

What can we learn from

The Thief
on the cross
Beside Jesus

Is he in Paradise?

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What can we learn from the thief crucified on the cross alongside Jesus? Why was this incident recorded at all, and can we learn anything important from this event?

First, let us consider who this person was. There is nowhere in recorded history for us to determine what the lifestyle was of this thief. But we can presume he was not an amiable person. He was obviously a thief, and who knows what other crimes he may have committed to earn the death sentence? In the book of Luke, we see the confession of this criminal. He admits he is guilty and deserving of the penalty he is now about to pay.

It is very important to note here that he also says Jesus has done nothing wrong. Then he calls Jesus Lord and then asks Jesus to remember him when He comes into His Kingdom. In doing this, he is acknowledging Jesus as his Messiah. Showing Jesus he has faith in who he is. Maybe this thief heard of some miracles Jesus had performed. Or maybe he had actually seen some of these miracles for himself. This we do not know, but from the comments he made about Jesus, I feel he must have had some limited knowledge of who Jesus was. This event is recorded for us in Luke 23 verses 39 to 42.

Luk 23:39 one criminal who was hanged insulted him, saying, "If you are the Christ, save yourself and us!"

Luk 23:40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Don't you even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?"

Luk 23:41 And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.

Luk 23:42 He said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

When we consider this event, we realise the following

points about this criminal. He would not have been baptised. Nor had he ever followed Jesus nor prayed to Him. By his own confession, he was a thief and deserving of his penalty. He was only a matter of a few hours from his death when he asks Jesus to remember him.

A very late conversion and declaration of his belief in Jesus as “The Son Of God”. This fits in very well with what we hear in the book of Acts 2:21.

Act 2:21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

This thief was obviously calling on the name of the Lord. Therefore, he qualifies as one who can be saved. So even with his very late declaration of Jesus being the “Son of God”. He is assured of a place in God’s kingdom. Now read the amazing response this thief got from Jesus in Luke 23 verse 43.

Luk 23:43 Jesus said to him, “Assuredly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Jesus tells this thief he will be in paradise. This is the reward for the thief after his confession that Jesus is the Christ. It is also the reward millions of other people have been promised because of their faith in their Lord.

But this is also where we come upon what may be a major error in interpreting this verse. Most people will more than likely disagree with me. But if you listen to the end, I am sure you will see what I mean.

The first thing to realise is that when this was originally written in the Greek, there were no punctuation marks used. Therefore, the commas used in the verse were not in the original. Those who interpreted this verse put the comma where it best suited their own beliefs and understanding.

Some earlier books have the comma before the word today, while others put the comma after the word today. Consider the 2 versions of this verse below. One with the comma placed before today. Then consider the same verse with the comma after the word today, and see how it completely changes the meaning of the verse.

When the comma comes before today, as in this version. "Assuredly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise". This interpretation can mean the criminal will be in paradise on that very day with Jesus. But now read the same passage with the comma after the word today. As in the following version of the verse.

Assuredly I tell you today, you will be with me in Paradise. Here Jesus tells the criminal he will be in paradise, but he does not say when this will happen. It will be in the future, but how long in the future? He will enter paradise when he is resurrected from the dead. The same as every other person who has died in faith.

To establish which one of these verses is correct. We must consider other passages from the Bible that concern the time when all the saved will receive their rewards and be in paradise. We must work out when each of those who have died in faith will indeed enter paradise. Will it be on the very day they die. Or will all the faithful enter the kingdom at a yet future date?

The apostle Paul teaches us that all believers who die will come forth from the graves. But only when Jesus Christ returns the second time. This has been recorded for us in one Corinthians 15 verses 20 to 23.

1Co 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead.
He became the first fruits of those who are asleep.

1Co 15:21 For since death came by man, the resurrection

of the dead also came by man.

1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

1Co 15:23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then those who are Christ's, at his coming.

We see in verse 23 that Christ is the "first fruits". He is the very first person to be made alive, or resurrected from the dead. This also includes the entire population of people who ever lived before the time of Jesus. They are all awaiting their turn to be resurrected.

The 11th chapter of Hebrews is commonly known as the "faith chapter". Here you can read the names of many of those who have lived since the world was first created. Some famous names such as Abel, Noah, Abraham the father of the faithful, Moses. Plus others who did mighty deeds in the name of God. When do they receive their reward for entering God's kingdom? The answer is in the following amazing passage of scripture that describes how they lived, how they were treated. They received promises, as we see in verse 33, but they have never received those promises. Please listen to Heb 11:32-40.

Heb 11:32 What more shall I say? For the time would fail me if I told of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets;

Heb 11:33 who, through faith subdued kingdoms, worked out righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

Heb 11:34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, grew mighty in war, and caused foreign armies to flee.

Heb 11:35 Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, not accepting their deliverance, that

they might obtain a better resurrection.

Heb 11:36 Others were tried by mocking and scourging, yes, moreover by bonds and imprisonment.

