

Three Thieves' Last Days

#0045

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—November 30, 1979

I enjoy seeing how the different verses and stories in the Bible fit together in many, many different patterns. One of the things that interest some people is jigsaw puzzles. But there's one thing about a jigsaw puzzle, there's only one place for each piece, and you can only make one picture. But in the Bible, we have thousands of pieces, and they can be made into millions of pictures. They fit together in many different patterns. Of course, they need to be fitted properly, and the Holy Spirit can help us to do this.

Tonight, I want to study with you an interesting subject that I've been meditating on lately. We're told that we should meditate from day to day on the scenes in the life of Jesus, particularly the closing scenes. There's always something new and wonderful as we meditate on the life and sufferings and death of our Lord.

If you would like a title for our meditation this evening, it is this: Three Thieves' Last Day—the last day of three thieves. Our opening text is Matthew the 27th chapter and the 38th verse. This is a description of that dark Friday when the Son of God was led out to the hill called Calvary, placed upon the cross, nailed to the wooden bars, and hung up between the heavens and the earth to suffer and to die.

“Then were there two thieves crucified with Him, one on the right hand, and another on the left” Matthew 27:38.

Somebody says, “I thought you said, Brother Frazee, that the subject was three thieves?”

It is. We'll come to the third one by and by. But just now we're looking at these two. What does the Bible call them? Thieves. Do you know why? That's what they were.

They were not only thieves; they were murderers. They had joined Barabbas in an insurrection, and had been caught, brought to trial, Barabbas was the leader. He deserved to be on that middle cross, and he would have been, except for the fact that Jesus was placed there, and Barabbas, the robber, the murderer, was released.

What a picture, friends, of the innocent dying in the place of the guilty! You know, every one of us is just as guilty as Barabbas. Just as guilty as either of those thieves that died, one on the right hand and one on the left.

Interestingly enough, these thieves, the one on the right hand, and the one on the left came to that crucifixion, as far as the court was concerned, and as far as the attitude of the people was concerned in the same situation. They were both guilty,

both thieves, both suffering, as the Bible says, “the due reward of their deeds.” But one of them closed his life a rebel, and the other closed his life saved and will be in the kingdom of God throughout eternity. Let’s turn over and read about in Luke the 23rd chapter.

“And one of the malefactors which were hanging railed on Him, saying If thou be Christ, save Thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due rewards of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom” Luke 23:39–42.

One of them cursed Jesus right to the end; the other turned and cast his dying soul upon the dying Savior, pleading for mercy.

“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today thou shalt be with me in paradise” Luke 23:43.

Will he? Will he be there? Yes.

What a great surprise this must have been to many people; one of the last souls that the Son of God won was a thief dying with Him there on Calvary. Nobody—don’t miss this—nobody when that morning dawned expected that thief to be a convert to Christ before the sun set. But was he? Yes. He spent his last day on earth in reaching that point of penitence where he could plead for mercy and get it. And he will be saved in the kingdom of God.

Someone has said that there is one record like this of the eleventh-hour conversion, a man saved right, you might say, in the last moments of life. One record in the Bible. One that men may be encouraged and have hope. Only one that all men may be warned! I bring you this great fact tonight friends, that a man can be saved at *any* point in his life right up to the last moment. That’s the experience of this penitent thief.

The reason that more aren’t is that it’s very unusual for a man to go all his life in one direction and then suddenly reverse at the last moment. But God is *always* ready to receive, and His Spirit is pleading right up to the last moment.

Let me share with you a beautiful statement that goes with this from *Selected Messages*, Book one, page 262. There are going to be some others that have this experience besides that penitent thief.

“Some among the redeemed will have laid hold of Christ in the last hours of life, and in heaven instruction will be given to those who, when they died, did not understand perfectly the plan of salvation. Christ will lead the redeemed ones beside the river of life, and will open to

them that which while on this earth they could not understand" *Selected Messages*, Book 1, page 262.

Wouldn't you like to be there when Jesus takes that penitent thief down by the river of life and starts instructing him in many things that he didn't understand here in this life? Won't that be a wonderful hour? He might even turn him over to the apostle Paul, or to John for certain instruction. Maybe God will bring somebody to *you* to give some special classes to?

Don't misunderstand me, friends, these people are saved, all right. But did the thief know everything? No. He knew enough to cast his helpless soul on Jesus. That's what he needed to know to find salvation. But in Heaven, he's going to learn some things that he missed here. And God wants every one of us to get all we can in this life because, as some of you have heard me say, Heaven is wonderful and there is no end to it, it's all through eternity, the only way to get more is to start sooner.

So, if there's anybody here tonight that hasn't started yet, you've missed a lot. But you'll miss more if you put it off. Give your heart to Jesus tonight. Do tonight what the thief did. Don't wait for the last day of your life.

