

Funeral Bible Talk on Luke 23:39-43

As we mourn Alf's passing we are faced with the fact that death comes to all of us.

This day reminds us, more than anything else can of our mortality. Today's a good day to think about how well prepared we are for our own death.

Let me read some words from the Bible that reassured a man as he was dying. Jesus spoke these words of reassurance. The dying man was not a good man. In fact he was dying as a criminal, being executed for his crimes. He had lived a bad life and was now facing his death and soon his Maker.

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Jesus: "Aren't you the Christ? 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. "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

What's the story here? This is the day that Jesus died. He had been nailed to a cross along with two men who were thieves and murderers. Jesus was in the middle with these men on either side of him. Those who'd gathered to watch the spectacle of the death of these men were mocking Jesus. They knew about the great miracles Jesus had performed. They knew about his claim to be the Son of God.

They think he's crazy for letting himself be killed like this, so they're mocking him.

All three men who hung on those crosses that day knew they would die in a matter of hours. They had time to prepare for their soon departure from this life.

The ways the two men react to Jesus as they face death are opposite reactions. They show us the right way and the wrong way to prepare for our passing from this life.

One of these dying men treats Jesus as if Jesus was his servant!

The eyewitnesses of Jesus' death tell us this as recorded in verse 39: One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Jesus: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

What is this dying man saying to Jesus? "Save yourself and save me!" He treats God as if God was his servant!

If we're honest about it, we should admit that we've all treated God the same way. We try to move God from the right place he has at the centre of our lives. We believe he is there, but don't respond to him as God. Sometimes, in tough times, we pray to God and ask him to fix our problem. We treat God as if he's our servant. I've done that sometimes, and you probably have too.

The tragedy here is that this man recognises that Jesus is the Son of God, the God he will soon come before for judgement, but he will not humble himself. He treats God as if God was his servant.

Some years ago, somewhere on the streets of London, a 5-year-old girl fell off her bike. An everyday occurrence in a big city. But at that very moment the Queen Mother was passing in her Rolls Royce. "Stop the car," she commanded the chauffeur. "Help her up," she tells the driver. The Queen Mother invited the little girl to ride home in the Royal car. But the 5-year-old answered, "No thank you, I'm not supposed to take lifts from strangers." When she gets older she'll possibly regret that she didn't take up the royal offer.

In all seriousness. What a great tragedy it would be to pass from this life and come before God without treating Jesus as our King.

The other dying man shows us the right way.

The other dying man treats Jesus as a King.

This is what he said to Jesus: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Instead of treating Jesus as if Jesus was his servant, he treats Jesus as his King. He says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Now Jesus hardly looked like a King at this point! He's dying a criminal's style of death and being mocked by the crowd. Yet he is doing what a king should do. He is acting in the best interests of his people, he is acting as their representative. On their behalf he defeats an enemy they themselves could never defeat. He takes the full blame and responsibility for all the wrong and evil things his people have believed in and done. That wrong and that evil, with which we are all so personally familiar, has the power to see us treated by God as his enemies when we face him after death. So Jesus, as King, takes the blame for it so those people who treat him as their King we welcomed by God as his friends, and no longer as enemies.

This man shows us the right way to prepare for death, he treats Jesus/God as his King.

This man is given the best promise any person can hear, and particularly when they face death.

What is that promise? Today after you are dead you will be with God in paradise.

That's what Jesus said to this man: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

This dying criminal who changed his attitude and treated Jesus as King is given this great promise. The promise that he will be welcomed as a friend by God. That he will be with God forever. He doesn't know how this could be possible. But we do. He didn't know that Jesus' death at that very point was the way God made that possible. But we do.

When the Japanese were swooping down through Dutch Indonesia in World War 2 many Dutch aircraft made the dash to Northern Australia. Unfortunately some were shot down by Japanese fighter planes. One such plane was a Dutch DC3 carry a precious cargo in a small box. It was carrying diamonds. It crash-landed on a northern Australian beach. Eventually the diamonds were recovered by a beachcomber. But he lost some on the process. Somehow they found their way into the hands of local people who hadn't seen diamonds before. They were using them as marbles and all sorts of things. When they heard the police were looking for the diamonds they threw them into the creek and other places. They had handled the diamonds, become familiar with the diamonds but did not realise how valuable they were.

Though Jesus seems familiar to us, we may fail to see how important he really is.

At death everything depends on how we have reacted to Jesus. Today is a very good day to say to Jesus, "Please remember me now that you are King." Today is the right kind of day to reflect on this and get ready for the time when it will be your day to meet God!
