

The Final Words of Jesus – “Today You Will Be With Me In Paradise”

Luke 23:32, 39-43

Last week I asked you to picture the scene of Jesus being nailed to the cross & what it must have been like to receive such treatment... being innocent!

Today, I want you to picture the same scene but from the perspective of a man nailed to a cross next to Jesus... **a criminal** deserving of such a sentence.

Our minds always go to Jesus, & what He was experiencing... **But he was not the only one crucified that day...** The crowd was gathered not just to witness Jesus' execution, but the execution & death of these 2 other men as well!

Imagine that you were one of these criminals nailed to a cross for something you did that was so wrong that you truly deserved this death penalty!

Imagine hearing the taunts, the accusations, the condemnation of the crowd and knowing that their words were accurate and their response, justified!

Imagine thinking that these would be the last words you hear before you die

- **“You have been found guilty of these charges...”**
- **“For your crimes, you are sentenced to death by crucifixion!”**
- **“I hope you rot in.... for what you have done!”**

Imagine looking out and seeing the people's faces who came to observe your execution... You see, Jesus was not the only one being crucified...

As you know, the story doesn't end there.... **These were not the last words this criminal heard, & this mob scene was not the last image in his mind!**

Instead of just reading the passage found in **Luke 23:32-33, 39-43**, first let's hear the words of **the song “Thief”**, and then we will read the text together!

Again, imagine all that this criminal must have been thinking, feeling, experiencing in this moment, & then he hears **“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise!”** Could it be true... Me... After all I've done?

Imagine what the people in the crowd, who came to witness this criminal's execution, must have thought overhearing these words from Jesus!

“Truly” – If anyone could reveal truth in this moment of life & death, it is the one who is the very giver of life & the one who Himself will conquer the grave... The one who came from heaven & will return there high & exalted!

“I say to you” – Why would Jesus waste His breath/words on someone like this? This man deserved what he was experiencing... & yet **Jesus hears him, responds to him, & receives him into the glory of His everlasting Kingdom!**

“Today” – Jesus teaches us much about life after death by this one word! When death comes, we (believers) will immediately go to be with Jesus!

There will not be a time of limbo... or a need for our loved ones to pray for us... **Our bodies will be buried but we are not there...** We will be in glory!

“you will be” – There is room for criminals, thieves, & murderers in heaven because **our admittance there is not by our works, but thru Christ's work!**

All that this man on the cross next to Jesus did to deserve this punishment, can & would be forgiven, & his life/eternity set free from all condemnation!

Faith in Jesus Christ covers a “multitude of sins” and is the only basis for our hope of heaven! It doesn't matter what you, or others think/say about what you deserve... **What matters is what Jesus says, and whether we believe it!**

“with me” – What makes heaven so great is not the streets of gold... the reuniting with passed loved ones... or even the absence of pain & suffering... **What makes heaven so great is that we will be with Jesus forever!**

“in Paradise” – The bonus is that, with Jesus, comes all the other benefits of heaven as well! **Paradise lost, in the Garden of Eden, will be Paradise found!**

We can live today, & however many more days we have in this life, w/ absolute confidence of what comes after our death. **Not just because of what Jesus said to this criminal on the cross, but because of what Jesus did 3 days later!**

- Do you think you are underserving of heaven?
- Do you think someone else is undeserving of heaven?
- **Don't be surprised by who you will see one day in heaven, by today understanding how it is that a person actually secures a spot there!**

Jesus came **“to seek and to save the lost.”** How are we to live in response?

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Imagine hearing the taunts, the accusations, the condemnation of the crowd and knowing that their words were _____ & their response, _____

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Again, imagine all that this criminal must have been thinking, feeling, experiencing in this moment, & then he hears **“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me _____** Could it be true... Me... After all I've done?

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_____ – If anyone could reveal truth in this moment of life & death, it is the one who is the very giver of life & the one who Himself will conquer the grave... The one who came from heaven & will return there high & exalted!

“I say to _____ – Why would Jesus waste His breath/words on someone like this? This man deserved what he was experiencing... & yet Jesus hears him, responds to him, & _____ into the glory of His everlasting Kingdom!

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