death.

Now, you think that Augustine is a great theologian and you think that Calvin is a great theologian; at least I hope you do. You think that Luther is a great theologian and you think that Jonathan Edwards is a great theologian. And you think that Lewis Sperry Chafer was a great theologian, well I want to assure you that this man deserves a place in the company of the greatest of the theologians. It's doubtful that there is anyone who has ever reached such a peak of faith at that point in the unfolding of the program of God as this man did. And I think the promise that Jesus gives him is evidence of that fact. For now after having uttered his great prayer of repentance and faith, his great petition, "Jesus, remember me when thou comest in Thy kingdom," our Lord turns to him and gives him the ultimate reward for his faith. He says, "Verily, I say unto thee today, (comma) thou shalt be with me in paradise." Now, some have punctuated the text that way. They have put the "today," with, "Verily, I say unto thee," because you see by so doing they may teach their doctrine that when a man dies he doesn't really pass into the presence of our Lord Jesus. He either enters into a time of nothingness or he enters into a time of slow soul sleep from which he is to be awakened at a later date and given a second chance.

Now, if it just depended on the Greek text you could translate it that way because remember in the original text there are no points or marks of punctuation. So we could say that this man said, "Verily, I say unto thee today thou shalt be with me in paradise." That is ultimately, you shall get there as everybody else will ultimately get there. But let me ask you something. Here is a man who has prayed, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom." Our Lord's answer is, of course, an advance over his petition. He doesn't say, "Now, in paradise or in the future you shall be with me in my kingdom." He's obviously giving this man a great deal more than he's asked for. I remember that

Paul says that, He able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," and that is precisely what happens right here.

Now, if he simply said, "Thou shall be with me in paradise," then the force of today would not have much force at all. As a matter of fact when you think about it, if you translated it, "Verily, I say unto thee today," it adds nothing at all. For when does our Lord speak? Well, obviously it's today. It doesn't have any force at all. You might as well illuminate it, "Verily, I say unto thee, thou shall be with me in paradise." The word today has no force at all. It only has force if we take it with the following clause, as it has been almost unanimously taken by exegeses and interpreters, for the very reasons that I'm suggesting to you. It becomes a totally superfluous word.

But if the thief should pray, "Jesus, remember me at that distant event when you come in your kingdom." Our Lord's answer then, "Today thou shall be with me in paradise," why then it has tremendous force. And I think any true Christian with the Holy Spirit within your heart will respond to the force of this great promise that our Lord gave, "Today thou shall be with me in paradise." So it is nonsense to suggest that we have an error in punctuation in our versions. This is what our Lord said. He said, "Today, thou shall be with me in paradise," because when a man passes out of this existence, this physical existence, he lays aside his body that's true, but his spirit goes to be with the Lord which is taught elsewhere in the New Testament of course.

Now, let me analyze that statement for a moment. "Today thou shall be with me in paradise." It is a promise with an infallible basis. "Today thou shall be with me in paradise." And will you notice what begins that promise? "Verily, I say unto thee, I say unto thee," it rests upon the nature and character of our Lord Jesus Christ. Mary said concerning the Lord Jesus, "Whatever he says to you do it." The New Testament says that, "He is the first born from the dead. He is the great prophet. Whatever he says is absolutely true." And this promises rests upon the infallible basis of the character of our

Lord Jesus. It is also a promise of immediate blessing. He says, "Today thou shall be with me in paradise."

No purgatory even in between. This man who has lived a life of thievery and banditry and robbery, today he is going to be with our Lord Jesus Christ. It is known, well now for a few hours or a few days or a few months or a few years you must enter purgatory and there through the fires of purgatory have some of your sins refined. But it is today thou shall be with me in paradise. And you know, you that have been listening, the reason our Lord Jesus can say this is because the blood that is being shed then is sufficient payment for the sins of sinners and sufficient payment for all the sins of the dying thief who is offering this petition to the Lord Jesus. And it is a promise of infinite bliss, "Today thou shall be with me in paradise."

Was there ever a stranger days pilgrimage than the pilgrimage of the dying thief? That morning he had awakened in the in the tentacles of the great serpent in a Roman cell. He had heard the jailer coming. He had heard the doors flung open. He had been told that day, "Today is the day you die." He had been given a cross. He had carried his cross all the way out to the hill of The Skull. There they had hung him upon the cross. That night he sleeps in the bosom of our Lord Jesus Christ. I doubt that there is a stranger journey in any man's existence that that one days journey that he had, an amazing journey from the Romans cell to the side of our Lord Jesus in paradise. If our Lord died early, as seems evident, this thief must have heard all of the other words that Jesus uttered. I daresay with the perception, the wisdom, the keenness of his intellect that when he heard our Lord Jesus utter all of the sayings of the cross by the time that he heard Jesus say, "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit," he had had the equivalent of seven years training at Dallas Theological Seminary. [Laughter] And when he entered into the presence of our Lord he didn't have to apologize for the fact that he came into heaven without a theological degree.

