

Today You Will Be With Me In Paradise

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[0 : 00] You will find the words of our text tonight in the Gospel of Luke and in chapter 23. And looking particularly at verse 43 where we read.

And he, Jesus said to him, Truly I say to you today, You will be with me in paradise. Today you will be with me in paradise. I want to look at this portion of scripture under two headings tonight.

And there are two sets of words again. The words of the penitent thief on the cross. And the words of the Lord to the penitent thief on the cross.

This morning we looked at all that took place in the first part of this portion from verse 34.

[1 : 09] Where Christ says at the beginning of his first seven says, Father forgive them for they know not what they do. And now when we move on tonight to the second say, Today you will be with me in paradise.

There are very few people in this world who wake up in the morning and they say to themselves, This is my last day in this world.

Very few people that wake up knowing that they will not sleep again in this world. That death will come to them that very same day.

But this was the experience of our Savior on that day. He knew that this was going to be his last day before he experienced death in this world.

And we read in this portion of scripture that not only he, but also the thief, also came to know that. Because Christ told him that he would be with him today in paradise.

[2 : 30] We live in a world where we say and we promise ourselves years. And we live our lives as so death is the furthest thing from us imaginable.

And we think to ourselves that we can be ready for it and that we have plenty time. I'm amazed that I'm standing here tonight preaching the word of God.

As I remember a day in my own experience, we're travelling to Harris to work. Going up a hill and round a corner I came head to head with a 40 foot fully loaded articulated lorry coming down the hill. And the crash happened very quickly and pushed away when I was driving right back to within an inch or two of going down the edge of a mountainside.

And I can tell you that when I break at the age of 18 and watch this huge articulated lorry coming straight towards me, I can put my hand on my heart and say that I did not call out for the mercy of God.

[3 : 57] But I closed my eyes and this is the words that came to me, hell here I come. In that moment I was convinced I was going to die and I knew I wasn't ready.

And I had no time to cry out for mercy. But I was wrong. Instead of being seconds for me left to live in this world, the Lord has spared me another 30 years since that day.

We have grown up hearing the story of the two men that were crucified with Christ. And we have regarded and known one to be called from our earliest memory the penitent thief.

So that's what we will call this man tonight, the penitent thief. The word penitent means simply to feel sorrow or to show regret for things that we have done in the past.

To be bluntly to be repentant as this man goes. But sometimes as I've said we think that if we leave it to the end that that will give us enough time.

[5 : 18] But that's far too dangerous a thing to do with regard to our never dying souls. And we give the Lord thanks tonight that we can read of this account where one was saved with just minutes, perhaps an hour, left of his life on mercy's ground.

And we give thanks to the Lord that these things do happen. But we believe that there are few and far between. Let's look at then the first heading tonight, the words of the penitent thief on the cross.

And as we read of his conversation with Christ, I want to bring to your attention another conversation that he was having before he spoke to Christ. Because as we read this portion of scripture it comes across to us almost as if this was the better of the two thieves.

But when we read the other versions, the other portions of scripture, the other gospels, we read something very very interesting. Matthew's account in chapter 27 and in verse 44 this is what we read. And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

[6 : 49] Luke does not give an account of the mockery of the two thieves. He gives but the account of one thief mocky.

And Luke is the only one of the four gospels that gives an account of this man coming to faith in Christ. But let's look at what we've gone through already this morning. First there was some mocking from the crowds, those that stood by.

Then there was some mocking by the Jewish people. Then there was some mocking by all the rulers. And then there was some mocking by all the soldiers.

And as we said in the morning, things are progressively getting more and more horrendous for our Savior on the cross. And just when we think that things can't get any worse for him, we find that the two people on either side of him join in with everybody else.

And spewing forth their renown and their hatred at Christ. One on either side. As if all that our Savior was not hearing from the multitudes of crowd gathering wasn't enough.

[8 : 04] Both the thieves start on. And both these thieves are on the very brink of eternity. Both of these thieves have just got minutes left to live, hours at most.

And yet it would appear that they have no concern for their sales, as they are caught up with the awful mocking of Jesus Christ.

Notice what we read in verse 30. One of the criminals who was hand railed at him saying, are you not the Christ?

See how he is questioned. Christ is quenched question. And in the previous verses we hear of the other saying, if he is the Christ of God, if you are the king of the Jews.

This other version here the ESV says, are you not the Christ? But in other versions it says, if you are the Christ. See this Atanik if? And it's from every single party, every single group of people that are attacking Christ with this venomous hatred.

