

What the Redeemed Thief Crucified With Christ Would Say to You Today

Two criminals were crucified with Jesus on Good Friday. They hung in naked shame and agony on cruel crosses for approximately six hours. Both blasphemed Jesus at first, spewing vicious insults His way. Their names were not recorded. Ultimately, one was saved; one was lost. One was forgiven; the other was condemned. One was transported to paradise; the other was taken to perdition. One's heart was hardened with hate; the other's was melted by love. One cursed God with his dying breath; the other whispered a soul-saving prayer.

What made the difference? What caused the believing thief to change his mind about Christ? One plausible explanation is that when he saw Jesus forgive His own murderers, it made a profound impression on him. His eyes were opened and he realized that this was no ordinary man. He'd never witnessed such an extreme expression of love. In one of His seven recorded statements from the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34a).

Included in that prayer were not only the religious leaders who conspired to His death, the Jews who consented to it and the Romans who executed it, but every fallen man whose sin made the cross necessary. Since our sins helped put Jesus on the cross, we too were the enemies He forgave and for whom He died. The great preacher Charles Spurgeon said, "Let us go to Calvary to learn how we may be forgiven. And then let us linger there to learn how to forgive."

The cursing crook was so moved by Jesus' benevolence that faith ignited in his heart that he too could be saved. He

offered a simple, sincere, nine-word prayer that changed his eternal destiny, "Lord, remember me when you come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Author Max Lucado observes, "The only thing more absurd than his request was the fact that it was granted ... he who deserved hell got heaven."

The only thing that thief and Jesus had in common was their method of execution. One was a common criminal; the other was the just judge of all the earth. One was as guilty as sin; the other was the only innocent man to ever live. To the thief's request to be remembered, Jesus replied, "Truly, I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). That thief, though crucified on earth for his crimes, now walks a free man in heaven due to the power of forgiveness. What Jesus said to that thief is a message of hope to us all. If Jesus forgave His own murderers, He will forgive us. If Jesus saved a desperate, dying thief, He will save us too. Friend, there is no sin too big for the blood of Jesus and no failure too great for the grace of God to overcome.

The Gospel account of the thief's redemption answers the question, is there such a thing as death-bed repentance? Absolutely! Do I recommend it? Absolutely not! Why give God the crumbs of your life instead of the cream? Why burn the candle of your life for yourself and blow the smoke in God's face? Yes, God will save any person who prays with sincere repentance and faith, even up to their last breath. But who is to say if a person takes that risk that they will have such an opportunity. They might die suddenly in an eternally lost condition. That's why the Bible emphatically states, "Look, now is the accepted time; look, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). Friend, don't gamble with your soul. Why roll the dice on eternity? Call on God now, while He is dealing with you. He will save your soul and radically change your life.

In 1871, D. L. Moody preached a sermon entitled "What Shall I Do With Jesus?" As he concluded, he asked his congregation,

the largest church in Chicago at the time, to take a week to consider this question and return the next Sunday to make their decision. By his own admission, Moody called it the biggest blunder he ever made in his ministry. That same day, the Great Chicago Fire roared through the city, killing over 300 people, destroying over 1,000 buildings, including Moody's church, and leaving thousands homeless. Some of the people who attended his service that day were among the dead. Afterward he reflected, "What a mistake! Since then I never have dared give an audience a week to think about their salvation ... now is the accepted time." He went on to say that he would have given his right arm to be able to do it over again.

If the redeemed thief could talk to us today, he'd probably say, "Don't wait until the last day of your life to receive salvation." It's far better to serve God all along and give Him your best years, not your leftover last days. As one author noted, "God guarantees forgiveness for repentance, but He doesn't guarantee tomorrow for our procrastination." Two thieves were crucified with Jesus. One is now glorified with Him. We can share that same fate. We don't have to die lost in our sins. Our decisions determine our destiny.

Destiny is not a matter of chance; it's a matter of choice! The dying thief changed his eternal destiny by making the right choice. We can too. Isn't it amazing how much we can learn from a thief?

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