

Jesus, the Sinners' Saviour (Communion)

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[0 : 0 0] says to Jesus, verse 42, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Jesus said to him, truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

And what are we seeing when we see that scene there in Calvary when the repentant thief is asking Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom? And then, surely we're focusing on the grace of the Lord Jesus when he says to that man, that criminal, truly, I say to you today, you'll be with me in paradise.

And, you know, as we contemplate the grace of the Lord Jesus, even in uttering these words to that repentant sinner, as we see what's happening there on the cross, as Jesus is hanging there, as he's at that point of death, as he's at that point where he's going to give his life for the sins of his people, what do we see?

We see love. We see the love of the Lord Jesus. We see love towards a sinner who by his own works, by his own merits, couldn't save himself.

We see a sinner whose life had been so characterized by sin and criminality. And yet, as we would say at that eleventh hour, in fact, just some moments before his death, he's brought into the kingdom of God through faith in the Lord Jesus, through the grace that Jesus shows to that individual.

[1 : 3 6] And, you know, as we're seeing again, and we've read this account many times, you've read this account many times, as we see Luke's account of the crucifixion, we're seeing grace.

We're seeing that grace that not just this repentant sinner received that he didn't deserve, but we're seeing the grace that none of us deserves. I don't deserve it. You don't deserve it.

None of us deserve it. As we were thinking last night in our pre-communion service, because we're sinners, we've offended a holy God because of the sin within us, because of our sinful natures.

But we come to this passage and we rejoice that we see grace given. Grace is undeserved, but glorious grace.

Heaven source grace. Grace is undeserved, but glorious grace. And as Luke tells us, by the inspired word of God, as Luke tells us of this grace, then it's for each one of us surely just to gasp and wonder and amazement that even there on the cross, Jesus has concern for that individual, just as he has concern for everyone for whom he came to give his life.

[2 : 5 3] So, we look again at this scene. We see again the Son of God hanging on the cross. There he is, hanging between two criminals. And of course, the one criminal who will not bow the knee to Jesus, who will not give his life to the Saviour, even as he's breathing his last.

And yet on the other side, the other criminal, the one who, as other scripture accounts tell us, when he was on the cross initially, hurled insults at Jesus.

But through the divine grace of God, one time refusing to honour the Lord Jesus, but by that grace of God, being enabled to give his life to the Saviour when he sees who Jesus truly is.

And we marvel, as we say, at the grace of the Lord Jesus in saving that thief, that repentant thief. And, well, you know, this is a communion service.

This is a service where we remember the Lord's death till he comes. This is a communion service where we recall the wonder of the depth of the grace of God in sending Jesus to die for sinners such as ourselves.

[4 : 16] So, we look on the Saviour. We look by faith. We look in love. And we look in thanksgiving for all that the Saviour has done for us.

And to be particularly focused on what Jesus has done and that this passage brings forward and brings forth. Three things, I think, to notice particularly.

Three things that are not coincidental, not just happening by chance, but three things that we see to encourage you, you who will be taking the Lord's Supper in a few moments' time.

And, yes, to encourage all of us here, whether you're taking the Supper or not, to see Jesus. You're not taking the Lord's Supper. Look to Jesus.

Look to the one who was willing to come for you, to die for you. And there's Jesus. Where is he? He's in the midst of sinners. And where's Jesus?

[5 : 14] What's he doing? He's converting a lost sinner there on the cross. And how is he doing it? He's receiving that lost sinner. So, let's look at these three aspects that we see in verse 42 and 43.

First of all, Jesus in the midst of sinners. Now, think of Jesus' earthly life from the moment he was born through his life. What do we see?

Well, think of the moments when Jesus was born. Yes, in one sense he was in the midst of sinners. Mary, his mother, was a sinner. There was no, you know, immaculate conception or any of that stuff.

No. But remember, when Jesus is born, he's surrounded by those who love him. Mary, his mother, loves her son. Mary's husband, Joseph, is there.

