

[This sermon from the papers of Dr. Gordon H. Clark was first preached by him at his father's Bethel Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia on August 8, 1924 at just twenty-two years of age]

Lord, Remember Me.

There the three crosses stood. Christ was in the center with a malefactor on each side. Those on the outside crosses had probably heard of him who was between them, but had probably not been so close to him before. Whatever they did not know about him, there was one thing they did know; and that was the charge on which he was condemned. He had claimed to be God and Savior. Perhaps they could see the inscription over his head, written in letters of Hebrew, or Latin and of Greek. If they turned their heads a bit toward him they could read about him, THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH? THE KING OF THE JEWS.

And the thief on the left hand cross, considering the inscription and the cross out of harmony together, taunted him who hung there. With a sneer he spits, If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us. If thou be the Christ, we don't for a moment believe you are, but if so, save thyself and us. That scoundrel on the left hand cross, wanted to be saved, but from what did he want to be saved. He didn't seem anxious to be saved from sin. He wasn't worrying about crime. No, he wanted to be saved from the consequences of sin and from the penalty of crime. There was no repentance in his plea. He wanted immediate release from his sufferings and felt offended that Christ didn't save him, in spite of the fact he didn't believe Christ could save.

From the right hand cross came a mild reproach, a calm rebuke, answering him, saying, Dost thou not fear God? Seeing thou art in the same condemnation. Don't you know that we must stand before God to answer for our sins. You have no right to taunt him, you are in no position to mock him, you are in the same predicament yourself, and so am I. However, we are justly here, we are guilty and merit this death, we have been condemned lawfully, we receive the due reward of our our deed; but this man hath done nothing amiss. He is innocent and you know it. This is a frame up on him. He is not guilty. Do not torment him, but let him be.

Why did the thief on the right hand cross take Christ's part? He championed Jesus when no one else dared to. Christ's enemies were triumphant around him, exulting in his torture, Christ's disciples had fled, and the few women at the foot of the cross were scared speechless. Only the dying thief dared to speak in Christ's favor. And it must have taken courage on his part to do so, if we are to believe tradition. For we are told that as soon as the Jews heard him defending Christ against reproaches, against further agony, as soon as they saw him befriending him, so soon did they rush at him with one

howl and maltreat him terribly. With physical outrages they tortured him. With insult and ignominy they covered him. How dared the thief to speak in Christ's favor? Why did he do it? We are not authorized to suppose that the thief had listened to Jesus preach. We cannot imagine that he was a secret disciple. No, he was a desperate criminal. But he had heard Christ say one thing. As the three of them were being lifted up on their crosses, Christ said, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. This the thief had heard, and indeed it was a revelation to him. So, rebuking the other thief for abusing Christ, he said, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. He did not ask to be saved from the cross, he only wanted to be remembered in that kingdom of which he knew so little. But he knew the King!

Lord, remember me. The dying thief knew little. But he did know he needed to be remembered. And that is more than some people know today. He knew too, that Christ could remember him and that if Christ did remember him that would be sufficient. He knew also, and he knew it full well that he was guilty and that Jesus was innocent. There the two hung on their crosses beside each other, one the Most High God, the other, the most miserable of men; miserable assuredly, but blessed in this, that he recognized who hung beside him. Many people stood scornfully before that scene. Some of them had seen Christ raise the dead and had not believe, the thief saw him put to death and acknowledged the Lord and King.

This was an immediate revolution in that malefactor's character. It was a sudden change wrought by God. It was God working instantaneously. There was not much education, no gradual leading to his conversion. It wasn't education at all, it was salvation. God works instantaneously in children of Christian parents. They become Christians as they grow, gradually, and when grown, they cannot put their finger on a calendar and say, on such a day I became a Christian. I was attending a meeting of Sabbath-School Supts Asso and the lecture was on evangelism. We were asked how many of us could give the date of our conversion. Of several hundred men in the room, only two or three raised their hands, and when questioned, admitted that they had been converted after the age of twenty. So a child may gradually grow into being a Christian. But if a man grows up an unbeliever, unsaved, and is then converted, he will know that at a certain time he made a definite decision for Christ. It may be vague or it may be vivid. It is a point in time. He had been walking to hell, his back was to God, and he turned. He turned his back to hell and the devil and faced the Lord Jehovah. That turning is conversion. All thru the life of the thief on the cross, he had not known God. Now in the eleventh hour and fifty-ninth minute, he turns and says, Jesus, remember me when thou comest into they kingdom.

The answer that was returned to him was all that he expected, Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise. That morning the malefactor was one of the three worst criminals in the

land. Barrabas, the worst, escaped his punishment thru the Jew's hatred of Christ. And these two thieves were the next worse to Barrabas the worst criminals that could be found to be put aside of Jesus and disgrace him. That morning he was a condemned criminal in a Roman court; that evening he was a redeemed saint before the throne of God.

It paid him well to be crucified that day. Had he escaped his punishment as did Barrabas, or had he been put in prison or flogged, had they done anything with him but crucify him, he would have been a lost man. Since, however, he was crucified, he was a saved soul. He was, in a sense, the first Christian, and the only one who took Christ's part that day. Dying he lived. Perishing he was saved. And what God has done, God can do again.

But, remember only one thief was saved. The other was lost. The one man took the opportunity that was offered. It was his only opportunity. He never had one before, and certainly he would never have one again. It was his only chance. And he made the most of it. It was the other man's only chance too, but he passed it by, and was lost. You too can be saved; you too can be lost. And this may be the decision moment. Today is the day of salvation, now is the associated time. Will you echo the thief's prayer: Jesus, remember me.

The purpose of the church is certainly to save sinners as much as to instruct saints. It is a witness in a world of sin. If the church of Christ does not tell the story of redemption, it will not be told. Christ didn't send angels to preach the gospel, but a sinner who had been converted.

At the Volunteer hall, not a week goes by without some person coming the altar, and accepting Christ as a Saviour. Every week there is at least one convert.

Bethel Church, I am afraid, can point to no such record. Is this church derelict in its duty? We must proclaim the gospel and try to save sinners. Therefore I give the call. Who will accept Christ? Who will do as the dying thief? Who accept salvation under the blood of Jesus?

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day,
And so may we, tho vile as he,
Wash all our sins away.

