

Luke Ch23v35-43 - Sayings From The Cross #2

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[0 : 00] Well good morning everybody. You might like to turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 23. We're going to read from verses 35 to 43. So it's Luke chapter 23 and verses 35 to 43.

And last time I was with you on a Sunday morning we were looking at the first of the sayings of the Lord Jesus from the cross and I'm a great believer in simply just moving on to the next thing and keeping going and trusting the Lord to speak to our hearts. So we're going to look at the second saying from the cross which actually just continues on where we left off the last time where Jesus prayed, Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. So read from verse 35.

It'll also be on the screen in front of you. The people stood watching and the rulers even sneered at him. They said he saved others let him save himself if he is God's Messiah the chosen one. The soldiers also came up and mocked him.

They offered him wine vinegar and said if you are 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 are under the same sentence.

[1 : 43] We are punished justly for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. Then he said to Jesus. Then he said Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.

And Jesus answered him. Truly I tell you. Today you will be with me in paradise. So Father we pray that as we look at your word this morning that you might bring comfort to our hearts.

That you might increase our faith. That you might give us greater confidence in the words of the Lord Jesus. And a greater hope for the things that are to come.

And we ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen. Well I have no idea what comes to mind when you think of the word paradise.

Some of you are probably immediately thinking of a sun holiday. The feeling of warm sand between your toes and the sun upon your skin. Well it doesn't get much better than that.

[2 : 58] If you are busy parents. And as much as you love your children. And I know you do.

Perhaps your idea of paradise is a weekend away without the children. If you are grandparents with an empty nest.

Nothing fills you with greater joy than all of the grandchildren coming. And staying for the weekends. And for others it might be the idea of simply getting away with a group of friends. And enjoying one another's company for a few days. You see the reality is that your idea of paradise and mine are probably altogether different.

But for a moment I want you to think less about the place. And more about the feeling. Because however different our ideas of paradise might be.

They probably stir up the same kinds of feelings. Fulfillment. Peace. Delight. Contentment.

[4 : 00] Joy. Pleasure. That place that you would like to stay forever. And never have to go back to the daily routine of normal life.

That's the promise of paradise. And that's exactly what Jesus offers one of these criminals who hangs on the cross next to him.

The promise of paradise. Now it's difficult to know what this man knew about Jesus before the day of his execution.

He has certainly heard Jesus ask God to forgive the people who are responsible for his death. And he seems convinced that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

So here on the cross in verse 42 with his dying breath he says, Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.

[5 : 01] Well it is a bold request isn't it? By a man who has absolutely nothing to offer.

But he asks it just the same. And more surprising yet is Jesus' response. Truly I tell you, Today you will be with me in paradise.

You see the promise of paradise is given to this man immediately upon death. It's more than he could ever imagine.

He simply asked Jesus to remember me when you come into your kingdom. His thinking is far away. It's in the future.

It's distant. It's out of reach. But Jesus responds, Truly I tell you, Today you will be with me in paradise.

[6 : 04] The answer to this request would come much sooner than this man had hoped. He wasn't going to rest in some kind of unconscious state, awaiting the kingdom of Jesus to be established, sometime in the way off distant future.

His soul wasn't going to be put on ice, awaiting the resurrection of the body. No, he would be with Jesus that very day.

As believers in Jesus, this is the wonderful hope that we have. That though our bodies are buried in the ground, we do so in sure and certain hope of the resurrection of the body when Jesus comes again.

Not resting in some kind of unconscious state until he comes. But no, immediately upon death, we enter into what Jesus calls paradise.

But we are probably more familiar with calling heaven. Now popular thinking about heaven usually conjures up all kinds of images of clouds and harps and the angels.

[7 : 14] And the reality is that the Bible doesn't give us a lot of information about heaven. Truth is, it's pretty light on the details. Rather, when the Bible speaks about heaven, it's less focused on the what and more focused on the who.

Ultimately, the promise of paradise is less about a place and more about a person. And we see that here in the words of the Lord Jesus.

He tells this dying man that immediately upon death, he will be with Jesus. Jesus says, truly I tell you today, you will be with me in paradise.

You see, ultimately that is what makes heaven heaven. The presence of Jesus. Remember the apostle Paul described it as being away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Yes, the body dies. Yes, the body is put to rest in the ground. But the soul, the person, is immediately at home with the Lord.

[8 : 34] It's for that reason that Paul, as he's in prison and threatened with death, could write, I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.

It's what enabled the first Christian martyr, Stephen, to say with his dying breath, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. See what both Paul and Stephen are confident of?

Immediately upon death, they would be with Jesus. Now, many of us take comfort in the knowledge that in death, we will be reunited with a loved one who has died in the Lord.

