



WEEKLY SERMON

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Message #2 Seven Words of Christ at Calvary

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Text: Luke 23:9-43

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Colossians, said this in Colossians 4: 2-13a, "**Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you ...**" He talks about:

His Person: In verse 12 we read, "**Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you ...**" Epaphras was a first century evangelist who established the church in Colossae. Later, when the church was threatened with heresy, he encouraged the apostle Paul to write to them, giving us the epistle of Colossians. At the end of this letter, Paul commends Epaphras who had visited him in Rome.

His Pain: In verse 13, Paul says, "**For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you ...**" The word "**zeal**" has the idea here of "**pain**." Paul is saying Epaphras has a pastor's heart. He is in intense pain over you.

His Perseverance: In verse 12 we read, "**... always labouring fervently for you in prayers ...**" The phrase "**labouring fervently**" is the Greek word "**agonizomai**," which means "**to agonize**." He was on his knees agonizing in prolonged, intense, effectual, fervent prayer. This was not simply a prayer of God-consciousness, flipping up little thoughts to God. It was agonizing, struggling, wrestling with God - like Jacob when he said, "I'm not going to let you go until You bless me, God." This word "**agonizomai**," describing Epaphras prayer is also used in:

I Corinthians 9:25, "**And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.**" Here the word "**striveth**" is used to describe an athlete who runs a long race and beats his body to make it go - driving it...agonizing it.

John 18:36, Jesus, answering Pilate, said, "**... My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews ...**" The word "**fight**" is the same word which is used to describe Epaphras' prayer. He was fighting for the Colossians in his prayers.

Romans 15:30, Paul says, "**Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.**" Again the words "**strive together**" are from the same word "**agonizomai**."

Epaphras was always occupied with this intense, spiritual wrestling with God on behalf of his people. Today, I don't think we know the meaning of what it is to pray like that. We give up too easily.

His Prayer: In verse 12 we have his prayer, "... that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. Epaphras had a proper view of the ministry. He wanted the people mature and confident that the TRUTH is the truth, so their minds wouldn't be confused by false teachers. He wanted their doctrine and their behavior to be mature.

His Pattern: Can you imagine what a blessing this prayer warrior was to Paul? Can you imagine what an encouragement he was to all the others working with Paul to see him praying like that - day after day after day, and to see Paul praying day after day and night after night? Can you imagine the impact that the lives of those two men had on everyone else? Epaphras was laboring in prayer about the spiritual warfare people were facing. We too are bondservants of Christ, and our job involves others - winning them, helping them, encouraging them, serving them, meeting their needs, and extending to them the love of Christ. This week who can you be an Epaphras, to? _____

In His Amazing Grace

Pastor David Miklas

Additional areas to ponder this week:

First: Here are TWELVE Things Pastors Cannot Do:

1. **Read minds.** Everybody knows that, but many church members hold pastors accountable for unstated expectations.
2. **Be everywhere.** No human being can be every place at once, yet some members still get angry when pastors have to say "No."
3. **Change hearts.** Only God can do that.
4. **Know everything.** Most pastors study hard, but nobody can answer every question somebody asks.
5. **Please everybody.** Even Jesus couldn't do that.
6. **Live sinlessly.** Nobody can. Including you. And me. We're all **sinners**.
7. **Grow Churches.** If the church does grow, it's because God does it.
8. **Multiply dollars.** That's too bad, too, since some churches don't pay their pastors well.
9. **Escape mistakes.** All of us will mess up sometimes, often unintentionally and even unknowingly.
10. **Avoid favoritism.** Pastors minister to everybody, but having better (and best) friends is natural.
11. **Reveal everything.** No matter how much you may want to know the details, pastors may not be in a position to tell you.
12. **Ignore sin.** Pastors must address this issue, even when it's not popular.

Second: FOR the layman to think about – when you say that's Not My Job."

This is a story about **FOUR** people named: **EVERYBODY**, **SOMEBODY**, **ANYBODY**, and **NOBODY**. There was an important job to be done and **EVERYBODY** was sure that **SOMEBODY** would do it. **ANYBODY** could have done it, but **NOBODY** did it. **SOMEBODY** got angry about that, because it was **EVERYBODY'S** job. **EVERYBODY** thought **ANYBODY** could do it, but **NOBODY** realized that **EVERYBODY** wouldn't do it. It ended up that **EVERYBODY** blamed **SOMEBODY** when **NOBODY** did what **ANYBODY** could have done.

