

The Lost Story

Matthew, Mark and Luke tell of the two criminals crucified with Jesus, but only Luke, in the words of Paul Harvey, tells us the rest of the story – an important story normally lost in what, at least to Christians, is the single most meaningful and significant event in history:

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Jesus to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, 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 Christ? Save yourself and us!”

But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:32-43

This is the ultimate story contrasting, in seconds, the life and consequences of those who reject and those who accept Jesus – or maybe more rightly it should be said, those Jesus accepts and those He rejects.

Everyone is a criminal – no one is worthy of paradise.

Paul, in *Romans*, related the road of sin and death everyone walks contrasted with the door of paradise some later find:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. Ro 3:21-25

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” This was a general statement applying to the Romans who crucified Jesus and the Jews who handed Him over to the Romans – and particularly the two criminals, whose sins resulted in the crucifixion; for without the “redemption that came by Christ Jesus” Jesus could not offer anyone paradise.

It is a fearful thing to see that years of crime can lead a person, even in an agonizing death, to cling to their sin and pride, rejecting Jesus and His offer (even at the point of death) of eternal salvation.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

Paradise is achieved only by a person acknowledging their personal sinfulness, repenting and looking to Jesus Christ for hope and help. While salvation certainly will be evidenced by a new life, it occurs, as we saw with the thief, in a second – rejection can take a lifetime; salvation, on the other hand, is instantaneous:

But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:6-9

Crimes can, praise God – by Grace, soften a person to see their need. The second criminal, by faith, saw and said:

“We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Paradise isn’t earned – it is a gift.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. Eph 2:1 - 9

It is never too late!

Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:32 -43

It is never too early!

I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation. 2Co 6:1

This may be the last offer!

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. Eph 1:3 - 6

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

“Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?”

“Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay him?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen. Ro 11:33 - 36