I completely understand why we do that. But the comfort of the gospel is far greater than that. The comfort of the gospel is that they will be with Jesus and that we will be with Jesus and it is the presence of Jesus that makes heaven heaven.

Not the presence of those that we love. And it's the presence of Jesus that would welcome this dying criminal into paradise.

[9 : 57] This dying thief immediately upon death would be with Jesus awaiting his coming kingdom. Remember, that was his request in the first place.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Now, when Jesus responds by telling the dying man that he'd be with Jesus in paradise that very day, he's not attempting to correct the man's theology.

He's not saying, no, forget this talk about a coming kingdom. Today, you're going to be with me in paradise. No, the man's understanding does need to be expanded.

It does need to be filled out. It is incomplete, but it is not incorrect. And perhaps the same thing could be said about our thinking.

You see, if your future hope is only of heaven, of paradise, of what happens immediately upon death, then your theology is just as incomplete as the dying thief.

[11 : 14] His thinking was too far into the future, but perhaps yours is too immediate. You see, the dying thief is thinking only of the future kingdom with little or no understanding of the immediate promise that Jesus offers of paradise.

But perhaps yours is only focused on the immediate promise of heaven with little or no thought of the world that is yet to come.

What the Bible describes as the new heavens and the new earth. You see, the end of the Bible, and I know that you've been looking at this recently, finishes with the most incredible imagery, picturing the new Jerusalem with God himself as the temple descending from heaven so that as John describes it, God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them.

It is literally heaven upon earth. God makes this new earth his dwelling place.

And all who've trusted in Jesus will enjoy a real resurrected physical life on a real renewed physical earth.

[12 : 42] It will be a world in which you really do get to feel the sand between your toes and the sun upon your skin. A world in which there is fulfillment in all of the work that you do.

Pleasure in the relationships that you have. Joy in the things you get to do with others. Peace with your neighbors. Delight in the food you eat. And intimacy with the God that you love.

The world that is to come, the new heaven and earth, is a physical one. Not only with sights and sounds, but with touch and smell and taste.

It's a world just as physical as ours. C.S. Lewis would say more real than ours. And it is the final destination of all of God's people.

Until that time, we experience what theologians call the intermediate states. Immediately upon death, the believer in Jesus is immediately present with Jesus in heaven.

[13 : 58] What the Apostle Paul describes as better, is the final destination of all of God's people.

That will only happen when Jesus returns to the earth from heaven, defeats all of his enemies, raises even our dead bodies from the ground, and ushers in his everlasting kingdom on a new heavens and earth.

If the criminal's concept of the afterlife was incomplete and limited, because he was missing the assurance of paradise upon death, ours is just as incomplete.

Perhaps even more incomplete than his. If we are missing the very best parts of all that God has promised, a real, resurrected, physical life on a real, renewed, physical earth, on which God will dwell with his people forever.

The criminal on the cross simply asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom. But Jesus gives him the promise of paradise.

[15 : 24] Immediately upon death, that he would be with Jesus, awaiting his coming kingdom. And it's the same promise that Jesus offers to all who will turn to him in faith.

The promise of paradise. Immediately upon death, that we will be with Jesus while we wait for his coming kingdom. A renewed heavens and earth where we will enjoy life with our saviour as it was always intended to be.

Now, in the advertising world, when you're offered the promise of paradise, no matter if it's a two-week sun holiday, a weekend spa break or retreat where you get to indulge in your favourite hobby, you know that there is going to be a cost.

As the sales agent tries to sell you the promise of paradise, you already have this question going around in your mind. What will this cost?

So what is the price of paradise? We've heard the promise of paradise, but how much will it cost?

[16 : 48] Well, here, the promise of paradise is offered to someone who was deserving judgment. The two men crucified with Jesus are identified throughout as criminals.

We see that in verse 32 and 39 and again in 40. They are lawbreakers. These are men whose crimes are so serious, in fact, that they have been sentenced to death.

And in the Roman world, that was by means of crucifixion. Now, in other cultures and at different times, executions were swift. Whether it was the guillotine in France or the gallows in England, it was meant to be quick and clinical.

But it was not that way in the Roman world. Crucifixion was purposefully designed to be slow and painful. The condemned person hung upon the cross, experiencing both excruciating pain in their

body and suffocation in their lungs.

It could go on for hours, even into death. But it was a warning to all around that this was the judgment that fell on those who broke the Roman laws.

[18:04] Now, one of those criminals is able to recognize just that. Look at verse 41. He says to the other, we are punished justly for we are getting what our deeds deserve.

On each side of Jesus hang those who are deserving judgment. But there is a greater judgment than that of the Roman Empire. It is a judgment far greater than any judgment that we could experience in this life.

