

Luke 23:26-43
October 4, 2020

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When you think about people you have tried to reach with the gospel message, how receptive are they to the concept of God's wrath for our sin? And even if you haven't shared the gospel in a while, what is your perception of how the spiritually lost view "sin?" [Let people engage]

Transition: Throughout history, wicked men have done some terrible things: slaughtered innocent women and children, tortured people for pleasure, walk into schools or movie theaters and start randomly shooting people, genocides around the globe, and many other evils too hideous to mention. But never has the human race stooped so low as when the Jews crucified the Lord of glory and mocked Him while He was hanging on the cross. To get us ready for today's text, I would like us to read the crucifixion account not only from Luke, but Matthew, Mark and John as well. Let's start with Luke 23:26-43.

X-Ref: [Matt. 27:27-44](#); [Mark 15:21-32](#); [John 19:17-27](#)

BOOK:

The Crucifixion

²⁶ As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. ²⁸ Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'" ³⁰ Then

"they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!'"
and to the hills, "Cover us!"

³¹ For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**" And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One."

³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?" ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

⁴³ Jesus answered him, “**I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.**”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

- The cross displays His amazing love (praying for enemies while being nailed to cross)
- The cross displays to us an amazing Savior

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

- The cross displays the devastation of human sin
- God’s dreadful judgment (We tend to discount the seriousness of our sin...but God cannot be appeased.)

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

- He was sinless and righteous, yet loved us so much He bore our sins.
- He is full of mercy, love, and forgiveness

LOOK:

The point of Christ’s suffering on the cross was that He bore God’s dreadful judgment that we deserved, thus satisfying His wrath for us. If Christ crucified is your Savior, you will escape the day of God’s wrath on sinners. As Paul triumphantly puts it, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” ([Rom. 8:1](#)) Let’s share this good news with those who are spiritually lost!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 274-276). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Jesus and Simon (Luke 23:26)

It was a part of the prisoner's humiliation that he carry his own cross to the place of execution, so when Jesus left Pilate's hall, He was carrying either the cross or the crossbeam (John 19:17). Apparently, He was unable to go on, for the soldiers had to "draft" Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross for Him. (This was a legal Roman procedure. See Matt. 5:41.) When you consider all that Jesus had endured since His arrest in the Garden, it is not difficult to imagine Him falling under the load. But there is something more involved: carrying the cross was a sign of guilt, *and our Lord was not guilty!*

Thousands of Jews came to Jerusalem from other nations to celebrate the feasts (Acts 2:5–11), and Simon was among them. He had traveled over 800 miles from Africa to celebrate Passover, and now he was being humiliated on a most holy day! What would he say to his family when he got home?

What looked to Simon like a catastrophe turned out to be a wonderful opportunity, for it brought him in contact with Jesus Christ. (By the way, where was the *other* Simon—Simon Peter—who had promised Jesus to go with Him to prison and to death?) Simon may have come into the city to attend the 9 A.M. prayer meeting in the temple, but the soldiers rearranged his schedule for him.

We have good reason to believe that Simon was converted because of this encounter with Jesus. Mark identified him as "the father of Alexander and Rufus" (Mark 15:21), two men that Mark assumed his Roman readers would know. A Christian named Rufus was greeted by Paul in Romans 16:13, and it is possible that he was the son of Simon of Cyrene. Apparently, Simon and his two sons became well-known Christians who were held in honor in the church.

Before Simon met Jesus, he had religion and devotion; but after he met Jesus, he had reality and salvation. He did both a physical and spiritual "about face" that morning, and it transformed his life. God can still use unexpected and difficult situations, even humiliating situations, to bring people to the Savior.

Jesus and the Jerusalem Women (Luke 23:27–31)

Public executions drew crowds of spectators, and one involving Jesus would especially attract attention. Add to this the fact that Jerusalem was crowded with pilgrims, and it is not difficult to believe that a "great multitude" was following the condemned man to Calvary.

In that crowd was a group of women who openly wept and lamented as they sympathized with Jesus and contemplated the terrible spiritual condition of their nation. It has been pointed out that, as far as the Gospel records are concerned, no woman was ever an enemy of Jesus. Nor was Jesus ever the enemy of womankind. His example, His teachings, and most of all, His redemption have done much to dignify and elevate women. The news of His birth was shared with a Jewish maiden, His death was witnessed by grieving women, and the good news of His resurrection was announced first to a woman who had been demon-possessed.

