

**(Matt. 27:38-39)** – *“THEN WERE THERE TWO THIEVES CRUCIFIED WITH HIM.”*

These two thieves are prime examples of God’s sovereign, distinguishing grace in salvation. The fact is that the one on the *“RIGHT HAND”* of Christ was, as some have described it, “plucked as a firebrand from the burning out of the very jaws of hell by God’s sovereign grace, while the one *“ON THE LEFT”* was left to suffer the just consequences of his sin. The question is *“WHAT OR WHO MADE THE DIFFERENCE?”* As we see here, all who *“PASSED BY REVILED HIM, WAGGING THEIR HEADS.”* Verse 44 tells us that both thieves *“which were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth.”* Mark tells us that this was in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy – *“And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And He was numbered with the transgressors”* (Mark 15:28; cf. Isa. 53:12). The word “numbered” in Mark 15:28 is the word for imputation, and the fact that the Lord Jesus was (and is) the Surety of God’s elect, having their sins imputed to Him, certainly shows how He was “numbered with the transgressors.” This speaks of the great legal exchange in that by the sins of God’s elect He was made sin “Who knew no sin,” and by His righteousness imputed to us “that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Our sins imputed to Him led to His condemnation, suffering, and death. His righteousness imputed to us leads to our justification, spiritual life in the new birth, and brings us to glory.

**(Matt. 27:40)** – *“THOU THAT DESTROYEST THE TEMPLE, AND BUILDEST IT IN THREE DAYS.”* Without knowing it, their mocking the Lord by repeating His own words spoke volumes of truth describing, not the destruction and rebuilding of the physical temple, but of the destruction of His own sinless body and His resurrection from the dead. This would establish the ground of His own exaltation (Php. 2:5-10) and of the salvation of His people from their sins. They continued with their mocking – *“IF THOU BE THE SON OF GOD, COME DOWN FROM THE CROSS.”* They did not realize that the fact that He was (and is) the Son of God, which means He was (and is) the Messiah (the Anointed Savior) meant that He could not “come down from the cross,” as He had to die this death to save His people from sin and establish righteousness for God to be just to justify them.

**(Matt. 27:41-42)** – *“HE SAVED OTHERS; HIMSELF HE CANNOT SAVE”* – This is the very essence of the Gospel! The Son of God died as our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. In order to accomplish our redemption and salvation, He had to die, and He did so willingly. If He had saved Himself, we would all be lost and condemned forever and ever. *“IF HE BE THE KING OF ISRAEL, LET HIM NOW COME DOWN FROM THE CROSS, AND WE WILL BELIEVE HIM.”* His mediatorial kingship (lordship) was based on the fact that He would die and be raised from the dead to secure the salvation of His people from their sins (Acts 2:29-36). But by saying that if He would “come down from the

cross,” they would “believe Him,” they lied. Think of all the miracles they had already seen and not believed Him. And consider that faith to believe in Christ is the gift of God given to His elect. It is not by people seeing miracles to convince them. It is a work of the Holy Spirit Who convinces them.

**(Matt. 27:43)** – *“HE TRUSTED IN GOD; LET HIM DELIVER HIM NOW, IF HE WILL HAVE HIM:”* – Our Lord Jesus Christ, as a man, lived by perfect faith, in all things trusting God His Father. He was our supreme example of how to honor, obey, and live for God in this world - BY FAITH! His faithfulness to the Father in keeping His covenant promises secured our complete salvation (Rom. 3:22; Php. 3:9). *“FOR HE SAID, I AM THE SON OF GOD”* – Jesus Christ of Nazareth openly, publicly declared Himself to be the Son of God, the Messiah and Savior of sinners. And that is who He is! He is God and man in one glorious Person.

**(Matt. 27:44)** – *“THE THIEVES ALSO, WHICH WERE CRUCIFIED WITH HIM, CAST THE SAME IN HIS TEETH.”* As we read, two thieves were crucified beside Him (Luke 23:33–43), and both began their time on the cross by mocking and blaspheming Him (Matt. 27:44; Mark 15:32), as did many of the spectators. As they both were being tortured with this awful death, they still joined the crowd in cursing and denying Jesus Christ. This shows the natural depravity and enmity of man against the Lord God. But the thief on the right of Christ suddenly changed and began to rebuke the thief on the left of Christ. He said, as Luke recorded in *Luke 23:40-41* – *“Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds.”* What, or Who, made the difference in this man’s understanding and attitude? Who made him to differ from the thief on the left? We know from God’s Word that it is only God’s free, unmerited, sovereign grace that makes the difference between who is saved and who is lost (Rom. 9:15-16; Eph. 2:8-10). This is evidence of Holy Spirit conviction that brought this thief to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works. He cried out, *“Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom” (Luke 23:42)*. The Lord *“said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43)*.

Many people use this wonderful story of conversion to promote ignorance, claiming that it proves we do not have to know anything, not even the Gospel, to be saved. But although this thief may have been ignorant of many theological issues, he did know Jesus Christ as the one true Savior of sinners. He knew his own sinfulness and depravity, and he knew that the death of Christ would provide a remedy for sin and death as he knew that Christ would be raised from the dead and enter His kingdom. Another bad thing that people sometimes conclude is that they can wait to believe in and follow Christ on their death bed. But none of us know the time, manner, or place of our death. Now is the day of salvation. Believe now and rest in Christ for righteousness and eternal life!