"Today Shalt Thou Be With Me In Paradise"

Two thousand years ago Jesus Christ completed our so great Salvation. All because of Calvary, the Apostle Paul can say in I Corinthians 2:2, "**For I determined not to know anything among you save Christ and Him crucified.**" All because of Calvary we can sing,

**Praise Him! Praise Him!
Jesus, our blessed Redeemer!
For our sins He suffered and bled and died;
He our Rock, our hope of eternal salvation,
Hail Him! Hail Him! Jesus the crucified.**

The source of the arrangement of the crosses at Golgotha is uncertain. No one knows for sure why Jesus was hung between those two thieves.

Perhaps it was Pilate's idea, adding additional insult to injury.

Perhaps it was ordered by the Jewish officials, desiring to continue to blaspheme the Son of God.

Perhaps it was the centurion's call to place Jesus on the center cross.

Whoever made the decision, the likelihood is that there was malice in the motive. Yet, above all, there was a Divine purpose at work. It gave Jesus an opportunity to reach out in hope and compassion to those desperately in need. But make no mistake; He did so while continuing to endure inexpressible pain.

When a man was hanging on a cross, suspended on iron spikes, he wanted one thing and one thing only - **death**.

When a man was hanging on a cross He thought of one person and one person only - himself. **Death** could not come fast enough.

That's what makes the SEVEN statements Christ uttered from the cross during the 6 hours from 9:00 AM in the morning to 3:00 PM in the afternoon, so incredible. Unlike all other victims of crucifixion, Jesus was more concerned about others and their needs than he was about Himself, and rightly so since He was the Son of God dying to pay the eternal debt of our sins.

The first three words from the cross were said during the daylight; the last four were uttered after the darkness came over the land.

The first three words from the cross had to do with His compassion for others; the last four had to do with His suffering and the meaning of His death.

Again to review, notice these SEVEN utterances:

FIRST are the words of **FORGIVENESS**: "**Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.**" Luke 23:34

SECOND are the words of **SALVATION**: "**Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.**" Luke 23:43

THIRD are the words of **AFFECTION**: "**Woman, behold thy Son!...Behold thy mother!**" John 19:26-27

FOURTH are the words of **ANGUISH**: "**My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?**" Matthew 27:46

FIFTH are the words of **SUFFERING**: "**I thirst.**" John 19:28

SIXTH are the words of **VICTORY**: "**It is finished...**" John 19:30

SEVENTH are the words of **CONTENTMENT**: "**Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.**" Luke 23:46

Now as we continue to linger under the cross we hear a second utterance, the words of **SALVATION** found in Luke 23:32-44,

"And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. (33) 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. (34) Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. (35) 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. (36) And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, (37) And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. (38) And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.** (39) And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. (40) But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? (41) And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. (42) And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. (43) And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise. (44) And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.”

In verses 39-43, we have a study in contrast of the two thieves. One thief received Christ, the other thief rejected Christ. It needs to be noted,

They were both being crucified, dying for their wicked crimes committed.

They were both equally near Christ, the one on His right the other on His left.

They both heard and saw all that transpired that day.

They both were notoriously wicked and now suffering rightfully.

Here are two thieves under exactly the same circumstances and conditions. The one thief repented of his sins, called for mercy and went to Paradise with the Lord. The other thief hardened and un-repentant rejected the person of Christ, the message of the cross, died in his sins and went to Hell.

Before we go on, I want to point out there were **THREE** thieves that day at the cross. We have the recorded words of two of the thieves, however even though the third thief did not speak, I believe he was present. I will share more about the third thief at the end of the sermon. So just who were the two men crucified with Jesus.

