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THE THIEF

“He said to Jesus, Remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom. And he [Jesus:: said to him, Indeed I say to thee this day, thou shalt be with me in Paradise.”—LUKE 23:42,43—Diaglott

Those who consider salvation to be an escape from everlasting torture to a paradise of pleasure, and dependent only on accidental circumstances of favor, see in this narrative the doctrine of *election* exemplified—Jesus, being pleased by the consoling words of the one thief, *elected* him to heaven, and equally elected that the other should roast to all eternity, unpitied, unrelieved. Truly if God has made salvation such a *lottery*, such a *chance* thing, those who believe it to be such, should have little to say against church lotteries, and less against worldly ones.

But this is not the case. This scripture has evidently been much misunderstood. To get its true import, let us take in the surroundings and connections.

Jesus had just been condemned, and was now being executed on the charge of treason to Caesar’s government, in saying that *He* was a king; though he had told them that his kingdom was “not of this world.” There upon the cross above his head was the inscription of his charged crime, written in three languages: “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.” All knew of his claims and derided him, except one of the thieves crucified with him. Doubtless he had heard of Jesus and of his wonderful character, and said in his heart: This is truly a strange and wonderful man; who can know that there is no foundation to his claims? He certainly lives close to God; I will speak to him in sympathy; it can do no harm. Then he rebuked his companion, mentioning the innocence of Jesus, and, turning to Jesus, the conversation noted above took place.

We cannot suppose that this thief had any correct or definite idea of Jesus—nothing more than a mere feeling that he was about to die, and a straw of hope was better than nothing. To give him credit for more would be to place him *in faith* ahead of all Apostles and followers of Jesus, who at this time had left him and fled, and who three days after said: “We [had:: trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.”

We can have no doubt as to the import of his petition; he meant that whenever Jesus reached his

kingdom power he desired favor. Now, note Jesus' answer. He does not say that he has no kingdom, but, on the contrary, by his response he indicates that the thief's request was proper. The word translated "*verily,*" or "*indeed,*" is the Greek word "*amen,*" and signifies "*so be it,*" as you have asked: "I say to thee this day [this dark day, when it *seems* as though I am an impostor and about to die as a felon], thou shalt be with me in Paradise."

Now, the substance of this is, that when the Lord has established his kingdom, the thief will be remembered and be in Paradise. Notice that we have changed the comma from before to after to-day. This makes it perfectly clear and reasonable. Jesus might have told the thief more if he had chosen. He might have told him that the reason he should be privileged to come to Paradise was because he was paying his *ransom* then and there—dying for his sins. He might have told him further, that he was dying for and ransoming also the *other thief*, as well as the whole gaping and deriding multitude before him; as well as the millions yet unborn and millions then entombed. We know this, because we know that "Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every *man,*" and that as in Adam, or on his account, all die, even so in Christ, or on his account, shall all be made alive and be privileged to come back to that Edenic condition forfeited by the first man's sin, redeemed for men by Christ's righteous sacrifice.

As already shown, the garden of Eden was but an illustration of the perfect and beautiful earth when fully released from the curse. The word Paradise is of Arabic origin, not Greek—it signifies a *garden*. The Septuagint renders Gen. 2:8 thus: "God planted a *paradise* in Eden." When Jesus has established his kingdom, bound evil, etc., this earth will become a *paradise*, and the two thieves and all that are in their graves shall come into it. And by becoming obedient to its laws they may live forever in it. We doubt not, however, that the kind words spoken in that dark hour to the Lord of glory, will no more lose a *suitable reward* than the gift of a cup of cold water, or other small kindnesses done to those whom this King is "not ashamed to call his *brethren.*"

But have we the right to change the comma? Certainly, the punctuation of the Bible is not inspired. The writers of the Bible used *no punctuation*. It was invented about four hundred years ago. It is merely a modern convenience, and should be so used as to bring out sense and harmony with all other Scriptures. This harmony and sense is obtained only by the punctuation we have given above. To read it as usually punctuated, it would teach that Jesus and the thief went away somewhere that day, which is contrary to the following scriptures, which read carefully: Luke 24:46; John 20:17; John 3:13. In the latter text note that the words, "*which is in heaven,*" are an interpolation as shown by the oldest MSS.

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