



And Jesus replied, “I assure
you, today you will be with me
in paradise.”

Luke 23:43

LAST WORDS.

Week 2

“I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”**Luke 23:43****THE NEED FOR SALVATION**

The scene is laid out clearly for us: Jesus, the Son of God, has been convicted, tortured, sentenced to death and is now fulfilling that sentence through His crucifixion. As He hangs upon the cross, struggling to survive, He is between two other crucified men, criminals. Unlike the innocent Jesus, these men are truly guilty of a crime and paying the price.

What these two men say to Jesus on the cross is deeply important for us today. One criminal looks at Jesus and mocks Him. He rejects who He says He is. He expresses only a selfish desire to get out of his punishment. The other criminal, however, responds with four essential professions of faith in the person of Jesus. He first acknowledges fear and belief in God (“Do you not fear God?”); secondly, he admits his faults, his sins (“We deserve to die..”); thirdly, he acknowledges Jesus’ righteousness (“...this man hasn’t done anything wrong.”); finally, he declares Jesus as King (“...remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”). The response of the criminal is the response of the righteous and saved.

Over and over again in scripture, we see that pride, arrogance, and foolishness are what lead us to sin and also what lead us to think that the only thing that can save us from our sin is ourselves. The greatest folly of our lives is believing the lie that we are not that bad or can do better by just being better. The truth is that we are incapable of saving ourselves. It is only through faith in Jesus that we are made free.

If we are willing to be humble, repentant, and faithful like the second criminal crucified on the cross beside Jesus, we will be given the same promise Jesus gave to him. “I assure you, today, you will be with me in paradise.” Jesus uses His final words to hit home the entire purpose of His life on earth, that He desires to be with us in paradise, and the only way to do that is to see what is keeping us from Him and humbly seek forgiveness and life in Him.

**REFLECTION**

For some of us, the decision to believe and the confession to follow Jesus is one we made long ago. For others, it is one we have never made. Regardless of where you stand today, reflect on Luke 23:26-43 by studying the words of the criminals (specifically the second criminal) and Jesus’ last words that He shares with him. Study these other passages (Acts 4:12, John 14:6, Matthew 19:16-26, Ephesians 2:8-9, John 3:16-18) that share what salvation looks like and requires from us. Finally, spend time in prayer confessing your need and desire for Jesus’ salvation in your life.

**If you make a decision today about salvation or have more questions about the salvation Jesus offers us, please reach out to us at grace@graceclarksville.com.*

Week 2, Day 2

Tuesday

Matthew 11:28-30, Acts 4:11-12, John 14:6, Romans 8:38-39

“I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23:43

PARADISE IN HIM

When Jesus looks at the criminal being crucified beside Him, he says, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.” He’s not simply referring to heaven but what heaven represents. When we think of eternal paradise, or heaven, we often harken more toward the imagery found in Bugs Bunny cartoons or Greek Mythology. We think of a city in the clouds or tiny cupid wings on the backs of individuals who fly around and play harps. However, this is not the imagery we see in scripture of what heaven, or paradise, looks like.

According to scripture, Heaven is many unique and mysterious things, but first and foremost, it is a place of union. Paradise is so named because it is the eternal soul-body dwelling of man with God. Nothing is greater in all eternity or creation than our union with our Creator. It is the fulfillment of time and the purpose of our lives.

In the simplest way to explain it, paradise is paradise because it has God in it. Heaven represents an eternal relationship with Jesus. Heaven is the home free from all distraction, sin, corruption, and devastation that attempts to separate us from Him. It is being at home with God. One of the clearest examples of this is when Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” The declaration of Jesus offering rest immediately brings to mind the imagery of our heavenly Father opening His arms wide for us as we run and snuggle deep within His embrace. We are at home when we are with God.

The most wonderful news for us today is that we don’t have to wait to experience a taste of this paradise; we have to be willing to prioritize our lives around running into the embrace of Jesus daily.



REFLECTION

Let’s practice the taste of paradise right now by drawing near to Jesus. Take at least ten minutes to lie down, close your eyes, and picture paradise as we see it in scripture- an eternal relationship with Jesus. Warm and open your heart to what that kind of rest, or embrace, from the Lord might feel like. After this time of reflection, write down what emotions you felt and end your time by thanking Christ for the invitation to an eternal relationship with Him.