Heb 11:37 They were stoned. They were sawn apart. They were tempted. They were slain with the sword. They went around in sheep skins and in goat skins; being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated

Heb 11:38 (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts, mountains, caves, and the holes of the earth.

Heb 11:39 These all, having had testimony given to them through their faith, didn't receive the promise,

Heb 11:40 God having provided some better thing concerning us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

These amazing people who served God before Jesus came to the earth, are yet to receive their rewards, as we can see in verse 39. Then in verse 40, they will not be made perfect. They will not enter God's kingdom apart from, or before, the apostles of Jesus Christ.

In all of Paul's writing there is noway he ever tries to comfort the living, by telling them that their deceased loved ones are already with Jesus in heaven. He always attempts to bring peace into their hearts by reminding them of the resurrection of the dead. This I will show you in the following sections of scripture. First, in the book of 1 Thessalonians, we can see the Lord return, and only then are the dead resurrected. We see this in chapter 4 starting in verse 15.

1Th 4:15 For this we tell you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will in no way precede those who have fallen asleep.

1Th 4:16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with

a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with God's trumpet. The dead in Christ will rise first,
1Th 4:17 then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. So we will be with the Lord forever.
1Th 4:18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

This thought is reinforced in the book of John in chapter 5 and verses 28 and 29.

Joh 5:28 Don't marvel at this, for the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs will hear his voice,
Joh 5:29 and will come out; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.

Notice in these verses that all those in their tombs, or in their graves, will hear his voice and come out of their graves and be resurrected. All those means everyone who has ever lived and died. Some resurrected to eternal life, and some to judgement.

When Lazarus, the brother of Martha, died, Martha was aware of the fact that Lazarus would be resurrected from the dead at "the last day". This is clear from her conversation with Jesus just before he went to the tomb of Lazarus and raised him from the dead. Recorded in Joh 11:23-25.

Joh 11:23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."
Joh 11:24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."
Joh 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will still live, even if he dies."

Lazarus, a wonderful friend of Jesus, will be raised from the dead on "the last day", when Jesus Christ returns in all

power and glory. This we saw in the book of John above, when all who are in their graves will come out.

Paul again talks about the resurrection of the dead, and not only his hope for the resurrection but also the hope of the Pharisees. They also believed there would be a resurrection of the dead, both for the just and the unjust. Paul confesses his faith in the resurrection of the dead in Acts 24 verses 14 and 15.

Act 24:14 But this I confess to you, that after the Way, which they call a sect, so I serve the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets;

Act 24:15 having hope toward God, which these also themselves look for, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

The last scripture I will present here is in the book of Revelation. After Jesus returns, he sends an angel to bind Satan and throw him into the pit. It is after this when the dead are resurrected as we can see in Revelation 20 verses 1 to 6.

Rev 20:1 I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.

Rev 20:2 He seized the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole inhabited earth, and bound him for a thousand years,

Rev 20:3 and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were finished. After this, he must be freed for a short time.

Rev 20:4 I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God,

and such as didn't worship the beast nor his image, and didn't receive the mark on their forehead and on their hand. They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

Rev 20:5 The rest of the dead didn't live until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over these, the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with him one thousand years.

In these scriptures, we see the dead will be rewarded and raised from the dead at the resurrection of the righteous. Notice verse 5 above. This is the first resurrection. This will happen only when Jesus returns, not before. So with this thought in mind, how can we claim the criminal crucified with Jesus went into paradise the day he died on the cross? If this is the case, then he would be the only one to have ever died and gone straight to Heaven.

Please also consider the following. The day Jesus died, he was placed in the tomb for three days and three nights. Then, at the end of this time, Mary met him at the tomb. We read about this encounter in John 20 verses 16 and 17.

Joh 20:16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him, "Rabboni!" which is to say, "Teacher!"

Joh 20:17 Jesus said to her, "Don't hold me, for I haven't yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brothers, and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

It is very important to understand what Jesus said the Mary three days and three nights after he died on the cross. He said to her. "Don't hold me, for I haven't yet ascended to my father". Then he tells Mary. "I am ascending to my Father and your Father". Therefore, if he has not yet ascended to his

Father, then he did not ascend on the day he was crucified. If Jesus did not ascend on the day he and the thief died on the cross, then how could the criminal have ascended with him?

This thief who had done nothing to deserve God's grace, except to call upon the name of Jesus, is now assured by Jesus he will enter paradise. This will be with the rest of the resurrected dead at the return of Jesus Christ at the very end of this age. The example of this thief in the Bible is to make very clear to us the meaning of John 3:16. Whoever believes in Him, and it does not matter how late they believe, all that matters is that they believe. They will be in paradise.

Faith in "The Son Of God" is all that matters to be saved. No good works will ever get you there. Only faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and saviour will save you. But just like the criminal on the cross, you will not receive your reward until he returns and resurrects all people from all times.

Thank you for listening, and may God bless you and help you grow in knowledge and understanding.