[9 : 22] They are all approaching him and saying to him in the same way, if you are, if you are, if you are. And these two thieves carry on in the same way. They continue in the pattern that all the others have carried on with their mockery of Christ.

Why did the thieves hate Christ so much that they would join in in such a way? What have Christ ever done to them that they felt so compelled to join in this unity of hatred towards Ossiria?

Well the only thing that I can think of is as we focus upon three men being crucified, all the attention is given to the worst of all in the middle, Ossiria.

And it would seem as if the crowds and the multitudes gathered there are little or showing little or no interest in the thief on the left side or the thief on the right side.

And this further antagonises these men as their lives come to an end and they see Christ in the middle getting all the attention.

[10 : 41] And this I believe is something that intensifies their hatred for Christ in such a way that they feel somehow or other neglected or somehow or other as if people just couldn't care less about them.

And so they join in the mockery. It's so easy for us to do what everybody else does, isn't it? It's been the pattern of our lives from when we were going to school with kids.

How easy it is just to do what everybody else does. So very difficult to stand out alone and to not be ashamed to be different from the earliest stages in life until the latter stages in life.

But you see it is not by chance in some way or another that Christ is placed between these two thieves as we spoke upon in the morning. Little did Pilate know as he ordered Christ to be crucified in the middle of these two thieves to mock Christ and to ridicule Christ that he was actually just fulfilling the same scripture we spoke about in the morning in Isaiah chapter 53 where we read these words in verse 12 of Christ being numbered with the transgressors and yet he bore the sins of me making intercession for the transgressors.

Isn't it remarkable that here is Pilate seeking to shame Christ, seeking to make him look like a fool and yet at the same time he doesn't realise that what he's actually doing is fulfilling the words of the prophet from hundreds of years ago.

[12 : 41] Of what unmeasurable depths of suffering our blessed saviour has gone through for his people, for you and for me.

What depths think of his birth surrounded by cattle? Think of how he came into this world, for the beasts of the field, think of how he leaves this world between two thieves.

Do we even begin to understand what he endured for our eternal hope of glory and of being his people?

Notice when you look at these two thieves, before the change comes into the life of the penitent thief, they are both equal in every way.

Notice what we see that they are both sinful, they are both equally wicked, they are both equally sinful, they both equally deserve to be put to death for what they have committed, sins they have committed.

[13 : 48] They were both dying in excruciating pain, each of them going through the same horrendous experience. They both heard and saw exactly the same thing.

They both urgently needed forgiveness for their sins, yet only one, turns to Christ. And yet both witnessed and heard everything that Christ did and everything that Christ said.

Isn't it frightening that we can reach the stage in life where death is nearly upon us and still there is no interest, there is no respect, there is no desire whatsoever to worship this Christ.

So let's look at then the repentance of this man, this penitent thief. And we see that the very first thing that he does as we read this portion of scripture, his very first concern, his very first notable step in becoming a Christian is to notice that what he is doing is wrong.

And so for whatever reason this man stops joining in with the crowd. And this man surveys and this man is watching the other thief and he listens to the words of the other thief in anger and in hatred towards Christ as he stops himself doing what he was doing.

[15 : 29] We read that in verse 40 and then we find that he rebuked him saying, do you not fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation.

What made him stop his venom towards Christ? What made him rebuke the other thief?

Well, we just don't know that. There could be very many different reasons for that. Perhaps this penitent thief was somebody who somewhere down the line had heard Christ preach.

Perhaps this penitent thief had witnessed one of his miracles. Perhaps this penitent thief had heard all the answers that Christ had given Pilate and was now thinking of them over and over.

Perhaps he was just focused on the words that were written above the head of Christ. This is king of the Jews. Perhaps it was the words we looked at in the morning that were now starting to be blessed to him.

[16 : 40] Father forgive them for they know not what they do. But this man stops all of a sudden and this man changes all of a sudden.

And he realises his need of Christ all of a sudden. And his desire is to stop doing what he was doing.

And for whatever time he had left to honour the Lord. It is most probable that this man was a Jewish man.

But whatever made him stop we know this that the Holy Spirit is now working in his heart. The Holy Spirit is causing unrest there.

And the Holy Spirit is speaking to him. As the Spirit spoke to every single one of us at the very beginning of our Christian life.

[17 : 42] As the word was being blessed to us. As we were being challenged through the things of eternity. And how many times I am sure like me in years gone by before the Lord had mercy on us God spoke to us.

And I said and I am sure you were the same. Not yet Lord. I wonder if there is anybody here and the Holy Spirit is speaking to them tonight.

