

The Path to Paradise

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[0 : 00] So as you know, maybe you don't, but now you will, today's a special day. Today we're celebrating the 40th anniversary of Paul Hayes' ordination.

And as I said last Sunday, it's real close, because, I mean, we were just within a couple of years. Actually, he's got about 39 on me? No, 37 on me. So we come to this moment today, on the 40th anniversary of Paul's ordination, to give thanks to God for Paul's unwavering faith, for his commitment to the service of God's kingdom.

We express our gratitude for Paul's tireless efforts to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, to share God's love with all people. Join me in praying for Paul. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we humbly come before you today to offer our heartfelt thanks for Paul Hayes. A man who has faithfully served your people in so many places over so many years.

We thank you for his willingness to go above and beyond, for his compassion and his kindness, and his dedication to the mission of your church.

[1 : 15] Father, we're grateful, deeply grateful, to have Paul and Linda as part of our church family now, and for the many gifts and skills you have given them that they are now sharing with us.

Lord, we ask that you would continue to bless Paul and Linda with your grace and your mercy. Give them the strength and courage to continue to serve you faithfully. May Paul and Linda both be filled with your peace and joy as they continue to seek and serve you.

Father, as Paul comes to preach now, fill him with peace. Affirm him again in his calling to serve you and to declare your truth. We offer this prayer in Jesus' precious and powerful name.

Amen. Amen. With that introduction, I was kind of almost sure that he wasn't talking about me. It's been an honor and a privilege to serve for so long, and I just, it's so great.

And I'm so pleased that so many of my family and friends have come to celebrate with me. We've had some friends come all the way from Saskatoon.

[2 : 27] Well, they didn't come all the way from Saskatoon for this, but they just happened to come all the way from Saskatoon, and they're here today. That's great. And then, of course, my best friends for decades, and others are here, and it just sounded great.

When I was thinking about what I preach today, because it's such a special occasion, I thought for a long time about what it takes. So I thought I chose a passage that's been dear, near and dear to me for a long time, and I thought such a special occasion deserves a special passage.

And I'd like to read Luke 23, verses 36 to 43. The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, If you were the king of the Jews, save yourself.

There was a written notice above him which read, This is the king of the Jews. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him. Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us.

But the other criminal rebuked him. Don't you fear God? He said, Since you were under the same sentence, We are punished justly for getting what our deeds deserve.

[3 : 40] But this man has done nothing wrong. Then he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Jesus answered him, Truly I tell you, Today you'll be with me in paradise.

Well, that's the first church we served together. And you notice that Linda hasn't aged a bit since then. Yeah, that was 40 years ago, on the September, on the Labor Day long weekend, ordained to the Christian ministry.

It was a great time. It's kind of interesting. Church normally held about 60 people. And capacity was 100. There were 150 people gathered there that night.

As you can guess, the singing was incredible. It was beautiful. Wonderful service. One of the things that made me special is that, made me feel special is that, when it came time for the people, pastors to lay hands on me, a number of the past, other pastors from the other town, from the

different denominations, came and laid hands on me as well.

So I really felt, not only I was ordained to the Baptist ministry, I was ordained to the Christian ministry. It was a special time. This passage is a wonderful one.

[5 : 04] This passage is recorded only in Luke. Strange, it's such a special passage. You'd think the other evangelists might have recorded it, but no.

It's also the only deathbed conversion in the Bible that I know of. And it's special for that reason, but it's more special for me and the faith that exhibited by this criminal on the cross.

The cross was a very special time. And there is a reason why the cross is a symbol of Christianity. The cross wasn't thought of as a great thing at the time of the Romans.

Not at all. But it was special. And the suffered under Pontius Pilate shows that the crucifixion of Christ is rooted in history and it focuses on the crucifixion of Christ.

Christianity is all about that. The Romans didn't invent crucifixion, but they perfected it. They crucified many, many people. I've heard of thousands of people being lined up for miles, being crucified all at the same time to show the people, don't you dare defy Roman might.

