



DEAN WELCH - TEACHER



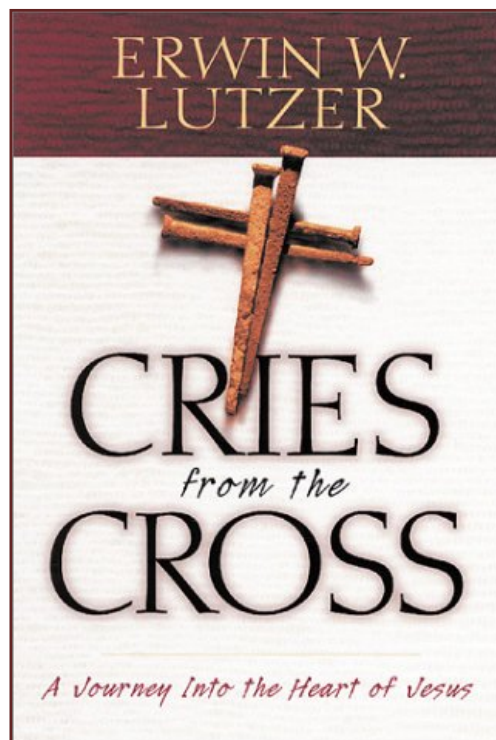
THE TALE OF THE CRUCIFIED CROOK & LOVE

[LUKE 23:43 & JOHN 19:25-27]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

MARCH 8, 2009

LESSON #2 FROM THE *MASTERWORK* SERIES STUDY OF:





MARCH 8, 2009

THE TALE OF THE CRUCIFIED CROOK & LOVE

[LUKE 23:43 & JOHN 19:25-27]

Life is full of choices. Once upon a time there was a court jester who had served the Caliph at Baghdad and his court, keeping them amused whenever they called on him. One day in a moment of thoughtlessness, he offended the Caliph. For his mistake the Caliph ordered that he be put to death. "However," said the ruler, "in consideration of your many years of service, I will let you decide how you will die." "Well," replied the jester, "if it's all the same to you, O most gracious Caliph, I choose **DEATH BY OLD AGE.**"

As we touched on last week, you don't get to choose how you die usually, but you do get to choose how you live. You and I are the sum total of the choices we make. Hour after hour, day after day, you make choices, big ones, little ones, tough ones, easy ones, liberating ones, confining ones, selfish ones, selfless ones. As we continue our study from Dr. Erwin Lutzer's book, *Cries From The Cross—A Journey Into the Heart of Jesus*, today we look at the second and third words of Jesus on the cross. **HOW MANY OF THE SEVEN LAST WORDS CAN YOU REMEMBER?** ¹"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34); ²"Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43); ³"Jesus said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple 'Here is your mother'" (John 19:26,27); ⁴"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Matt. 27:46); ⁵"I thirst" (John 19:28); ⁶"It is finished" (John 19:30); ⁷"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

*Author Joseph Bayly wrote about death from firsthand experience. He lost all three of his children: one at eighteen days, after surgery. Another died at age five with leukemia. His third child died at eighteen after a sledding accident complicated by hemophilia. As a committed Christian Joseph Bayly knew that he would see his children in heaven. In his book, **THE VIEW FROM A HEARSE**, he tells of what he said to offer hope to a woman whose small son was dying. "It is good to know, isn't it," he said slowly, choosing his words with unusual care, "that even though the medical outlook is hopeless, we can have hope for our children in such a situation. "We can be sure that after our child dies, he'll be*

removed from sickness and suffering and everything like that, and be completely well and happy." "If I could only believe that," the woman replied. "But I don't. When he dies, I'll just have to cover him up with dirt and forget I ever had him." How sad, but more often than not, this woman's words express the hopeless plight of so many people. Jesus spoke some last words so we wouldn't have to feel this way; so we could know the truth about death and dying.

As we look at the second phrase from the cross, we see Jesus' prayer for forgiveness answered. Remember last week, His first words were asking the Father to forgive **THEM** for they didn't know what they were doing. Now, He puts that into action on a single person level—one-on-one! Turn to **LUKE 23:39-43(NASB)**.

*³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" ⁴⁰But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹"And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴²And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" ⁴³And He said to him, "**Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.**"*

So, the SECOND PHRASE is what? *"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."* Jesus' second cry was one of **ASSURANCE**. Even when it would have been very easy to focus on his own pain and heartache, Jesus remembered what he was about. **Luke 19:10** (NASB), *"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."* With his last breath, Jesus was living out his purpose in life. Yet, so often we lose our perspective and forget what we are here for.

