

“The Outlaw Who Got In”

Luke 23:32-43

Series: Outlaws and Outcasts Week 5. The Thief on the Cross

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What did I see in Him?

A King?

The words above His head said He was a King.

He was raised on high above the crowds.

Not on a balcony giving a speech.

Not on a throne handing down commands.

But on a cross.

The crowds gathered around did not revere Him or cheer for Him.

They came to insult Him and watch Him die.

His royal robe lay on the ground – a prize to be won in a crap shoot

His crown lay on his head

A crown not of gold but of sharp and piercing thorns.

He did not look like a King.

What did I see in Him?

A Conquering General?

Soldiers stood at attention at His feet.

Their duty was not to defend Him but to destroy Him.

He did have blood on His hands.

It was not the blood of defeated enemies

Not the blood of nations subjugated by His sword.

No, the blood on His hands was His own.

He did not look like a Conquering General.

What did I see in Him?

A Miracle Worker?

I heard the rumors:

How he healed multitudes,

Opened the eyes of the blind,

Cured diseases of body, mind and spirit

Silenced the raging storms,

Even raised some from the dead.

He did not look so powerful now:

Beaten, bruised, bleeding, dying

He was a patient in need of intensive care not a Great Physician

He was a victim, not a Victor.

He could not save Himself from death.

He did not look like a Miracle Worker.
The crowds, the priests, the soldiers all saw Him as an Outlaw.
A rebel against Caesar
A blasphemer against God
He broke Rome's law.
He broke God's law.
That's why the justice of Caesar crucified Him.
That's why the judgment of God condemned Him.
The Law of Moses says: "Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse"
(Deuteronomy 21:23).
So this Outlaw became an Outcast.
Crucified on a blood-stained rock called the Skull
Outside the city walls
On the edge of the city dump
The crowd around our crosses shouted at Him:
Prove yourself!
Heal yourself!
Save yourself if you are the Christ, the Chosen One of God!
But He never did.
Even my partner in crime hurled insults at Him:
"Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"
Then, He said something which made no sense:
"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"
Why would He forgive us?
What did we not know?
What did we not see?
What did I see in Him?
Not much...except this: I knew He was innocent.
Many innocent people are put to death.
Yet He was more than just an innocent man paying for another's crime.
It seemed he was paying for everyone's crime...yours and mine.
He became an outlaw to save all the outlaws.
He became an outcast to bring back all the outcasts.
Long ago I gave up on God.
I forgot all the Scripture I learned as a child.
Yet in those last moments, when my whole life paraded before me,
I remembered some obscure words – prophecies about:
A silent man who is insulted and despised
An innocent man who is unjustly executed
A spotless lamb who is led to the slaughter
A scapegoat who is cast out bearing the sins of all people
A condemned man who's death wipes away sin and sets us free.
This is the King who liberates all nations
The One Chosen by God to bear our curse
The Christ who saves us by not saving Himself
And I was the only one there that day who could see it in Him.

“Don’t you fear God?” I shouted back at my friend on the far cross.
It’s time to get honest. We deserve death.
But this man has done nothing wrong.”
Then turning to the man between us I said,
“Jesus, some day when you receive your Kingdom, please remember me.”

In His agony, He turned His head and looked at me.
As His eyes fixed upon me I wondered:
What did He see in me?
All my life everyone told me I’d come to no good.
The neighbors, my teachers, my parents, gave up on me.
I was an outcast
So I became an outlaw
The anger and rage burned within me.
It came out of me in theft, violence and destruction.
It was the only way I knew how to deal with the world.
They called me an “evil-doer”
My gang used me
And when I was in trouble, they abandoned me.
Finally the authorities captured me
And decided it would be best to destroy me.
I deserved this punishment.
I earned it.

So what did He see in me as I hung on my cross?

His eyes could see what no other saw
Not the authorities, my parents or my partners in crime.
Not even me.

What did He see in me?

Nothing much – except this:
He saw in me a treasure, long buried and forgotten,
Yet in His eyes I was of infinite value and worth.
He was willing to give all He had to ransom me.
He saw in me a seed, trampled, choked and dying,
Yet in His eyes capable of receiving new life and growing thirty, sixty, one hundredfold.
He saw in me a lost lamb wandering in the valley of the shadow of death
Yet in His eyes I was precious enough to make the angels sing for joy
He saw in me a lost son who ran away from His Heavenly Father,
Yet His eyes saw past the stench and slop I wallowed in.
In His eyes I am a beloved Child of God
Still deeply loved, embraced, and welcome home.

I had given up on God.

Yet in that one instant, in that one gaze,
I could see in His eyes that God never gave up on me.
With parched cracked lips He said, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

What did I have to offer Him?

Nothing – I was almost on my last breath.
Yet He asked nothing from me.
Instead, He gave me new life in His Kingdom.
And I would not have to wait for it.
I would not have to look for it.
He would take me there Himself.
Today.

And if you could see me today in paradise,

You would not recognize me.
I have become what no one could see in me,
No one except Him.
All my evil deeds
The record of all my wrongs
A lifetime of sin
Is washed and cleansed
And I am forever free.

I am the outlaw who got in.

And if I can get in
Then so shall you, if you turn to Him.