

Luke 23:22-42

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[0 : 00] Has anyone tried booking a holiday with lastminute.com ever?! Anybody do that? And did it work? Did you get a holiday? Did you get there?

! It's possible to leave things to the last minute, isn't it, including holidays. And, as we'll see, more important things as well. As Paul said, Sue and I went down to Devon and looked after a church there for about five years.

And the first person who was saved, the first person who became a Christian there, because our church secretary befriended him and explained the gospel about Jesus to him, was a man called Norman.

Six weeks later, Norman died in St. Vincent's Nursing Home in Plymouth. And this guy, Norman, had had a reputation for being rather a nasty, selfish piece of work.

And he died after six weeks, having become a Christian. And I was asked to take his funeral, and as is normal, when you take a funeral, you go around and you talk to the family beforehand.

[1 : 09] And I was quite surprised, or I shouldn't have been, and I was amazed to hear about how his family said this man, Norman, had changed utterly in the last six weeks of his life, and changed for the better.

Lastminute.com, or what? In particular, his attitude, and that's a key word for this morning, his attitude to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ had changed.

His attitude to Jesus totally had changed. But particularly to Jesus' death on the cross. Why else would a previously irreligious and ungodly man choose a hymn for his own funeral with the words, I love that old cross, where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was slain.

And I believe that it was because Norman had met the Lord Jesus Christ right at the very end of his life, and that's rather like what happened to one of the thieves, the criminals, who died with the Lord Jesus on the cross in Luke chapter 23, on page 884 of your pew Bibles, your chair Bibles, your church Bibles.

Do keep that passage open, we're going to look at what happened. I mentioned earlier about how Norman's attitude to Jesus had changed.

[2 : 49] And as Jesus was dying on the cross, having been crucified there, in verse 32 and verse 33 of our passage, Luke chapter 23, there were lots of different attitudes to Jesus.

And some of those attitudes were dire, they were really awful attitudes to Jesus. So let's look at what was going on, and compare their attitudes to him, with his own attitude to them, as well, indeed to us.

Let's look at some careless attitudes to the Lord Jesus in verses 32 to 39. So there were all these attitudes around. In verse 32, we discover that there were two other men, both of them criminals, who were also led out with Jesus to be crucified.

And they came to this place called the skull, and they crucified all three of them there. So it's Jesus with the criminals, traditionally known as the two thieves, of course.

There was Jesus crucified on a cross in the middle, and on his left and on his right were two actual criminals, traditionally known as thieves.

[3 : 57] And whereas Jesus in verse 34 says, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they're doing, he's actually praying God's blessing on those Roman soldiers who were actually at that point in time crucifying Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

That was Jesus' attitude to them. What was their attitude to Jesus? Well, if you carry on reading in verse 34, you discover that they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

In other words, they cared more about Jesus' clothes than they did about Jesus. Now, that has got to be a fairly disgusting attitude to the Lord Jesus, hasn't it?

By any standards. Contrast that with Jesus' attitude to them, to the Roman soldiers. Mercy, kindness, and forgiveness as he prays, Father, forgive them.

That's amazing, isn't it? Then, in verse 35, we see that there were people standing there watching Jesus dying on the cross. And the Jewish rulers were there and they sneered at Jesus and they said, he saved others.

[5 : 05] Ha, ha, ha. They were mocking, you see. Let him save himself. If he could save others, let him save himself. They thought that had quite a pleasant symmetry to it. They thought they were being a little bit clever there, you know.

They were mocking him. If he saved others, let him save himself. If he is God's Messiah, the chosen one. And those Jewish scribes and Pharisees were sure that if Jesus was now dying, he could not possibly be God's Messiah.

What kind of Messiah would end his life in such ugly failure according to them. And it's interesting that the Greek word for saved, as in he saved others, is the same as the one that's used for healed as well.

So presumably they knew about Jesus' healing miracles. So when they say he saved others, they probably mean he healed others. Let him save himself, you see. So they thought they were being clever.

They even knew Greek. They did, of course. And then there were the soldiers in verse 36. They came up to Jesus and mocked him.

[6 : 17] Everybody seems to want to mock Jesus as he dies on the cross. They offer him some wine vinegar, which was probably bitter or sour or gone off as part of the mockery.

And they said the same sort of thing. If you are the king of the Jews, like the sign over your head says, the king of the Jews, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.

The same sort of mockery. And you know, Jesus could have saved himself. Have a look on your handout at the quotation there from Matthew 26, verse 53.

Matthew records that Jesus says, do you think I cannot call on my father and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legion of angels? Jesus could have saved himself.

He could have asked angels to do it for him, couldn't he, in fact. But Jesus goes on and he says, but how then would the scriptures be fulfilled?

[7 : 14] It had to happen in this way. In other words, Jesus had to die for God's plan of salvation to work.