Jesus appreciated their sympathy and used it to teach them and us an important lesson. While they were weeping over the injustice of *one man's death*, He was looking ahead and grieving over the terrible destruction of *the entire nation*, a judgment that was wholly justified (see Luke

19:41–44). Alas, it would be the women and children who would suffer the most, a fact supported by history. The Romans attempted to starve the Jews into submission; and hungry men, defending their city, took food from their suffering wives and children and even killed and ate their own flesh and blood.

The nation of Israel was like a “green tree” during the years when Jesus was on earth. It was a time of blessing and opportunity, and it should have been a time of fruitfulness. But the nation rejected Him and became like a “dry tree,” fit only for the fire. Jesus often would have gathered His people together, but they would not. In condemning Him, they only condemned themselves.

We might paraphrase His words: “If the Roman authorities do this to One who is innocent, what will they do to you who are guilty? When the day of judgment arrives, can there be any escape for you?”

Jesus and the Malefactors (Luke 23:32–43)

It had been prophesied that the Suffering Servant would be “numbered with the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12; Luke 22:37), and two criminals were crucified with Jesus, men who were robbers (Matt. 27:38). The Greek word means “one who uses violence to rob openly,” in contrast to the thief who secretly enters a house and steals. These two men may have been guilty of armed robbery involving murder.

The name *Calvary* comes from the Latin *calvaria* which means “a skull.” (The Greek is *kranion*, which gives us the English word *cranium*, and the Aramaic word is *Golgotha*.) The name is not explained in the New Testament. The site may have resembled a skull, as does “Gordon’s Calvary” near the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem. Or perhaps the name simply grew out of the ugly facts of execution.

Our Lord was crucified about 9 A.M. and remained on the cross until 3 P.M.; and from noon to 3 P.M., there was darkness over all the land (Mark 15:25, 33). Jesus spoke seven times during those six terrible hours:

1. ***“Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34).***
2. ***“Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).***
3. ***“Woman, behold thy son” (John 19:25–27).***
[Three hours of darkness; Jesus is silent]
4. ***“Why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46)***
5. ***“I thirst” (John 19:28).***
6. ***“It is finished!” (John 19:30)***
7. ***“Father, into Thy hands” (Luke 23:46).***

Luke recorded only three of these seven statements, the first, the second, and the last. Our Lord’s prayer for His enemies, and His ministry to a repentant thief, fit in well with Luke’s purpose to show Jesus Christ as the sympathetic Son of man who cared for the needy.

While they were nailing Him to the cross, He repeatedly prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Not only was He practicing what He taught (Luke 6:27–28), but He was fulfilling prophecy and making “intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12).

We must not infer from His prayer that ignorance is a basis for forgiveness, or that those who sinned against Jesus were automatically forgiven because He prayed. Certainly both the Jews and the Romans were ignorant of the *enormity* of their sin, but that could not absolve them. The Law

provided a sacrifice for sins committed ignorantly, but there was no sacrifice for deliberate presumptuous sin (Ex. 21:14; Num. 15:27–31; Ps. 51:16–17). Our Lord's intercession postponed God's judgment on the nation for almost forty years, giving them additional opportunities to be saved (Acts 3:17–19).

It was providential that Jesus was crucified *between* the two thieves, for this gave both of them equal access to the Saviour. Both could read Pilate's superscription, "This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews," and both could watch Him as He graciously gave His life for the sins of the world.

The one thief imitated the mockery of the religious leaders and asked Jesus to rescue him from the cross, but the other thief had different ideas. He may have reasoned, "If this Man is indeed the Christ, and if He has a kingdom, and if He has saved others, then He can meet my greatest need which is salvation from sin. I am not ready to die!" It took courage for this thief to defy the influence of his friend and the mockery of the crowd, and it took faith for him to trust a dying King! When you consider all that he had to overcome, the faith of this thief is astounding.

The man was saved wholly by grace; it was the gift of God (Eph. 2:8–9). He did not deserve it and he could not earn it. His salvation was personal and secure, guaranteed by the word of Jesus Christ. The man hoped for some kind of help in the future, but Jesus gave him forgiveness that very day, and he died and went with Jesus to paradise (2 Cor. 12:1–4).