The worshipping shepherds who honour the Lord Jesus. And then as an infant, in all likelihood two years later, the magi, the wise men, they come to worship Jesus.

[6 : 20] Sinners worshipping the Saviour. But of course, through Jesus' life, he's continually in the midst of sinners. Those who reject him.

Those who will have nothing to do with the Saviour. The authorities, the religious leaders, the political leaders, having nothing to do with him. And then when Jesus comes to this moment when he gives his life, when he's about to give his life, what do we see?

We see hatred. We see insults. We see mocking. We see sneering. We see that even as we read there from verse 32 onwards.

You see that thread running through of all levels of society. Showing not just their disapproval of Jesus, but their rejection of Jesus.

The religious rulers, they're scoffing at Jesus. The soldiers, they're mocking him. The soldiers, they're like a good, you know, it's just a spectacle to these soldiers.

[7 : 25] And even the criminal hurling insults at Jesus. But while, you know, the authorities, the Roman rulers who put Jesus on that cross, although we're not told specifically, it may well have been that there's Jesus deliberately placed between two criminals.

Jesus who claimed to be king, king of the Jews, but there he is now in between these two criminals. Whether that was engineered or not, the point is this.

It's exactly where Jesus must be. That's the area that by God's sovereign purposes, Jesus is there on the cross in the midst of sinners.

God had eternally decreed that his one and only son should die in that very place, at that very time, in that very location.

Jesus followed his father's will in everything he delighted to do, his father's will, even dying for sinners. He's there to reconcile sinners to God.

[8 : 31] But even in that very place, where Jesus is giving his life, he's there between two, two criminals who deserve, by the law of the land, deserve to be put to death.

And that's what we see there in verse 33. When they came to the place that's called the skull, named Golgotha, there they crucified him and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

And, you know, when we read through scripture, we see that this was absolutely God's purpose, the divine purpose for Jesus dying, even in that place between two criminals.

And, of course, a very real reason why Jesus should die in the midst of criminals. Because he was identifying with these sinners. Jesus who came to give his life.

Jesus who came to bear the sins of his people. Jesus who was made sin for us. Jesus, even there on the cross, identifying fully with sinners.

[9 : 36] Go back to the prophecy of Isaiah some 700 years before Jesus' day. Isaiah prophesied about that very situation, the suffering servant, the servant whose death would be that substitute, him for us in our place, that death to satisfy God's justice.

You read in Isaiah 53 verse 12, he was numbered with the transgressors. But when you read the original language, it brings it even more, even more pertinently, he let himself be numbered among the transgressors.

He let himself, he allowed himself to be numbered with the transgressors. I mean, if you let yourself do something, if you allow yourself to do something, you're doing it voluntarily.

You're allowing such and such a thing to happen. And that's what we're seeing here. But Jesus, he allowed himself to be numbered with sinners.

He let himself. He did it by his own free will. And this really brings to us the truth that the sinless Son of God, the sinless Son in whom was no sin, he let himself be there among sinners.

[11 : 01] There he is paying the price for sin. There he is showing truly that he is the saviour of sinners. So it's no coincidence that Jesus was there in between these two criminals.

Jesus was counted with transgressors, with sinners. He allowed himself to be there on the cross between the criminal on his right hand and the criminal on his left hand.

In fact, that being among sinners, it wasn't simply there on the cross that that, of course, happened. It was throughout this whole ministry. Remember when Jesus was baptised at the start of his ministry.

Why did he allow? He allowed himself to be baptised. He let himself be baptised by John, John the Baptist. Why? Because Jesus wanted to identify with sinners who need to be cleansed, who need to be washed by his blood.

And now Jesus, again, he's identified with sinners because he's come to bear the sin of the world. And there's Jesus, willing. You see, the grace of Jesus being willing to identify with sinners, even though he'd done nothing wrong.

