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LAETARE, THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

JOHN 6:47-57

Background

The Twelve had been instructed and sent forth to preach. They had just returned and Jesus had taken them into the wilderness. There multitudes came to see Him, and in compassion He fed them with five loaves of bread and two small fish. When they wanted to make Him king, He withdrew. The following day they found Him in Capernaum, and He preached the sermon on the Bread of Life, of which our text is an important part.

Textual Study

"Truly, truly": Christ is speaking of a matter of life and death. . . . "He who believes": The object, "on Me," is not in the text. But faith always has an object, and Jesus is that object, as is clearly set forth in the entire sermon. At this point the emphasis lies on the act of believing. . . . "Bread of Life": Life-giving bread naturally also sustains life. Here spiritual life is clearly indicated. . . . "From heaven": The Jews made much of the fact that Moses had given the people bread from heaven. Jesus points out that His coming down from heaven implies that He was in heaven before, which could not be said of the bread eaten in the wilderness. . . . "Living bread": Before, it was called life-giving bread. Here the bread itself is the living Christ. He can give life because He is Life. . . . "My flesh": Luther makes much of these two words. Here is Christ's humanity and His deity. He has just declared Himself God; now He speaks of His flesh, not merely the flesh of a man, but the flesh of the Son of God. This flesh Jesus will give for the life of the world. The substitutionary death of Christ is clearly referred to. This men are to eat, that is, to accept as being given for them. There is no

reference here to the sacramental eating of Christ's body. The Sacrament is instituted much later. . . . "My blood": This points to the fact that death would be violent. His blood would be shed. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission for sins. . . . "Eternal life": those who believe have it now but will enjoy it in perfection after the resurrection on the last day. Here there is joy at the prospect of it, and the prospect is certain. Having the living bread, we have life in ourselves and will be raised to everlasting life. . . . "Abides in Me": This is said of all who truly believe. Christ gave His flesh into death once. His blood was shed once. But He constantly dwells in those who believe in Him, and they live in Him. . . . "The living Father": Christ will not let us forget that He is the God-Man. The heavenly Father is true Father. Christ owes His life as a man to the Father. It is because of the Father that Christ came into the world as man. . . . "As — so": As Christ lives because of the Father, the Father having willed that Christ become man, so we live because of Christ, having received life from Him.

Introduction

Here, as on other Sundays in Lent, we see Christ and Satan in conflict. The devil has tempted Christ to continue to give bread to the people and be their king without fighting for His kingship. He now tempts people to accept the bread which Christ gives and be satisfied with it, thus taking the easy way out, not bothering to receive Christ the true bread from heaven. Christ therefore wrestles with Satan over us. His call to us: Take Me, Not Just My Gifts

I. Not to Do So Is to Ignore Christ's Purpose in Coming into the World

A. Christ's purpose was not primarily to work miracles. Even Moses had not come

for that purpose. Though he "gave" manna from heaven for 40 years, his chief purpose was to be a *spiritual* leader of God's people. Yet the Jews remember only the earthly gifts He gave. Now they want to do the same with Christ. "Just feed us, and we'll be satisfied." Yet there was no need for Christ to come from heaven to feed men. God does this through nature.

B. He came to give His flesh for the life of the world and to shed His blood for their salvation. For this cause the Father had given Him life as a man. In Him is eternal life, and men receive it by believing His promise.

II. *Not to Do So Is to Lose the Benefit of Christ's Coming*

A. The spiritual life He gives and sustains.

B. His abiding presence.

C. Eternal life, here and hereafter.

(See the textual study for the development of these truths.)

Conclusion

Point to the urgency with which Christ pleads in the text. He is deeply concerned about us. He wants us to be saved. He will not let Satan rob us of this blessing if we will only take Him at His Word. "Take me," He pleads. Thank God that He is so concerned about us. This is our assurance of the continuation of His blessings. With an oath He assures us, "He that believes has everlasting life."

JUDICA, PASSION SUNDAY

JOHN 13:31-35

Background

Our text takes us to the Thursday of Holy Week. This week is so full of events that we need not go beyond it for proper background for the text. After silent Wednesday we come to Thursday with the celebration

of the Passover, at which time there was strife among the apostles concerning their status (Luke 22:24). Christ then announces that one of the group will betray Him, and that leads to the text.

