

Three Windows: Through His Pain

4/5/2009 - Jim Johnson – Luke 23:34-43

We cope with pain in a variety of ways. As we think of Christ on the cross, it seems that He chose to internalize His pain. He shut out the world, and devoted his energy to controlling His reactions to the throbbing and the stabbing in His body. He did not want anything that He did or said from the cross to embarrass His father in heaven or stain the sacrifice that he offered. That is the picture we see of Him in Luke 23:34-43 as he relates to the 2 thieves.

A. Jesus was Aware of Their _____ 34-38

There was hostility at the foot of the cross, and iniquity next to it. Christ was executed in the company of two thieves. Luke called them criminals. Matthew called them “robbers” (Matt 27:38). Mark’s called them transgressors. They were guilty and therefore sentenced to death.

Just as Christ had his accusation posted on His cross (38) the thieves also had theirs. It was the Roman custom to have the crimes of the accused written out on a tablet called a titulus. The condemned person would then typically carry the titulus with his crimes to the site for the execution. This was done to humiliate the condemned and to warn others from such crimes.

Christ hung between the two of them. They were able to read His accusations. They in fact used the information they read to mock Christ. He, no doubt, could read the list of their crimes as well. Jesus was fully aware of their crimes but He ignored them. He was more concerned about the stabbing in His hands, and the difficulty of getting his breath. He was trying to control that impulse to cry out from the pain.

B. He was aware of their _____ 39

One of the criminals, no doubt angry about his own suffering, began to attack Jesus. He hurled abuse at him – from one cross to another. Christ heard the stinging insults. He could have answered them. He was aware of the criticism. He could have defended himself. He could have made threats or offered excuses – BUT He ignored them. He remained silent. He was more concerned with managing His pain than defending his honor.

C. He was aware of their _____ 40-41

Initially both thieves were mocking Christ. But something suddenly snapped in one of the thieves. He turned his head towards his partner in crime who was still mocking the Lord Jesus, and defended the honor of Christ while admitted his own guilt before the law. Two dying men were arguing over the justice of Christ's sentence. He was no doubt aware of the conflict but He ignored it.

D. He was aware of the _____ for mercy. – 42-43

The thief that had defended Him had his hands and his feet pinned to the cross, but his heart had taken an amazing journey - from bitterness to a fully developed faith in Christ. He didn't know a lot about Jesus, but the words of the thief indicate that he believed Jesus to be the legitimate King of Israel and that He would rise again and rule that Kingdom. There on the cross his cynicism gave way to a sincere and humble faith. He asked Christ to remember Him when He came into His Kingdom, to resurrect him and give him eternal life. Up to this point Christ had not said a single word to those men, but here He summoned enough strength and energy to say, *"Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."*

APPLICATION

Christ hung there in anguish. It took every bit of energy to lift his body up in order to capture the next shallow breath. He didn't have the energy to despise the thieves for their sin. He didn't have the will to defend himself against their mockery. He didn't really care that the two thieves were in conflict with each other, but when that sweet simple prayer of faith was uttered by the penitent thief, he heard it, and he mustered every bit of his strength to say *"Today you shall be with me in paradise."* Those are words that He lived to say - words that He died to say. On the basis of that man's faith in Christ, Jesus assured Him of a place in heaven that would be delivered to him that very day.

Jesus tunes out our failings, and tunes in to our _____

We all have our shameful signs to carry. Like the men on the crosses, we too are transgressors and our failures are written out. In Colossians 2:14, Paul spoke of a certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us – a written record of all our wrongdoings. Those indictments have earned us the death sentence. So we find ourselves in the very same position as those two thieves – condemned to die for our sins. But Jesus still stands ready to hear our confession, and expression of faith. He stands ready to save us and secure our future just as he did the thief. Call upon Him to do so.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

Use this section in your personal or family devotions to better apply the truth.

1. If a tablet of your crimes against God were made, what would be written on it?
2. As you think of Christ at this point in your life – do you sense that He is tuning you in or out?
3. What could you say to Him that would interest Him at this point?