[12 : 15] Not one nanosecond of sin had ever entered Jesus' heart. But here he was, before the justice of God, to give his life for sinners, so that God's wrath would be appeased.

And you see the contrast. The sinner who deserved death, and either side of Jesus who deserved nothing of death. You see the sinless perfection in the midst of sin.

And when you see Jesus there on that cross, then we worship the one who was crucified for us. We worship the crucified Christ.

The Christ, of course, who was crucified and who rose again. But we worship the Christ who gave his life so that you might have eternal life.

And you who are about to receive the elements before you, you who are going to take the bread, you're going to take the wine, remember what you are doing.

[13 : 20] You're remembering his death. You're taking what we call the sacrament. A sacrament's just a sign. You're taking these signs that point to the body and blood of Jesus given for sinners, given for you.

That bread that's going to be broken, the bread that reveals or points to the broken body of Jesus. And the wine that you have there that points to the blood of Jesus shed for you.

When the animal sacrifices happened in the Old Testament, the blood that was shed at that point, telling that life had been given for another. When you take that cup or these cups to your mouth, be reminded, remember that life was given.

That life was given voluntarily by Jesus for you. He allowed himself to be given in sacrifice so that you might not face the penalty that sin deserves.

But in saying that, you know, Jesus there is in the midst of sinners, let's not forget this. Jesus, he's still in the midst of sinners. He's still with us even now.

[14 : 31] Jesus is present with us as a congregation, with us by his Spirit. We come to the Lord's table. It's the Lord's table.

He's the head of the table. We speak of the Lord's Supper. And when you take the bread, take the wine, then we can say that you're feeding on Christ spiritually.

And you're doing it by faith. And by faith, you see in the bread and the wine, by faith you see the sinless Saviour who gave his life for sinner you and sinner me.

So rejoice that he is. He's been now with sinners, letting himself dwell with sinners. He's here to feast with sinners as we feast with him.

He's given you that promise that he's with you always, even to the very end of the age. So Christ there in the midst of sinners.

[15 : 29] But secondly, as we see more particularly, Christ, Lord Jesus, converting a lost sinner. And again, you know, you really have to just think hard on what's happening there on the cross.

With Jesus' life, his life's ebbing away. That life that Jesus had for 33 years, that physical life, that life is now ebbing away.

The physical pain, of course, is there. The hands nailed to the cross. The feet nailed to the cross. He's got the thorns on his head. He's thirsting.

It's that slow loss of life. Even deliberately so, the Romans were very clever in exercising that torture. But of course, there's that greater, infinitely greater pain.

That pain that no human will ever endure. That pain of sin bearing, bearing the sins of his people. And there's Jesus on the cross there and Jesus giving his life and he's aware that he is there to bear the sins of his people.

[16 : 44] He's going to drink from a cup, but he's going to drink from the cup of God's wrath. And he's going to do that. He's going to drink it to the full so that every single one for whom he came to give his life will be saved.

And he's doing all this, bearing the sin of his people. He's doing it in the midst of pain. He's doing it in the midst of shame. He's been mocked, as we said.

He's been taunted. The assaults of hell are directed towards Jesus on the cross. And not only that, but as other gospel writers tell us, Matthew and Mark tell us, at first both thieves, both criminals, hurling their insults at Jesus.

But it's actually only Luke who tells us that a conversion happens there at that little mound in Calvary.

One of the thieves is converted. One of the thieves turns to Jesus. One of the thieves is saved. And I know we can maybe dwell too much on the repentant thief and not enough on the Lord Jesus on the cross.

[17 : 52] But, you know, as we look at the repentant thief there, as Luke directs us to, then surely we're the more directed to the love of God and the work of God and the grace that saves a lost sinner and that grace that continues to save sinners.

And, you know, we marvel what is happening there on the cross. We don't know that, humanly speaking anyway, what turned that thief from one who hurled insults at Jesus to one who gave his life to the Saviour.