Textual Study

"When He had gone out": The reference is to Judas, who is to have an important part in the glorification of Christ, though not in his own right. John 13:2 reminds us that the devil had put it into Judas' heart to betray Christ and thus to usher in the work of redemption which would lead to Christ's great glory. . . . "Is glorified": Christ uses the past tense. He sees the work of redemption already complete, so sure is He that all will now be done according to God's plan as prophesied in Scripture. He is glorified through His work of redemption. Nothing gives greater glory to Him than does the fact that He is the Redeemer of the world. The theme in heaven will not be merely "Blessed is the Son of God" but "Blessed is the Lamb that was slain." . . . "The Son of Man": This is Jesus' self-appellation. Each time the name is used we see a reference to Daniel 7:13-14 where one like unto the Son of Man comes in the clouds to judge the world. Before He judges the world, He will earn salvation for men. In all lowliness He will show Himself as the servant of men, humbling Himself even to death and thus providing men with an escape from the terrible judgment that will befall the wicked. When He comes to judge, those who know Him as Savior will pass from judgment into life everlasting. . . . "Where I am going": This is into death. No man can follow Christ into this substitutionary death. He must go alone. We are to be baptized with Him into death. We can follow Him into heaven and we shall do so in His day. But He must tread the winepress alone, covering Himself with the blood of His enemies. This we say to His glory. . . . "Love one another": The love

we are to show is the love that Christ showed. He loved us because He is love, not because we are lovable. This higher love is possible for Christians because Christ's love dwells in them. When they so love their fellowmen, they are doing it with a love which Christ Himself has poured into their hearts. . . . "By this all men will know": Christ had earlier pointed out that the disciples would have to suffer, but their sufferings would not prove them to be Christ's disciples, for other men also suffer here on earth. Though others can and do suffer as Christians do, they cannot love as Christians can. Christians can love as Christ loved because He is in them and with them. Thus their love contributes to His glory.

Introduction

In the opening verse of our text we are reminded that the devil is at work. He is still trying to thwart God's plan of salvation. Now he enters the heart of Judas, taking him out into the night to betray Christ into the hands of His enemies. The devil will have a heyday. He has been responsible for strife among the disciples. He will get the Jews and the Gentiles to conspire against the Lord. Another day, so he thinks, and the Savior of the Jews will be dead. These would be evil days for Christ. But the devil doesn't know the truth. He cannot know the truth. Only in the light of our text and other clear words of God do we see the truth, that:

The Last Days of Christ on Earth
Were the Best

I. Even the First Days of Holy Week Were Very Important for Christ

- A. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem
- B. His last days of miracle-working and teaching
- C. His triumph over His enemies
- D. His outreach to the Gentiles

II. His Greatest Day Was the Day of His Death

A. Christ Himself speaks of it as the day of His glorification.

B. The Father, too, glorifies the Son for His suffering and death.

C. For this we, too, shall glorify Him with all the saints.

III. In the Light of This Day All Other Days Become Glorious for Christ's Disciples

A. Even Judgment Day will be glorious for us to behold (see notes on The Son of Man).

1. Christ spoke of it as a day of rejoicing for His disciples.

2. We will be able to glory in it because of our redemption.

B. Every day can be a day of rejoicing in the glory of our Lord.

1. We are assured of His love and of the victory which is ours because He loved us (our lot is not that of Judas).

2. Through His love we, too, can love one another and so glorify Christ.

Conclusion

May the consideration of Christ's best days on earth help us to see again how blessed our days are because of Him. May we use each day He gives to His glory. May He hasten the coming of the Last Day, when we will see Him in His glory.

Springfield, Ill. MARK J. STEEGE

PALM SUNDAY

JOHN 12:1-8

As he enters Holy Week the Christian feels a special desire to be near Jesus, to be with Jesus. The Christian makes the words of the Introit for the day his prayer, "Be not Thou far from me, O Lord," and he exults in the words of the Gradual, "Thou hast holden me by my right hand: Thou shalt

guide me with Thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory."

In many of our churches this is the Sunday when classes of children kneel at the Lord's altar and promise anew that they will always strive to be with Jesus. The text shows us Lazarus, Mary, and Martha with Jesus. It also provides us with the warning example of Judas and his hypocrisy. In addition it demonstrates how easy it is to be led astray, for the other disciples joined Judas in complaining about "waste." Those who understand what it means to be with Jesus will be ready to make sacrifices for Him. They will not do this to obtain His approval, but to show Him their love. His approval will be forthcoming, however.