So, these two thieves, one on the right hand, and one on the left. One, on the last day, continued his cursing and rebellion and died a lost man. The other turned, gave his heart to Christ, threw himself upon His mercy, and *all* unexpected to everybody he died a saved man. Isn't that wonderful? Yes.

Now you're wondering who that third thief was? Well, we'll turn over to the Gospel of John and find out who that other thief was that died that last day.

"Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray Him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" John 12:4–6.

What is the name of this thief? Judas. Did he die that day? Was that his last day? Oh yes. This verse calls him a thief. But I want to show you the difference between Judas and that rebellious thief that died on the cross impenitent. Everybody thought that Judas was a man of great importance in the church. And if he'd died the day before he did die, before his character was revealed, they might have had a great funeral for him. But he died of suicide, in desperation, his character revealed, because he had become what? The betrayer of the Lord.

But remember friends, remember, when the sun set that Thursday evening ushering in the sixth day of the week, Jesus knew that that was Judas' last 24 hours on earth. But nobody else knew it. Judas didn't know it. The priests didn't know it. His fellow disciples didn't know it. Nobody knew it but Jesus.

And what efforts Jesus put forth! Do you remember in the upper room He allowed Judas to sit right next to Him? And when He started in to wash the disciples' feet, whose feet did He wash first? Judas. And we're told that as the Savior bathed those feet, the impulse was strong in the heart of Judas to yield and then and there confess his rebellion, his perfidy, his covetousness and lying. But he wouldn't yield.

He went out to betray his Lord for thirty pieces of silver. And in the midnight hour, he acted his part, led the mob to Gethsemane where the Savior had been praying, kissed his Lord as a sign to give to the mob which one to take. Wasn't that awful friends? And who was this man? Oh, he was an ordained minister, one of the 12 apostles, one of the inner circle of Christ's disciples. He spent his last day on earth betraying his Lord for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave.

Ah, what a pity, friends! What a pity! What a testimony to the terrible character of cherished sin, even though it be secret. You know we are told by Inspiration that the other disciples admired Judas and his financial ability, and his executive ability. Judas had a *great* opinion of himself, and he impressed the other disciples because he went right ahead and he was bold.

But Judas never came to the place of fully surrendering to Christ. He was attracted to Him. He admired Him in many ways. But do you know what Judas thought? Judas thought that Christ would be more successful if He would listen to Judas. That's right! He really thought so. He thought he could teach Him a few things if Jesus would only listen.

But Jesus didn't seem very responsive to that attitude. He tried every way to win the heart as well as the mind of that disciple. But his love of money, his love of position cost him his life.

Ah friends, is there anybody here tonight cherishing some sin? Maybe something that nobody else knows about? The Bible says in John 12:6 that Judas was a thief, but nobody but Jesus knew it, and Jesus didn't reveal his secret. The other disciples thought that he was really an expert, but Judas had deceived his own heart by his selfishness.

My point is this, friends: your problem may not be the love of money, it could be like Judas. Whatever your problem is, Jesus can give you the victory. The same Christ that snatched from the jaws of the enemy that penitent thief out on Calvary, is able to rescue a soul at the last hour. But that same dear hand is powerless to save the one who cherishes sin and will not give it up, no matter what his reputation, no matter what his position.

Let's think of it this way, friends: When that last day came, nobody knew that Judas was a lost man. But he was. When that last day came, nobody knew that that penitent thief was going to be saved. But he was. Jesus was making every effort to win all of them, and He did win that penitent, but he lost Judas because Judas wouldn't yield.

In other words, no matter how bad your sin is, Jesus can deliver you if you'll let Him. Jesus can deliver you if you let him. But no matter how good your

reputation is, in your home, in the church, wherever, if you hold on to some sin and will not give it up, it will eventually lead you, as it did Judas, to lose your soul.

Judas was *in* when that last day came, but he died *outside* the fold. The thief was out when that last day came, but he died *inside* the fold. The choice made the difference. Jesus is in the saving business.

So this evening, as we meditate on these three thieves and their last day on earth, that day of the crucifixion, thank God, we don't have to be like that rebel that hung on to his rebellious attitude there on the cross. We don't have to be like Judas exposed at the last in sin and wickedness. We can be like that penitent that turns to Christ and says, "Lord, remember me."

Will He hear? Oh yes. He will hear. Day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, our souls can turn to Him. For that one uplifted upon the cross says, "I, if I be lifted up..." will do what? "Draw all men unto me." I thank God for the view of Calvary tonight and for the assurance that His Holy Spirit is drawing all our hearts.

Shall we kneel together and look to the Lord for His mercy?

[Elder Frazee ends the service with prayer.]

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