
THE MURDERER'S FAITH.

The evangelists teach that there were two malefactors crucified with Christ; the one on the right hand, and the other on the left. "One of the malefactors which were hanged, railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us? but the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we, indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss; and he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," Luke 23: 39—43.

Good reader, observe particularly what I write. When we critically view the confession of this evil doer, we are astonished at the great power, the good nature, the abundance of fruit, spiritual vision, energetic love and the free confession of his faith. It is evident that he had been an abandoned,

ungodly reprobate, who neither knew nor feared God, but maliciously committed all manner of sins, robbed his neighbor of his goods and shed his blood. Matthew and Mark call him a murderer, and Luke calls him a malefactor. This appears to be the case as he testifies himself, that he had to die for crimes which he had committed.

Notwithstanding all this, as soon as this malefactor, extended on the cross between Jerusalem and Mount Calvary, heard in his last distress, the word of God from the mouth of the Lord, it wrought in him so powerfully, that his heart within him was touched and changed, which led him to seek, from that moment, the salvation of his fellow-men and rebuked his reviling companion, saying, Fearest thou not God? He confessed his own sins and his maliciousness, saying, We are receiving according to our merits and works; and he acknowledged the condemned Jesus (who was cursed to die on the cross as one of the most aban-

done malefactors, by the chief priests, pharisees and scribes, and denied of the people and condemned to death), to be innocent, righteous, pure and without sin, saying, This one has done no evil. Besides this, he also sought grace and mercy of God, although it appeared to human understanding that he was denied all mercy, and every favor both by God and man. For he was at this time the most rejected and despised of all men, as the prophet laments, Isa. 53: 6, and the thief applied to none other, in heaven or upon earth, than to this poor, innocent, calumniated, banished and crucified Jesus; in full confidence drawing near to him, as the throne of divine grace, that he might obtain the remission of his sins, saying, "Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

I think, this may justly be called, a true, christian faith, and a truly worthy fruit of penitence and repentance; and it was nothing else to the Lord, but a refreshing of his thirsty soul, as a molifying of his deep wounds, as a consolation of his sore distress, and as a comfort in his painful sufferings and cruel death, so that he in the same hour, heard the consoling, joyful word of divine grace and eternal peace, from Jesus, namely, Fear not, all thy sins which thou didst commit in thy ignorance are covered, they shall never more be remembered, either by me or my Father. I pledge my innocent blood as security; therefore, be of good cheer, what thou didst desire, thou hast already obtained, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

Behold my reader, here you have, in the malefactor mentioned, a fair example of a sincere, christian faith, with its properties, disposition, nature, power and fruits. With this same murderer, many vain despisers comfort and flatter themselves in their sinful and impenitent lives, think and say to themselves, God is merciful; he knows that we are the children of Adam, if we do not live as the Scriptures teach, and as they would have us live, yet we hope, by the grace of God to be saved, as was the murderer. These poor creatures know not that the thief will be a sore condemnation to them; because they hear the word of the Lord so often, and believe it not, neither

are they obedient thereto. Ah reader! do not thus mock God; I fear many will fail in their hopes in this matter.

Again, I say that all wilful despisers, who thus say and think in their hearts, must be eternally convicted by this thief, and shall stand confounded, for as soon as he heard the gospel of grace, he received it in a pure conscience, through faith, and became penitent, regenerated and pious. And these hear it from year to year, see daily so many fair fruits, and that it is so gloriously testified by possessions and blood; nevertheless, they remain unbelievers and are hardened in sin; for they reject the inviting grace, they resist the operating Spirit, they condemn the preached word, they trample under foot the proffered gift, and say, where are the Scriptures, whereby we may comfort such unreasonable, shameful scorers, or promise and proclaim to them the grace and peace of the Lord?

I fear they are the sterile, unfruitful earth, of which Paul speaks, which drinketh in the rain of the holy, divine word, that cometh oft upon it, and nevertheless, bears only thorns and thistles; are rejected and nigh unto cursing, which are to be burned. They are those of whom Solomon laments and says, "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof, I, also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh and when distress and anguish cometh upon you, then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer," Prov. 1: 22-28. But because they do not look for light, he will turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.

The murderer believed as soon as he heard. O! that they would do so; and think upon what David said, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, *harden not your hearts* as in the provocation," Heb. 3: 15.

The murderer heard but *once* and *believed*, and these hear it so often, and yet they believe not. He heard and was changed; but these hear and continue the same, and harden their hearts yet more and more.