Introduction

We sing: "Jesus I will never leave, Who for me Himself hath given; Firmly unto Him I'll cleave Nor from Him be ever driven. Life from Him doth light receive,— Jesus I will never leave." When we sing these words, do we always fully understand and mean what we are singing? Our text provides us with a good opportunity to consider once again our discipleship, or

Our Being with Jesus

I. This Will Cost Us Something

A. It will cost us time. Lazarus took time to be at the meal although there was some danger involved for him. Mary had taken time earlier to sit at Jesus' feet to hear His Word.

B. It will cost us service. Martha waited on table. Mary anointed the feet of Jesus and then dried them with her hair. Our service must be rendered in humility. We cannot claim reward.

C. It will cost us our possessions. The ointment was costly (a year's wages). Our money is to be at His disposal.

D. An unwillingness to pay the price would show how little we value God.

II. This May Bring Persecution

A. Lazarus' danger in being with Jesus was very real. (John 12:10-11)

B. Mary suffered the cutting remarks of Judas. Sometimes our persecution comes from people who are outwardly connected with the church. Wrong motives are ascribed to services rendered.

C. An unwillingness to suffer with Him would indicate we will not be glorified with Him.

III. This Meets with the Approval of Jesus

A. Jesus took up the defense for Mary and commended her highly.

B. Jesus assures us of the crown of life as we continue to be with Him. (Rev. 2:10b)

IV. Our Being with Jesus Comes About Only by His Being with Us

A. He came to the world, to Bethany, to Jerusalem, to the cross and grave, and to the triumph of resurrection.

B. This same Jesus comes to us in His body and blood in the Sacrament and through the preaching of His Word.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

LUKE 22:14-20

Being with Jesus will call for our being present on Maundy Thursday as He celebrates the Passover for the last time with His disciples and as He institutes the Sacrament of the Altar. On the anniversary of the institution of the sacrament our hearts should be filled with thanksgiving to the Lord for His marvelous gift to us. We confess in the words of the Introit for the day: "In Him is salvation, life, and resurrection from the dead: by Him we are redeemed and set at liberty." Of this we are assured in the sacrament. So we also say in the Gradual, "He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered: the Lord is gracious and full of

compassion." As we celebrate the sacrament, we remember what Christ has done for us and give thanks to Him for His grace to us.

Introduction

For the children of Israel the Passover meal was a meal of remembrance and of thanksgiving. They were to remember how the Lord had delivered them out of Pharaoh's power. They were to give thanks for this deliverance—deliverance that was coming. Through many captivities and enslavements they had hoped for God's promised deliverance. Now—although only a few realized it—a far greater deliverance was being offered to them and to all the world through Christ, the Passover Lamb. This Passover meal Christ has replaced for us with the Sacrament of the Altar, a meal of remembrance of forgiveness secured through our Lord's death and resurrection of thanksgiving, and of a future hope of our Lord's return. When the Passover meal was first observed, it was with a certain fearfulness. The Exodus had not yet been accomplished, and Egypt's slavery was still very real. Later celebrations must have been with mixed feelings—for Israel did not always live in a land of milk and honey. But even when days were darkest, there were prayers of thanksgiving accompanying the Passover meal. So we find that Jesus also gives thanks as He institutes the Sacrament of the Altar and distributes His body and His blood to the disciples. Theirs must also have been mixed feelings—for our Lord's "exodus" had not yet been accomplished and the situation in Jerusalem was such that the disciples knew His life and theirs were threatened.

Our Lord has instructed us, "This do." And so we would this night. But is there any word that can better sum up our feelings than "thanksgiving"? For all that has been accomplished, for all the future promises, for all that now is ours—is there any more appropriate word than "thanksgiving"?

Our Prayer of Thanksgiving at the Sacrament of the Altar

I. *It Is Prompted by the Love of God, Who in Christ Jesus Accomplished the World's Salvation*

A. "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." We see His determination to go the way of the cross for us.

B. "I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Through His impending death the redemption of all men would soon be completed. God's saving act would be accomplished, and all men would be urged into membership in the people of God.

II. *It Is Prompted by the Testament That Offers Us All He Has Accomplished*

A. In this testament the significant action is one way. Jesus bequeathes Himself to us. He gives His body and blood to us with the bread and wine. We are on the receiving end of all that Jesus' life and death mean for us.

B. He offers us forgiveness, life, and salvation—a new relationship with God that is already ours and will be ours to all eternity.