It should be noted that the people at Calvary fulfilled Old Testament prophecy in what they did: gambling for our Lord's clothing (Ps. 22:18), mocking Him (Ps. 22:6–8), and offering Him vinegar to drink (Ps. 69:21). God was still on the throne and His Word was still in control.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 262-262)

5. THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS (23:26–49) (Matt. 27:32–56; Mark 15:21–41; John 19:17–30)

Crucifixion was a common method of carrying out the death sentence in the Roman Empire. It was probably the most cruel and painful method of death the Romans knew. Crucifixion was reserved for the worst criminals; by law a Roman citizen could not be crucified. Crucifixion was usually a long slow process, but Jesus died in a remarkably short period of time for He voluntarily "breathed His last" (v. 46).

23:26–31. A man named **Simon, from** the town of **Cyrene** in North Africa, was forced to carry Jesus' **cross** part of the way to the Crucifixion site. On the way Jesus warned the people of their coming persecution. Because Jesus was going to the cross, the kingdom was being postponed and times of tribulation would come on the nation (cf. Hosea 10:8; Rev. 6:15–17). Jesus' message was being rejected when He was physically present. How much more it would be rejected in coming years! (Luke 23:31)

23:32–43. Luke did not state, as did Matthew and John, how the events of Jesus' death fulfilled Old Testament Scriptures. Luke's purpose, instead, was to show that **Jesus** was the forgiving Messiah even as He died. Jesus asked the **Father** to **forgive** those who were killing Him (v. 34), and He forgave one of the men sentenced to die with Him (v. 43). Even in death Jesus had power to make people right with God. And yet **the rulers ... sneered** (v. 35) **the soldiers ... mocked** (vv. 36–37), and **one of the criminals** crucified with Him insulted **Him** (v. 39).

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (pp. 1560-1561). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

23:27–31 Many think Jesus would not have stopped to utter these words and that Luke created them. But Luke had already reported Jesus’ prophecies of Jerusalem’s destruction, so including another here seems to serve no theological or narrative purpose. This, taken with the Semitic elements of Jesus’ words, argues that they predate Luke and are likely to be historical.

23:30 Although the phrases “fall on us” and “cover us” come from Hs 10:8, Jesus was not citing the passage directly nor claiming that the future action of the women (and others in Jerusalem) fulfilled Hosea’s prophecy in any strict sense. He borrowed the language of terror in the face of judgment from the book of Hs to highlight what the Jerusalemites were to expect in the destruction of the city.

23:34 It is unclear whether the prayer was originally part of Lk. The oldest manuscripts omit it. This prayer seems to be at odds with Jesus’ warning to the women of Jerusalem (v. 30). This implies at the least that one or the other was not originally a part of Lk. If both sayings go back to Jesus, then Jesus was not asking that the consequences for His rejection be prevented but that the individual guilt of those involved in His mockery and death be forgiven.

23:36–37 For a discussion of what Jesus was offered as He died, see note on Mk 15:36.

23:39–40 Both Mt 27:44 and Mk 15:32 state that the criminals crucified with Jesus mocked Him. Only Luke tells us of one’s repentance. Over the course of a crucifixion that lasted for several hours, the second criminal apparently became impressed with Jesus’ demeanor and speech and changed his view of Him.

23:43 This promise does not contradict Jn 20:17. Upon His death, Jesus’ spirit went to “paradise,” which may mean heaven (2 Co 12:2–4; Rv 2:7) or the place of the righteous dead (called “Abraham’s side” in Lk 16:22). Jesus’ body remained in the grave until His resurrection, and it was the attempt to hold on to Jesus’ physical presence that Jesus admonished in Jn.

Butler, T. C. (2000). *Luke* (Vol. 3, pp. 391–396). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

B. The Glory Revealed on the Cross (23:26–49)

SUPPORTING IDEA: *The cross revealed the glory of Christ in his obedience to God, his care for other people, his innocence, and his control of the gates of glory.*

23:26. The crowd had their way. Jesus trudged toward the hill of execution, the crossbeam on his shoulder. Roman soldiers accompanying him apparently saw Jesus had become too weak to carry a heavy Roman crossbeam, so they forced a man from the crowd to carry Christ’s cross. Mark 15:21 notes that Simon was the father of Rufus and Alexander, apparently Christians known to the church (cf. Rom. 16:13). Cyrene is part of present-day Tripoli (see Acts 6:9; 11:20; 13:1). More than likely, Simon was a Jewish pilgrim who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. On his way back to the city from a visit to the countryside, he suddenly found himself forced to carry the Savior’s cross. Inadvertently, he etched his name in world history.

