



*39 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. 40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. 42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. 43 And Jesus said unto him, **Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.** (Luke 23:39-43)*

Blinded by some black shroud over the boy's head, he could not see the peril of his condition. Blinded by fear and shame, his recollection of recent events were lost in the mist of confusion. The shroud was held in place by a rope that circled the young man's neck. There seemed to be a large knot in the rope slightly off-center of the back of his neck – the ingenious work of the executioner's art designed to twist the head and snap the neck at the ropes end. When the boy attempted to remove that shroud, he discovered that he was helpless to do so as his hands and arms were shackled. Neither could he walk for his feet and legs were likewise tightly fastened together. In fact, he was helpless to do anything but stand where he had been bound – much like the thief on the cross.

The first memories of his childhood flooded his mind. He recalled the loving caresses of a dear mother comforting his fevered brow during some youthful illness. His mind wandered from home to places quite distant from home and its base of love and kindness. He had experienced early success at sports and even scholarship having gained entrance to a prestigious university; but he was soon disappointed with the false facade of academia. Moreover, he found himself surrounded by others whose souls were devoid of the wholesome values of family and polite charms.

There were voices mixed together about him.

Almost as in a dream, he heard the voice of some aged man reading a Psalm which he had not heard in a very long time. . . . and there arose the confused murmur of voices that seemed to surround the planks upon which he stood that were angry and condemning. There were a few voices of pity and compassion; but others uttered vicious cursings and condemnation. These latter voices far outnumbered the former ones.

What could all this mean, he wondered. Only segments of the utterances found reception in the young man's awareness: "*The Lord is my shepherd....*" some tender old voice read. "*Thief!*" shouted some hoarse voice "*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures*" "*Murderer!*" "*But he is just a boy!*" some feminine voice proclaims. "*Guilty as mud!*" is the harsh response from some throaty fellow. "*He preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies....*"

Another clear but dispassionate voice makes a very official observation: "*It is almost time....one minute to go. No word from the governor. Prepare for the final disposition of the prisoner.*" "*And I shall dwell in the House of the Lord forever and ever. AMEN!*" "*My son, may the Lord have mercy upon your soul,*" pronounces the kind old voice. "*But that is it!*" thought the young man. "*I need MERCY!*"

Thousands of thoughts and memories built to a crescendo in his tortured mind. Thoughts of love, hope, faith, home and Gospel truths, long forgotten that he had heard in his tender young years. Now his life was revealed to him in its totality of ruin. There were no more excuses or denials. Yes, he was Guilty as charged, and of far more than that with which he was charged. He was now helpless to do anything to merit salvation. His hands and feet were as immobile as the thief on the cross who appealed for pardon from the suffering Christ! "*Mercy, Lord. Have mercy on my soul!*" the young man silently prayed. Suddenly, the shroud was jerked from over his head. He was surprised to see himself on some sort of pedestal elevated some distance above the ground. His confused and terrified mind did not remember what circumstances had brought him here. There were a multitude of cruel faces surrounding him, looking up in hideous anticipation. But the nearest was a kind and loving face - that of his old and weary mother standing ten feet below in front of the gallows erected in his honor.

"*You are Indeed a lucky fellow, young man!*" a finely uniformed man proclaims. "*The Governor's pardon came just in the nick of time,*" the man says as he removes the noose from around his neck.

The pardon was full and complete. He was free to go to those who loved him first, and he did. Never was he so happy, and never so light of foot.

The coroner, properly attired in black, removed the body of a young man from beneath the ten-foot gallows and returned it to the morgue where it would await a pauper's burial. But the young man was no longer a pauper. He spent that bright and beautiful morning with His Savior - and he did, indeed, dwell in the House of the Lord forever and ever.

Do you wonder who this young man was? It was YOU! It was ME! And every other who passes from mortality to glorious salvation in Christ - even if at the last minute! We were, in a word, as good as dead! We were blinded by the allurements of the world. We were fettered by wicked and unwholesome desires. We could do not good or righteous work. It was only the GRACE and MERCY of God that lifted the veil and loosed the fetters. Now, we are freed by that perfect Law of Liberty which is our Lord Jesus Christ!