III. *It Is Prompted by Our Remembering in Faith How Important His Gift Has Been in View of Our Need*

A. Conscious of our sin, we repent and ask the Lord for forgiveness.

B. We remember that Jesus gave Himself into death for us. We remember what He had to endure for us as our Substitute. We remember what He has acquired for us by giving Himself for us.

C. As His heirs in faith we now remember to live for Him. He provides us with help for this in the sacrament. The new life He secured for us He gives to us, and He lives in us.

Conclusion

As we consider what Christ gives to us in the Sacrament of the Altar, we have ample reason for our prayer of thanksgiving: "We give thanks to Thee, Almighty God, that Thou hast refreshed us through this salutary gift. . . ."

GOOD FRIDAY

LUKE 23:39-46

(See the Sermon Text Study at the end of the Homiletics Section.)

The observance of Good Friday deepens our understanding of sin and grace. We see more sharply the dread power of sin and the greater power of our Savior over sin. This twofold truth must become very real for us because we are deeply involved in it. This is stated for us in the words of the Introit for Good Friday: "All we like sheep have gone astray; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." We have a very direct part in causing what happened on His cross.

At the same time we need to see with grateful hearts that we are also the ones who have benefited directly from the suffering and death of Jesus. The Gradual for this day states: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed."

Introduction

The Christian is with Jesus on Good Friday. On that first Good Friday not many of the Savior's followers were present. Some of the women from Galilee were there, standing at a distance. The disciples, with the exception of John, were probably hiding for fear of the Jews. Even if these men did not quite comprehend what was happening, even if they knew only that He who was on the cross was their Friend, their behavior was shameful. Certainly this isn't the kind

of loyalty we would offer towards Him whom we confess to be the Savior-King, the Christ. Since this is true, we today need to take our places at the foot of the cross to be

With Jesus, Our Savior, on Golgotha

I. *We See the Dread Power of Sin There*

A. Sin causes the sinner to turn against God. The malefactor on the left began to blaspheme Christ. Sin drives the sinner in this direction even today.

B. Sin brings death to the sinner. The malefactor on the right confessed that their suffering and death had been deserved by their misdeeds. "And we indeed justly" — those words can well be spoken by us today.

C. Sin reveals man's situation — so desperate that the loving God must invest His Son's life to remedy it. The supernatural darkness signified that God in justice had turned away from Him who was bearing the sins of all the world. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

II. *We See the Greater Power of Our Savior There*

A. He promised Paradise that day to the penitent malefactor. What comfort and joy for this man to hear this! Heaven will be his in the presence of Christ forever.

B. He satisfied the demands of God's justice and gained access to the throne of grace for us. This was indicated by the rent in the temple veil.

C. He demonstrated by the manner of His death that He is the Lord of death as well as of life. He died, not from exhaustion, but with a loud shout and that given voluntarily. He laid down His life so that we might live.

Conclusion

Let us rejoice in the greater power of our Savior. Let us not be offended at the way He was crucified and reviled, but let us rather confess Him, as did the penitent thief,

and gratefully worship Him as our mighty Lord and Savior from sin, who has won heaven and life eternal for us. Let us ever be near Him now, and we shall be with Him forever in Paradise.

EASTER

MATTHEW 28:1-10

Joy must be the dominant note for Easter, based on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This note of joy sounds forth in many of the Easter hymns, but always it is based on the fact that Jesus lives. This note of joy must ring forth in the Easter sermon. It is there in the Introit for this festival: "He is risen, Hallelujah! Why seek ye the Living among the dead? Hallelujah!" That same note of joy coupled with thanksgiving is present in the Gradual. "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good: for His mercy endureth forever. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

Introduction

Easter, which brings us the marvelous story of the Savior's resurrection, is strictly a Christian festival. It brings the Christian the unfailing guarantee that he has complete pardon from God and that he has life with Him now and forever. This real meaning of Easter, this real joy, can be ours!

"Jesus Lives! Let All Rejoice"

I. *This Is the Message the Angel Proclaimed at the Savior's Tomb*

A. He proclaimed it to the women, the faithful followers of Jesus, who had been on Golgotha on Good Friday and had noted where He was buried. The Easter message is for Christians.

B. He supported His message (1) by pointing to the empty tomb, (2) by reminding the women of Christ's promise to rise, and (3) by promising them that they would see Jesus in Galilee.

C. He proclaimed the message before

Jesus had appeared to any of the disciples. We are to build our faith upon the Word. The resurrection of Jesus is God's absolute guarantee for man's redemption.