As we look at the second "words of the cross," we find ourselves listening to a deathbed conversation between three dying men. It begins with one of the criminals mocking Jesus, it continues with

the other criminal defending Jesus and recognizing His rule, and it concludes with Jesus pardoning the repentant man and giving him eternal life. *What do you think caused the repentant thief to change his mind?*

"Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The only thing more outlandish than the request was that it was granted. Just trying to picture the scene is enough to short-circuit the most fanciful of imaginations; a thief and ex-con asking God's Son for eternal life? Ha! No way, we think! Trying to imagine the appeal being honored, well, that steps beyond the realm of reality and enters absurdity. But as we see from Scripture, absurd as it may appear, that's exactly what happened. He who deserved hell got heaven, and we are left with a puzzling riddle. *What, for goodness sake, was Jesus trying to teach us?* What was he trying to prove by pardoning this strong-arm, who in all probability had never said grace, much less done anything to deserve it? In order to explain my theory, I need to tell you a tale that Max Lucado wrote about several years ago in *No Wonder They Call Him The Savior* that you may not believe:

*It seems a couple of prowlers broke into a department store in a large city. They successfully entered the store, stayed long enough to do what they came to do, and escaped unnoticed. What is unusual about the story is what these fellows did. They took nothing. Absolutely nothing. No merchandise was stolen. No items were removed. But what they did do was ridiculous. Instead of stealing anything, they changed the cost of everything. Price tags were swapped. Values were exchanged. These clever pranksters took the tag off a \$395.00 camera and stuck it on a \$5.00 box of stationery. The \$5.95 sticker on a paperback book was removed and placed on an outboard motor. They **REPRICED** everything in the store!*

Crazy? You bet. But the craziest part of this story took place the next morning. (You are not going to believe this.) The store

opened as usual. Employees went to work. Customers began to shop. The place functioned as normal for four hours before anyone noticed what had happened. Four hours! Some people got some great bargains. Others got fleeced. For four solid hours no one noticed that all the values had been swapped.

Hard to believe? It shouldn't be—we see the same thing happening every day in our very society, don't we? We are deluged by a distorted value system. We see the most valuable things in our lives peddled for pennies and we see the cheapest smut go for millions. The examples are abundant and besetting. Why do we do what we do? Why do we take blatantly black-and-white and paint it gray? Why are priceless mores trashed while senseless standards are obeyed? What causes us to elevate the body and degrade the soul? What causes us to pamper the skin while we pollute the heart? Our values are messed up. Someone broke into the store and exchanged all the price tags. Thrills are going for top dollar and the value of human beings is at an all-time low. Value is now measured by two criteria, appearance and performance. Pretty tough system, isn't it? Where does that leave the retarded? Or the ugly or uneducated? Where does that place the aged or the handicapped? What hope does that offer the unborn child? Not much. Not much at all. We become nameless numbers on mislaid lists. Now please understand, this is man's value system. It is not God's. His plan is much brighter.

Think again about the verses we just read from **Luke 23:39-43**. If anyone was ever worthless, this one was. If any man ever deserved dying, this man probably did. If any fellow was ever a loser, this fellow was at the top of the list. Perhaps that is why Jesus chose him to show us what he thinks of the human race. Maybe this criminal had heard the Messiah speak. Maybe he had seen him love the lowly. Maybe he had watched him dine with the punks, pickpockets, and potmouths on the streets. Or maybe not. Maybe the only thing he knew about this Messiah was what he now saw: a beaten, slashed, nail-suspended preacher. His face crimson with blood, his bones peeking through torn flesh, his lungs gasping for air.

Something, though, told him he had never been in better company. And somehow he realized that even though all he had was prayer, he had finally met the One to whom he should pray.

"Any chance that you could put in a good word for me?" (Loose translation.) *"Consider it done."*

Now why did Jesus do that? What in the world did he have to gain by promising this desperado a place of honor at the banquet table? What in the world could this chiseling quisling ever offer in return? I mean, the Samaritan woman at the well I can understand. She could go back and tell the tale. And Zacchaeus had some money that he could give. But this guy? What is he going to do? **Nothing!** That's the point. Listen closely. **Jesus' love does not depend upon what we do for him.** Not at all. In the eyes of the King, you have value simply because you are. You don't have to look nice or perform well. Your value is inborn. Period.

Notice the **WHEN** in this verse. When the criminal died, he immediately joined Jesus in His Kingdom. That day. But how does this work, exactly? It helps to remember that Jesus' concept of "today" is very different from ours. When Peter wrote about the Day of the Lord and tried to reassure Christians who were impatient to see Jesus come back, he said: *"But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day."* (**2 Peter 3:8**) In other words, time is a human construct, a linear experience of seconds, minutes, hours, day, weeks, months and years. Eternity, on the other hand, is a divine experience, a constant living in the now that holds past, present and future in the same moment.

