

GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

92 – The Thieves

Announcements:

11/1 @7:30 -

Prayer

11/2 @6:30 -

Grace Group

11/5 @8:30 -

Sunday School

11/5 @6:00 -

Family Night

PSALM 7

ICE BREAKER: Has there been a time that you have done something and immediately regretted it? What happened?

READ: Matthew 27:33-44

One of the things that makes the different Gospels beautiful (and honestly one thing that makes reading them just a bit more different) is that each writer includes different thoughts and ideas to portray a specific thought in each event. That was true for all the miracles and parables that have come before this, and it is even true here at the crucifixion. So today I would like to look at Matthew's telling of the famous (or rather infamous!) thieves that are crucified next to Jesus. What we will first see is how different Matthew's telling is than the more famous one (in Luke) then look to the part of their story that we are much more familiar with.

Before diving into the details that Luke provides us with, let's focus on the (little) information Matthew gives us on these two. Here they only get two verses. "Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left" (verse 38) and "And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way." (verse 44). And that's it. So what is Matthew doing here? I think there are two things, one tells us about Jesus and the other about the heart of man. First, what this tells us about Jesus. Simply put the robbers here serve to add to and magnify his shame. Just their presence there speaks volumes about what was thought of Jesus. He is here hung among the common criminals. Rather than a position of honor, being placed between these two is a position of DIS-honor! Then Matthew includes that even the robbers were ridiculing him. In other words: Jesus is not just being crucified, but he is being crucified between two criminals. But he is not just being crucified between two criminals, but he is being crucified between two criminals that are mocking him. Even here in his last painful moments it keeps getting worse. You cannot overstate the depth of pain and humiliation that Jesus endured on the cross.

DISCUSS: Why is it important that Matthew goes out of his way to magnify the depth of pain and shame that Jesus endured?

But the second thought that we can wrestle with is what do these two men tell us about us? And here in Matthew's telling they become the perfect picture of the doctrine of total depravity. We know, because we read all the details, about what Jesus went through. But these men are going through something similar (though honestly not quite as bad). At a minimum they are living what they know for certain were their last moments. The same pain and feelings of suffocation that Jesus was here experiencing, they were too. And what do we find these men doing? Even here there is sin and hatred in their hearts. Even here, in their final moments we see WHY they need a savior. In Genesis, before the flood we read how evil man became in that "every intention of the thoughts of his heart was ONLY EVIL CONTINUALLY" (Genesis 6:5). And Matthew wants us to see that this is true even here. So the Messiah was here crucified between two "case studies" of why he needed to come. In some sense their reviling and cursing of Jesus on the cross is what drove him TO the cross!

DISCUSS: Matthew would have been aware of the same thing that Luke was (we are about to get here), namely that one of these men would repent, but he does not include that information. I would argue that this is partially so we can see the wickedness of the heart of man. Why is this an important thing for us to see?

READ: Luke 23:39-43

It seems that at some point one of the thieves had a change of heart. What Matthew paints as the depth of man's depravity Luke turns completely around to the depth of the grace of Jesus. All of the same things that we said about Matthew's telling: the suffering, the shame, the ridicule can be said here. And then, in the midst of this one man cries out to Jesus. Luke uses a thief for the same purpose that Matthew used Pilate's wife in his telling, as the ONLY person to call Jesus innocent. And this man receives a full pardon from his savior. A wretched (see last point) worthless criminal (see the first point) is ushered into the kingdom of heaven. What is Luke's point? There are many, but here we can focus on just one. If this man who was before this mocking Jesus, can have a change of heart, and cry out in repentance and be delivered on the cross, then ANYONE can be saved. There is no heart too hard, no soul too lost, no person so close to death that the power of Christ cannot save them. Here the power of our savior is on full display!

DISCUSS: Why is the forgiven thief such an important character for us to know? What hope does he give us?