And then we get to the criminals that I mentioned, the traditional thieves who were there on Jesus' left and right. One of them, let's say it's the one on the left, in verse 39. One of those criminals who hung their whole insults at him, railed at him, it says in your church Bibles.

Aren't you the Messiah? And then he comes up with the same thing as the others who have insulted Jesus. Save yourself and us.

Now that's slightly different, isn't it? Save yourself, Jesus, and us. And the and is important there, you know, because that was the one thing that Jesus could not do.

He could not both save himself and other people. And this is very important. You see, he could turn water into wine.

[8 : 20] He could calm storms. He could feed 5,000 people just like that. He could raise Lazarus from the dead. He could heal thousands of people, but he could not save himself and other people.

You see, Jesus had to stay on that cross and die so that you and me and many others can escape hell so that we can be saved.

Jesus had to be unsaved, didn't he? saved. And we must not be like the soldiers or the Jewish leaders or any of the other mockers.

You must not be like that because you understand now, if you didn't understand before, why Jesus had to die and why he could not have been saved.

He could not save himself so that you can be saved. you perhaps heard that people say that the single event that defined the 20th century was the Holocaust when something like 7 million people died seemingly pointlessly.

[9 : 39] Well, you know, the event that defined not just the 20th century, the event that defined the whole of time and indeed all of eternity, that event is Jesus dying on the cross to save others.

And we must make sure that we do not have a mocking wrong or even just a careless attitude to Jesus dying on the cross. So we've looked at some careless attitudes to Jesus and careless

attitudes to him dying on the cross, haven't we?

Obviously we now need to look and see if we can find in this passage a right attitude to Jesus and his death, don't we? Let's look at verses 40 to 42.

What then is the right attitude for us to have to Jesus dying on the cross? Well in verse 40 we discover that the other criminal, so we've had the first one on my left, the other one, the second one, say, on Jesus' right, rebukes the first criminal, says, don't you mock him, don't you fear God, since you and I are both under the same sentence of death.

And although one dying thief had had a very bad attitude to Jesus, even insulting him in verse 39, and the other one did at first as well, we understand from the other gospels, yet this other one says in verse 41, we are being punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve, that this man has done, this man Jesus, has done nothing wrong.

[11:16] Now what kind of attitude is this second thief showing us to the Lord Jesus? What kind of attitude is that? It's an attitude of humility, is it not?

It's an attitude of awareness of his sin. It's an attitude of awareness of justice, God's justice, I think, too, isn't it? And we know that because in verse 42, then he says, Jesus, he somehow turns himself and addresses Jesus.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. So, in addition to his attitude of humility, awareness of sin, and awareness of God's justice, this second criminal, second thief, also has an awareness that Jesus is the saviour, that Jesus is the king.

The sign above Jesus' head said so. In verse 38, the king of the Jews. And somehow he knows that the only one who can save him now from God's justice, from all his sin and criminality, the only one who can save him now is Jesus.

And you know perhaps that Jesus' name itself means God saves. So he turns to him and says, Jesus, God saves, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

[12:42] them. And so he urgently wants to be saved and he urgently wants to make the knowledge that he has been saved, that he will be forgiven, that he is forgiven, personal.

And so he doesn't just say, Jesus, remember, he says, Jesus, remember me, doesn't he? You notice that little word, Jesus, remember me. And somehow, I suppose, by the working of the Holy Spirit in his heart and what he's previously heard and understood, he now understands that Jesus was dying so that his sins, this career thief's sins could be forgiven.

And that is the right attitude for him to model and for us to have as well, isn't it? We must have that same humble, urgent, personal, trusting attitude to Jesus and especially to Jesus dying on the cross.

Have you got that kind of attitude to Jesus and his death on the cross? We've looked at bad attitudes to Jesus, haven't we? We've looked at the right attitude that this second thief, criminal, exhibited towards Jesus.

Thirdly, then, look specifically at verse 43 and we'll see Jesus' promise to this dying criminal, Jesus' promise to all of us in this room, in fact.

[14:07] So, verse 43, then. How do we know that the second thief, criminal, on the cross, who had lived his whole life in sin, at that very last moment, lastminute.com you might say, was saved by Jesus.

How do we know he was saved by Jesus? Well, we know it because of verse 43. Jesus somehow turns to him and he answers him and he says, truly, amen, I tell you, today, you will be with me in paradise, not just on holiday, but in paradise, in heaven, you see.

And so right at the end of his life, this second criminal turns to Jesus and says, save me in effect, doesn't he? And Jesus somehow turns to him and he saves him, doesn't he?

He makes this amazing promise. Truly, I tell you, today, you will be with me in paradise, the very opposite of dying on a cross.

And that happened right at the end of this man's life, didn't it? Right at the end, lastminute.com.

Now the Bible also warns us, do you remember what it says in Ecclesiastes chapter 12 verse 1? [15:25] Very wise advice is given to us, and indeed not just advice, but a command, remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come.

