

Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. ³³ When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left.

³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.

³⁵ The crowd watched and the leaders scoffed. “He saved others,” they said, “let him save himself if he is really God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” ³⁶ The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine. ³⁷ They called out to him, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” ³⁸ A sign was fastened above him with these words: “This is the King of the Jews.”

³⁹ One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you’re at it!”

⁴⁰ But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? ⁴¹ We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.” ⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”

⁴³ And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23:32-43 NLT

Christ’s whole intention in coming to this earth was to provide salvation for mankind. The message of the cross is the heart of the gospel. What happened in this holy story and conversation is so telling about why Christ came to earth.

You can hear it in His prayer in the garden as recorded in John 17.

Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you, ⁸ for I have passed on to them the message you gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me. John 17:7-8 NLT

You can hear it at the last supper table.

¹⁹ He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “This is my body, **which is given for you**. Do this to remember me.” ²⁰ After supper he took another cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, **which is poured out as a sacrifice for you**.”

Luke 22:19-20 NLT

You can hear it in His words from the cross:

³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” Luke 23:34 NLT

1 Peter 3:18 reminds us of this: ¹⁸ *Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.*

Today we are looking at the story of a man that was a bad man. He was a man that had stolen from others. He was being crucified for his crimes against his community. The fact is all of us are born sinners and in need of salvation. (Romans 3:20, Isaiah 53:6)

We are looking at the story of a man saved at the last moments of his life. The point is that as long as there is life there is hope. As long as a man or woman can sincerely repent of their sins Jesus stands ready to forgive. The part that people often miss is that He wants to be in relationship with you so that your life radically changes.

If you ever wanted to understand and know how to be a Christfollower here is your pattern.

It is the story of a man who changed his mind because in Matthew and Mark's account of this story he first joins in with the complaining and accusing thief on the other side of Jesus' cross. When you really encounter Jesus Christ it is an instant eye opening experience.

He repented for all the bad that he had done in his life
He turned to Jesus both literally and figuratively.

Here is a pattern of what it means to come to the Savior of the world.

1. He was a man with an urgent request

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

- a. This request showed that he believed in an after life

He believed that there was something going to happen following his imminent death. He didn't believe that life ended when we draw our last breath. Something inside of him caused him to think that there would be life after death.

What do you believe? If you believe in life after death you will live your life in a way that prepares you for eternity. This man was very fortunate. He had the chance of a lifetime. He died by the Savior of the world.

You and I have a chance to live by the Savior of the world.

- b. This request showed that he acknowledged Jesus Christ as Lord

It is a remarkable thing to think that this common thief all of the sudden gained the knowledge and recognition of Jesus to be able to acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior. How did this happen?

So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:3 NLT

How could this man who didn't follow Jesus at all suddenly recognize His for who He was? I've often wondered if this thief didn't work the crowds that flocked to see the miracles and hear Jesus talk. Maybe he had heard enough or maybe it was in what he saw when he looked on the face of a man being killed for sins he didn't commit.

Maybe he saw the glory and light of God radiating from the face of Christ.

Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

⁵ *You see, we don't go around preaching about ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus' sake.* ⁶ *For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:4-6 NLT*

Are you ready to acknowledge Christ as Lord?

- c. This request showed that he believed Christ had the power to change him

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

The simplicity of his request is a demonstration of how simple salvation really is. "Jesus, remember me. . ."

It is so easy for anyone at any time to pray and connect with Jesus Christ. I am not talking about using Him as some kind of cosmic vending machine where you put in fifty cents worth of prayer and push a button and out comes your answered pray. I am talking about beginning your life with Christ. It's a daily walk.

You don't need to change anything that will come later.

You don't need to be clean or perfect that will come later.

You don't need to understand everything about God or even salvation, you will understand it as you live it.

For "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved." Romans 10:13 NLT

The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day;
And there may I, though vile as he, wash all my sins away.

That's the thief's story now let's look at the response from the middle cross.

2. He received an immediate response

⁴³ *And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.*

I want to simply break these words apart and see them for what they are. Put yourself for a few moments on the thief's cross. We were all there at one time or the other in our lives. If you are Christian today somewhere along the line you had to turn to Jesus and say, remember me, forgive me, I believe in You. You said to Jesus, "Lord I want you in my life."

What happens when we sincerely turn to Jesus?

a. He received assurance

It is important for us to notice that our Lord did not promise that the man would first of all be in Purgatory; but He promised that at once he would be in Paradise. There are no biblical grounds at all for believing in Purgatory as an intermediate place between earth and Heaven, where the soul is purged.

When Jesus finished His work on this earth He didn't go to purgatory He went to heaven or paradise. How do I know that? Listen to the words found in Hebrews 1:3:

*The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. **When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven.***

Jesus gave this man absolute assurance that on this day he would be with Him in heaven. What are you sure of today? Not much really when you think about it. We are not sure about our health, our wealth or much else really. Benjamin Franklin said, "There are only two certainties in life; death and taxes."

There is one more: you can have the assurance that your sins are forgiven and that you are on your way to heaven instead of hell when you die.

b. He received it about that day!

One writer has said that this man had breakfast on earth with the Devil and supper in Heaven with the Lord.

It was not simply that Jesus promised this man that he would go to Paradise, but that He said that he would be with Him in Paradise that day! This guilty thief would be with the Jesus for the rest of that day and into eternity. For you and I it is a promise of a hope to come. None of us know when it will happen but for this man he knew that he would be dead in a few hours and he knew that he would be with Jesus.

Where are you headed when you die? Do you have an assurance that you are right with God?

What happens when we die? Do you ever think about it much? You need to think about it because it's a whole lot easier to die if you know what you believe before you are staring death in the face.

*And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, **we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died.***

¹⁵ *We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. ¹⁷ Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ So encourage each other with these words.*

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 NLT

The bottom line is that those who die in Christ are with Christ and will return with Christ on His second visit to this earth.

This man received a wonderful promise. I wonder if you have that promise today?

c. He received the promise of eternal life

You've heard me say it before. Now let me remind you once again. Life down here is like a vapor. You live it and then one day you wake up and realize how quickly it all has gone by.

Yardstick, Paper

As God's partners, we beg you not to accept this marvelous gift of God's kindness and then ignore it. ² For God says, "At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you." Indeed, the "right time" is now. Today is the day of salvation. 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 NLT

That is why the Holy Spirit says, "Today when you hear his voice, ⁸ don't harden your hearts. Hebrews 3:7-8 NLT

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

Perfect submission, perfect delight, visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
angels descending bring from above echoes of mercy, whispers of love.
Perfect submission, all is at rest; I in my Savior am happy and blest,
watching and waiting, looking above, filled with his goodness, lost in his love.

This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long; this is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.