He reproved his reviling companion, and admonished him, that he should fear God; but these blaspheme and revile all the faithful who do so; and love those who hate the truth. He unreservedly confessed his sins and wickedness, without fear; but these, no matter however avaricious, drunken, proud, unchaste, unclean, envious and idolatrous they are, do not confess their transgressions and sins, and when called to repent and reform, they say, Yea, what have we done?

He acknowledged that Christ's kingdom was not earthly, for he said, *When thou comest into thy kingdom*; but these have all their pleasures in gold and silver, in eating and drinking, in splendor and wantonness, and in the perishable, visible riches of the world; they do not regard the invisible, eternal riches, which Christ out of grace, has bestowed upon all his believers, and merited them by the shedding of his precious blood.

He confessed the poor, condemned, crucified Jesus before all the rulers, priests, Pharisees and before the people, and acknowledge him as his Savior and Lord; but these, alas! deny his Almighty Majesty, his heavenly origin and glory, and do not regard his judgment, Spirit, word, ordinances, commands, sacraments and promises, although he has seated himself as a triumphant and conquering prince, at the right hand of the Father, and has received all power, both in heaven and upon earth, in eternal glory of the Father.

He sought mercy, favor and the forgiveness of his sins, of Christ; but these seek it of their preachers, priests and monks, through masses, confessions, absolution, bread and wine, holy water and the like superstitions and abominations.

He heard, because he believed on Christ, the pleasing words, *To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise*; but these shall hear, because they believe not on Christ, the dreadful, intolerable and awful sentence, *Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire*. Their faith was unlike, as will also be their reward. Let all mockers take this to heart.

And thus, take notice, finally this penitent sinner will rise up against those who have comforted themselves with him in their sins, and criminate and condemn them before the face of his Majesty. For they hav-

ing so often heard the sweet melody of the divine word, and never were grateful, nor ever learned or believed it with open and renewed hearts; but the murderer heard it but once, and immediately believed. Ah! dear children, beware and seek Christ while he may be found, and call on him while he is yet near, lest his anger go forth, and the fire of his fierce wrath consume you.

Think you, O perverted scorners! that you can receive or reject faith, repentance, sorrow for sin, and the grace of God, at pleasure? O no! Holy Paul says, "Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind," Rom. 1: 28. That sentence shall be passed upon all proud scorners. Children beware!

Notice this parable, There is a very rich potentate, emperor or king, whom I, through great ignorance, hated all my days; he had compassion upon me, and because I am such a poor man, he, through his faithful servants, tendered me not only his favor and friendship, but also a great sum of gold, many precious stones and gems, and all this out of love and compassion; and I am so ungrateful, that I will not only not give meat and drink to the faithful servants of this kind prince, who loves me dearly, for these great favors; but I turn them with ignominy and disgrace, out of doors, throw mud and stones at them, put them into prison and bonds, deprive them of property and life, take the proffered gifts, place them in a closet, and trample them under foot, &c., and inform the prince, That I do not now desire his presents, but if he will, in the course of one or ten years offer them again, then I will perhaps, make up my mind and receive them and tender my thanks for the favors. Now, I will allow you all to judge, whether it would be right that such a prince should again offer his favor, since I treated him and his servants so perfidiously? Or whether he should not much more turn his favor into displeasure, and his love into wrath toward me, for my presumptuous tyranny, haughty rejection of his favors, and severely punish me? I think, you would award me his punishment and not his grace.

Thus it is with you. O you scorners! The

merciful Lord, whose riches and grace are immense, has graciously pitied us in these abominable, last days, and had compassion on our great blindness and deadly poverty, although we hated his holy will from our infancy, and through his faithful servants freely offered us his beloved Son with his holy word, Spirit, merits, ordinances and example, tendered us his grace, peace and eternal life, kingdom, inheritance, joy and glory, together with the remission of our sins; he dug about us and fostered us, barren trees, for many years. He calls and teaches daily, through his chosen, who willingly sacrifice possession and life as a testimony; he puts at variance the father against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the members of the family against one another, and friend against friend, &c. Some he suffers to be driven about in strange countries, in tribulation, in sorrow, in misery, in fear, in want, in vexation, in deserts, in mountains, in dens and in caves of the earth. He gives signs in the sun, moon, and the stars in heaven; in earthquakes, war, pestilence, new diseases, famine, and unheard of wonders upon the earth. As a hen gathers her chickens, he would gather us under the wings of his love; and as a faithful shepherd of his sheep, he would bring us to the right fold of his grace; bring us into the chamber of his covenant, and kiss us with the lips of his peace; wash us from all our uncleanness, and make us his bride; redeem us from the dominion of hell and death, and lead us into the kingdom of heaven, and of eternal life. In short, he would release us from the power of darkness and the devil, and receive us and make us holy as his chosen children and heirs.