Lots and lots of theories, I suppose, as to what turned that man's heart. But surely the answer is that God was working a work of faith in that man's heart so that even if that man's life was ebbing away, his life, his physical life, ebbing away, the glory of eternal life has been gifted to him.

And you see that transformation as we read there, certainly from verse 39 to verse 42. You know, there's blasphemy all around Jesus.

You know, we're told that one of the criminals hanging there railed it to him, aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us. You know, there's blasphemy on the cross. Because there's, you know, because there's denial that Jesus is the Christ.

[19 : 20] There's the crowd mocking Jesus below. You know, are you really the Son of God? They're denying who Jesus is, denying his power. But with all that blasphemy around him, here's Jesus.

The marvel of Jesus there in his love and his grace. I mean, you know, think of Jesus identifying even with the prophets, the Old Testament prophets.

Prophets were abused by the people. They didn't, the people didn't believe the word of God that the prophets gave. And now here's the greatest of the prophets. He's been rejected by men.

He's suffering the blasphemies of hell. He's suffering the hatred of Satan. And he will not leave the cross. He'll remain there. It's not the nails.

It's not the nails that hold Jesus to the cross. It's his love. It's love for sinners. And as we said, you know, other accounts, other gospel accounts tell us at first that two criminals are blaspheming Jesus.

[20 : 30] But what do we notice? Luke tells us, verse 40, the second thief, he stops his blaspheming of Jesus. Jesus no longer has been mocked by him. And we see clearly that this criminal, this repentant criminal has been converted.

He no longer blasphemes Jesus. He now even, he rebukes the criminal on the other side of Jesus. And that repentant thief, you know, he's saying to that other criminal, don't you fear God?

since you're under the same sentence of condemnation as I am. But the other thief won't change. He won't give his life to Jesus.

The repentant thief knows that he's there because of the crimes that he's committed. But he's changed. He's transformed. Grace has changed him. The love of God has changed him.

Just as grace and the love of God has changed you who professed the name of Jesus who will testify to that grace in a few moments' time when you take the bread and take the wine and make your public profession of faith in Jesus.

- [21 : 44] Because it's not just the criminal on the cross where we see grace, the work of God and grace in saving a person. It's all, all for whom Jesus gave his life.
- you were converted. You who loved the Lord Jesus, you were converted through the grace of God. I don't know the circumstances of your conversion.
- Some of you may have been converted in a dramatic fashion. I would imagine most of you through a gradual process. But here's a man who's dying.
- He's got just moments left in his life. But the point here, surely, isn't so much to say, well we can wait to the last moment before we give our lives to Jesus.
- No. The point surely is the urgency of giving your life to Jesus. There was a person who, someone who said to Bishop Ryle, there's no urgency for my salvation.
- [22 : 48] He's remember the dying thief. And then Bishop Ryle said to him, ah yes, but which one? Which one? It was only one thief was saved and that by the grace of God.
- And don't let there be anyone here this morning who are saying, you know, we can just wait for another opportunity. Maybe the next communion time or maybe, you know, when I feel more like it and I'll maybe consider giving my life to Jesus.
- No. You know, I think Victorians used to glamorize deathbed conversions. Well, I've only heard of one and that second hand. It's a rare, it happens, of course it happens.
- But, you know, we look to the miracle of grace in every person, every converted sinner's life. That thief that was saved on the cross, it's not, that's not given to us to tell, you know, of the probability of a last chance.
- No. We're told here of the power of God to save sinners in so many different circumstances. Whoever you are, whether you're a thief or a criminal or whatever sins you've committed, then remember that God will not cast anyone away who calls upon him in faith.
- [24 : 14] That thief had first met Jesus with hatred and blasphemy. But that thief was converted for the very grace of God. Don't give up on anyone for whom even now, even today, is blaspheming Jesus, hurling abuse at Jesus.
- No, remember, remember that thief, that repentant thief whom God touched with a saving grace. And, remember, you who will be taking the bread and the wine.
- You think on that time when you were converted, when you gave your life, you who once were at enmity with a saviour, but grace changed your life.
- What will you do when you come to the table? Yes, you'll remember what Christ has done for you and is giving of himself for you on the cross. What else will you do? You'll be humbly receiving the Lord Jesus by faith.
- You'll be humbly recognising the death of Jesus. But, won't you also be giving thanks? You know, one of the words that we use for communion is maybe a word we sort of tend to not to use in our own tradition, the word Eucharist.
- [25 : 33] But, I think it's an important word Eucharist. Eucharist is from the Greek word thanksgiving. And, it's something that was certainly stressed at the time of Reformation. this is a thanksgiving.
- This is a time to give thanks to God for the gift of the Lord Jesus. And so, truly we do come to the table with thanksgiving in our heart.
- And, truly we do and should be at the table giving thanks. Even as you take, you know, when you're taking a meal, you're giving grace, you're giving thanks. Well, surely even when you take the bread and take the wine, give thanks in your heart to God for the gift of Jesus.

