

LOOKING AT LUKE
LAST MINUTE RESCUE

Friday, September 4

Reading: Luke 23

Luke 23:38 *There was a written notice above Him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save Yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this Man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise."*

In 1849, Author Fyodor Dostoyevsky was arrested by the Russian government for his involvement with a subversive group and was sentenced to death! But at the last minute, a note from Tsar Nicolas I was delivered at the scene of the firing squad commuting his sentence to ten years hard labor in Siberia. Dostoyevsky would live to write his greatest works - "Crime and Punishment" (1866) and "The Brothers Karamazov" (1880).¹

When we come to the crucifixion of Jesus, we meet another man condemned to die who is saved at the last minute. The thief who hung on the cross next to Jesus deserved his fate, but in Jesus he saw a chance for redemption from his life of crime. Like his companion on the other cross, he had begun by throwing insults at Jesus. But as the hours went by, something changed his heart. Perhaps it was Jesus' forgiving His enemies that first caught his attention. Perhaps it was the silence of Christ as everyone hurled insults and abuse at Him. Whatever the reason, he now comes to Jesus' defense.

First, we see that this man understood that he was a sinner. He knows that he is receiving the just punishment for his crimes. He also realized that Jesus was the Savior. He boldly proclaims that Jesus "has done nothing wrong" and will have a kingdom. His prayer is a simple plea for Jesus' mercy. "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom." He obviously had read the sign and believed that Jesus was the King – the Savior Israel had been waiting for! This man had more faith than all Jesus' followers. It appeared the kingdom was over! Jesus was dying as a criminal! Yet this man still believed Jesus would have His kingdom.

Jesus' answer is clear: "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." The other criminal had mocked at Jesus' power to save. This man embraced Jesus' salvation. He would close His eyes on a cross and wake up in eternity with the Lord. Do you have friends or relatives that need to accept Christ as Savior? Maybe you've been praying for a long time and they still reject the gospel. Don't lose heart! If this hardened criminal could come to Christ at the last minute, there is hope for anyone. Sometimes it takes the realization that you have nothing left to realize that Jesus is all you need.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fyodor_Dostoyevsky