

Thoughts on the Passion



When you consider the Passion Story – the story of Jesus’ arrest, trial, death, and resurrection – there is a lot to think about. We are told it will be a theme of study for us throughout eternity.

Today, we’re going to focus on just one small part of the story. Reading from Luke 23, beginning at verse 39:

One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself – and us, too, while you’re at it!”

But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”

And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:39-43, NLT)

Now, let’s get the Adventist thing out of the way right here at the beginning. We often miss the message of this passage because we get fixated on that comma in verse 43.

Punctuation was not a part of the original language. That comma was placed there by someone several hundred years after it was written according to how they understood that passage along with Heaven and Hell.

In their mind it was appropriate for Jesus to say *“I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*

Today, we are not going to discuss at all what happens when you die, but following His resurrection, Jesus said to Mary there in the garden, where she mistook Him for the Gardener:

“Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (John 20:17, NLT)

He had not yet been in Paradise Himself, so it would make more sense to place the comma like this: *“I assure you today, you will be with me in paradise.”*

To use this text as a proof of what happens after we die, is pretty shaky – but there are other passages that make it clear; but, that is for another time and place.

Now, let’s look at the real message of this passage. What really happened there on the cross? Why would this story be placed in an account of Jesus death?

Over the past couple of months, we have been studying the book of Romans together – we have almost made it through chapter 8. Let’s reconsider a couple of those passages.

Thoughts on the Passion



In regards to the Law, Paul wrote:

Its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are. (Romans 3:19-20, NLT)

The law does not have the power to save anyone – its purpose is to help us know what sin is and how badly it has taken over our lives. Paul continues:

But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law ...

I know this sounds strange, but in Romans 2 & 3, Paul showed that in order to be righteous by keeping the law, you must do so perfectly, 100% of the time – no slip ups ever! So God providing another way to salvation is our only hope! To realize this is true, is a great relief!! Reading on:

We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

We all know this is true in our lives regardless of how good we may look to others.

Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.

Jesus died to free us from the penalty for our sins! This is what we are celebrating this weekend that includes both Passover, which looked forward to Jesus' death, and Easter, when most Christians look back at Jesus' death and celebrate the gift He gives us!

For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood ... He makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26, NLT)

This is what was going on there on the cross between Jesus and the thief. It is an example of what happens every time someone gives their life to Jesus.

We often look at the thief's experience with Jesus as an exception. We rationalize that Jesus must have known what course the thief's life would take, given a chance to live – so it was safe to save him.

But, his experience is not an exception, it is the rule. Whenever anyone commits them self to Jesus, at that moment, they stand perfect before God, completely freed from the eternal penalty for their sin.

This is what Paul was talking about when he said:

Thoughts on the Passion



But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law ... For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. (Romans 3:21-24, NLT)

He means what he said. This will be true every minute of every day we spend with Jesus. This is the basis of our salvation. It is totally His gift to us – that we do not deserve.

This story is here in Scripture so we can know how utterly simple salvation is. It will always be God's gift to us and we will never deserve it.

The story of Jesus' Passion – His arrest, trial, death, and resurrection – is here so we can understand how much salvation really costs. It cost God His life. But, He offers it free to you and me.

The thief on the cross by Jesus illustrates how simple it is. Let's not make it any harder than God has. Let's keep it simple!

Thoughts on the Passion



Scripture References

Luke 23:39-43 (NLT): *One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So*

you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself – and us, too, while you’re at it!”

⁴⁰ But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? ⁴¹ We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.” ⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”

⁴³ And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:39-43, NLT)

John 20:11-18 (NLT): *Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. ¹² She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. ¹³ “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her.*

“Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”

¹⁴ She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him. ¹⁵ “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?”

She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.”

¹⁶ “Mary!” Jesus said.

She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”).

¹⁷ “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message. (John 20:11-18, NLT)

Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. ²⁰ For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.

²¹ But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. ²² We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

²³ For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. ²⁴ Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the

Thoughts on the Passion



penalty for our sins. ²⁵ For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, ²⁶ for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.

²⁷ Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. ²⁸ So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.

²⁹ After all, is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is. ³⁰ There is only one God, and he makes people right with himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. ³¹ Well then, if we emphasize faith, does this mean that we can forget about the law? Of course not! In fact, only when we have faith do we truly fulfill the law.

(Romans 3:19-31, NLT)

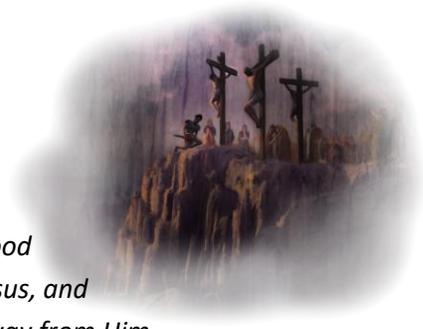
Romans 8:26-34 (NLT): *And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. ²⁷ And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. ²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. ²⁹ For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.*

³¹ *What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ³² Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? ³³ Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one – for God himself has given us right standing with himself. ³⁴ Who then will condemn us? No one – for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us. (Romans 8:26-34, NLT)*

E.G. White Writings

Desire of Ages, pages 749-752: *To Jesus in His agony on the cross there came one gleam of comfort. It was the prayer of the penitent thief. Both the men who were crucified with Jesus had at first railed upon Him; and one under his suffering only became more desperate and defiant. But not so with his companion. This man was not a hardened criminal; he had been led astray by evil*

Thoughts on the Passion



associations, but he was less guilty than many of those who stood beside the cross reviling the Saviour. He had seen and heard Jesus, and had been convicted by His teaching, but he had been turned away from Him by the priests and rulers. Seeking to stifle conviction, he had plunged deeper and deeper into sin, until he was arrested, tried as a criminal, and condemned to die on the cross. In the judgment hall and on the way to Calvary he had been in company with Jesus. He had heard Pilate declare, "I find no fault in Him." John 19:4. He had marked His godlike bearing, and His pitying forgiveness of His tormentors. On the cross he sees the many great religionists shoot out the tongue with scorn, and ridicule the Lord Jesus. He sees the wagging heads. He hears the upbraiding speeches taken up by his companion in guilt: "If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us." Among the passers-by he hears many defending Jesus. He hears them repeat His words, and tell of His works. The conviction comes back to him that this is the Christ. Turning to his fellow criminal he says, "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?" The dying thieves have no longer anything to fear from man. But upon one of them presses the conviction that there is a God to fear, a future to cause him to tremble. And now, all sin-polluted as it is, his life history is about to close. "And we indeed justly," he moans; "for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this Man hath done nothing amiss."