II. *This Is the Message the Women Were to Make Known to the Disciples*

A. The disciples were in dire need of this message. They had failed Jesus, had been offended in Him. They had failed to grasp His promise that He would rise again the third day. They had serious doubts now. They needed to know that Jesus had not rejected them, that He had forgiven them and still loved them.

B. The disciples were to hear the story of the resurrection and to rejoice because of it, for they had been with Him and had heard the story of sin and grace from Him. They needed to have their faith built up. The women were not told to go with the story of the resurrection to the leaders of the Jews. Christ's concern was first of all for His disciples.

III. *This Is the Message We Are to Accept in Faith with Great Joy*

A. We are to do this because the resurrection of Jesus is sure. What is supported by the angel's proclamation, by the open, empty tomb, by the earthquake, and by the appearance of Jesus to the women on the way is guaranteed to us by the testimony of the Holy Spirit to each of us.

B. We rejoice because we are assured of Christ's love and forgiveness, of peace and the wonderful hope of life eternal with Christ in heaven.

Conclusion

"Jesus lives! Let all rejoice." This is the Savior's message to us Christians. Let us firmly believe it, so that we will ever be with Jesus and have the Easter joy in our hearts.

Howard Lake, Minn.

GERHARD C. MICHAEL

SERMON STUDY TEXT

LUKE 23:39-46

Why does "the beloved physician" include in his carefully planned gospel (Cf. Luke 1:1-4) the account of the repentant thief, an incident otherwise unrecorded in the gospels? Why does Luke present the aspects of Jesus' death on the cross recorded in 23:44-46?

Through the eyes of this text we see several important emphases of Luke's Gospel.

Jesus is the loving and sympathetic Savior of all people. The Gentile physician assures his readers of the universality of God's grace. Jesus is the son of Adam, the father of all men (Luke 3:38). Roman rulers are mentioned. The Roman centurion builds a synagogue for the Jews and has greater faith than any Israelite (Luke 7:1-10; cf. Matt. 8:5-13). Jesus has concern for the Gentile Samaritans (9:52ff; 10:29-37; 17:11-19). A centurion is able to praise God. (23:47)

Christ seeks the lost and the lowly. He came to seek and save the lost (19:10). The birth is announced to shepherds (2:8-20). The hungry are filled with good things (1:53). Special attention is paid to women (7:11-17), a sinful woman (7:36-50), a pleading woman (18:1-8), religious outcasts (18:9-14; 19:1-10), sinners. (15:2)

Jesus' forgiving grace overflows. The parable of "The Elder Brother" shows the complete forgiveness offered to the prodigal son (15:11-32). Jesus forgives those who crucified Him (23:34). The disciples are to preach repentance and forgiveness to all nations. (24:47)

Verse 39: Α κακούργος was one guilty of a serious crime, a criminal in the eyes of the law. βλασφημέω ("railed at him") is not substantially different from the ὀνειδίζω of Mark and Matthew.¹ The form of the question addressed to Jesus by the blasphemer is

especially bitter. Οὐχί, an interrogative word in questions that expect an affirmative answer, is stronger than the simple οὐ. The first malefactor is not asking a question, "If you are," but in his tormented anguish is throwing out the taunt, "Since as you assert you are the Messiah, why don't you choose to deliver us!"

Verse 40: The rebuke of the second criminal recorded in v. 40 gains significance from his analysis of the situation recorded in v. 41 and his confident request of v. 42. It is the inequality of the sentences administered that leads the second criminal to search for another evaluation of what is happening. The emphasis on the fear of God, as effected by the position of φοβῆν, shows that the concern of this malefactor was directed toward another Judge and another sentence. His concern reflects the words of Jesus, "Do not fear those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!" (Luke 12:4-5). All three crucified men were suffering the same condemnation of death. But there surely *must* be another reckoning, in view of the disparity in this sentence. For God is the God of justice, whom to know is to fear. (Ps. 11:1-10)

Verse 41: With a newly discovered sense of right and wrong the second criminal analyzes the scene on "The Skull." The disparity which he observes underlies his question of v. 40. He has seen the contrast. On the one hand are the criminals, whose condemnation is justifiable; what they are receiving is in keeping with, corresponding to (ἄξιος), the things they have done. On the other hand is Jesus. The οὗτος is emphatic.² The contrast is drawn between the ἡμεῖς μὲν and the οὗτος δέ. "This one" has done nothing

¹ Alfred Plummer, *St. Luke* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), p. 534.

