

Luke 23 – Right Relationships: The Greatest Power

Book (1127-1130) – Matthew 27:44, Luke 23:32-43

Hook (1130-1135) – A missionary in East Asia was teaching the Bible when a Hindu brought in someone who was sick. Despite prayer, the sick man died. The missionary had been teaching doctrine, propositional truth, but the Hindu rejected the gospel because it did not have power.

A patient of mine had lost family members recently, her daughter had renounced her faith, and her other daughter had earlier tried to take her own life. She was paralyzed with worry and had not the power to be free.

Several friends in their early and mid-30s are asking God why He has denied them a spouse.

Some people believe that only the material universe exists and that real power is only that power which changes the material world. Christians accept a universe of matter and spirit and understand that the greatest power in both realms is the power to restore relationships between God, man, and the rest of Creation.

Power to Change Yourself
Power to Know God

Right Relationships: the Greatest Power

Power to Influence Others
Power to Rise Again

Look (1135-1150)

Power to Change Yourself

See yourself as you are – The man thought about his life...

1. He had brought shame to his family and friends. In modern times guilt for violating universal, impersonal laws is a primary feeling, but in ancient societies shame for the destruction of relationships is paramount.
2. He bore the guilt of breaking Roman law, for which he was being crucified.
3. He had the guilt of breaking God's law, for which he faced final judgment.
4. He had inflicted pain and loss on others which could never be undone.

Accept this reality – faced with such hopeless conditions...

1. He could have resisted, arguing that his actions were not so bad, or that they were not his fault. He could have chosen to see himself as a victim rather than a perpetrator.
2. He could have despaired, slumping into death.
3. He could have begged for mercy, asking the Romans and Jews present to take him down from the cross.
4. He could have accepted his responsibility and his punishment.

Change – He repented of the evil in his life.

The robber probably heard about Jesus while he was in Jerusalem, since news about Him was everywhere. However we have no evidence that Jesus or the disciples ever spoke to the robber. His change of heart was the miraculous work of the Spirit of God.

Illustration

Discussion Questions/Application

Perhaps our sins are pride and fear rather robbery and murder. When faced with our sin, we have the same options that this criminal did. What have we done? Give examples.

What do we want to change? How have we tried to change it in the past? How should we try to change in the future?

Power to Influence Others

See them as they are – The man thought about the other robber...

1. He had brought shame to his family and friends. In modern times guilt for violating universal, impersonal laws is a primary feeling, but in ancient societies shame for the destruction of relationships is paramount.
2. He bore the guilt of breaking Roman law, for which he was being crucified.
3. He had the guilt of breaking God's law, for which he faced final judgment.
4. He had inflicted pain and loss on others which could never be undone.

Accept the reality of their condition

1. He could have denied the extremity of the other man's condition in the same way that he could have denied his own.
2. He could have ignored the other man's plight and kept quiet. He was near death and had nothing to gain by publicly rebuking the other robber.
3. He could have spoken out against the actions of the other robber and tried to get him to change his ways.

I am sitting in a quiet study sipping tea and considering the options available to the repentant thief. In reality the man did not calmly consider his options and select the best. He was in agony of body and soul, facing inevitable and eternal damnation. His actions were barely his own, the Spirit of God was working within him mightily.

Influence – He accepted reality, and then he rebuked the other thief for insulting Jesus. In a real sense the man on the cross was evangelizing the other man on the cross. We have no evidence that the other robber accepted Christ based on this testimony, but this story has clearly influenced millions of lives over the past two millennia.

Illustration "PICTURES"

Discussion Questions/Application

Do we see others as they are, or as we would like them to be? Are our enemies worse and our friends better than they actually are? Do we assume that other people are worse so that we feel better? Are our relationships with others a top priority?

Power to Know God

See Jesus Christ as He is

1. He had done mighty works and spoke powerful words in Jerusalem and throughout Palestine.
2. Many people followed Him and believed that He was the Messiah.
3. The Jewish religious leaders stood in front of them mocking Him, though clearly He was innocent.
4. The primary accusation against Jesus was that He was the King of the Jews, the Chosen One of God.

5. Jesus was about to die. Yet in some way, Jesus Christ would have a kingdom of some kind.

Accept Him as He is

1. Whatever His kingdom would be, Jesus could grant admission into it.
2. There was no place that this robber more wanted to be than with this amazing man.

Change – The robber asked Jesus to remember him in His kingdom.

Illustration "PICTURES"

Discussion Questions/Application

Do we see Jesus as He is? Do we hear the world mocking Him? Do we see the Church denying Him? Do we deny Him? Do we ask to be where He is?

Power to Rise Again

Finally, God gives His people the ultimate power over the material world, the power to rise again after death.

See Jesus Christ as He is – Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, rose again in a glorified body and forever defeated death. People who deny Jesus’ resurrection do so on one premise, that men don’t rise from the dead. They never consider that Jesus was the God-Man. As such, He had to rise from the dead.

Accept Him as He is – Because He did, those who follow Him, who do as this criminal did, will also live after death.

Change – Live our lives in the power of Jesus’ resurrection, and the certainty that we will as well.

Illustration "PICTURES"

Discussion Questions/Application

What is resurrection power? No fear of death, no reason to worry, and complete faith in God.

How shall we live in it?

Took (1150-1200)

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Verdict – What do you want them to DO as a result of the truths they have just received?

Additional Reading – MDHarrisMD.com.

Invitation

Closing prayer