And you still haven't fully trusted in Christ as your Savior. Well this man does. The Spirit is at work within him.

It is the Holy Spirit that is now speaking to him. His conscience has been preached. And now he looks at Christ and he looks at him in a different way.

And he looks at him with a different attitude completely. Notice what he doesn't say to the other thief in rebuking him. He doesn't say to him, do you not fear punishment?

[18 : 48] He says to him, do you not fear God? This man knows as he is dying that this is the Son of God.

This man knows that Christ is who he claims to be. He may not have great understanding like you and I have. But he has enough simple faith to stop mocking and cursing Christ.

And to have a conversation with the Lord. He knows as a sight of his own sinfulness as he stops his mockery.

He is now truly aware on the cross of who he is and what he is. The book of Proverbs tells us the well-known version in chapter 9 and in verse 10.

We all know it. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And the knowledge of the Holy One is inside.

[20 : 00] How many of us can relate to the fear of the Lord in our own lives when first Christ started to work in our hearts? Here's this man with the fear of the Lord in his heart now.

His conscience fully alive even though he is in great pain and anguish. He knows that he is in the same condemnation as Christ.

And he says to the other thief, do you not fear since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? Yes, they are under the same condemnation.

They are all condemned to death but not death for the same reason. Their reasons for being put to death is completely different to the reason of Christ being put to death.

So first he challenges, he stops and then he rebukes the other thief. Isn't that incredible?

[21 : 04] What strength he was given, what grace he was given immediately. Some of us can remember when we were younger and when we were living lives that weren't to the glory of God.

And some of us I'm sure like I was. I remember when the Lord started to work in my life and I started going to the prayer meeting and I went to see my friends and I went to phone my friends to explain to them that I wouldn't be going out with them any more at the weekend.

They were so shocked, they were so amazed, they were gobsmacked. I'm sure that was your experience too for many of you.

While I tell you this other thief must have been gobsmacked, shocked, amazed, to all of a sudden have been rebuked by another dying thief in such a way as this.

And then in verse 41 we read of the thief's confession. We indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.

[22 : 18] He is confessing that they deserve to be put to death for what they have done, but this man in the middle, he has done nothing wrong.

He makes no excuses. He's not there being crucified saying this isn't fair. This isn't right. Give me a second chance.

He's there being crucified and he's accepted the fact that he's getting his just rewards.

And then after his confession here we read of another confession. And this one is even more incredible. He has a second confession, the confession of Christ's innocence.

This man has done nothing wrong. And then when you read through the Gospels, you find that this man, this penitent thief, this unnamed man, joins the list now of a whole group of other people who have said the same thing of Christ, and yet Christ is still being crucified.

[23 : 38] Because Herod has said this, Pilate has said this, Pilate's wife has said this, Judas Iscariot has said this, and now we find the penitent thief.

But even in the midst of all those people who have said Christ has done nothing wrong, Christ must still die on our behalf on the cross.

And furthermore to that in verse 42, we read this, and he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

He notices and he recognises something, that the Jewish people, that all the ruler, that all the people of the Sanhedrin, that all the people that were Roman soldiers, that all the people involved in the judicial system that sent in Christ to death, here is this thief, and he recognises something that nobody else recognises, the kingship of Christ.

Remember me when you come into your kingdom. Now you think of your Saviour there at that moment of time.

[25 : 03] You think of Christ, and you picture Him on the cross, in the midst of all that He has gone through, and you remember that Christ, the Saviour, is now deserted by His disciples.

They are nowhere to be seen, all be adjunct and back later. He is mocked by His own nation, not one of the Jewish people standing up for Him.

And not only that, but He is suffering, accused as being a pretender. And the only person there, who has any profession of faith in Christ, is this penitent thief, who but a short while prior, was mocking and ridiculing.

That's amazing grace. That's the very last person that you would have expected to give our Saviour any kind of encouragement on the cross.

But that is you the Lord used. And look at this thief's helplessness. Picture this thief now on the cross, being crucified.

[26 : 20] He is a man who is not going to be able to walk the paths of righteousness, because his feet are nailed to the cross.

He is not going to be able to do great things for the Lord with his hand or with his body, because his hands are nailed to the cross. He cannot, he does not have time to turn over a new leaf, or live a better life to honour the Saviour, because he is dying.

His healthless, hopeless situation. Is that not how we all come to Christ?

In a healthless, hopeless situation. Is that not how we came to Him on bended knees, saying, Lord, I am lost?

There is no hope for me, unless You helped me, unless You changed my life, unless You redeemed me.