And it is the judgment of God. It is a punishment that never comes to an end. It is the eternal judgment of hell.

One of these criminals fears God just as little as he has feared the Roman Empire. But the other is aware that whatever judgment he faces now, there is an even greater judgment yet to come.

He pleads with the other criminal that if he will not take seriously the judgment of the Roman Empire, that he will at least take seriously the judgment of God. He pleads in verse 40, don't you fear God?

[19:20] Stop these insults. Stop the mockery. Don't you understand who it is that hangs on the cross beside us? But this man dies as he has lived with concern neither for the laws of men nor for the commands of God.

Breaking the laws of Rome left both of these men deserving judgment. But ignoring, breaking, and disregarding the commands of God leaves every one of us deserving far greater judgment.

It doesn't matter whether you are the greatest of lawbreakers or the most careful of law abiders. All of us find ourselves in the same positioning of deserving the judgment of God.

For each of us has failed to live as we should. Loving God as we should. Caring for others as we should. Whether we realize it or not, we are those who are deserving of judgment the greater judgment of God.

But between these two criminals was the one who had done nothing wrong. Once again this is obvious to one of the criminals.

[20:43] He can't understand the way in which the other one is insulting Jesus. They're all under the same judgment but he can see clearly in verse 41 this man has done nothing wrong.

Now it's hard again to know what this man knew or how he came to this conclusion. Had he heard about Jesus and his ministry? Had he heard about the miracles of Jesus? Or did he hear the teaching of Jesus?

Has he heard about Pilate declaring the man innocent and yet condemning him to death? Or is it simply what he's observed of Jesus as he hangs on the cross? We don't know but he had seen enough to know that next to him hung one who had done nothing wrong.

You see here is the price of paradise that the one who had done nothing wrong would die for those deserving judgments.

I'm sure you noticed that three times Jesus is encouraged to save himself. First in verse 35 the crowd standing around watching and the rulers sneered at him.

[22:00] They said he saved others let him save himself if he is God's Messiah the chosen one.

It's followed by the soldiers who mock him in verse 37 if you are the king of the Jews save yourself.

the final time by one of these criminals hanging next to him in verse 39 aren't you the Messiah save yourself and us? Couldn't Jesus have saved himself if he really was God's promised Messiah?

Wouldn't Jesus have had the power to strike down his enemies with a single word? couldn't Jesus have prevented all of this from happening?

Well we know of course he could but the price of paradise was that the one who had done nothing wrong would die for those deserving judgment.

After all who has the right to paradise to eternal pleasure to enjoy life with the holy God except the one who deserves it.

[23:16] One who's lived a spotless life. One who's innocent of breaking any of the commands of God. One who's only ever loved God perfectly.

Jesus alone was deserving of paradise. But for you and I to enjoy paradise death. Well a price had to be paid.

The one who had done nothing wrong would die for those deserving judgment. Isn't that what's happening on the cross?

Of course Jesus could save himself. Of course Jesus could strike down his enemies with a single word. but if he had done that he could not have spoken these words to the criminal who is dying on the cross.

Today you will be with me in paradise. Indeed he could never have made that promise to any of us. [24 : 26] you see the price of paradise was one that we could never pay. That psalm that Ralph read at the beginning showed that very clearly.

And yet here it is offered to us freely. The dying thief bears witness to that. He could do nothing to earn his place in paradise.

He had no time to do anything. He lacked all ability to do anything. He simply looked to Jesus in faith.

And that is the only way that any of us find a place in paradise. When we realize that we could never do anything to earn our place there.

That we could never pay enough to secure our place there. That we could never do enough to deserve our place there. But rather like this dying criminal we look to Jesus in faith.

[25 : 35] Trusting that what he has done has secured for us what we could never achieve for ourselves. The promise of paradise immediately upon death while we wait for his coming kingdom.

let's pray together. Father as we read these words we see this man being offered something far greater than he can possibly imagine.

His request has been bold enough and yet he's given even more still. and we know that that was only possible because the one who had done nothing wrong would die for those deserving judgment.

And Father we thank you that that promise that is extended to this man is extended to us and indeed extended to all who will turn to Jesus in faith. That we too can enjoy paradise.

That we can be with Jesus while we wait for his coming kingdom. Oh Father it's beyond our comprehension all that you have planned for your people.

[26 : 57] But we pray that again today that you will have helped us to further grasp something more of the life that lies ahead and that it most certainly is not because of anything that we have done but only because of what the Lord Jesus has done for us.

And we pray this in his name. Amen. In just a moment we're going to stand and we're going to sing together Jesus Pet It All.

And then after that Ralph's going to lead us in a time around the Lord's table. So when the musicians are ready we'll stand to sing.