² C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1953), p. 122.

ing that could be considered improper, out of place, or unrighteous.

It is a special concern of Luke to show that Jesus was undeserving of his condemnation. In v. 15 of this chapter we hear the verdict of Pilate that Jesus had done nothing deserving death. Three times Luke records the assertion of Pilate that there is no guilt in Jesus, nothing as a cause for death (23:4, 14, 22). The words of the second criminal regarding Jesus' innocence prepare for the final declaration of that innocence voiced by the centurion (23:47). The just suffers the punishment of the unjust. (Is. 51:12)³

Verse 42: The repentant criminal did more than observe that an innocent man was numbered among the transgressors. He believed that the Just One could account the transgressors righteous (Is. 51:11). The disparity of the condemnation did not produce a lasting frustration for him. His fear of God looked to the righteous acts of God for redemption (Ps. 111:10). If this condemnation was unjust, he was ready to appeal to the One who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:23)

He asks, "Jesus, at the time You come into Your kingdom, remember me." ὅταν ἔλθῃς εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν σου as used of Jesus is unique. It may be that εἰς is merely being used interchangeably with ἐν.⁴ There is 4th- and 5th-century evidence for ἐν. (There are other references to Jesus as coming ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ, Matt. 16:28). Yet the more difficult reading εἰς may actually have been that intended by Luke. The gospels teach that the Kingdom has come in the person and work of Jesus (Luke 11:20). The kingdom of God which is to come is Christ's kingdom (22:18, 30). More often Jesus speaks of God bringing His kingdom to men

(12:32; 10:9), or of men entering that kingdom (18:24). The repentant criminal, however, asks neither for the Kingdom as a gift nor for the privilege of entering that kingdom. He asks only to be remembered by the One whom he now sees as King. He asks at most to be associated with Jesus when Jesus makes the transition from His present state of humiliation to His imminent glorious return to the Father.⁵ That is the assurance he receives in v. 43 (μετ' ἐμοῦ). Association with Jesus is a significant aspect of the future kingdom, as seen in Jesus' words to His disciples, who are to "eat and drink at My table in My kingdom" (Luke 22:30). Matthew records a similar saying: "... until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29). The criminal who is to die with Jesus asks that when the Messiah comes into His kingdom he might not be left behind to a more severe condemnation than that which he was experiencing.

On what basis does the penitent criminal make his request? His faith in one who is crucified with him is remarkable. "Some saw Jesus raise the dead and did not believe. The robber sees Him being put to death and yet believes."⁶ Luke leads us to believe that the second criminal keenly felt the inequality of the crucifixion of Jesus. Granted a Jewish background⁷ and contact with Jesus, he may indeed have come to trust that the One suffering with him was suffering for him. A more specific answer may be found in

³ Thus He sets the pattern for His followers. Cf. 1 Peter 2:19-23.

⁴ See further Blass-Debrunner, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, c. 1959), 198, 205, 206, 218.

⁵ That a "second coming" is not necessarily referred to here is supported by understanding "Paradise" in verse 43 as referring to an interim state of the blessed. See discussion of verse 43.

⁶ Plummer, p. 535.

⁷ Ibid., p. 535: The penitent "believes that Jesus is the Messiah, and he knows that the Messiah is to have a kingdom. It is all but certain that the robber was a Jew. This is antecedently probable; and to a heathen the word 'Paradise' would hardly have been intelligible."

Luke's recording of the saying of Jesus in 23:34, in which Jesus' forgiving attitude toward His enemies was expressed in the hearing of the criminals and of "the people" (v.35). As mentioned in the introduction, the forgiveness of sins was one of the emphases of Luke's Gospel. The proximity of this saying to our text both lends the clue to understanding the plea of the second criminal and also justifies calling him the "penitent" thief. Because he recognized that he also was an "enemy" of Jesus and applied Jesus' offer of forgiveness to himself, he was able to reach out to Christ in faith.