Now, we have to look at the second saying and so we're going to turn over to John chapter 9. This is the third but the second of this study tonight in John chapter 19 verse 26 and verse 27, I hope you have not thought that I have exaggerated too much in calling him one of the noblest theologians of history. John chapter 19 verse 26 and verse 27, and this one I have just entitled in the outline, "Honor thy father and thy mother," which will recognize as one of the ten commandments. No man ever kept the commandments like our Lord Jesus. And here is one of the illustrations of the honor that he gave to his mother or to his parents. John chapter 19 verse 26 and 27, "When Jesus therefore saw his mother and the disciple standing whom he loved," it's evident from the account that John the apostle had with all the others earlier had run away from the cross when they saw the terror and brutality of it, "all of them forsook him and fled," the Scriptures say in one of the other Gospels. But John had come back to the scene and he is here now. And we read then, "whom he loved, He saith unto his mother, Woman behold thy son. Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother. And from that hour the disciple took her unto his own home." Mary is the first to plant kisses on the brow of our Lord Jesus. She is the first to guide his hands and his feet in infantile movements. And now she feels the sword that pierces through her as it had been prophesied early in the life of our Lord Jesus in Luke chapter 2 and verse 35.

It is very interesting that in the New Testament the Lord Jesus never speaks of Mary as his mother. I do not think that this is intended in any way to suggest that Mary was other than what she was, blessed among women. But it almost as if he anticipated the fact that a large religious organization would make a great deal more of her than the Scripture make of her. He never called her, "My mother." The terms that he uses to refer to her generally are the terms, such as is used here, "woman". Now that does not have the connotation that it has in our language. If we were to refer to someone today, "woman" well that would be a term of discourtesy. It is not to be looked at in that way.

But our Lord referred to her was "woman" not as "mother". Mary is unique in the New Testament only because Jesus Christ is unique. She is blessed among women not because she herself pours out blessings but because she has received the great blessing of being the mother, according to the flesh, of our Lord Jesus Christ. She must have been now about fifty years of age with graying hair and lines of widowhood in her face. She is in Jerusalem perhaps because of a strange presentiment concerning the fate of our Lord Jesus. John has now returned to the side of the cross as I've suggested, and notice that Jesus does not rebuke the backslider, John, for having raced away.

Now, I mention that our Lord turns to Mary and calls her mother because, as you well know, in the Roman Catholic church a great deal more has been made over Mary than should have been made over her. Pope Pius IX who lived a long time ago said that in this statement which Jesus made, "Woman, behold thy son," that in the person of John Mary was receiving all Christians as her children. The pope looked at this statement as if it were typical. "Woman," and Mary stands for herself and the church and John stands for all believers in our Lord Jesus. So, "Woman, behold thy son," so that all of the members of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ are received by the virgin Mary and cared for by her. What the next statement, "Behold they mother," should mean to John who then takes Mary into her care is overlooked by the pope. He doesn't say anything about that because that text does not suit his interpretation.

I say that more has been made over Mary than should have been made over her. Let me prove my point. I'm going to give you a prayer of the Roman Catholic church. It's the prayer that is entitled Salve Regina, which means "save O queen". This is the prayer, "Hail, holy queen, mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, our hope. To thee we cry, poor banished sons of Eve. To thee we send up our sighs, morning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then most gracious advocate," and so forth. In other words, it is to Mary that we prayer in order that Mary may influence her son that he in turn may confer a blessing upon us. If there is anything that is human, it is a petition addressed to Mary

because she is supposed to have influence with the Son of God. If Mary could hear, in her present place of bliss, the petitions that are made to her I am sure that sword would pierce her soul to think that from her God and Savior should be diverted to her what alone should be direct to him. Mary of all peoples recognized the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus and now recognizes them even more. The Romanists call her "Mater Dolorosa" or "The Sad Mother". They also call her the "queen of heaven" totally I think without knowledge of the fact that the term "queen of heaven" in the Old Testament is a title of false goddesses. In Jeremiah chapter 7, Jeremiah chapter 44, that very term is used of the heathen goddesses, "queen of heaven", much better to exalt the Felius Dolorosas than the Mater Dolorosa.

