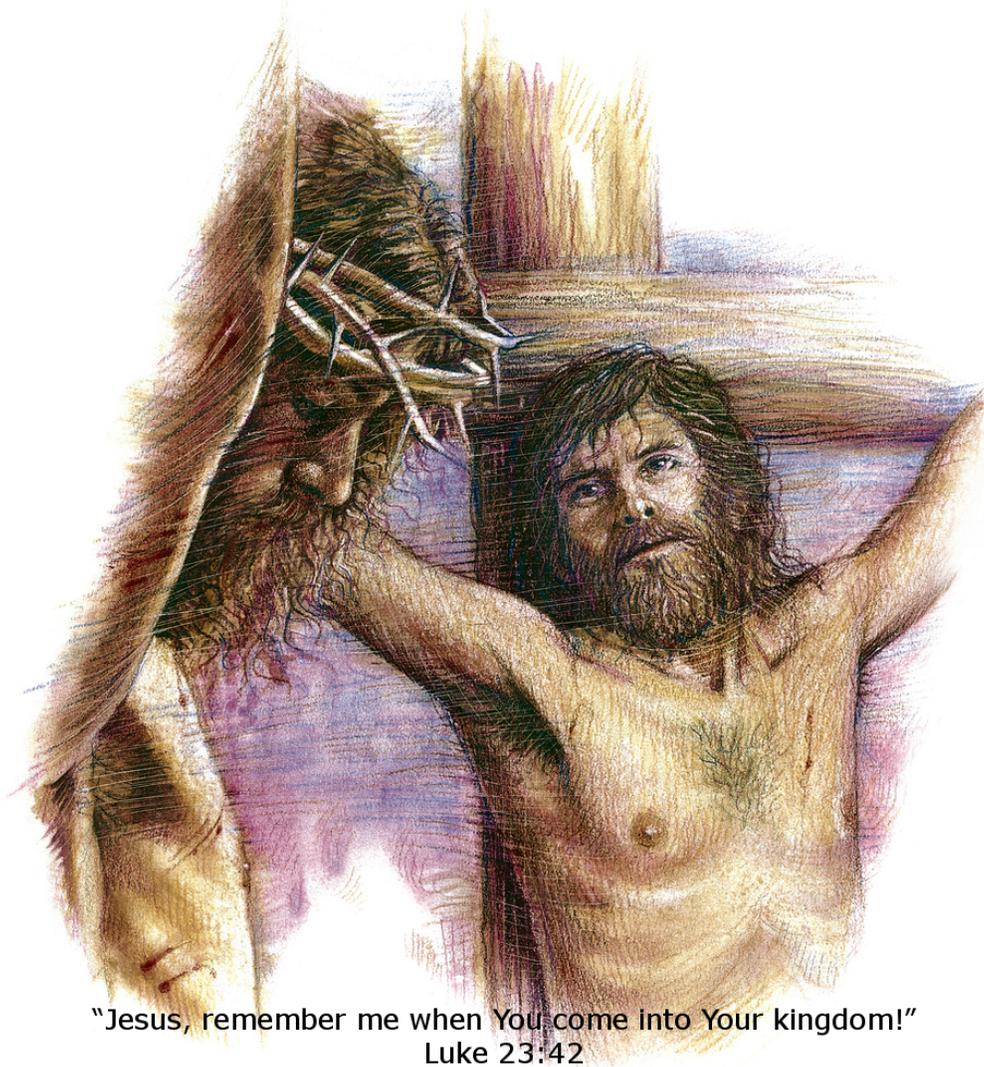


“Paradise, Jesus, and the Penitent Thief”

Original 31 January 2021, Updated 1 August 2022

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“Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!”
Luke 23:42

The Penitent Thief Speaks to Jesus from the Cross
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"And he was saying, 'Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!' And He said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.'" (Luke 23:42-43)

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Read: Luke 23:33-43

Consider. For the person who puts their faith in Jesus, upon the death of their body, their soul goes immediately to be with Jesus in Paradise.

Two thieves were crucified with Jesus that day - one on the right and the other on the left (Luke 23:33). Both thieves were next to the One who could save them. Yet, one thief hurled abuse (literally, *blasphemed*) at Jesus (Luke 23:39, Ref. 1). The other, penitent thief recognized that he himself was guilty yet Jesus was innocent. The penitent thief said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!" (Luke 23:40-42). To this thief, the penitent thief, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Jesus' promise to the penitent thief has brought hope to millions of believers over the centuries since Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus' promise to the penitent thief brings believers hope today as we consider the destination of our souls upon our death and the destination of the souls of our loved ones.

In the next two sections, I would like to focus on two important points, or "take aways" from Jesus' promise to the penitent thief.

Paradise is Where Believers Will Be with Jesus after Death

Jesus could have told the penitent thief, "Today you will be in Paradise." But Jesus did not say that. Jesus said, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43, underline added).

Paradise in Greek is *paradeisos* (par-ad'-i-sos), which is "*an ancient Persian word meaning 'enclosure, garden, park'*" (Ref. 2). Paradise is mentioned in the New Testament only three times - in Luke 23:43, 2 Corinthians 12:4, and Revelation 2:7.

The Apostle Paul expressed his desire (his *passionate longing*) to be with Jesus after his death when he wrote, "But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I

am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better" (Philippians 1:22-23, Ref. 3).

Likewise, the early Christians were encouraged, that when they were absent from their body, they would be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8, Ref. 4).

Note that Jesus' promise to the penitent thief, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise," did not apply to the unrepentant thief who verbally abused Jesus and did not believe in him. Scripture teaches that the souls of the unrighteous go to the place of torment Jesus described in Luke 16:22-26.

There they await judgment and the second death (Revelation 20:11-15). It is far better to believe in Jesus during our earthly lifetime and to have his assurance that upon the death of our body our soul will be in Paradise with him.

The Souls of Believers Immediately Enter Paradise to be with Jesus after Death

Jesus told the penitent thief, "Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43, underline added). Not tomorrow. Not some time in the future. Today. Jesus spoke to the penitent thief in language that he would understand. Even though their dead bodies would be on the cross or in the grave (Luke 23:50-53), the souls of the Savior and the penitent thief would be alive and in Paradise together that day (Ref. 5).

Another biblical example illustrates a believer's expectation of going immediately to be Jesus upon his death. At the time of his death from stoning, Stephen the martyr said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Then he died (Acts 7:57-60).

Apply. Let the words of Jesus to the penitent thief comfort you as you consider the destination of your soul upon your death. "Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Put your faith and trust in Jesus who is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. You will receive God's gracious gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23), and upon the death of your body, your soul will go to Paradise to be with Jesus.

References

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