

The Wonderful Power Of Christ In His Death To Convert Sinners.

Text: Luke 23:46-48

Suggested Hymns:

52, 79T307, 127, 292, 54

1) To convince them of the guilt of their sin

2) To persuade them of the forgiveness of their sin

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 23:46-48 ***“And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’” Having said this, He breathed His last. “7 So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, ‘Certainly this was a righteous Man!’” 48 And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The vilest deed the sun ever witnessed was committed on this day. The greatest benefactor of the whole human race was put to death. And that benefactor was the great God of heaven who had taken upon Himself the form of a man.

Jesus of Nazareth, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, who is the Son of God begotten of the Father in eternity, was nailed to the cross and was hanging on the cross from nine in the morning until three in the afternoon when He died.

And by whom was this terrible deed committed? Not by the evil spirits, not by the enemies of God in the invisible world who are doomed to eternal destruction, but by man, by the enemies of God in the visible world, by God’s own creatures, whom He loved to such an extent that He sent His beloved Son into the world for their salvation.

On this day the seemingly impossible was done, the Prince of life was put to death, the Creator was slain by the hands of the creature.

What must have been going on in heaven while this was done on earth! What must the holy angels have been doing! Has it never struck you as something peculiar that no angel appeared on Calvary? When Christ was born the angels came down from heaven and sang hymns of praise. Angels served Him in the wilderness. Angels announced His resurrection. Angels explained His ascension. But when the Son of God dies, the heavens are closed. The angels have withdrawn. They bury their faces in their hands, as it were, and weep, weep at the sufferings of their beloved God and Lord and at the terrible deed committed by fallen man.

When Jesus died, God Himself died. This is positively true. But even in death God remains God. Even the dead Christ, the lifeless corpse hanging on the shameful tree, exhibits divine power. During the past Sundays in Lent we contemplated the rays of divine glory seen in the suffering and dying Christ at different instances, but today we reach the climax when we shall see the rays of His divine glory issuing forth from His corpse.

Our text tells about the wonderful effect which the death of Jesus had upon two classes of people, upon the centurion and his soldiers who were in charge of the execution, and upon the people that had come together from the city of Jerusalem to witness the crucifixion.

And what was the effect? They were converted to Christ. And this was not done perchance. Christ Himself had made a distinct Prophecy that this should be done. Speaking of His crucifixion, He said in John 12:32, ³² *“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”*

And what do we see now? Even the dead Christ, the lifeless corpse, has still retained the power to verify His words and is now actually drawing all people unto Himself, even the great sinners that had put Him to death and had mocked and abused Him. Let us consider with the help of God’s Holy Spirit the wonderful power of Christ in His death to convert sinners. May the Lord bless our meditation this Good Friday.

1. The Power Of Christ In His Death To Convince Them Of The Guilt Of Their Sin.

The wonderful power of Christ in His death to convert sinners is plainly visible in the people that witnessed His death on the cross. The Lord Jesus had

been the greatest benefactor to the Jewish people. He had healed thousands from various diseases. He had proclaimed to them the words of eternal life. He had performed before them the greatest divine miracles.

And the people did cling to Him and only a few days ago had escorted Him into the city of Jerusalem shouting, *Hosanna to the son of David!* But what a change came over the people when they found Jesus apparently helpless in the hands of His enemies and saw that He was to be condemned to death! They no longer thought of what Jesus had done for them. They were easily persuaded by the scribes and Pharisees, chief priests and elders, to join them in their demands before Pilate that Jesus should be crucified.

It was the people that cried, *“Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas”¹ Crucify Him, crucify Him!² “His blood be on us and on our children.”³* And when Jesus was hanging on the cross, not only the elders and chief priests mocked Him and reviled Him, but from the people also such voices were heard as, *“You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”⁴*

⁴¹ *Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said,* ⁴² *“He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.”* ⁴³ *“He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”* ⁴⁴ *Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing.* Can we conceive a baser ingratitude and more diabolical depravity than is shown on the part of these people?

Yet what is done when the people see that Christ is really dead, when they see His features and see that life is extinguished? We are told, ⁴⁸ *And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned.*

Look at the wonderful power of Christ in His death to convert sinners, to produce in them a radical change, to convince them of the guilt of their sin! Before Christ died, the people remained unmoved in spite of all the agonies, and suffering, and groaning of their victim on the cross, but the moment His head drops upon His breast in death, they smite their breasts, which was an indication of deep remorse.

They smite their breasts like the tax-collector who would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, *God be merciful to me a sinner.*

Now their eyes were opened and they perceived the great guilt of their sin. Their conscience cried out, *Oh what have you done! You have murdered the Son of God! You have killed the Messiah! How shall you escape the wrath of God now? Woe, woe unto you!*

And they could not get rid of these tormenting thoughts. The suffering, groaning, dying Christ certainly haunted them in their dreams for the next fifty days, until the day of Pentecost, when they heard Peter's sermon and received the Gospel of God's reconciliation with them through the death of His beloved Son. Three thousand people were baptised that day.