23:27. Some of the people joined in demanding Jesus' crucifixion (vv. 14–25), but others sadly joined the procession from Pilate's court to Calvary's cross. Women often served as professional mourners, but certainly that was not the case here. The women who had so faithfully supported Jesus (8:1–3) were probably included in this larger group. They expressed grief and anguish over the coming suffering and death of their Lord.

23:28–31. Always attentive to the needs of others, Jesus noticed the women and probably recognized some of them. He tried to change the direction of their grief. He was not the one who needed to be mourned. Later he would confess that he was in the Father's hands. They needed to turn attention inward. They faced the tragedy of the fall of Jerusalem and all the suffering connected with that. Jesus had already wept over the city and the fate of its inhabitants (19:41). These mourners needed to save their tears for their own disastrous future. What would they do when the Roman army surrounded and destroyed the holy city? Even more, what would they do when the final judgment day arrived with its tribulation and horror? The universe will be turned upside down. Barren women will be blessed (contrast the picture of blessing on Elizabeth and Mary in chaps. 1–2). Why such a reversal? Because no mother will want to see her child suffer the tortures that all the inhabitants of Jerusalem will face.

That will be the time when Hosea 10:8 is fulfilled. Jerusalem's citizens, particularly its women, will seek refuge. Even the refuge of death caused by a mountain toppling on them would be better than facing the Roman armies as they destroy Jerusalem.

Jesus closed his speech to the women with a proverb whose meaning is highly debated. It is a comparison between a lesser and a greater evil, but who causes the evil and exactly what is the evil? The image is of a green tree and its lumber that is hard to burn and dry wood that burns easily and quickly. Apparently, Jesus said the current disaster that God was allowing to happen—the joining of Romans and Jews to kill him—was hardly comparable with the disaster the women would face in Jerusalem. God would let the Roman government destroy Zion, the city of promise, the city of hope, the city of David. All Jewish political, messianic, and religious hopes would be snuffed out. The city of peace would be the scene of deadly warfare in which innocent civilians would suffer as much as defending soldiers.

The implication of this statement is that all hopes rest in the green tree of Jesus on Calvary, not in a new political leader on a Jewish throne in Jerusalem and not in a new religious priest in a purified temple in Jerusalem. Romans and Jews may think they have established their power and authority in crucifying Jesus. Romans will think they have proved their superiority to the Jews' religion and their God when they destroy Jerusalem. But before either of these events, Jesus shows that he remains in charge, knows what will happen, and confirms it as part of God's eternal plan.

23:32. Jesus had known all along that he faced a criminal's death. He looked to his participation with the lawbreakers in 22:37. Here the expectation became reality. To the uninformed bystander, Jesus' death appeared one more instance of cruel Roman justice, which took the most notorious criminals and placarded them against the sky for all to see so no one would imitate their heinous deeds. Ironically, Jesus now showed his followers what he expected of them—taking up a cross to follow him. They must lose their lives to save them just as he was doing.

23:33. Three men carried crossbeams to Calvary. All arrived at the deathly destination, aptly named Golgotha, "Place of the Skull." Modern tourists join the pilgrimage to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to find Golgotha. Nothing proves or disproves this ancient tradition. Ironically as Jesus was ushered into his glory on the mount of crucifixion, two criminals claimed the position

on the right and the left, positions over which his disciples had argued so vehemently. Meanwhile, the disciples had fled the area, afraid of being identified with this criminal. Two thieves took up crosses and followed Jesus to Golgotha, while his chosen disciples hid in fear.

