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THE DYING THIEF

By: C. D. Cole

The work of our Lord Jesus Christ may be divided into three parts-- prophet, priest and king. At his crucifixion there were three groups of people around the cross--there were the daughters of Jerusalem, a sympathetic group; there were the scribes and soldiers, a deriding and indifferent group; and one of the two thieves, a believing man. Christ spoke to each of these three groups, and his words to them represent Him in His three-fold office. As the prophet, He said, "Daughters of Jerusalem weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For the days are coming." As a priest He said, speaking of the deriding group, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And, the King, in His sovereignty, ruled the heart of the penitent thief from the cross, opened the gates of the kingdom of heaven, and said, "Today, shalt thou be with me in paradise."

We have here an illustration of the drawing power of the cross. Christ had said, "And I, if I be lifted up will draw all unto me," and here is the conversion of a most unlikely character, while the gospel is being enacted. Here is another instance of Christ's power in seeming defeat. While laying down His life, He had the power to snatch this sinner as a brand from the burning. It seems strange to think, that, perhaps at that moment, the only human who thoroughly believed in Christ, was that dying thief. The disciples were recreant, denying, fleeing. A handful of women are standing there, not knowing what to think about it, and alone, of all the sons of men, the dying thief was in the sunshine of faith, and could say, "I believe."

We have here an actual demonstration of salvation by grace. And, remember all men are saved alike. If you can prove that one man has been saved without any works, then you prove that all men are saved without works. Here was a wicked man--his past was black with iniquity, according to his own confession, for he says his crimes merited the death he was dying. Mark says both of the thieves, at the first, railed on Christ. In his salvation there were no good works--no baptism, no sacrament, nothing but a looking to Christ in implicit trust.

In the conversion of the dying thief, we have a striking illustration of the universal law of the progress of the gospel, in the two-fold effect of the contemplation of the cross. All men do not have the same view of the cross. The death of Christ does not mean the same thing to all men. Here are two men--the two thieves--beholding the same event under the same circumstances, but with a different effect. This is the history of the gospel wherever it goes--some believe and some believe not. This is its history right now among us. But what is the consequence? A parting of the whole mass of us, some to one side and some to the other. Take a magnet and hold it over an indiscriminate mass of metal shavings; it will gather out all the iron and leave the rest. The attractive power of the cross goes out over men wherever it is preached, but from some there will be no response. Why is this? In some hearts there will be no yielding its attraction. Why?

This question may be answered from a two-fold point of view, from the point

of view of God's sovereignty, and from the standpoint of man's responsibility.

1. Our first answer will be from the angle of sovereignty. Here are two men alike in need, alike in criminality, alike by nature, alike in that the icy finger of death was upon them but different in their attitude towards the cross. But, suddenly there came a difference in these two men, to the one the cross became gloriously attractive, to the other it was repelling. What made that difference? Sovereignty answers, "it was God who made them do differ." One was called, the other not. I Corinthians 1:23, 24, "*But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*" One was a sheep, the other was not. Christ said, ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep. One was of God, the other was not. John 6:45, "*It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*" One was drawn by the Father to Christ, the other was not. John 6:44, 65, "*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will*

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REPENTANCE AND FAITH

BY: C. D. COLE

Acts 20:21, "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul on his return to Jerusalem from his last mission tour, leaves his ship at Miletus and calls for the elders of the church at Ephesus which was nearby. In speaking to them, he reminds them of their knowledge of his ministry during the three years he lived in Ephesus: he served the Lord with humility and tears and afflictions in the nature of persecution by the Jews. He kept back nothing that was profitable to them. He taught publicly from house to house, testifying both to Jews and Greeks, repentance towards God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. In repentance and faith we have the way or terms of salvation. Every saved person has done two things: he has repented towards God and he has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

The New Hampshire confession has one of the fullest and finest statements of these two doctrines to be found anywhere: "We believe that repentance and faith are sacred duties and also inseparable grace wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God; whereby being deeply convinced of our guilt, danger and helplessness and of the way of salvation by Christ, we turn to God with unfeigned contrition, confession, and supplication for mercy; at the same time heartily receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our prophet, priest, and king, and relying on him alone as the only and all-sufficient Saviour."

Analysis of this declaration will show the lost how to be saved and will refresh the experience of salvation in the hearts of the saved. Broadly speaking we have (1) repentance and faith defined; and (2) repentance and faith experienced.

(1) Definition. Repentance and faith are sacred duties. This is amply supported by scripture. Luke 13:3, "*I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*" Acts 20:21, "*Testifying both to the Jews,*

and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." See also Acts 17:30.

Repentance and faith are inseparable graces wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God. This too is scriptural: Acts 5:31, "*Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.*" See also Acts 11:18, II Timothy 2:25, and I Corinthians 3:3, 6. Repentance and faith are like two sides of a coin, you cannot have one without the other. Repentance and faith are sometimes used together and sometimes used separately. When used together, repentance always precedes faith: Mark 1:15, "*And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.*" See also Matthew 21:32 and Acts 20:21. When repentance and faith are used separately, the one implies the other.

(2) An experience. There must be a conviction of sin: being deeply convinced of our guilt, danger, and helplessness, and of the way of salvation through Christ. Every man has a guilt complex and a sense of danger, but in true repentance, this is intensified and perpetuated.

Repentance and faith is a turning to God with sincere contrition, confession, and supplication for mercy; at the same time heartily receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our Prophet, Priest, and King, and relying on Him alone as the only and all-sufficient Saviour. In conversion, there is sorrow for sin; there is confession of sin; and there is supplication for mercy and reliance upon Christ as the only and all-sufficient Saviour.