In Luke 23:39, they are called “**malefactors**” meaning they were evil-doers, or better said “**criminals.**”

In Matthew 27:38, we read, “**Then were there two thieves crucified with Him...**” The word Matthew used here is a word for “**bandits.**” We could call them “**Hoodlums.**”

It is likely that these two men were the criminals along with the released prisoner, Barabbas, mentioned in Mark 15:7, “**And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bond with them that has made insurrection with him...**”

Suffice it to say these two men were not first-time offenders. They were **criminals, thugs, and hoodlums.**

Turning to the description of these two men found in Matthew 27:44 we read, “**The thieves also, which “blaspheme...”** at Jesus. Both men, along with the crowd, shouted harsh curses and abuses at the Son of God. In essence they were saying “**So you are the great Messiah, the ‘King of the Jews,’ then let’s get with it. Why don’t you save yourself and us too?**”

Now from Luke’s account in chapter 23, we discover as these hardened evildoers were shouting at Jesus, a remarkable transformation occurred.

In **verse 39** we have **the words from the UN-REPENTANT THIEF**, “**And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.**” The text says this criminal kept “**railing**” on Jesus. He kept “**mocking**” Jesus. He kept on saying in a taunting manner over and over again, “**Save thyself and us; save thyself and us.**” This man was saying in effect, “**Lord, I don’t really need salvation; I just want you to get us all out of**

here.” He wanted a temporary fix to an eternal problem.

This is no different today, one person will listen with indifference in his heart rejecting the message of salvation, while the other will have his eyes open to see his need of a savior and respond to God’s offer of mercy. Often I have heard people say:

I don't need your religion, **I have my own.**

I don't need your kind of Christianity, **I have my own.**

I don't need your Christ; **I have my own way of making it** in life now and afterwards.

I don't need to read the Bible, listen to the Bible preached, or obey its commands. **I am too busy doing my own thing.**

Remarkably you will notice, the Lord Jesus did not answer the taunting and mockery coming from this criminal. Jesus was silent.

In **verses 40-42** we have **the words from the REPENTANT THIEF**. This thief came to Jesus:

In-spite of **WHO** he was, a condemned thief,

In-spite of **WHERE** he was, on a cross,

In-spite of **WHAT** he had done in criminal activities.

Considering this conversation occurred at a time when, for all outward appearances, Christ had lost all power to save Himself let alone others.

His **ENEMIES** were triumphing over Him.

His **FRIENDS** had mostly forsaken him.

PUBLIC opinion was against Him crying, "**Crucify Him.**"

There was not one in the crowd who stood there with outstretched hands and cried, "**Behold the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.**" And yet in the midst of that rejection, this repentant thief turned to Christ. This in itself was a miracle of grace.

Consider this conversation took place **BEFORE** the supernatural phenomenon of that day. This thief cried, "**Lord remember me...**" before:

The three hours of darkness from 12:00 noon to 3:00 in the afternoon.

The Lord’s sixth statement, the triumphant cry, "**It is finished...**"

The renting (tearing) of the temple veil.

The earthquake that opened the graves.

The centurion’s statement, "**Truly this was the Son of God.**"

I believe that God had purposely set this conversation before any of these things occurred so that His sovereign grace might be magnified and His power acknowledged, "**that seeing is not believing, but believing is seeing.**"

I believe that God chose to save this thief under the most unfamiliar circumstances, so that "**no flesh should glory in His presence.**" I believe He did that to teach us:

1. **NOT to magnify human instrumentality above divine agency,**
2. **SALVATION is of the Lord, and**
3. **EVERY conversion, that saves a wretch like me, comes from GOD’S AMAZING GRACE.**

If ever there was a death-bed conversion, this was it. This man, a sinner, dying on the cross for the crimes he committed, calls out, "**Lord remember me.**" And Jesus says, "**To-day shalt thou be with ME in paradise.**" Do not pass too quickly over that all-important word, "**Today.**"

It was to the rich publican, Zacchaeus, Jesus said, "**...for today I must abide at thy house.**"

It was to this thief Jesus said, "**Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.**"

It is to those without Christ, Paul admonishes, in II Corinthians 6:2, "...**behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.**"

The thief on the cross cries out for salvation, and the Lord hears and answers. It is most interesting that this dying thief on the cross was not saved by:

**Joining some church,
Going through baptism,
Weeping in front of an altar,
Raising his hand during an invitation,
Walking an isle during the invitation hymn, or
Performing some good works.**

Praise God, marvelous grace abounds through faith and faith alone. Let's do away with any thought that we can earn salvation.