I bet that thief wished he'd taken notice of that advice, that wisdom earlier. But, we have Luke chapter 23, don't we?

And God has given us this thief on the cross, this criminal, to teach us that we can be saved, we can be forgiven, whatever our past lives have been like, and even if we don't have any future life to speak of less as well.

And it's an amazing thing, isn't it, that every now and then, God shows his mercy to someone foolishly late in life. Now, I'm not recommending it, God has to have a lot of things. But, it does happen sometimes. And I hope that was what happened to Norman in Devon that I told you about at the beginning of this message. God had mercy on him very late in his life. I also had two granddads, one was called Darby Grandad, one was called London Grandad, I'll leave you to work out why.

[16:38] And it seems that London Grandad, my London Grandad, also turned to the Lord Jesus Christ in repentance, more or less, on his very deathbed. So, that seems to be what's happened to Norman in Devon, the thief on the cross, and even my London Grandad.

And you say, well, what exactly happened at these last moments in people's lives? Well, let's look at what happened to this second thief, as in verse 43 and verse 42 of our passage.

And I need a big book, a big black book, to do with a much heavier, more sinister coloured book really than this one, I think. Two things happened in verse 43.

One is this, God took that criminal, that second thief's worthless, sinful life. All his bad record of everything he'd done.

and he gave it to Jesus. That's the first thing. All his sin was transferred to Jesus, who at that very moment was dying, paying for it on the cross.

[17:59] And there was a second thing I said. Yes, the other thing, the second thing that God did at that moment in his justice was he took Jesus' perfect life, he took all Jesus' innocence and his perfect record, and he gave that to this second thief on the cross.

Those two things happened. And Jesus has promised to you, right now in fact, is that if you humbly cry out to him, remember me, even from in heaven, where Jesus is now, he will take you to be with him in paradise if you die before Sunday lunch today, or if you die in 80 years' time.

It doesn't really matter, does it? But Jesus can and will do the same for you if you turn to Jesus like that thief did. Jesus, remember me.

You put your trust in him. So, in conclusion then, that really raises three things. Here's the first one. Excuse me. Maybe you have had a rather mocking, dare I say, or at least a careless attitude to Jesus and his blood-bought salvation.

[19:26] Maybe that's you this morning. Maybe you sniggered when you saw a car bumper sticker that said something like, Jesus saves, but Harry Kane scores on the rebound.

I think that's roughly up to date, isn't it? Maybe you laughed at that. Well, that means that you have a careless, perhaps even a mocking attitude to Jesus and his salvation.

But, you know, your attitude to Jesus, especially to his saving death, is the most important thing. Nothing matters more. that's the first thing.

Secondly, maybe you've not quite had the confidence to trust Jesus personally, so you're certainly not mocking Jesus, you're not taking his death on the cross lightly, but you have somehow not yet relied on him, you have somehow not yet cried out to him, Jesus, remember me and save me.

Maybe you're a little bit like the audience of one Charles Blondin who was actually French, I think his name is Charles Blondin, he had an audience in 1859, see the picture, see what he's doing there?

[20:38] The picture's on your handouts as well. He's crossing the Niagara Falls because he is a tightrope walker, and he's doing it with a wheelbarrow in front of him as well, and the crowd is oohing and aahing as he stops in the middle and pretends nearly to fall off and that kind of thing.

And he gets to the other side where the audience are. There's Charles Blondin, Charles Blondin, and he says, do you believe I can carry a person across the Niagara Falls in this wheelbarrow? Now no doubt some people kept very quiet at that point, because they could see where this was going. But there were others who were just there for the entertainment, and they said, yes, yes, you were the greatest tightrope walker there ever was.

Okay, says Mr. Blondin, or his manager did, get into the wheelbarrow. And nobody did, at least on that occasion anyway, because they lacked the confidence to trust Monsieur Blondin.

Personally, you see, they somehow weren't quite prepared to put their bodies where their mouths were, sort of thing. Now, the thief on the cross was not like that at all.

[21 : 57] And the thief on the cross is in the Bible to give you and me complete confidence that even if we cry out at the very last moment with a life of sin behind us and nothing else, Jesus, remember me, that not only can he save you, but he will.

He promises to save you, you see. Even today, if you died, you would be with him in paradise. If you died before lunch, you would go straight to be with Jesus.

And the question has to be, are you ready to get into Jesus' wheelbarrow, so to speak? And thirdly, then, maybe you understand what Jesus did when he deliberately sacrificed himself on the cross. maybe you are actually ready to make Jesus' salvation personal for yourself. In which case, with that dying thief, I urge you to say, I urge you to pray, Jesus, remember me, Jesus, forgive me, save me, I'm sorry I left it till now, but I remember there's another verse in the Bible that says that now is the day of salvation, so please, save me, now, and then I will live the rest of my life for you.

It might be short, or I might die in 80 years. That's what we need to pray, isn't it? Should we do that right now?