[6 : 25] And the crucifixion was probably the worst method of execution ever invented. Because it was not only a slow and painful death, that often took several days for the person to die, is also shameful death.

Because they'd have you out in public display in front of everybody and all the people would come laughing at you. And then it was even more shameful for Jesus because here he was, the Son of God, King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, being crucified between two criminals.

As Isaiah 53, 12 says, he was numbered with the transgressors. Treated like a common criminal. It was interesting, I was reading one of the books recently and talked about how this woman went into a store and they forgot to take the tag off when she walked out and then all the alarms went off and she said, it was so terrible because I was treated like a common criminal.

And the pastor who wrote the book said, that's how Jesus was treated. Think about that. Not only did he leave heaven for a manger, but he left it to be treated like a common criminal.

To die a so painful, shameful death. That's why Paul writes in Philippians 2.8, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death.

[8 : 00] Even death on a cross. The worst kind of death. You know, it's interesting, Canada abolished the death penalty many years ago, but in the U.S., where they still practice it, they say they try to make it as quick and as painless as possible.

Well, the Romans were the exact opposite. They wanted to make it as slow and agonizing and shameful as possible. They wanted to really dehumanize the person being crucified.

And think about that. There was a notice written above the cross of Jesus. And the notice was written in Latin, Aramaic, and Greek.

All the three languages that were spoken in that area. So there would be no question about what the charge was. Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

And it's interesting, all of the abuse that's inflicted on Jesus at the cross is connected with that charge. The soldier said, if you were the King of the Jews, save yourself.

[9 : 08] The ruler said, he saved others. Let him save himself. He is God's Messiah, the chosen one. And notice the religious leaders didn't even bother to address him directly.

They talked about him and not to him. How humiliating. And even to the point where one of the criminals who hung their heads at him, aren't you the Messiah?

Save yourself and us. But interesting, another kind of irony, the whole thing. Each of them keeps saying, he saved others. Let him save himself. The word save keeps coming back.

Save yourself. Save us. And what was Jesus doing on the cross? Saving us. That's exactly why he was dying on the cross.

To win our salvation. To purchase our forgiveness at the cost of his own blood, at the cost of his own life. That's exactly what he was doing, was saving us.

[10 : 09] That one criminal wanted to cheat justice. Save yourself and us. Help me get off this cross. I don't want to be dying. Well, of course not.

Who does? And he presumed to speak for the other criminal as well. Alas. But the second criminal had a different attitude. Don't you fear God?

Since you were under the same sentence, we are being punished justly for we're getting what we deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. Then he said, Jesus, remember you when you

come into your kingdom.

And that prompted a great response from Jesus. Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise. So, that's what I'm going to talk about this morning. The path to paradise.

There's three steps on the path to paradise. First of all, it's important to note that crucifixions were meant to be public. Extremely public.

[11:09] There was a huge crowd gathered. And they were all listening to what was happening. So all the words that Jesus entered were uttered before many, many people.

And they would all heard it. So when, in John, it talks about how Jesus saw his mother there and the disciple whom he loved. And he said, son, son, here's your mother.

Mother, here's your son. That's in John 19. Wanting to, and they would have both heard it. Would have known. And all the words, and it talks about seven words from the cross.

They were all public. And the words from these two criminals were also public. Everyone would have heard them. So important to note that. It's also, Jesus was a very public figure.

And Palm Sunday, he rode into Toronto on a donkey's colt. And it talks about how as he approached Bethany, Bethelage and Bethany on the hill called Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and they gathered the coat.

[12:14] And when he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they'd seen.

Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, Teacher, rebuke your disciples.

I tell you, he replied, if they keep quiet the sons will cry out. And then soon after that he comes in and he tosses the seltzers out of the temple.

Very public events. So everyone would have known what was happening. Including the two people that were being crucified with Jesus.

They would have known Jesus was a very public figure. Revered by some, despised by others.

That's the way it was. It's interesting, I've heard when I talk about the second criminal, he's often called the thief on the cross.