There is no question now. There are no doubts, no reproaches. When condemned for his crime, the thief had become hopeless and despairing; but strange, tender thoughts now spring up. He calls to mind all he has heard of Jesus, how He has healed the sick and pardoned sin. He has heard the words of those who believed in Jesus and followed Him weeping. He has seen and read the title above the Saviour's head. He has heard the passers-by repeat it, some with grieved, quivering lips, others with jesting and mockery. The Holy Spirit illuminates his mind, and little by little the chain of evidence is joined together. In Jesus, bruised, mocked, and hanging upon the cross, he sees the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. Hope is mingled with anguish in his voice as the helpless, dying soul casts himself upon a dying Saviour. "Lord, remember me," he cries, "when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." (750)

Quickly the answer came. Soft and melodious the tone, full of love, compassion, and power the words: Verily I say unto thee today, Thou shalt be with Me in paradise.

For long hours of agony, reviling and mockery have fallen upon the ears of Jesus. As He hangs upon the cross, there floats up to Him still the sound of jeers and curses. With longing heart He has listened for some expression of faith from His disciples. He has heard only the mournful words, "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." How grateful then to the Saviour was the utterance of faith and love from the dying thief! While the leading Jews deny Him, and even the disciples doubt His divinity, the poor thief, upon the brink of eternity, calls Jesus Lord. Many were ready to call Him Lord when He wrought miracles, and after He had

Thoughts on the Passion



risen from the grave; but none acknowledged Him as He hung dying upon the cross save the penitent thief who was saved at the eleventh hour.

The bystanders caught the words as the thief called Jesus Lord. The tone of the repentant man arrested their attention. Those who at the foot of the cross had been quarreling over Christ's garments, and casting lots upon His vesture, stopped to listen. Their angry tones were hushed. With bated breath they looked upon Christ, and waited for the response from those dying lips.

(751)

As He spoke the words of promise, the dark cloud that seemed to enshroud the cross was pierced by a bright and living light. To the penitent thief came the perfect peace of acceptance with God. Christ in His humiliation was glorified. He who in all other eyes appeared to be conquered was a Conqueror. He was acknowledged as the Sin Bearer. Men may exercise power over His human body. They may pierce the holy temples with the crown of thorns. They may strip from Him His raiment, and quarrel over its division. But they cannot rob Him of His power to forgive sins. In dying He bears testimony to His own divinity and to the glory of the Father. His ear is not heavy that it cannot hear, neither His arm shortened that it cannot save. It is His royal right to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by Him.

I say unto thee today, Thou shalt be with Me in Paradise. Christ did not promise that the thief should be with Him in Paradise that day. He Himself did not go that day to Paradise. He slept in the tomb, and on the morning of the resurrection He said, "I am not yet ascended to My Father." John 20:17. But on the day of the crucifixion, the day of apparent defeat and darkness, the promise was given. "Today" while dying upon the cross as a malefactor, Christ assures the poor sinner, Thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.

*The thieves crucified with Jesus were placed "on either side one, and Jesus in the midst." This was done by the direction of the priests and rulers. Christ's position between the thieves was to indicate that He was the greatest criminal of the three. Thus was fulfilled the scripture, "He was numbered with the transgressors." Isaiah 53:12. But the full meaning of their act the priests did not see. As Jesus, crucified with the thieves, was placed "in the midst," so His cross was placed in the midst of a world lying in sin. And the words of pardon spoken to the penitent thief kindled a light that will shine to the earth's remotest bounds. **(752)***

With amazement the angels beheld the infinite love of Jesus, who, suffering the most intense agony of mind and body, thought only of others, and encouraged the penitent soul to believe. In His humiliation He as a prophet had addressed the daughters of Jerusalem; as priest and advocate He had pleaded with the Father to forgive His murderers; as a loving Saviour He had forgiven the sins of the penitent thief. (Desire of Ages, pages 749-752)

Thoughts on the Passion



Steps to Christ, pages 21-22: *Oh, let us contemplate the amazing sacrifice that has been made for us! Let us try to appreciate the labor and energy that Heaven is expending to reclaim the lost, and bring them back to the Father's house. Motives stronger, and agencies more powerful, could never be brought into operation; the exceeding rewards for right-doing, the enjoyment of heaven, the society of the angels, the communion and love of God and His Son, the elevation and extension of all our powers throughout eternal ages – are these not mighty incentives and encouragements to urge us to give the heart's loving service to our Creator and Redeemer?*

And, on the other hand, the judgments of God pronounced against sin, the inevitable retribution, the degradation of our character, and the final destruction, are presented in God's word to warn us against the service of Satan.

Shall we not regard the mercy of God? What more could He do? Let us place ourselves in right relation to Him who has loved us with amazing love. Let us avail ourselves of the means provided for us that we may be transformed into His likeness, and be restored to fellowship with the ministering angels, to harmony and communion with the Father and the Son. (Steps to Christ, pages 21-22)