Such is the power of Christ's death to this day. If the death of the Son of God cannot convince you of the guilt of your sin, what will? Can you doubt for one moment that your sins, even if in the eyes of others they were ever so small, they are grave offences in the sight of God, when you look upon the anguish, and suffering, and bitter death of God's own Son? Can you regard your sins as mere trifles, when you consider that nothing could atone for them but the great sacrifice of the Son of God, when on the cross He bled and died?

By nature we are all disposed to make light of our sins, not to mind them much, to find excuses for them, and to expect of God that He should not be so severe on us because we have sinned. But the death of the Son of God reveals to us the wrath of God on account of our transgressions. In the sight of the holy God sin is something so enormous, so aggravating, so terrible as to demand the severest punishment. *"The soul who sins shall die"*⁵ is God's stern judgement. And so the Son of God, having taken upon Himself the entire guilt of our sin, had to die, die not for His own sins, but for the sins of strangers, for the sins of the world.

Let us submit to this power of the death of Christ to convince us of the guilt of our sin. We shall not be benefited in the least by accusing Pilate and condemning the Jews. We must perceive that we are the wrong-doers, that we have crucified and murdered the Son of God by our sins; for, if we had not

sinned, there would never have been any necessity for the great tragedy on Calvary and the Son of God would never have been obliged to die.

2. The Power Of Christ In His Death To Persuade Them Of The Forgiveness Of Their Sin

Still, if the death of the Son of God would only reveal to us the guilt of our sin and nothing more, we would have to sink into the pit of despair. But praised be God! In His death Christ also exhibits the wonderful power to persuade sinners of the forgiveness of their sins. This is shown in our text by the example of the centurion and his men.

The soldiers had committed a terrible deed. Their hands nailed the Son of God to the cross. It is true, they had been commanded to do this by their superiors, and they were Gentiles who did not know God. But did they not hear Pilate say, ***“I find no fault in Him”?***

Did they not see Pilate wash his hands before the multitude in protest of his innocence? Does not the most degenerated heathen know that it is a crime to put an unguilty man to death? And what rudeness do we see these soldiers display! They act like brutes and demons, mocking Jesus, tormenting Him, and doing all they can to the very last to increase His suffering.

Still what do we hear? Whilst the living Christ does not seem to impress them in the least with all His meekness, the dead Christ produces upon these rude men a most wonderful effect. We are told, ⁵⁴ ***So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God!”***⁶

The moment that Christ died there was a revolt in the realms of nature. There was an earthquake. The earth quivered and shook and there was a cracking in the rocks, splitting them and rending them in two. If anything will frighten a heathen, it is something extraordinary going on in nature.

And so these signs of angered nature frightened the heathen soldiers. But what frightened them most was the manner in which Jesus died. They did not expect Him to die as yet. He was not exhausted. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, and the two robbers crucified with Him were still living immediately before sundown. The crucified often lingered from two to three days before death came. All at once, in the darkness surrounding them, the ears of these

soldiers are startled by a piercing cry from the lips of Christ, saying, “***Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit,***” and then, in the full possession of all His vitality, He gave up His spirit.

They perceived that Jesus’ death was a voluntary act, that He died of His own will. And this was the fact. Jesus of His own will delivered up His own spirit, and therefore, we never read that Jesus expired, or that He fell asleep. It was the manner of Jesus’ death which frightened them more than anything else, and now they saw with horror and consternation what a wicked deed they had performed.

But, at the same time, they remembered what Christ had said about Himself, and now they believe Him and ⁴⁷***So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, “Certainly this was a righteous Man!*** Look at the wonders of God’s grace under the cross upon which the dead Christ is hanging!

Not only do the people who, only a few hours ago had been shouting, ***“Crucify Him, crucify Him!”*** smite their breasts in true repentance, but the very murderers of the Son of God, who had literally stained their hands with His blood, come to believe in Him. The greatest sinners among Jews and Gentiles are converted. The dead Christ accomplishes things in the human heart that are beyond understanding.

This has always been the case. The power of Christ in His death is the same to this day. What was the secret of the Apostles’ success in the world? What broke down the ramparts of heathenism and established the Christian Church among the nations of the earth? Was it morality taught by the Christian religion? No; it was Christ crucified.

The dead Christ on the cross conquers the human heart. ***For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.***⁷ This is the precious Gospel which brings life and salvation.

Let a sinner be ever so deeply fallen, Christ’s death on the cross will rescue him. Let his sins be ever so numerous and great, Christ’s death on the cross will secure forgiveness. Let the disease of his sin be ever so deeply rooted, Christ’s death on the cross is the remedy. Let the sinner be on the point of death and

standing before the very gates of hell, Christ's death on the cross has the power to snatch him away from the fiery pit and to place him into paradise.

Let us all submit then, to the wonderful power of Christ's death to persuade us of the forgiveness of our sins. Let us firmly believe what Isaiah says, ***He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.*** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 23:18

² Luke 23:21

³ Matthew 27:25

⁴ Matthew 27:40

⁵ Ezekiel 18:20

⁶ Matthew 27:54

⁷ John 3:16