

## The Malefactors

1. mentioned :	Matthews	27 :	18 + 44
	Mark	15 :	27.
	Luke	23 :	19-23
	John	19 :	18

2. What <sup>is</sup> the central figure of the Easter Season—  
 a season of joy which marks the victory of Christ  
 over sin and the grave—  
 which marks the foundation of our faith  
 for as Paul says if Christ be not risen  
 then is our faith vain and our preaching vain.  
 If anyone could successfully dispute the  
 resurrection, the Christian faith used in time  
 disappears like fairy tales disappear when  
 children grow up.

3. Many of the sermons that will be  
 preached today will have the resurrection  
 as their theme. Let us break with  
 tradition and retire on steps a  
 little. Let us go back to ~~the~~ <sup>Good Friday</sup>

and to the three crosses on Calvary.  
 Let us not forget that there were three  
 - the cross of Christ in the centre, with  
 that of a malefactor on his right-hand  
 side & that of another malefactor on his  
 left-hand.

3. It is interesting to see how these malefactors  
 are dealt with in the Gospel.

In the Gospel of Mark & John they are  
 mentioned in passing as it were, just  
 the fact is stated that they were crucified  
 together with Christ & placed on on each side.  
 St Matthew also mentions this fact but  
 adds that they also joined in the satirical  
 remarks that were directed against Christ  
 by the crowd.

"He saved himself others, himself he cannot save  
 b. He trusted in God, let him deliver him now  
 c. Then that destroyed the temple & rebuildeth  
 it in three days save thyself  
 Matthew says "And the thieves also, which  
 were crucified with him, cast the same in  
 his teeth

Jesus gives a fuller account of what actually happened. He distinguishes between the two thieves. They did not address the same remarks to Christ. It is one of them who said "If thou be Christ, save thyself & us"

But the other rebuked him saying But thou dost not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation.

And we indeed truly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man has 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 "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

There are three things noteworthy in the words of the malefactor

- In spite of the fact that he was a bad person, had lead a life which ended in the punishment reserved for the worst transgressors he still feared God. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". As long as a

person still has the fear of God in him,  
there is still hope for him.

2. We see this in the fact that he  
recognised the justice of the punishment  
meted out to him. "For we receive  
the due reward of our deeds". This is  
the first law of penitence - for us to  
recognise the enormity of our deeds  
and the justice of the punishment that  
follows them. "The wages of sin is  
death". It is when we recognise this  
fact that we are on the road of salvation.

3. This man did not ~~ask~~ unlike the other, ask  
Christ to save him from his cross  
He simply said "Remember me when  
thou comest into thy kingdom". He asked  
for nothing more than to be thought of  
kindly. He knew that Christ for his  
righteous life deserved surely receive  
a crown of glory - he would enter into  
the kingdom of God. And he says in  
your moment of victory and success  
think of those of us who have made

a mess of our lives.

And what was Christ's response. As usual  
His response was immediate,

"Today" — not tomorrow, not "after you  
have proved that your repentance is  
genuine" but "today thou shalt be  
with me in paradise!"

1. How different Christ's approach to the sinner  
is from ours. What do we do when  
we find people in trouble. We scold,  
we jeer, we add to the punishment.  
They are already suffering, we pride  
ourselves on not being as other men  
are. We do everything except to comfort  
and to save. Christ teaches  
us a lesson in the right attitude  
towards those who have fallen.

2. Secondly Christ teaches us to think  
of the sufferings of others even when we  
are suffering ourselves. If we had  
been in that position we would have  
adopted the attitude of "Every man for

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himself. We would have replied "How do you think I can help you when I am in such trouble myself." That may be man's way of doing things but Christ's way is to think of others first all the time to go the second mile, to love our enemies, to befriend them who spitefully use us. It is not an easy way, but it is Christ's way. It is the way His followers are expected to go.

At this Easter time when we are thinking so joyfully of the mighty Resurrection of Christ let us ask God to give us grace to remember:

1. That the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom
2. That the wages of sin is death - that ~~is~~ the only thing we are entitled to receive in this world is the "due reward of our deeds"
3. That if we repent of our sins we have a Saviour who can come to aid, not tomorrow but "today".

Today if ye will hear him harder  
not your hearts. He is able to save  
unto the uttermost.