When a Christian dies, he enters eternity and immediately arrives at that moment where Jesus is coming and paradise is restored. Like pushing through the fur coats in the wardrobe and tumbling into C. S. Lewis' series about *Narnia*, the believer who dies in the Lord instantly arrives there. In the meantime, those who are left behind continue to measure their experience with clocks and

calendars, constrained by the schedules and routines that we are forced to keep.

This story tells us above all that it is never too late to turn to Christ. There are other things of which we must say, "The time for that is past. I am grown too old now." But we can never say that of turning to Jesus Christ. So long as a man's heart beats, the invitation of Christ still stands. [HAVE YOU MADE THAT DECISION?](#)

OK, let's move now to His [THIRD PHRASE](#). Turn to **JOHN 19:25b-27 (NASB)** and follow along: *²⁷...But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" ²⁷Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own household.*

Here we see Jesus as a [MAN OF COMPASSION](#). The third phrase is from the end of verse 26 and verse 27: *He said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!"* He was **ALWAYS** thinking about others. This was for both his mother and for John. His mother would have physical needs that must be addressed. John would have emotional needs. (He was the tenderhearted one of the twelve.) We can take a lesson from his last words of compassion. [WHY DID JESUS LEAVE HIS MOTHER'S CARE WITH JOHN AND NOT WITH HIS BROTHERS?](#) If you remember, Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him until AFTER His resurrection. They most likely were not there while He was being crucified on the cross.

The gospels provide only the briefest glimpses of the relationship between Jesus and Mary. [What tortured thoughts were passing through Mary's mind as she saw her son in such extremity.](#) Very likely she would recall the words uttered in a prophecy by Simeon when the infant Jesus was presented in the

Temple, *"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."* This was that moment - the sword was being cruelly thrust into her. It was suffering for Jesus to see his mother among those who stood near the Cross. He suffered because of her suffering. He always entered into the needs of his people. He wept over the rebellious people of Jerusalem.

Here he is touched with his mother's suffering, but please notice that he doesn't refer to her as "MOTHER" rather as "WOMAN". Have you ever wondered why? On the face of it, it would have seemed to be more tender and loving to have done so, and Jesus lacked nothing in consideration and compassion. *The reason is that Mary must no longer think of him as being her son.* The more she thinks of him as her son, the more she will suffer when he suffers. *Mary must begin to look upon Jesus as her "Lord"*. Even then she will suffer, but this suffering will be of a different nature. She will then know that however terrible his agony is, it is glorious because of its purpose. She will then begin to concentrate on its redemptive meaning. Mary's merely emotional suffering must be replaced by something higher, that is, by adoration. This was the way that Jesus ministered love unto the broken hearted. It shows that in the Cross all barriers have been broken. Mary represents the women of the world, all too often treated as inferior. She represents those getting on in years. But at the Cross there's no age barrier, no sex barrier, for all who come to Jesus are part of his household.

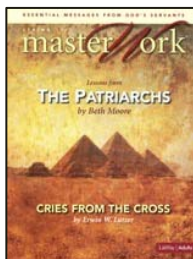
This Third Word from the Cross also reveals the relationship of Jesus with his disciple John, the one who had been closest to him. It didn't require a long explanation for John to know what was meant. *We read that from that hour John took Mary into his own home.* The question might be raised, "But why was not Mary committed into the care of one of her other children?" The answer is probably because they as yet hadn't received him by a living faith. John was ready and acted without hesitation. It has been said that this Word from the Cross is the least theological, but

practical application of the gospel must never be separated from its message. It is only as theory is translated into practice that relationship with Christ becomes a living reality. This Word tells us that there's love for you in the cross, and it's a love which having been received, is to be shared with others.

Like the crucified thief on the cross, your most important decision in life is where you will spend eternity. Amazingly, it is your choice. You decide for heaven when you decide for Christ. *"Tie A Yellow Ribbon" was the name of a popular song. It tells of a man who's been sent to prison. He's served his time and is now coming home on the bus. He admits that she who once loved him has every right to reject him. He's to blame. So he's written to tell her that if she forgives him, she should "tie a yellow ribbon 'round the old oak tree." If there is no yellow ribbon, he'll just go riding by on the bus. As the miles roll by, all the man thinks about is that oak tree. Will it have a yellow ribbon on it? As the bus approaches the oak tree the man sees not one but a hundred yellow ribbons.*

Like the man on the bus, many are fearful of death and what's ahead. We know our hearts, we know our failures and we wonder if God will really forgive us and welcome us home. The good news of the Gospel is that he will! When we, like the thief on the cross, turn to Christ for salvation, God will welcome us into heaven. The yellow ribbons will be tied on every tree for you when you turn to Christ and trust Him only.

Let's Pray.



© 2000 R. DEAN WELCH
MARCH 8, 2009