

GOD'S WORK OF CONVERSION

Luke 23:39-43

This account in the final days of the Lord Jesus records the story of two men who faced their own death while our Lord was suffering and dying on the Cross. What makes this narrative significantly instructive is that it teaches us the truth that what ultimately sets apart a defiant heart from a tender and believing heart is God's work of conversion in a sinner's heart. Let's consider the three components of God's converting work as exhibited in the penitent heart of a regenerated sinner.

1. A Genuine

When God converts a sinner, He generates a genuine fear of God in the individual's heart (Luke 23:39-40). Unlike the unrepentant criminal who kept reviling the Lord Jesus, the penitent thief exhibited a genuine fear of God manifested in his heightened awareness of God's holy judgment and his humble admission of guilt (Romans 3:14,18; 2:5,8 Matthew 10:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Luke 18:13).

2. A Glorious

When God converts a sinner, the Holy Spirit awakens his mind to behold the awesome glory and amazing beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ. From seeing oneself as totally guilty before a righteous God and totally deserving of God's wrath, the repentant criminal turned his gaze upon the majesty of the Lord Jesus (Luke 23:41-42). His glorious vision of Jesus' perfect righteousness and mighty power to save turned his despair to a joyful assurance of Jesus' forgiveness and mercy (Luke 23:4,14-15,22,41,47; 1 Peter 2:22-23; Luke 1:35; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 1:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Matt. 1:21)

3. A Great

When God converts a sinner, He grants the repentant sinner His great promise of salvation. (Luke 23:43). The Lord Jesus assured the penitent criminal that he would be with Christ in paradise on that very day. This great promise of salvation is a promise of immediate, personal and heavenly salvation (John 17:24; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Rev. 2:7).

In the morning, this criminal was in prison. At noon, he's hanging on the cross. By sundown, when he breathed his last, this converted criminal went to heaven to be with our Lord Jesus forever. As one author said, "In the morning, he's in guilt. In the afternoon, he's in grace. By the evening, he's in glory." What a gospel! What a Savior! May we then never boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! (Galatians 6:14)