Give thanks to Jesus for what he's done for you and what he continues to do for you. Yes, even when you leave the table, return thanks.

It's a tradition, I know, in different parts, or some parts of our land, in returning thanks after a meal. Well, surely even in the meal of meals, the Lord's Supper, we can return thanks for all that God has blessed us with, even in a communion, in a Lord's Supper.

[26 : 40] Well, what have we seen so far? Christ in the midst of sinners, Christ converting a lost sinner, but then finally Christ receiving that lost sinner.

That repentant thief, he'd been rebuking that first, that unrepentant thief. You can just see that across the bow of Jesus, as it were, words.

But then, you know, as he stops rebuking that unrepentant thief, he turns to Jesus. He turns to Jesus. And he looks at the face of Jesus, the face covered in blood.

He looks at the Saviour who's dying on the cross. And he offers perhaps the first prayer he ever offered in his life. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

You read it in the original Greek, you read it in the English here, it's just nine words, nine simple words, nine short words. This is a short sentence, this is a short prayer, but it's a prayer of faith.

[27 : 47] It's a prayer of faith that expresses that faith in the Lord who's King, who's Saviour. This is the last human to speak directly to Jesus before Jesus.

dies. And there, you know, with all, as we've said, all that blasphemy and hatred and rejection all around there, all around Calvary, we have the dying thief speaking to Jesus, but he's not mocking him anymore, he's not insulting Jesus anymore, he's speaking to him in faith and in prayer.

Here's this thief, he's recognising who Jesus is, he's the divine son of God and the thief is recognising this. And he's even addressing Jesus by his name, by the name Jesus.

Again, this is important, Luke wants to bring out the importance of this, because as you know, the word Jesus is from the Hebrew word Yeshua, Joshua, the word that means Lord saves.

So here's the repentant thief calling on Jesus, the Lord who saves, the Lord who saved him even on that cross. And he knows, now he knows Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

[29 : 04] Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. This repentant thief is recognising Jesus as king.

He's recognising that Jesus has a kingdom to bring sinners into. And he's saying, Lord Jesus, don't forget me when you come into your kingdom.

there's so much even in these few words just to dwell on. I think the first thing is to notice the natural nature of salvation.

Jesus, remember me. Remember me. Jesus saves sinners, individual sinners. He saves you, he saves me.

He saves the worst of sinners. He saves individuals who think they're worth nothing, even in the eyes of the world. But he saves sinners.

[30 : 01] He saves you, he saves me. And you remember that when you come to the Lord's table. You remember that when you're sitting, even out with the table.

He knows you. He knows you individually. He knows you better than you know yourself. I mean, that thief on the cross, he was a criminal. Life had obviously been a life of perpetual sin and wickedness and evil.

But he still realized that Jesus was willing to receive lost sinners such as himself. And by faith he knew that Jesus wouldn't turn them away. And just as you have come to the Saviour, you came by faith.