[27 : 33] Those of us who are Christians, give thanks to the Lord that we were brought to that hopeless, healthless place that reduced us to bended knees in years gone past, pleading for the mercy of God.

Here we have the prayer of a dying sinner to a dying Saviour. It's as simple as that. And he seeks the mercy of God.

Here's a man who is dying on the cross, and he knows that Christ cannot help him in any way of his physical pain, but he knows that Christ can help him escape eternal pain.

An eternal ruin. And with that, he turns to Christ to speak to Him. And with that, he turns to Christ and he says, Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.

Lord, remember me into Your hands, I commit my kiss. It's a wonderful place to be when we realise that we can do nothing for ourselves unless Christ does it for us.

[28 : 59] For so many years of my life, I was convinced that it was my works that would get me to heaven and make me a good Christian.

But it's nothing to do with works. It's all to do with simple faith. And here this man declares that Christ indeed is a Messiah.

And he declares that Christ has a kingdom. And he declares that Christ has a throne, as he speaks to Him.

Here's a man who probably doesn't know much. He may not have great understanding of the kingship of Christ, of the kingdom of Christ, of the throne of Christ.

He may not have any understanding even when Christ speaks to him and says today, You will be with me in paradise. He may not have great understanding of these things.

[29 : 59] He may not have much in the way of understanding of Christ and His second coming.

But all we know about this man is that he knows that Christ has a kingdom and he decides to be part of that kingdom.

And he comes to the Lord and he pleads. And it is a pleading. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Whether he realises that it's at some point in the future or he realises that it's today, this man is dying. And this man now realises that all he wants to do is one desire is to be with Christ wherever Christ is to be found.

Well, it's that your desire tonight as our lives are heartling by as we've already seen a video reminding us this morning of the shoebox appeal of the fact that we are now into another season of the year, another month of the year, another year which is going by so very quickly.

[31 : 26] Where do we stand with regard to Christ as our lives are going by so very quickly? Let's look at then the second point.

The words of our Lord to the penitent thief on the cross. We've looked at what the penitent thief has said. Let's look for a moment at what Christ says back to you.

How Christ encourages them. What the Lord says. It's remarkable as we read this account and as we read the account of Christ being crucified.

It's remarkable His silence. Imagine on every side round the world everybody's throwing accusations and mockery.

Spewing the hatred. How difficult it is for us not to react. All he could hear was hatred in the midst of all that noise.

[32 : 33] But the minute a poor sinner cries out for mercy Christ replies straight away. Even in the midst of all that noise, even in the midst of all that shouting how Savior hears this pleading cry.

And it must have been but barely a whisper he had. As he is dying on the cross saying Lord remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Immediately Christ's reply truly I say to you today you will be with me in paradise. It's remarkable.

Even in the midst of all the pain and agony that our Savior is in His reply is immediate. You know when you who are in here tonight and you may not be a Christian yet.

And if you earnestly ask the Lord to come into your life and if you earnestly mean it it's not as if the Lord is going to say come back to me in three months.

[33 : 47] Come back to me when you're a better pusher. His reply is immediate. But it's only when we want it with all of our heart.

Fourteen years I spent praying for the Lord to come into my heart. Fourteen years I asked him to come in. But the Lord would not come in until I reached the point where I wanted him a hundred percent of my heart.

If we plead to the Lord to ask him to come into our lives and we're trying to hold on to one or two things that are off the world he's never going to come in.

It's all or nothing. And here is this man, one hundred percent, pleading for the mercy of God.

Christ answers his prayer in three ways as he answers the prayer of each and every single one of us in here that are saved by grace.

[34 : 50] He answers them first of all by hearing and he answers his prayer, our Savior. And then he pardons his guilty sins and then over and above that he promises them a reward and a place of paradise.

Exactly as he's promised us when our journey of faith began. The thief's prayer was great.

But you know this, the answer that the Lord gave him was greater still. He may not have understood much of the word paradise but I'll tell you one thing.

This thief understood what it meant, what these words with me meant. And that's all that was important to him.

The thief says to him, please let me come into your kingdom. Remember me when you go into your kingdom and this reply is, you will be with me.

[36 : 10] What comforting words this was. This man's salvation is now secure in the moments of Christ's great weakness.

What a Savior we have. What a Savior. And as we read further off the reply of Christ to him, truly I say to you today, you will be with me in paradise.

This goes back to what we were saying earlier on tonight, what we were praying about earlier on tonight. This word today, it's a remarkable word.

It's a word that tells us that this thief was going to die that day and be with the Lord. In a short while Christ would die and shortly after that the soldiers would come to break the legs of the other two thieves.

