

Reflections on the Good Friday message by Allan Jones, 2nd April 2010

“The Two Thieves” Luke 23:13-25, 32-43

Barabbas had caused uprising and murder in Jerusalem and is now in prison, waiting to die. One day he would hear, “Today is the day you must die”. He knew he was guilty. We are all guilty before God, too. He received what he deserved. *For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). We can't fool God. People think that there are degrees of sin. We compare ourselves with others. But with God, sin is sin. If we just one white lie, we are liars.

We must compare our lives with God's standard. Romans 6:23. At the end of this life people who don't know God will receive their wages – separation from God forever. Everyone is born separated from God and will remain so if they don't receive the gift of life.

Pilate could find no fault in our Lord Jesus Christ. He is not worthy to die, unlike Barabbas. There is no reason for Him to die. He is not guilty, but He became a substitute for Barabbas, who should have died. He was a notable prisoner, He should have died on the middle cross, where Jesus Christ died.

Today we celebrate that Jesus died as our substitute. Salvation is a free gift. Yet so many reject that which is free.

1 Corinthians 5:7. Christ is our Passover.

Barabbas knew he didn't deserve to go free, and neither do we. Titus 3:5, Isaiah 64:6. Barabbas did not receive justice but mercy. We also need mercy, not justice. Jesus gives us what we don't deserve. Ephesians 2:4-9. Note the beginning phrase, “But God...” We deserve punishment, but God...! Jesus paid a complete work (John 8:36).

One day the soldiers came when it was not mealtime. Barabbas was expecting to be taken out to be crucified. But instead they told him he was free. Our prison door is open. Jesus has opened it. You are free!

Barabbas was not re-arrested though he was guilty. Jesus was his substitute. Jesus paid it all. You are free if you want it. Even Christians are living in bondage. All can be free because Jesus has paid the price. We have a responsibility to those still in prison, to tell them that they can be free too.

The Other Thief. Luke 23:32-43. The dying thief made a prayer for salvation. Jesus was not alone in His death. Jesus came into this world to save sinners (Matthew 1:21, Luke 19:10, 1 Timothy 1:15). In the last moments, Jesus was still doing the work of saving sinners. It is the salvation of a bad man. Whatever appearances, we are all bad people. We are all sinners (Isaiah 53:6, Isaiah 64:6). Note the word, “all”.

The thief was just like Barabbas. Salvation is available to bad people, even you and I. It doesn't matter how bad. This one was saved just before he died. There is still hope if there is life. John 6:36-37 applied right to the moment of death. It can happen so simply, so quickly. At first the thief mocked also, but then something happened that he changed his mind. He must have recognised who the Lord was.

The dying thief prayed to Jesus (verse 42). (1) He believed in life after death, because he recognised that Jesus had a kingdom. He did not believe in annihilation. There is life after death for the good and the bad. Life would not make sense if there is nothing else. We have this blessed hope that one day we will be with Jesus forever. (2) He acknowledged Jesus as Lord at the time of His death (1 Corinthians 12:3). It was a spiritual revelation. (3) He believed Jesus had the power to save him, and that he simply had to ask Him. How simple is the way to salvation (Romans 10:13).

Jesus is able to save to the uttermost – that means completely and for ever. Jesus' answer is: (1) "you shall be in paradise". Not in purgatory. He has purged our sins (Hebrews 1:3). When we die it is either paradise or perdition. (2) "With me". How great is the grace of God for a guilty sinner to have fellowship with Him. What a wonderful salvation!. 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18. (3) "Today". This is like His words to Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5,9). You can be saved here and now (Hebrews 3:8, 2 Corinthians 6:2). What a saviour!