Verse 43: Jesus' reply to the penitent thief is a matter of importance to Luke, as indicated by the introductory phrase, ἀμὴν σοι λέγω. Luke keeps only six occurrences of the affirmative ἀμὴν on the lips of Jesus.⁸

Before discussing the content of Jesus' reply, it is necessary to look briefly at the meaning of "Paradise." Παράδεισος was a common term in Greek literature for an orchard, or garden of trees.⁹ In the Septuagint παράδεισος is used regularly for the Garden of Genesis 2.¹⁰ Ezekiel reflects the faith of the Jewish people in an eschatological age characterized by a *new* Garden of Eden (36:35). The New Testament also describes the future of the righteous in terms of a new Garden of Eden (Rev. 2:7). In later Judaism, παράδεισος was used to describe the place for God's righteous people after death. The most striking of these passages is that in the Testament of Levi, 18:10, in which it is said of the priestly

Messiah, "He himself will open the door of Paradise, and remove the sword which threatened Adam. He will grant the saints to eat of the tree of life, and the spirit of holiness shall be upon them."¹¹

Other terms are used in late Judaism and in the New Testament to describe this paradise, in particular "the bosom of Abraham" (Luke 16:22). The expression occurs in Jewish writings where Abraham is "expressly designated as he who received the penitent into Paradise."¹² As Abraham is in Paradise, to rest in his bosom is to be in Paradise. Luke 16:22 notes that it is the angels who carry Lazarus to the bosom of Abraham. "A Targum on Cantic. IV, 12 says that the souls of the righteous are carried to Paradise by angels."¹³ Jeremias suggests that this passage describes the situation after death, not after the final judgment, as the use of Hades instead of Gehenna in Luke 16:23 would indicate.¹⁴ The reference would be to an intermediate Paradise, a place for the souls of the just prior to the final judgment.¹⁵ Biblical thought then would understand Paradise to mean: (1) the original Garden of Eden, (2) the future eternal home of the righteous, (3) the present hidden, interim home of the righteous.

Whether Jesus has in mind an interim abode or the future eternal home is of little significance. He has no intention of commenting on current Jewish beliefs on the subject. His word to the penitent criminal is a sure promise of association with Himself

⁸ A. R. C. Leaney, *St. Luke* (London: Adam & Charles Black, c. 1958), p. 285, discusses Luke's use of the phrase.

⁹ J. H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1930), p. 482.

¹⁰ See further J. Jeremias, "παράδεισος," *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, V (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1954), 763 ff.

¹¹ See R. H. Charles, *The Greek Versions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1908), pp. 63f.

¹² Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 280.

¹³ See Plummer, p. 393.

¹⁴ See Jeremias, p. 767.

¹⁵ Is this perhaps the "Paradise" of 2 Cor. 12:4?

(μετ' ἐμοῦ). Μετ' ἐμοῦ means not merely "in My company" (σὺν ἐμοί), but "sharing with Me." The Kingdom, Paradise, and Life are where Christ is. To be in Paradise is to be with Christ. That was the promise of Jesus Himself (John 12:26; 14:2-3); the desire of Paul (Phil. 1:23); the final, confident plea of Stephen (Acts 7:59). When the future kingdom of God is described in Rev. 7:9-17, the Lamb of God is enthroned in the midst of a great multitude. Speculative questions are cast aside. The host in white are gathered around the Lamb of God, who is their shepherd to guide them to springs of living water, who will wipe away every tear from their eyes. The concern of Revelation regarding the afterlife centers on fellowship with Christ, who has "opened" (i. e., restored) the Paradise of God (cf. 2:7). The Evangelists announce this opening of Paradise as already taking place in the coming of Jesus. Jesus' healing and preaching (Matt. 11:5) is the fulfillment of the paradisaical prophecies of Isaiah (35:1-10). What Jesus did evoked the astonished confession, "He has done all things well" (Mark 7:37), which parallels the creation confession of Genesis 1:3, "Behold, it was very good." John's Gospel points to Jesus as the bread of life and the water that quenches all thirst. Accordingly we can say of Jesus' word to the penitent criminal,

Paradise is symbolical of the choicest association man can enjoy with his Creator. Here on the cross Jesus is effecting a redemption which restores what Adam lost (cf. Luke 3:38). Jesus eats with publicans and sinners. Here on the cross He communicates the fellowship of God Himself to the repentant robber. Forgiveness speaks fellowship with God. This word to the robber is one of Jesus' most sublime claims to Deity. [sic]¹⁶

¹⁶ Frederick W. Danker, "Aids to Bible Study," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, XXIX, 7 (July 1958), 488.