23:34. Jesus had proven his ability to forgive sins in his healing ministry (5:24). He had taught that forgiveness comes only to those who forgive others (6:37; 11:4) and that forgiveness has no limits (17:4). He had called for love of enemies (6:27–28). On the cross he practiced what he had taught. He watched those who mocked him, played games with him, scourged him, and crucified him. Then he asked the Father to forgive them. He called for forgiveness because he loved his enemies, but the explicit reason was their ignorance. Neither Jewish accuser nor Roman executor fully realized the gravity of their actions. The Jews were protecting their religious establishment against this obnoxious newcomer who pulled the crowds away from them and demanded that they look at motivation rather than simple legal action. The Romans in the person of Pilate protected their political territory against one who proclaimed the kingdom of God was at hand. Both Roman and Jew acted defensively in putting personal self-interest and political and religious institutions above the call for justice. Blinded by self-interest, they never realized that they were executing an innocent man. They certainly were not aware that they were executing the Son of God who came to save his people from their sins. Jesus went beyond the call for justice to pour out grace on those who executed him.

Jesus' prayer for forgiveness leads to a deeper question. Does God forgive sins of ignorance? This passage does not answer that question. It does show that God can forgive the most heinous crimes. It shows that God knows the complex causes of sin and the interplay of motivations that lead to the most horrible sins. It shows the need for victims of sin and crime to forgive and seek forgiveness for those who have misused, abused, and persecuted them.

As Jesus prayed for forgiveness, the Roman soldiers continued their mocking games, taking his clothes and casting lots for them. In this act they fulfilled Psalm 22:18, although Luke does not explicitly say so. Nothing the Romans or Jews did caught God by surprise. He knew his Son would die, suffering for the sins of the world (Isa. 53). He knew the Romans would gamble for his few earthly possessions.

23:35. In Luke 22 the people gathered with Pilate and called for Jesus' crucifixion. Here they became mere onlookers, part of the audience in the theater of death. The Jewish leaders, however, continued their obnoxious behavior, mocking Jesus (cf. Ps. 22:8). In so doing, they unwittingly testified to the work Jesus was accomplishing (19:10; see Matt. 1:21). While the religious leaders worked to destroy life, Jesus worked to save it (6:9). As they attempted to save their own life, they lost it (9:24). The devil had taken the word of life away from them, and they did not believe and were not saved even though Jesus prayed for their forgiveness (8:12). First in the eyes of the people, they had become last in the eyes of God (13:30).

The leaders had listened to Jesus' teachings carefully; they knew he implied he was the Christ, the Messiah, the promised Savior of Israel (see 2:26; 9:20). He claimed to come from the Father and to have the power of the Father at work in all he did. Only in one other place does Luke use the term *the Chosen* or *elect*. Jesus had reminded them that God would not put off the prayers of his chosen ones but would bring them justice. Here in the midst of injustice perpetrated by the religious leaders and the Roman representative, Jesus finally showed the ultimate meaning of his teaching. On the cross God was answering the prayer of his people. He was bringing them salvation, assurance of eternal life. The elect were receiving more than justice. They were receiving the gift of grace. But that gift involved one person dying for the sins of the people. That one person could not save others by saving himself. He saved others by dying

for them, sacrificing himself. This was the suffering Servant-Messiah, not the self-serving, all-triumphant political messiah the Jewish rulers wanted.

23:36–37. Soldiers joined the religious leaders in their mocking game. They wanted to quench Jesus' thirst, so they offered him cheap wine used by the poor. Continuing his ironic presentation, Luke shows how those involved in killing Jesus stopped for a moment to care about his thirst. Having played at helping him, they joined the Jewish chorus in challenging Jesus to prove his kingship and to save himself. Thus, mockers echoed the charges against Jesus: religious blasphemy in claiming to be Messiah and political treason in claiming to be king of a new kingdom. Both Jews and Romans saw life from one perspective: self-preservation. Neither group understood that self-preservation is fleeting. No person can preserve his or her life for eternity. Eternal life is God's gift, given by the one who died on the cross. Refusing to save himself, he provided salvation for the world.

23:38. Pilate had authorized a placard to be placed above Jesus' head to describe his crime. Jesus' crime was claiming to be king of the Jews. Again, this had both a religious and a political dimension. This mocking placard, however, proclaimed eternal truth for those who would listen. Jesus is truly the king of the Jews, the promised Messiah, and as such is the only hope for the world. Those who would be part of an eternal kingdom must believe on him as their king.

23:39. Even the dying criminals who were crucified beside him got in on the mocking act as one of them echoed the Jewish cry. The Messiah should at least be able to save himself. While he was doing that, he might as well show his power by saving those who were dying with him. Surely this criminal deserved his fate, showing his character to the end. Suffering the most insulting of deaths, he hurled insults at the only one who could save him.