[13:17] I think that's a very unfortunate way of putting it. It's interesting, I looked, I didn't find a single translation that calls him a thief. A criminal, all kinds of other things.

Malefactor. How many of you, if you just stole a loaf of bread, would think, oh, I deserve to be crucified? No. It was probably within this direction. It's probably rebelled against Rome.

Barabbas, who was pardoned instead of Jesus, was in prison for insurrection and murder. That was what crucifiable offense is.

Usually rebellion against Rome. That's what they, and that's what Jesus was charged with.

Rebellion against Rome, being the king of the Jews. So, this was a very public confession.

The second criminal admitted his guilt in front of a crowd. Whole crowd gathered there. He was hiding it. He made no excuses for his behavior. 1 John, chapter 1, verse 8 says, we claim to be without sin.

[14:22] We deceive ourselves and truth is not in us. Verse 9 says, if we confess our sins, he's faithful and just and forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. That's the first step on the path to paradise.

A public confession of sin. We can't pretend we're without sin because all of sin, that's just the way it is. We must admit that.

Second is to confess your inadequacy. The first criminal focused on the here and now. He wanted to be delivered right now and either he wasn't thinking about the hereafter or he definitely wanted to postpone it.

He definitely wanted to. But the second one rebuked him saying, don't you fear God since we are under the same sentence? mind of the words of Jesus where he said, don't fear the one who can kill the body.

Fear him who after your body is dead can crash to in hell. In Luke 12. If Jesus was speaking in this kind of context, he would be saying, don't fear the Roman executioners.

[15:39] Fear God. And this is also what the second criminal was saying. Don't you fear God? Aren't you afraid of what's going to happen after you die? And then he said, I can't, I can't do it.

Jesus, remember me. I don't deserve anything, but remember me. He didn't ask you to be refuted. We don't know how much this second criminal, so-called thief on the cross knew about Jesus.

We don't know. Obviously, he would have heard about him, but we don't know. But we do know that he confessed a faith in Christ.

He knew he deserved to die, and he confessed faith in the resurrection. You know, and at the time of Jesus, there were two schools of thought amongst the Jews, and this second criminal is likely a Jew.

The Pharisees believed of the resurrection of the just. that's what Martha had expressed. It's also, the Sadducees did not. They believed the death was final.

[16:44] That was it. It's interesting those kind of thoughts still prevalent today. Some people believe that death is the end, but the second criminal certainly did not believe that.

He believed that there was a resurrection, and then, remember me, he confesses his inadequacy, and he confessed faith in Christ. Amazing faith.

When you think about it, think about what he believes. He believes that there's something beyond death, believes in the resurrection, that he and Jesus would be raised at the last day, but he also believes that Jesus is coming into a kingdom.

What? Jesus is dying as a criminal and a slow and painful death, and everyone's mocking at his claim to be king. soldiers, the leaders, even the other criminal, laughing at his claim to be king, but this criminal believed that he was going to be king.

How could someone dying a slow death come into a kingdom? Unlike the first criminal, he didn't ask to be spared a death. He just asked to be remembered. One was proud.

[18:00] One was humble. two different attitudes toward Christ. He believed Jesus would remember him. Romans 10, 9 says, if you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you'll be saved.

This is exactly what the second criminal did. Except, he didn't believe in a past resurrection that we do. He believed the first and future resurrection, which is even more amazing.

We know that Jesus raised from the dead. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus was seen by more than 500 people at one time. So it was easier for us to believe because we got the witness of the Bible and so on.

But this man was just being crucified with Jesus. He saw Jesus dying as a common criminal and yet he still believed that Jesus would rise from the dead and come as king.

Come into his kingdom. And then Jesus responds. And the words of Jesus' response are incredible. First of all, the word truly marks the statement as important.

[19:17] In fact, Jesus was saying, pay careful attention to what I'm about to say because it's important. Don't miss anything. It's important. Then he says, today, you'll be with me in paradise.