But see this word today. This word teaches us that purgatory is a lie. This word teaches us that there is no mysterious delay between the time of our death to the time when our eternal life begins.

[37 : 36] This word teaches us that there is no unconscious state or place that we go for a period or time. There's none of that.

Christ tells this man today and that day his soul went to be with the Lord. What's even more remarkable about this word today is that sometimes these people that were being crucified could live and could survive on the cross for two, three days before they eventually died from their injuries or from their thirst for malnutrition.

But Christ says to him today, Christ doesn't say to him tomorrow, Christ says to him today, he will be with me in paradise.

And little did the enemies of Christ know that in coming round to break the soldiers' legs that they were fulfilling a promise that Christ gave to this thief.

When Christ told him today, he will be with me in paradise. And here are one or two encouraging thoughts as we reflect on this penitent thief.

[39 : 19] Here is something to encourage us all, conversion with Christ as possible at any stage in life.

How we rejoice in that. Conversion with Christ as possible to the worst of sinners.

How we rejoice to that. You know when you think of this thief on the cross, and I mean this with all sincerity, while not seeking to offend anybody, but sacraments and ordinance doesn't come into his salvation.

This man dies without being a member of a church as we know it. This man dies without being an office bearer. This man dies without getting the privilege to hear the word of God preached in church.

This man, for all we know, may very well never have heard of him. This man had no time to be baptized. But I tell you this, he's in glory right now.

[40 : 41] He didn't have the privileges that we have. He didn't may perhaps he did and he chose not to use them. But isn't it wonderful how the Lord can take people?

And I think this is something that is, even after a communion season, how the devil can come and I remember it so well and attack his own people who never got the strength to go forward and remind them of just how much of a failure they are because they didn't sit at the Lord's table.

But you know what, it's not about us being a member of a church. It's about us being children of the living God. And here is a man who is on his way to glory as much as any person who may have been an office bearer or worshipping in a church for 40, 50, 60 years.

They are worshipping together in glory just now. What incredible love our Savior has for sinners, for his own people.

How sad in a sense that that man did not get to experience the companionship of Christ in this world and to know the keeping of Christ and to know of a friendship with God but great was his eternal reward nonetheless.

[42 : 23] This thief is in glory. It will you and I be there at the end of our life's journey because remember there was another thief who chose to ignore, who chose to want nothing whatsoever to do with the gospel, who chose not to answer Christ, who chose to want nothing to do with the Savior.

And he chooses his own way and his way is not to honour Christ. Well, as our time comes to an end, he has a thought for us all.

I wonder if Christ is looking down from glory just now and what he is thinking of each and every single one of us.

I wonder if he is looking down on glory and saying to himself, you will be with me in paradise.

Today you will be with me in paradise. We have no idea how long we have left in this world.

[43 : 52] What is Christ thinking? What is the Lord thinking of you and I as we are found gathered in his house tonight? Is he thinking well there is somebody who is safe and secure?

Or is he thinking well there is somebody who is yet to trust in the Lord?

It's worth noting too that this penitent thief was not converted because Jesus spoke to him.

Jesus did not speak directly to the thief until the thief spoke directly to Jesus. Did you notice that?

How many times has the Lord spoken to you in your lifetime? How many times has the Lord said, come unto me? How many times has the Lord said, today is the day?

[45 : 00] And again tonight you see. We are already thinking about tomorrow and next week. What if this is the last sermon we ever hear?

What if death comes? What if Christ comes before we even go to our beds tonight? Where does your soul stand?

Are you safe in Christ? Or are you putting Him off for another time? For a more convenient season?

We can think about this man in heaven. But spare a thought for the other thief who is in hell because he chose not to believe Christ.

And you see these two thieves are the two representations of man. Those who believe and those who don't.

[46 : 18] You may not want to hear it, but the reality of the matter is one thief went to him because he did not commit his life to Christ and the other thief went to him because he fully committed his life to Christ.

Where does that leave us tonight? Which thief are we most like spiritually? Are we fully committed? Are we on our way to heaven? Because of our faith in Christ? Or God forbid, are we on our way to hell? Because we continually say no.

My friends, let me tell you this in conclusion. If a dying Saviour can save a dying thief on the cross, how much more can a recent Saviour that will never ever die again save you if you could ask her to come into your life?

May this be the night that we all ask the Lord to come into our lives so that we will all one day be found worshipping where the penitent thief is in glory with the Lord in his kingdom, forever and ever and ever.

[48 : 03] Why and why would we refuse such an offer? May the Lord bless you, please, Lord.