23:40–42. The word *rebuked* is the same term Jesus used in casting out demons (4:35, 41; 9:42), healing the sick (4:39), and calming the storms (8:24). The second thief thus followed Jesus' advice in an ironic way, catching his fellow thief in a sin and rebuking him.

The second thief confessed his sins and invited the other thief to join his confession. They deserved to die. They were guilty. As such, they stood in sharp contrast to Jesus. How this thief came to recognize the innocence of Jesus we are not told, but his statement incorporates a great theological truth: Jesus did not deserve to die. He was the sinless dying with sinners, the innocent sharing the fate of the guilty, the pure Lamb of God taking on himself the sin of the world. Certainly, the thief did not recognize all this, but it was implicit in his statement. It calls Christians to confess the great work of the innocent Jesus. The thief thus joined the Roman ruler and the Jewish tetrarch in confessing Christ's innocence (see vv. 4, 14, 15, 22). A Roman soldier would soon join them (v. 47).

The repentant thief had rebuke for his fellow thief but a request for Jesus. He wanted to be remembered when Jesus entered his kingdom. Funeral inscriptions in Jesus' day often requested that the deceased join the righteous at the judgment. The thief shortcircuited this process, believing in some unexplained way that Jesus would survive crucifixion and establish a kingdom. This thief is the primary example of a deathbed confession. He did not know all he asked, but he had enough faith to ask to be part of whatever Jesus was up to. He had no more life ahead of him, but he sought eternal blessings beyond the cruel death he was enduring. When Jesus raised the dead, some decided to kill him. When they killed him, one decided to join him.

23:43. The time frame of the thief's request is not clear, but Jesus' response was quite clear. The thief did not have to wait even one day. His faith, whatever its source, secured him an immediate place with Jesus. He would be part of Jesus' kingdom today ... in paradise. The expression is borrowed from the Persian language, where the word *paradise* means a park or

garden. The Hebrew equivalent appears three times in the Old Testament (Neh. 2:8; Song 4:13; Eccl. 2:5).

The earliest Greek translators of the Old Testament used the Greek term for paradise for God's garden (Gen. 2:8–10). In the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha written between the Old and New Testaments, “paradise” takes on a new meaning in Jewish thought. It becomes associated with the blessing of final judgment (see 2 Esdras 4:7; 6:2; 7:36, 123, 8:52). This meaning appears three times in the New Testament (Luke 23:42; 2 Cor. 12:4; Rev. 2:7). This ideal end-time garden was described in terms of Genesis 2; Isaiah 41:18–19; 51:3; 58:11; 60:13; Jeremiah 32:41; Ezekiel 31:8–9; and Psalm 1.

Here we see a central New Testament text on eternal life. Jesus promised this believing thief that he would share life with Jesus in paradise today (cf. Luke 16:23). Some would take this as a reference to an intermediate state where Jesus and the thief would reside—Jesus until his resurrection and the thief until the final judgment. The promise of Jesus appears to offer much more than this. The thief had asked for participation in Christ's kingdom, and Jesus appeared to grant the request.

Jesus promised the thief immediate consciousness *today* of life in the *eternal kingdom*. This promise raises questions for Christians who look to the resurrection as the time for final judgment and entrance into the heavenly kingdom. How can a person wait for the final resurrection and still be aware of immediate presence with Christ today? Does this require an intermediate state as some would teach? To say this is to say that Jesus went to an intermediate state, and that paradise means an intermediate state. Yet, we know that Jesus went to rule with his Father in heaven.

The complex answer may involve a distinction between human linear time and God's eternity with never-ending time. On earth humans live in linear time, seeing one event following immediately after another. Our experience in linear human time causes us to describe life after death as a series of linear events. But with God one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. Thus, in the view of eternity a period of linear waiting may not be necessary. The next human experience after death, in this view, would be the final resurrection and eternal life with Christ experienced in the realm of eternity.

Christ's promise to the thief extends to all who believe in him. When we call on him for salvation, acknowledging our sin and seeking his salvation, he responds with a word for today. You, too, may experience life in Christ's kingdom today by believing in him.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 23:26-43). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.