

=CONVERSIONS=

Lesson 5

The Conversion of the Thief on the Cross

SCRIPTURE: Luke 23:27-49

INTRODUCTION: Tell the story of the conversion of the thief on the cross. Then discuss the points of the lesson.

I. SALVATION IS INSTANTANEOUS. The thief was saved in just a matter of moments. Though many events may lead up to salvation, salvation comes the moment a person's faith makes contact with God. (Teacher, spend a few moments here asking the pupils to relate different experiences of salvation in the Bible that were instantaneous—for example, Lydia, the Philippian jailer, Zacchæus, Matthew, the Ethiopian eunuch, etc.)

II. SALVATION IS KNOWLEDGEABLE. Although salvation is instantaneous, there are things a person has to know in order to be saved.

1. The four things necessary to know, the thief did know. They are as follows:

- 1) He knew he was a sinner. You will notice that he said he was suffering a just condemnation. In other words, he knew he was guilty.
- 2) He knew there was a penalty for sin.
- 3) He obviously knew that Jesus Christ was suffering that penalty. The fact that he said, "Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," leads us to believe that he did believe in the Messiah. Hence, he had been taught through the lamb offering that the Messiah would be God's Lamb. Hence, he realized that the Lamb (Jesus) would die for his sins. Hence, he believed in the atonement. This leads us to believe that he believed that Christ was paying the penalty for his sins.
- 4) He believed that faith in Christ would get him to Heaven. Notice he said, "Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." He believed that his faith would get him there.

These four things are the essential things that one must know.

2. There are some things, however, that he obviously knew other than these:

- 1) He knew that Jesus was God. He looked at the thief on the other side of Christ and said, "Dost not thou fear God?" This means that he believed that Jesus was God.
- 2) He believed that Jesus was sinless. He said, "This man hath done nothing amiss."
- 3) He believed in the kingdom age. No doubt he knew about the Millennium when the Messiah would reign on earth and a thousand years of peace would come. He knew about that time when the lamb would lie down with the wolf, when the child would play with the lion and in the hole of the cockatrice's den. He knew about the time when a man 100 years of age would die and people would say that it was like an infant dying. He knew of the coming age of peace and that the Messiah would reign on earth during that age.
- 4) He knew about the resurrection of Christ. The fact that he said, "Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," teaches us this. Bear in mind that Jesus was dying, and yet he talked about the coming kingdom and Christ's being there. Yes, he believed in the resurrection of Christ.
- 5) He believed that Christ would be his Lord. Notice he said, "Lord, remember me." He believed that Christ was the Lord of all and the God of the universe. This is very interesting. Someone had lodged some words from Scripture in the heart of this thief. These things he knew. Now he comes to die. He meets Christ, and he knows enough to be saved. This certainly should encourage us when we seem to fail to lead someone to Christ. The words that we give them, the Scripture that we quote, and the truths that we present may lodge in their hearts enough for them to accept the Saviour later.

- III. SALVATION IS MEETING A PERSON. You will notice that the thief's salvation was not accepting a dogma, but it was the acceptance of a Person, and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ.
- IV. SALVATION IS THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST. You will notice the words that Jesus spoke to him, "...with me in paradise." This means that wherever Christ went, the thief would go. It so happens that before the death of Christ, Hades was divided into two divisions: the division of the saved and the division of the lost. Those in the Old Testament who died went to the Paradise division of Hades awaiting the death of Christ on the cross to make the final payment for their sins. When Christ died on the cross, He descended into the Paradise division of Hades and brought out the saved who, in a sense, had been saved on "credit" or on the "lay-away plan." He then took them to Heaven with Him. They are now in Heaven. Hades now has only one division. That is the division where the unsaved are. Read Ephesians 4:8-10 and I Peter 3:18, 19 to find that Jesus entered into the Paradise division, the "saved" division of Hades, and carried with Him to Heaven the saved of the Old Testament, or better still, the saved before Calvary. Yes, the thief went with Him to Paradise to get the Old Testament saints that they might be taken to Heaven where they are now, awaiting the resurrection of the body.
- V. SALVATION IS FOR ALL. Here is a man who had never done anything good; in fact, he had done everything bad. Yet, he could be saved. Teacher, lead the class to list the names of wicked people in the Bible who were saved—for example, Mary Magdalene, Zacchæus, the demoniac of Gadara, etc.
- VI. SALVATION IS NOT BAPTISM OR COMMUNION. Teacher, bring a picture to class of someone who is well known. A picture of the pastor, if you have it, would be satisfactory, or a picture of one of the assistant pastors, and ask the class to tell you who that is. They will say, "That is Bro. Schaap." Then say, "No, it isn't; you see, it is only a picture, a piece of paper reflecting Bro. Schaap." Show them that baptism "is" salvation only in the same sense that a picture "is" Bro. Schaap. Show that communion, or the Lord's Supper, is the same thing. Let them know that the Lord's Supper pictures the blood and the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let them know that baptism pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.
- VII. SALVATION IS NOT WORKS OR RELIGION. This man did not attend church. This man did not tithe. This man did no good deeds. This man did not belong to a church. This man belonged to no religion, and yet, he went to Heaven. (Teacher, lead the class to realize the things that do not save, that are often considered a part of salvation.)