It is as we read in Titus 3:5, "**not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us...**"

It is as we read in Ephesians 2:8-9 "**For by grace are you saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.**"

NOBODY EVER DESERVED SALVATION, AND NO ONE EVER WILL. This thief was dying. In his helpless state on the cross, he turned to the Son of God who made the second utterance, "**Today, shalt thou be with me in paradise.**"

He was saved by **GRACE** not by works. He was saved by **FAITH** and faith alone. Yes, there are those who teach that **BEFORE** we're saved we must develop some kind of a moral character. Then **AFTER** we are saved we must bring forth a quantity of quality good works to stay saved. But the dying thief had **NO GOOD WORKS** either **BEFORE** or **AFTER** conversion.

Remember BEFORE his conversion he respected neither the laws of God nor the laws of man, And **AFTER** his conversion he died without actively servicing Christ.

Remember the simple fact that this one believed and was **SAVED**. The other rejected Christ and was **ETERNALLY DAMNED**.

John 3:36 summed up the experience of these thieves, "**He that believeth on the son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.**"

On what basis, then, was this one accepted into God's kingdom? Please pay close attention to the answer, **FAITH**. It's as simple, and as complete, as that, "**Faith alone in Christ alone, period.**" That's all that God wants. And that's all that we can offer. Would you notice carefully the words to the hymn "**Rock of Ages**":

**Not the labors of my hands,
Can fulfill the law's demands;
Could my zeal to respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.**

**Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Saviour, or I die!**

Why can't I bring something in my hand? Because everything I bring in my hand is contaminated by sin. Before God I am, as the hymn writer described, "**a naked, helpless, foul sinner.**" If I were to bring anything to the Father, it would pollute His holiness. Therefore God the Father is saying, "**You come to Me by faith in My Son, and I promise you INSTANTLY that you will be forgiven, cleaned up, clothed in My righteousness, and secure in My place in Paradise.**"

Looking back over Christ's second statement from the cross, I find timeless lessons for us today.

Lesson 1: No one is ever too far gone to become a Christian. This thief, a poor lost sinner about to go to Hell, admitted that he deserved it! He made no excuses. He put the blame on nobody. He offered no alibis. He confessed his sin and sought mercy.

The prodigal son said, "**Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight...**"

The publican in the Temple prayed, "**God be merciful to me a sinner.**"

The thief cried, "**Lord remember me when thou comest into Thy kingdom.**"

The Apostle Paul in his testimony said, "**...that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.**"

While on the cross, this man recognized that he could not save himself. That is the humbling truth to which all of us have had to come.

We have to recognize the filthy rags of our self-righteousness before we are ready for the garments of salvation.

We have to come to God as beggars, empty-handed, before we can receive the gift of eternal life.

We have to take the place as lost sinners before Him if we would be saved.

What could this dying thief do to save himself? He could do absolutely nothing.

He could not walk in the paths of righteousness for there was a nail through either foot.

He could not perform any good works for there was a nail through either hand.

He could not turn over a new leaf and live a better life for he was dying.

All of us in need of the saving of our soul must realize our sinful conditions as the **SOLE** prerequisite for coming to Christ for salvation, for "**...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...**"

I would guess that at some time in your life you have lost hope of salvation for someone thinking, "**there is no way to soften a heart that hard. That person just can't be reached with the gospel.**" Well have you ever heard of Mel Trotter? If there was ever a fellow too far gone, it was Mel Trotter. Here is his story:

"He was an alcoholic who cared only about one thing in life: his next drink. Even the needs of his family meant nothing to him. When his child became deathly ill, and he was given money to get the medicine the child needed, Trotter bought booze instead. The child died. Before the funeral, Trotter stole the shoes from his child's body in the casket to buy more booze. You probably think nobody can get any lower than that, but he did. Eventually, bleary-eyed and broken, he slumped down in the back row of a city mission, where the words of a hymn pierced through his drink-fogged brain. That very night Mel Trotter came to know Christ! A revolutionary change took place in his life. As a result of his leadership, today missions in the heart of many cities are ministering to broken men and women like Mel Trotter."

Thank God, the thief on the cross beside Jesus was not too far gone, nor was Mel Trotter and neither is the person you are thinking about right now. No one is beyond reach of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Lesson 2: All that God wants and accepts is simple faith. Notice again in Verse 42 a

statement of simple faith, "Lord remember me." Listen to these verses.