The hour of death became for the penitent a salvation-filled "today," through the promised sharing with Jesus. With the "today," Jesus pronounces complete forgiveness; He merges the future with the present. On this very day the penitent will be sharing the heavenly banquet (Luke 22:30; Matt. 26:29) with Jesus in a place of security and fulfillment. The details of the future life are left unspecified, but sure hope is given on the basis of fellowship with Christ.¹⁷

Verses 44—45a: "It was now *about* (ὥσει) the sixth hour." The time is not the principal concern; if it were, ὅτε would have been used. Luther takes ἐφ' ὅλην τὴν γῆν as referring to the whole "land," rather than the whole "earth."¹⁸ The Gospel of Peter interprets ὅλην τὴν γῆν as Judea, πᾶσαν τὴν Ἰουδαίαν.¹⁹

Luke explains the presence of the darkness by asserting that the sun's light failed (ἐκλείπωντος). The word is obviously the source of our word eclipse but actually means to "fail," "come to an end," or "give out."²⁰ The early church fathers were careful to say that it was not an ordinary eclipse that took place.²¹ The darkness might have been a sign of the sympathy of nature with the sufferings of the Son of God. The first Chris-

¹⁷ Communion with Christ is the basis for the hope of resurrection throughout the New Testament (Romans 6 and 8; 1 Corinthians 15; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:14; 1 Peter 1).

¹⁸ Plummer, p. 536.

¹⁹ See further H. B. Swete, *St. Mark* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1898, 1909), p. 384.

²⁰ Moulton and Milligan, on ἐκλείπω: "It seems more than doubtful that in Luke 23:45 any reference is intended to an eclipse. To find such a reference is to involve the Evangelist in a needless blunder, as an eclipse is impossible at full moon, and to run counter to his general usage of the verb = 'fail' (16:9; 22:32; cf. Heb. 1:12)."

²¹ See Plummer, p. 537.

tians probably interpret the darkness as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the judgment of God.²²

Verse 45b: Luke records that "the curtain of the temple was torn in two," as do Matthew and Mark, though they report it as taking place after the death of Jesus (Matt. 27: 51; Mark 15:38).²³ The curtain referred to is the inner curtain which separates the holy of holies from the holy place (cf. Exodus 26: 31ff.). The holy of holies was the meeting place of God with man, a place for God's self-revelation under the Old Covenant (Ex. 30:6). The tearing of the curtain indicates that through God's revelation of Himself in Christ, in the sacrifice of His death, the way was opened for every penitent to enter into the most intimate fellowship with God. The penitent has "a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf" (Heb. 6:19f.). In Heb. 10:19-22 the torn curtain is the flesh of Jesus. Through the death of Jesus the barrier between God and all people has been broken down. (Eph. 2: 11-16)

Verse 46: Luke records Jesus' last words as being a committal to the care of His Father. That was the same Father to whom Jesus recognized His obligation as a youth (Luke 2:49), whose will He was determined to perform (22:42), and who would shortly receive Him into His kingdom (23:42).

²² On the background of Amos 8:9 see W. R. Harper, *Amos and Hosea* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark), p. 181.

²³ Plummer, p. 538: "In the Gemara it is stated that some forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem, the heavy gates of the temple, which could with difficulty be moved by many men, and which were locked at the time, flew open about midnight at the Passover." . . . "these accounts hint at some strange occurrence as being remembered in connexion with the time of the Crucifixion."

That was the same Father whose forgiveness was proclaimed before the people (22:34, also without parallel), and whose forgiveness had just been granted to the penitent.

The words of Jesus' self-committal are those of Ps. 31:6. There is no need to attribute this saying to a special invention of Luke, as though it were an attempt to escape the harsher saying of Matt. 27:46 and Mark 15:34. Psalm 31:6 was used as the evening prayer of the pious Jew; a similar prayer, used by many, is: "in deine Haende, Herr, befehl' ich meinen Geist. Du rettetest mich, du treuer Gott."²⁴ As a well-known prayer the words would have come easily to the lips of Jesus at the evening of His earthly life. In addition Psalm 31 is a psalm of the falsely accused. The disparity of justice in the condemnation of Jesus would make the words appropriate. Moreover, Jesus prefixes the prayer with the confident "Father." Luke was at pains throughout his gospel to record those sayings and actions of Jesus by which Jesus proclaimed the forgiveness of the Father. On the cross He addresses the Father who forgives (22:34). Luke includes that final word of Jesus from the cross in which Jesus commits Himself to the same forgiving Father. The final word of Jesus heard by the penitent criminal is that confident call to God as forgiving Father. The penitent knows that with Jesus he, too, can call out, "Father," in the fast approaching evening of his life, knowing that he is completely forgiven. The word of repentance and forgiveness of sins is the final word of the Gospel which is to be proclaimed to all nations. (24:47)

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²⁴ See Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, n. d.), p. 435.