Week 2, Day 3

Wednesday

“I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23:43

Luke 23:26-43, Revelation 21:1-7, 2 Corinthians 12:1-4

PARADISE IN FREEDOM

C.S. Lewis' masterpiece series The Chronicles of Narnia ends with the book The Last Battle. In this final tale, the animals, humans, and creatures of Narnia fight to save their home of Narnia. Every book in this series has been fighting for this fantasy world, but in the climax, a doorway is revealed that leads to the home, or the country, of the Christ-like figure of the series, the lion Aslan. In the final paragraph of the book, Lewis paints a picture of Aslan's country that seems familiar to us,

“And as He spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.” -C.S. Lewis The Last Battle

Scripture gives us a small glimpse into what heaven will look like. It's not exhaustive and intensely detailed, but we know that our Savior will be there, peace will be forevermore, and happily ever after will be the new beginning of our story. Scripture makes clear that in paradise, we find freedom with God, freedom from the corruption and pain of the world, and freedom everlasting.



REFLECTION

Take a moment to thank God for the heavenly home that He has invited us to. Thank Him for the promise of His presence for all of eternity. Finally, ask Him to help you feel a glimpse of this future eternity today on earth by helping you draw near to Him.

“I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23:43

REMEMBER ME

*“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” That is what the second thief said. In the Old Testament, when God “remembers,” it has a distinct meaning. It does not mean “to think about” or “to recall to mind.” That would not mean very much. When God “remembers,” he does not just think about us. He acts for us, with power to save. Somehow the crucified criminal on Jesus’ right was enabled to see something that day that no one else saw. He saw Jesus reigning as a King and determining the destinies of people even in his tormented and dying state. To see him that way, Luke is telling us, is to see him as he truly is and to understand the source of his power. Not by signs and wonders, not by magic and dazzlement, not by “shock and awe,” but only by an ultimate act of God’s own self-sacrifice does Christ rule. His power is made known only through his death.” - Fleming Rutledge *The Seven Last Words from the Cross**

Jesus’ words to the criminal who asks Him to remember him are a powerful reminder for us today. That reminder is about how Christ not only thinks of us in His heavenly dwelling, but He also acts for us. His words to the criminal are the exact words He uses for every one of us who has looked to Him for salvation. The beautiful thing we can experience on this side of heaven is the power that comes from remembering Him, too. We walk in the steps toward heaven when we remember and act in accordance with God’s will. This act reminds us that He has done the same for us.



REFLECTION

Take time today to think of what Christ has done for you. Think mostly of His sacrifice. His crucifixion. His suffering. Remember Christ’s gift to you today. Think also of the gifts of heaven and grace that He bestows upon you daily through His creation, through a good meal, through laughter with friends, through the warmth of a child or spouse’s embrace. Thank Him for these remembrances He pours out to us, and ask Him to help you remember Him and act in His way today.

Week 2, Day 5

Friday

Luke 23:39-43, Isaiah 40:28-31, Psalm 27:13-14

“I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23:43

COMFORT IN THE WAITING

One of the greatest sufferings we can relate to in the crucifixion narrative is the waiting that is taking place. The torturous act of crucifixion was designed to inflict long-suffering and waiting. Those who were nailed to a cross would typically suffer for days before succumbing to suffocation or their injuries. The cross is a real image of long suffering. It also is a personal reminder for us of the long-suffering that we experience in life.

We all bear a cross of suffering in this life. The sufferings of sickness, anxiety, heartache, insecurity, loneliness, and fear are all too real for us in this life. When we read Jesus’ words to the criminal, “Today, you will be with me in paradise,” we read the words of longing that exist deep in our hearts. The words that Jesus shares with this criminal are the words we desire for our own lives. We desire to be made whole, right, free from suffering in the presence of Jesus in paradise, but we must wait. We have to continue to walk through the suffering of our Christian lives. As we walk through we can find comfort in the waiting. Our comfort is found in the crucified Christ, who walks with us in our suffering.



REFLECTION

Where do you feel suffering in your life right now? Maybe you are anxious about the world, maybe about a family member or loved one, perhaps your health, or disappointment with a career or life trajectory. The suffering we feel is typically not too hard to acknowledge, but it can be hard to let go of. It is hard to lift our suffering to Christ and trust that He will take them, help us through them, and comfort us throughout them. Begin the practice of finding Christ’s comfort in your waiting by giving your suffering to Him today. He has nailed our pain with Him on the cross. Thank Him for that and seek His help to walk in remembrance of this truth.

Week 2, Day 6

Saturday

Reflection Day

REFLECTION NOTES AND QUESTIONS

This week, we looked at Jesus' last words from Luke 23:43, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." As we wrap up this week's study, go back and read Luke 23:43. Reflect on these words that Jesus spoke. Reflect on what they mean about His character, His work on the cross, and how it should change how we see Him and live. Reflect/journal your thoughts on this or these following prompts:

- Write down what you learned about who God is this week.
- What is something you looked at this week that you want to receive from God in greater measure? Why?
- How can you begin to posture your life to receive more from Him?

Week 2, Day 7

Sunday

Rest Day

Use today to rest, pray, and catch up on any of this week's readings you may have missed. Use today as a preparation for your heart toward the next week's study of God and His word.