And with that faith knowing that Jesus wouldn't turn you away, whatever your past, whatever your background, love. Because you knew that the Lord Jesus is the Saviour of love.

And notice that response of love that Jesus gives to the repentant sinner in verse 43, truly I say to you, today you'll be with me in paradise. You know, again think of the context that Jesus is saying this.

[31 : 12] He's not saying this away from the cross, he's saying this on the cross. So even in the midst of his intense suffering, the suffering of his soul, Jesus is showing that man the love and the grace of the Saviour.

He's saying to the repentant thief, your prayers being answered, yes, this day, this very, very day, you're going to be with me, not on a cross, but you're going to be with me in glory.

Truly, Jesus says, truly, this is truth that Jesus is speaking, what he promises, he'll fulfill. The very day of the death of the thief on the cross, the very day of the death of Jesus will be the day when they're reconciled, when they meet together in the glory of heaven.

Jesus gives that man true hope that he's going to be secure eternally in the paradise of heaven. I mentioned a moment ago that the thief recognised Jesus as king, and, you know, when we again grasp what we're seeing here of Jesus on the cross, you know, we think of Jesus as prophet, priest, and king, and aren't we seeing this there on the cross, Jesus making himself known as king, the thieves recognise that, Jesus saying to the thief today, you'll be with me in paradise, surely that tells of the power, the majestic power of Jesus as king, the power that's going to make it possible for the sinner to come into his kingdom.

We've mentioned already Jesus when he suffered like the prophets of old suffering, but again here's Jesus on the cross, he's showing that he's the great prophet, he's a prophet proclaimed truth, he's proclaiming truth, prophets foretold what was to happen in the will of God, Jesus is foretelling what's going to happen to that thief in the will of God.

[33 : 18] There he is as prophet, as king, and there he is as priest, he's offering himself on the cross. He's the sacrifice, yes, but he's the one who's offering himself as priest.

But remember this, remember this is important, it's not just on the cross that Jesus is prophet, priest and king, king. Even now, he's prophet, priest and king because as prophet, he's continuing to reveal to you God's will for your salvation.

He's there as prophet to reveal to you what the will of God is for your salvation. and when you take the bread and take the wine give thanks that he is doing that as prophet and he's continuing to act as priest.

He's even now continually interceding for you at the throne of grace and give thanks that he's doing that even now for you and he's continuing to be king, he's king in the hearts of all who are his and so we cry out what a savior, our prophet, our priest, our king.

So we remember the Lord's death. We remember it by faith. We remember by faith that he's pointing to his death through the sacrament, through the bread and the wine.

[34 : 44] As you're about to take these, remember that you've been fed in your souls. The word has fed you, the word has nourished you. And even the elements, what we call the elements, the bread and the wine.

They are there to nourish, to feed your souls. We shall be feeding on Christ by faith. And so give glory to God. Give glory that the saviour, the saviour of sinners came.

He allowed himself to come. He allowed himself to live among sinners. He allowed himself to die on the cross in the midst of sinners. And he will be with you at the table enable you to help you to remember his death.

Remember what he did for you on the cross. You a sinner. He the sinless one. Remember the Lord's death till he comes.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we are so prone to wander and be distracted particularly at these times.

[35 : 52] But Lord, we pray that you will give that strength to remember, to call to mind and Lord, to call to mind with that view of action and to call to mind the death that was given for us and so that we might respond in faith and respond in service to serve you all our days.

Lord, teach us to have done with lesser things. Teach us, Lord, to cast our minds heavenward and to cast our minds even through that memory that we've been reminded of the cross of Calvary for sins that were borne by the Saviour.

So hear us, Lord, again as we wait upon you. Hear us, Lord, even now as we prepare in our hearts to remember through sacrament the death of the Lord Jesus. Strengthen, Lord, we pray, your people so to do.

So hear us, Lord, as we wait upon you now in song. Hear us, Lord, as we wait upon you expectantly with that expectation of your saving, nourishing, feeding of our souls.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.