Sorrow for sin is necessary in a desire to be saved from sin. As long as one loves sin, he will have no desire to be saved from sin. Confession of sin is the opposite of boasting of a so-called self-righteousness. The Publican confessed his sin and the Pharisee boasted of his self-righteousness. There must be a supplication for mercy and a reliance

upon Christ for the mercy craved. Begging God for mercy has no value apart from faith in Christ, for all the mercy God has is in Christ.

To boil it all down, repentance is the sinner taking the place of a sinner with full realization of sin and with a desire to be saved from sin as something dangerous and hateful. And faith is such a sinner looking to Christ and depending on Him for salvation.

In repentance, the sinner is occupied with self as a sinner; in faith he is occupied with Christ as Saviour. In repentance, the heart grieves over sin; in faith, the heart rejoices in Him. In repentance, there is a turning from sin as a hateful thing; in faith, there is a turn to Him, that is to Christ as Saviour and Lord. In repentance, there is hatred of sin; in faith, there is love for Him. In repentance, sin is bitter; in faith, Christ is precious. In repentance, the need of salvation is felt; in faith, this need is met in Christ. In repentance, the sinner is helpless; he distrusts himself; in faith, his trust is in Christ. One has had no saving faith until he distrusts self and trusts only in Christ. Faith is more than a mere assent of the mind to some historical truth or proposition. II Timothy 1:12, "*For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*"

I went once upon a time to hear a young preacher who announced that he would preach from Acts 16:30 and 31, where Paul in answer to the jailer's question, "What must I do to be saved?" replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Knowing that this preacher belonged to a group which insist that baptism is necessary to salvation, I naturally was interested to know how he would deal with a text that made no mention of baptism. And how do you reckon he handled the text. He noted, first of all, to whom the words were spoken, name-

ly to the Philippian jailer, a heathen man who did not believe in God. He said, "and if I were speaking to such a man, I would tell him to believe and be saved. But I am not preaching to heathen; I am preaching to people who already believe in God and Christ. And so I tell you to be baptized in order to be saved." Now this reveals a woeful lack of understanding of what saving faith is. To this preacher, faith was nothing more than what the demons have: they believe the historical facts about God--they believe and tremble. Everything in our declaration of faith would be without sense to this preacher.

I once moderated in a debate down in Florida between a Baptist and a man who believed in baptism as essential to salvation. When discussing the order of repentance and faith, the opponent of my Baptist brother would argue along this line: How can a man repent who does not first believe in God? This question reveals the same fault with the faith of the denomination they represent. There is a belief that must precede repentance. Of course an atheist would have to believe in the existence of God before he would repent, but this is not saving faith. Saving faith is much more than believing there is a God and that Jesus Christ is His Son; saving faith is a reliance or trust in Christ as Saviour.

If the jailer had not believed there is a God he would not have asked the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

Saving faith is accompanied by love--love to God and the word of God and the people of God. Without love, faith would only be interested in Christ as a fire escape and the believer would be emboldened to sin without fear. Galatians 5:6, "*For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.*" Faith which works by love causes the believer to want to please God and obey him. And this will lead him to be baptized in obedience to the Divine command.

Another truth in closing: Repentance and faith are permanent graces experienced as long as the born again person lives. They represent an attitude of heart towards God and Christ which lasts. After more than 50 years as a Christian, I am still a sinner, griev-

ing over sin, confessing it, and supplicating mercy while trusting in Christ for the mercy I need.

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raise him up at the last day;"..."And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father." One was born of God, the other was not. John 3:3, "*Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*"

What does God do in the damnation of men? Nothing. What does God do in the salvation of men? Much. He calls; He begets (see James 1:18); He draws man to Christ. Remember that the human race is headed towards hell to begin with. Divine interposition is not needed for men to go there. But, if men are to face about and go towards heaven, God must work. Salvation is of the Lord. We will now answer our question as to why one of these men was saved, and the other was not, from the standpoint of human responsibility. One believed, the other did not. Christ said of the Jews, "*Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.*" Man, every man, ought to believe on Christ. Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish. But some man pleads his inability and says I can't. But this does not excuse him, for he ought to believe on Christ. Inability does not destroy responsibility. God made man capable of obedience.

Men give various excuses for not believing on Christ.

1. The other thief was occupied with temporal needs. He said to Christ, "if thou be the Christ, save thyself and us." He was occupied with his present suffering, rather than future danger. He wanted relief from pain rather than the promise of eternal life. He was sacrificing the future for the present.

2. The moralist is blinded to the glories of the gospel by his self-righteousness. There were scribes and

pharisees around the cross, but it had no attraction to them. They did not trust Christ to save them. And why? Because they did not see their need of the death of God's Son for salvation. The cross has no saving power except to the self-condemned sinner. Look at the Pharisee and the Publican in the temple. The Pharisee was not occupied with the blood on the altar, but with his own imagined goodness. The Publican felt himself a sinner and trusted the blood. Christ said to the self-righteous Pharisees, "The Publicans and harlots go into the kingdom ahead of you."

A wealthy merchant of Philadelphia, who would not listen to the gospel message in health, sent for a preacher when he lay upon his death bed. The preacher said, "I have nothing new to tell you. You are a sinner, and Christ is a Saviour. Do you feel your guilt, and will you trust Him as Saviour?" "No," replied the man. "There must be some better place than hell for a man of my respectability."

3. Others refuse to trust Christ because they find a sort of satisfaction in the observance of rites and ceremonies and sacraments. But, there were none of these things in the salvation of this dying thief.