And the word today is a great deal of significance. It's interesting I've heard of people who want to move the comma and say that truly I tell you today, you'll be with me in paradise.

It's that people talk as if there's no intermediate state. But now, it's interesting I looked up in Bible Gateway where the verse in all translations and they all had the comma in the same place.

Not a single translator that wants to say anything other than today you'll be with me in paradise.

Now why is important the word today? First of all, remember that crucifixion took three or four days often to accomplish.

what Jesus is saying to the common criminal, to the second criminal, is your suffering is going to end today. Not three days from now, but today. How many of you have seen a loved one dying of cancer or some other horrible disease and when they finally pass away you said, his suffering or her suffering is finally over.

[20:38] That's what Jesus is saying to them. Your suffering will be over today. And in John it talks about when the soldiers came and they broke the legs of the criminals on either side of Jesus to hasten their death.

Now obviously breaking your leg is painful. Not something I'd appreciate, but would hasten by his death. It meant that he would die that day. Not three days from there, but that day.

And then it says you'll be with me in paradise. the criminal says remember me when you come into your kingdom. He was thinking of the distant event that we still celebrate. The idea when Jesus would come again in his kingdom.

Celebrate his kingdom and he says remember me when you come into your kingdom. That's what he wanted. Something in the future. Jesus said yeah, you get the future, but I'm going to promise you something today.

You're going to be with me in paradise. What's paradise? Paradise was used to be the term for the garden in Persia, but it came to be referred to as the intermediate state.

[21 : 51] It's also what Jesus refers to as a parable of the rich man and Lazarus where the Lazarus is gathered and Abraham's and the rich man is in Hades and suffering. Paradise the intermediate state is referred to in the Old Testament is Abraham's bosom and in the New Testament is the presence of Christ.

Paul says in Philippians 1 22 to 24, I desire to part and be with Christ. The other significant thing is that today you're going to have to work off your punishment.

It's been a few years working off your punishment and all the rest of the way. Normally some people think, well there's got to be some punishment. Reminds me an episode of one of my old favorite shows and Get Smart where Get Smart is captured and one of the chaos agents wants to torture him and says, what?

No torture? That's what we would think when Jesus says, today you'll be with me in paradise. Our cry out for justice says, what? No torture?

We want people, we want to sense that in some way or another we are paying for our sins. And here's a man horrible, deserving of death by his own admission and Jesus says, today you'll be with me in paradise.

[23 : 12] He wasn't baptized. He never went to church. He never did any great good deeds. Never tithed. But today you'll be with me in paradise.

That's grace. That's what grace is all about. As a song that we sing times goes, the vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus his pardon receives.

That's what it's about. And we got to realize that that's what grace is. There's a real contrast between the two criminals. Got more than he asked for.

One thought only about the present. One only asked to be remembered. One rejected Christ. One confessed faith. One was proud. One was humble. And that's the way it is today.

Those are the two responses to Jesus Christ right today. The response of pride, I can make it on my own. Or, I haven't done anything wrong. Not anything terribly wrong.

[24 : 18] My good deeds outweigh my bad deeds. That's the one attitude. Then there's the attitude of the second criminal. I have sinned. I deserve only death.

I've done nothing worthy of anything. Yet I humbly cast my feet at Jesus and say, remember me. That's the gospel.

The gospel is simple. Confessing our sins, confessing our inadequacy, and confessing our faith in Jesus Christ. That's it. Simple truth.

Luke 19.10 says, For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. Think about, that's exactly what Jesus is doing. He's saving the lost even when he's dying on a cross.

And he's opening his kingdom to a criminal. One who deserves death. But, it also reminds us that it's never too late. Hebrews 9.27 says, Just as people are destined to die once and after that to face judgment, reminds us that while there's life, there's hope.

[25 : 27] If you've got a loved one that doesn't know Christ, you've still got a chance as long as there's life. We're celebrating 40 years since I was ordained in the Christian ministry. After serving my Savior for decades, I have one request.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.