

Jesus' Concern For Others (#3)

Joe Slater

Imagine the difficulty of caring about the eternal wellbeing of the very people who are murdering you in the most intensely painful way possible. Jesus did! Even as He hung upon the cross, Jesus prayed for the ones crucifying Him – *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”* (Luke 23:34). One might expect Him to curse them or call down angels to destroy them. But Jesus prayed for them. He knew that unless they repented, trusting and obeying Him, they would die in their sins, face God in judgment, and suffer eternally in Hell. He loved them even though they hated Him!

Our Lord also loved and cared about the robbers being crucified alongside Him. The crowd was mocking Jesus, challenging Him to save Himself and come down from the cross. *“And those who were crucified with Him reviled Him”* (Mark 15:32). Yes, these condemned criminals both joined in the ridicule! Before long, however, one of them repented, rebuking his fellow-robber: *“Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward for our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong”* (Luke 23:40-41). Then he asked Jesus, *“Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom”* (v. 42).

What would you have done? Could you have said, as Jesus did, *“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise”* (v. 43)? Jesus was willing to forgive him. He was concerned for his soul! Only a little earlier, this man had been on the doorstep of eternal torment! But now he could look forward confidently to joining Jesus in Paradise.

Jesus concern for others wasn't limited to His enemies. (More about that next week!)

LESSONS FROM OUR LORD'S TEMPTATIONS

One of the most amazing incidents in the Bible is the temptation of the Son of God by the prince of “spiritual wickedness in high places.” Matthew, Mark, and Luke record this event. On this occasion, Satan engaged in an all-out assault on the incarnate Son of God. Among all of Jesus' adversaries, none other could equal the power of Satan. If our Lord triumphed over the spiritual assaults of the “prince of this world,” He truly was the Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Holy One with the power and authority to rescue all sinners from the kingdom of darkness.

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for forty days (Luke 4:2). This “wilderness” was often called “the devastation.” It is a frightening area east of Jerusalem consisting pretty much of nothing but rocks, jagged cliffs, and devastation. Alone in this intimidating wasteland Jesus was confronted by a subtle, crafty, clever deceiver. Satan designed each temptation for maximum impact.

Jesus overcame every obstacle this evil deceiver threw at Him. This shows us three important facts:

1. By His victory over the tempter, Jesus satisfied the Father's requirement for a perfect sacrifice for sin.
2. By being *“tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15, Jesus became the perfect mediator between God and man.
3. Jesus showed us how to use Scripture to overcome Satan's temptations. Satan hates God's word. When we use it, he is more likely to flee from us.

The temptation of Jesus was truly an amazing incident, and one that teaches the student of Scripture some magnificent lessons.

--Milton Smith (Tulsa, OK) via *Old Paths* (adapted)

It Happened In The Fall

It was late October and the leaves had just started to turn in the small rural community of Smithers Valley. The weather was pleasant, and folks were preparing for their annual fall festival. But amidst the pumpkin gathering and autumn decorating, there was a somber task to be done. Wilbur Stanley, a life-long member of the Smithers community had died and his funeral was today. As the hearse pulled into the cemetery, only a couple of cars followed, and that was to be expected. You see, Wilbur was one of the most despised people in Smithers. He had spent his life dealing other folks misery, one of the meanest, stingiest and foul mouthed fellas you'd ever meet. Children feared him, adults hated him and for the most part, everyone gave Wilbur a good lettin'-alone.

Just a month ago, Wilbur discovered he had a fast growing cancer and his time was short. He had gone to see the preacher, talked and studied the bible, made the good confession, then being baptized in Upton Creek. Those that heard of Wilbur's conversion scoffed at the idea, saying he'd waited to the last minute to attempt to be a decent human being. Many doubted he'd been sincere and had just taken out some “fire insurance” in hopes of missing hell. Most thought it was a slap in the face to those who had lived decent lives and contributed to the good of Smithers Valley. Even after his repentance, folks still detested old Wilbur.

Jesus told a story about some workers who went to work in a vineyard. Some were hired early in the day, while others came to work in the late evening. Despite the complaints of the early workers, those that came last received the same pay. (Matthew 20:1-16) He concluded the story by saying, *“So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”* (Matthew 20:16) We must never begrudge the “last hour” Christian, but rather rejoice at their obedience and their acceptance of the saving grace of God given to all men through Jesus Christ. Even those like Wilbur Stanley.

--Jay Launius (Maud, TX)