

THE THIEF IN PARADISE

"He said to Jesus, Remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom. And he [Jesus] said to him, Indeed I say to thee this day, thou shalt be with me in Paradise." – Luke 23:42,43.

Those who consider salvation to be an escape from everlasting torture to a paradise of pleasure, and dependent only on accidental circumstances of favor, see in this narration the doctrine of *election* exemplified – our Lord Jesus, being pleased by the consoling words of the one thief, elected him to heaven, and equally elected that the other should roast to all eternity, unpitied and unrelieved. Truly, if God has made salvation such a lottery, such a chance thing, those who believe it to be such should have little to say against church lotteries, and less against worldly ones.

But this is not the case. This Scripture has evidently been much misunderstood. To get its true import, let us take in the surroundings and connections.

The Lord had just been condemned, and was now being executed on the charge of treason against Caesar's government, in saying that he was a king: though he had told them that his kingdom was "not of this world." There, upon the cross above his head, was the inscription of his charged crime, written in three languages: "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." All knew of his claims and derided him, except one of the thieves crucified with him. Doubtless he had heard of Jesus and of his wonderful character, and said in his heart: This is truly a strange and wonderful man. Who can know that there is no foundation to his claims? He certainly lives close to God. I will speak to him in sympathy: it can do no harm. Then he rebuked his companion,

mentioning the Lord's innocence; and then the conversation above noted took place.

We cannot suppose that this thief had any correct or definite idea of Jesus – nothing more than a mere feeling that he was about to die, and a straw of hope was better than nothing. To give him credit for more would be to place him *in faith* ahead of all the Lord's apostles and followers, who at this time had fled, and who, three days after, said: "We [had] trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." – Luke 24:21.

We can have no doubt as to the import of his petition: he meant that whenever Jesus reached his kingdom power, he desired favor. Now note our Lord's answer. He does not say that he has no kingdom; but, on the contrary, he indicates by his response that the thief's request was a proper one. The word translated "verily" or "indeed" is the Greek word "amen," and signifies *so be it*, as you have asked: "I say to thee this day [this dark day, when it *seems* as though I am an impostor, **[R1455 : page 300]** and I am about to die as a felon], thou shalt be with me in Paradise."

Now the substance of this is that, when the Lord has established his kingdom, it will be in Paradise, and the thief will be remembered and be in it. Notice that we have changed the comma from before to after "to-day." This makes our Lord's words perfectly clear and reasonable. He might have told the thief more if he had chosen. He might have told him that the reason he would be privileged to be in Paradise was because his *ransom* was then and there being paid. He might have told him further that he was dying for and ransoming the *other* thief also, as well as the whole gaping and deriding multitude before him, and as well as the millions then entombed, and the millions yet unborn. We know this because we know that "Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man," and that as all

in Adam die, even so all in Christ shall be made alive, and be privileged to come back to that Edenic condition forfeited by the first man's sin, and redeemed for men by Christ's righteous sacrifice.

As already shown, the garden of Eden was but an illustration of what the earth will be when fully released from the curse – perfected and beautified. The word "Paradise" is of Arabic origin, and signifies *a garden*. The Septuagint renders Gen. 2:8 thus: "God planted a *paradise* in Eden." When Christ has established his kingdom, and bound evil, etc., this earth will become a paradise, and the two thieves and all others that are in their graves shall come into it; and by becoming obedient to its laws they may live forever. We doubt not, however, that the kind words spoken in that dark hour to the Lord of glory will no more lose a suitable reward than the gift of a cup of water, or other small kindnesses, done to those whom this King is "not ashamed to call his *brethren*."

But have we a right to change the comma? Certainly: the punctuation of the Bible is not inspired. The writers of the Bible used *no punctuation*. It was invented about four hundred years ago. It is merely a modern convenience, and should be so used as to bring out sense and harmony with all other Scriptures. This harmony and sense are obtained only by the punctuation we have given above. As usually punctuated, the passage would teach that the Lord and the thief went away somewhere that day, a statement contrary to the following Scriptures, which read carefully: Luke 24:46; John 20:17; 3:13. In the latter text note that the words, "which is in heaven," are an interpolation, as shown by the oldest MS.