But, alas, in relation to you, it is altogether vain: as already said, his proffered grace and word you reject; you persecute and kill his faithful servants and ministers; you defame and blaspheme the unblamable, pious life, together with the confession of the saints; you scoff at his great signs, wonders and reproofs, and your faces are like those of the lecherous, and your hearts as diamonds; you are neither ashamed, nor will you be converted; you say with per-

verted scorners, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit should we have, if we pray to him? Job 21: 14, 15.

Since then, you are so ungrateful to your God, yea, are altogether vain and insulting towards him, who has shown to us, from the beginning, such great mercy, that you entirely reject and disregard his paternal admonitions, chastisings, doctrines, commands, obedience to his holy word, and the innocent blood of his saints, together with all his great powers and miracles; yea, you consider them as mere deception and heresy; that you do not regard the day of grace; that you inconsiderately trample under foot Christ and his holy Spirit, gospel, regenerations, faith, sacraments, death and blood, together with all his other spiritual riches and heavenly gifts; and that you do not fear, seek, love, honor thank nor serve the Almighty, immortal, only and eternal God; and still hope that you will be saved with the murderer, then I tell and warn you in sincere love, while it is yet to-day, that your hopes will not be realized, for when you think to find him, he will then hide himself from you; he will turn his fierce countenance upon you, as the Scriptures say, "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me," Prov. 1: 28.

I therefore entreat and exhort my readers in general; to hear while you have ears, and see while you have eyes; understand while you have hearts; awaken and watch while you have time and space, lest your ears, eyes, hearts, and opportunities be taken from you, and you become deaf, blind, impenitent, hardened and perverted.

Friends, beware! now it is to-day, yesterday is past; to-morrow is not promised us. Short is the time; behold, the judge is at the door, therefore delay not, to turn unto the Lord, and defer it not from day to day: for his wrath will soon overtake you. Late repentance, says Augustine, is seldom true; but if true, it never is too late. Repent while you enjoy health, says he, that you may be certain.

Therefore, do as did the thief or murderer, for, as soon as he heard, he believed.

Do you also thus hear, and thus believe, for the eyes of the Lord are upon the faithful. The Savior says, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, shall be filled; those who seek, shall find; those who ask, shall receive; those who knock, to them it shall be opened. But if you refuse, when he seeks to bestow his grace upon you, he will also refuse when you seek him, and would fain obtain his grace. "They that despise me," saith the Lord, "shall be lightly esteemed," 1 Sam. 2: 30.

Therefore, seek while it is day, that you may find; ask, that you may receive; hear, that you may believe; believe, that you may do; and do, that you may live: for, from hearing, cometh faith; out of faith, doctrine; on obedience, the fulfilment of the promise depends.

For this reason all things are imputed to faith in the Scriptures; such as true repentance, regeneration, sanctification of the heart; the righteousness which avails before God; the blessing of salvation and everlasting life; for faith is the source and cause of all good, as is fully related.

Seeing, then, that this is the true and proper ground of the Scriptures, as we have briefly explained, you will then have to confess that all wilful scorers are put to shame in their doings, by the thief, and

that he will be their accuser in the day of the Lord, as the Lord says of the Ninevites, and of the Queen of the South.

All who hear and believe the word of Christ, and are turned by the power of faith with all their hearts to Christ, acknowledge Christ openly, by an unblamable, pious life, before all the world, confidently seek his grace and mercy, &c.: to them he is a glorious comforter, a precious balm and liniment in their troubled and wounded consciences, by which they may see and know God's unbounded favor, mercy and love, towards all truly penitent sinners, if they have sinned ever so long and heinously, that they by faith may satisfy their souls with him, and not doubt the grace of God on account of their sinful lives in which they formerly walked: for the Lord did not withhold his grace, nor did he say, No, thief, your sins are too great and numerous, and you also have sinned too long. But as soon as he saw his new heart, and heard him confessing, he bestowed his grace upon the poor, distressed sinner, and forgave him all his sins, and said, *To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise; for he that believeth on me has eternal life.* The prophet also says, If the righteous turn from his unrighteousness and does righteously, I will not remember his unrighteousness which he did.