

THE FOUR THIEVES OF CALVARY  
MATTHEW 26:47-56

Introduction

1. Of all the stories in the Bible, I think one of the saddest concerns the events leading to the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
2. To see Him arrive triumphantly in Jerusalem with the people shouting “Hosanna” to Him, and then four day later shouting “Crucify Him!”, has to tear at the heart of any Bible student.
3. Between His entering the Garden of Gethsemane and His yielding up of His Spirit on the cross of Calvary, Jesus came into contact with four thieves.
4. Even Jesus, for a moment, felt as though He was seen as a thief. **v. 55**
5. Remember Jesus’ words in **John 10:10**, *The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*
6. It is the four thieves that I would like to speak to you about. Who were they? What kind of men were they?

I. FIRST, THERE WAS THE THIEF WHO REGRETTED HIS DEED. **John 12:1-6\*\*\***

A. According to Matthew 10, Judas Iscariot was once successful and appreciated.

1. He was chosen, taught, and sent forth by Jesus to preach the gospel to the Jews.
2. He held a position of trust, that of treasurer.
3. He observed miracles, performed miracles, and preached the kingdom of heaven.

B. Driven by the sin of greed, he betrayed Jesus. **Matthew 26:14-16; 47-49**

C. Finally, his betrayal turned to regret. **Matthew 27:3-5**

1. When Matthew writes that Judas repented, he does not mean the repentance that leads to salvation as found in Acts 2:38 or 2 Corinthians 7:10.
2. The Greek word translated as “repented” in Matthew 27:3 means, “to regret, to have remorse.”
3. The words “repent” Acts 2:38 and “repentance” in 2 Corinthians 7:10 mean, “to have a change of heart.”

D. The repentance that deals with salvation commands a looking forward unto the spiritual man, while the repentance of Judas only commanded a looking back unto the physical man. And Judas dreaded the consequence of that one single act of betrayal.

II. SECONDLY, WE HAVE THE THIEF WHO WAS SPARED THE DEATH PENALTY.

**Matthew 27:15-16**

A. Matthew introduces us to a man named Barrabas.

B. It was the custom of the Jews to release a prisoner during Passover.

1. The crowd had the opportunity to choose between Barabbas and Jesus - between a murderous thief or an innocent man. **Acts 3:14** *But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you.*

C. Consider for a moment Barabbas:

1. We do not know anything of his parents or his upbringing.
2. We do know a little of his lifestyle. He was an insurrectionist, a murderer, and a thief. **Mark 15:7** *And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow*

*rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion.*

D. He was a notable prisoner.

1. The word “notable” means, “bearing a mark; having been stamped.”
2. He was distinguished for his great crimes.

3. Pilate never mentions the crimes, just the man. **Matthew 27:17**
- E. There is an interesting comparison in the names of Barabbas and Jesus. Jesus is the Son of the Heavenly Father, while Barabbas means “son of a father.”
- F. Barabbas had been tried, convicted, and was awaiting execution. Pilate, according to Luke 23:20, found Jesus innocent and wanted to release Him.
- G. But the crowd, steered by the chief priest and elders, rejected the Son of the Heavenly Father for the son of a father.
- H. Look what that choice prove - the crowd was more upset with the teachings, miracles, and influence of Jesus, than with the heinous crimes of a convicted law breaker.

III. THIRDLY, WE HAVE THE THIEF WHO REBELLED AND REJECTED JESUS TO THE VERY END OF HIS LIFE. **Luke 23:39** *Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."*

- A. The prophet Isaiah had foretold that Jesus would be crucified with thieves. **Isaiah 53:12** *He was numbered with the transgressors...*
- B. The crucifixion of all three on Mt. Calvary had similarities:
  1. Nailed, sagging, agonizing bodies. Raging thirst and a naked spectacle.
  2. People jeering and belittling all three.
- C. Then both thieves began to rail at Jesus, yet Luke tells us that one ceased his railing while the other kept on.
  1. These words were spoken in bitterness and carry the meaning, “Prove your claim.”
- D. What kept this thief from repenting and trusting in Jesus?
  1. First, it was what he forgot. He forgot God. He forgot that death was at hand. He forgot that he was the guilty one. He forgot that justice was being carried out. **Luke 23:40-41** *But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong."*
  2. Secondly, it was because of what he failed at. He failed to see what was most important at such a critical time. He failed to ask for deliverance from sin. Instead, he asked for deliverance from death.
- E. This man died in a state of rebellion in spite of the rebuke and repentance of the other thief, and with the Savior so close at hand.

IV. FINALLY, WE HAVE THE THIEF WHO REPENTED AND TRUSTED IN JESUS.

**Luke 23:42-43** *Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."*

- A. This thief understood his predicament and had a change of heart. In agonizing pain he looked to the center cross. He ceased his scoffing and turned to the only One who could save him.
- B. Even though this thief suffered the same agony as the other, he repented. Why?
  1. He had a fear of God which caused him to depart from evil. **Proverbs 16:6** *In mercy and truth Atonement is provided for iniquity; and by the fear of the Lord one departs from evil.*
  2. He recognized death was at hand and he was concerned about his eternal state.
  3. He admitted the sinfulness of his own conduct.
  4. He understood the innocence of Jesus.

C. His repentance did not bring escape from physical death, but it did bring escape from eternal death. It brought him peace, comfort, and fellowship for eternity in the presence of Jesus. **Luke 23:43** *And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."*

Conclusion:

1. These four thieves of Calvary represent all of mankind today.
2. Our lives, our attitudes, our sinfulness.
3. What is so remarkable is that Jesus loved all four equally, and shed His blood for the ransoming of all four. Each one had opportunity to be saved, but only one was. **John 3:16** *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*
4. Have you repented of your sins and asked Jesus to save your soul? Do you have the assurance of eternal life? Why not call upon Him while you still can.