What is the intent of this saying of our Lord Jesus? "Woman, behold thy son," and then to John the apostle, "Behold thy mother." I suggest three things and I have them here in the outline. He is first the provider for his own. Now, in 1 Timothy chapter 5 verses 6 and 8, the Apostle Paul exhorts Timothy with regard to the care of his own. He writes, 1 Timothy chapter 5 verse 6 and verse 8, "But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth. And these things give in charge, that they may be blameless. But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." And so here in a New Testament text that carries on the spirit of the Old Testament the Lord Jesus provides of his own. He was the eldest son, remember. And since there is no mention of Joseph, his father, here and since our Lord takes to himself the right to commit Mary to his first cousin John, it seems then clear that Joseph his father was by now dead. And so our Lord assumes the place of authority as the eldest son in the family and commits his mother into the care of the Apostle John.

Now the second thing, he is the fulfiller of the law. The law had said, "Honor thy father and thy mother." Now, the Lord Jesus had come on the scene in the New Testament expressing the fact that he was going to fulfill all righteousness. And then in chapter 5 and verse 17 and 18 of the Gospel of Matthew, he had said in the Sermon on

the Mount, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the law till all come to pass." Our Lord Jesus was required by the fact that he was a man and under law as a Hebrew to fulfill the law perfectly. This was something that he was, as a man, required to do. What he did on the cross in our atonement is something beyond what he was required to do. He was required to obey perfectly the Law of Moses.

And so it was required that he honor his father and honor his mother and to the last our Lord Jesus kept the law. He kept the law in that Passover supper, remember, not a single detail was missing in the observance of the last Passover. I said not even a fastidious angel studying the Scripture could find one thing that was wrong with our Lord's observance of the Passover feast according to Old Testament requirements. And so here with almost his last breaths he busily fulfilling the Law of Moses. He is the fulfiller of the law. And I think this was a mediatorial matter as well because he was not only required as a Hebrew to do this but he did this also in contribution to the finished character of his work.

And third, he is the proclaimer of a new relationship. He speaks to Mary and he says, "Woman, behold thy son." These statements were not made on Sunday. They were not made at the ascension of our Lord Jesus, the final separation from his own, because the ultimate significance of the statements is relative to the cross of the Lord Jesus. And I think by this statement he suggests to Mary and to others who will read it that the earthly relationships are over. The only relationships now that are valid are relationships via the new birth. The relationship to Mary, so far as the natural relationship is concerned, it is over with our Lord's death. "Woman, behold thy son. Behold thy mother." And as a corollary believers are now all in one family and there is no special relationship to the Lord Jesus anymore. The relationship that Mary had to him is no longer after our Lord's suffering.

So, "Woman," assigns her a position in his body, not he of hers. He leads her gently from natural union with Jesus to the mystical union with Christ. And when you turn to the Acts of the Apostles you see the confirmation of this. In the first chapter when Luke records the gathering in the Upper Room notice the position that he gives to the various individuals. In Acts chapter 1 and verse 12 through verse 14 we read,

"Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in they went up into an Upper Room where abode Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Phillip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, these all continued with accord and prayer and supplication with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brethren."

It's evident now that there stands preeminent in the body of Christ the apostles to whom is now committed the great apostolic teaching which will be carried out from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth. And so there stands preeminent in the church from now on the apostolic ministry.

"The chair given her is not a chair of honor such as Rome has provided for her and to such as Rome each day takes the trouble to dust off anew," Schilder says, "but it is the proper chair of a member of the body of Christ." Apostles are now important but Mary's position is no demotion. Her position in the body of Christ now is greater than it ever was as the natural mother of our Lord Jesus. And so we must not think that she has been demoted from a place of blessedness to a lesser place. But she has been promoted as well as the rest except in the body of Christ, the apostolic company is given the preeminence because it was they who were taught firsthand by our Lord and given the commission to take the Gospel to the four corners of the earth.

Well, I think anyone studying this great event of the cross of the Lord Jesus cannot help but be convinced of the riches of grace in salvation and life. The thief was not religious. He was not good. He was not baptized. He was not educated. He was not cultured so far as we know. He didn't weep. He didn't cry. He didn't confess. He didn't join the church. He simply turned in repentance in faith and that very day was in paradise with Jesus Christ. And the Lord topped each one of his requests, he said, "Remember me." Jesus said, "Today you shall be with me." He said, "Remember me when you come." Our Lord said, "Today you shall be with me in paradise." He said, "Remember me when you come in your kingdom." He said, "Today you shall be with me in paradise." I'm overwhelmed. I'm overjoyed at the manifestation of the grace of God.

Now, in the second incident he subjects time to eternity and the fleshly to the spiritual. "He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me," he said. And our Lord is the greatest illustration of putting God before his father or before his mother. Let's bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these great incidents which teach us so much concerning the saving work of Jesus Christ. We pray that the Scriptures may speak to us and that the obedience of the Son of God...

[RECORDING ENDED ABRUPTLY]