Romans 10:9, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Romans 10:13, "... whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Acts 16:31, "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.**"

Nobody has to beg God for salvation. We do not have to make promises, nor drive any bargains. We only have to **come, believe and call out.**

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am! Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe, O lamb of God, I come.

Lesson 3: Never doubt your instant acceptance into God's family when you open your heart to Him. The thief on the cross beside Jesus saw the power of God "to save everyone that believeth." Jesus answered, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Today is the day of salvation, oh blessed one, though today not tomorrow.

Today Jesus said to the Thief, "**shalt thou be with Me.**"

There were three crosses that day standing on Golgotha's hill.

On the **middle cross** was the marvelous, infinite, matchless Son of God dying for our sins.

On the **second cross** was the dying thief who rejected the Son of God.

On the **third cross** was the other thief who repented and came to Christ by faith.

It is possible that there was a third thief present at the crucifixion. Do you remember when Jesus was being presented before the crowd and they were given a choice by the governor, Pilate, to choose whom he would release to them, they cried "**give us Barabbas but crucify Christ.**" The story is found in Luke 23: 13-21. It is possible that Barabbas was in partnership with the other two thieves, perhaps he was the ring leader. It was Barabbas who deserved to die and not Christ. Yet Christ took His place.

Where do you think Barabbas was during the crucifixion? Possibly, he was at the foot of the cross looking up in the face of Jesus. There he may have said, "**Sir, I really don't know who you are. But this one thing I do know, you are the man who took my place.**" Is this not the truth we find in Romans 5:8, "**But God commendeth His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, CHRIST DIED FOR US.**" Literally, the word "For" is a Greek word meaning substitution. Here the verse says in effect, "**Christ DIED IN MY PLACE, HE DIED ON MY BEHALF.**" I believe Barabbas' song could have been:

I met Jesus at the foot of the cross
when I was bound by sin;
Jesus met me, cleansed my heart of its dross,
He gave sweet peace within.

I found pardon at the foot of the cross,
forgiveness full and free;
Now I love Him only, all else is loss,
His grace availed for me...

I met Jesus when I needed Him most,
Despair possessed my soul;
I was under condemnation and lost,

When Jesus made me whole.

The possible story of this thief, Barabbas, was written up in a gospel tract. That tract was handed to a young man 94 years ago in the city of Baltimore. He took the tract and read it. When he read the words that possibly could have come from the lips of Barabbas that day, "Sir, I really don't know who you are. But this one thing I do know, you are the man who took my place," my father, John Miklas Jr. a developing agnostic, who is now in heaven, placed his faith in the finished work of the Christ of Calvary.

We all approach the throne of God as sinners. We all are saved by His grace alone. Whatever specific words we might use our hearts all cry out to God: "I am a sinner. I'm lost. I'm bound for hell. There's nothing I can bring You to merit your favor. By faith, I ask Christ to be my Lord and Saviour. I believe He died as my substitute and was raised for me." Then we are all able to sing:

**Three crosses stood grimly side by side on the hill of Calvary;
On each a suffering man had died; Two for THEIR crimes, the other FOR ME!
"If Thou art the Christ," they taunting said, "Come down from the cursed tree,"
He heeded no jeering word they said, but, bowing His head, HE DIED FOR ME!**

If God has spoken to your heart after reading sermon #2 on the Seven Words of Christ at Calvary, "Today Shalt Thou Be With Me In Paradise" then right now talk to God about what He has spoken to you.

Do you have the assurance that one day you will go to heaven? If you have no assurance that you know Jesus Christ, then I trust you will decide to accept Him as your personal Savior. The Bible tells us in

Acts 16:31, "...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved..."
Romans 10:13, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

This prayer is here for those who need to ask Jesus to be their personal Savior: "I do want to go to Heaven. I know I am a sinner, and I do believe Jesus Christ died for me. I realize I cannot buy this great salvation, nor can I earn it. Knowing Jesus died on the cross and arose from the grave to pay my sin debt and to purchase my salvation, I do now trust Him as my Savior, and from this moment on I am completely depending on Him for my salvation."

If you made the decision to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior let me know. Please send an e-mail to, pdmikBBM@aol.com and I will send you some literature that will help you in your Christian life.

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