

# THE PENITENT THIEF,

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“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”—Luke xxiii. 42-43.

Everything connected with Christ is precious to the believer, and especially, every word uttered upon the cross when the weight of a world's woe lay upon his heart. His dying words were few, short, for his agony was too great, for continuous discourse, but they were rich in blessing, and very expressive of the reigning disposition of his nature. It is said that the ruling passion is strong in death, that then the artist is busy with his sketches while his thin fingers are grasping at shadows; that the general is engaged (as in the case of the Roman Marius) in his last mortal hours in giving orders to his troops, and the mother clings to her child, as she supposes, in her vacant embrace. And so, also, we see the ruling passion of Christ, which was love to the souls of men, strong in death. We have an affecting instance in this passage of his tender mercy, and his ready ear being lent to the sinner, and at the same time a remarkable instance, the most remarkable upon record, of a sinner being enabled to exercise faith and expectation in his redeeming grace. We have the Saviour upon the one hand, shewing that his love for the race was strong in death; and we have the sinner upon the other, ready at one moment to join with the murderous crowd that surged like angry waves around the cross—to join with them in their resentments and revilings, but the next touched by a mysterious power, so that all his enmity is slain, his passions are laid, and as a new-born babe he sincerely desires the milk of the word. A ray of divine light suddenly enters his darkened mind, touches the secret springs of his nature, opens to him new views of

himself, of the blessed Saviour that hung by his side, and that eternal world into which he was so soon to enter. Everything connected with the conversion of this man was remarkable. His faith in Christ under such circumstances was remarkable; his prayer was remarkable; his testimony in behalf of Christ was remarkable; and his acceptance on the part of Christ, so ready, so tender, so full, was also remarkable.

I. *His Faith.* How came this man to call Christ Lord, and how came he to speak of him having a kingdom? As yet no supernatural tokens of the greatness of the sufferer had appeared in the heavens above or in the earth beneath. No darkening of the sky, no rending of the rocks. His disciples were gone,—his friends silent—his enemies everywhere triumphant.—There was nothing in the scene of suffering that was going on to show that he was other than an ordinary mortal. Whence then had this man that knowledge necessary for faith in Jesus? Had pious parents in his early youth instructed him in divine things? had a godly mother watched over his outgoings and incomings when he a free and innocent child played beneath the ancestral vine and fig tree?—had she sung to his young ear those old psalms that speak of a coming Saviour, who was to die for our sins and rise again for our justification? Or had he himself walked with Jesus and beheld his glory, and heard him preach the gospel of his kingdom? We cannot tell, but we know that as a Jew he must often have been in the Synagogue and heard the presiding elder read the Law and the Prophets, and how that