

WORDS FROM THE CROSS

Day 2: The Joy of Salvation

"Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Execution through crucifixion in the Roman world was designed to last as long as possible to maximize its deterrent role. Since no vital organs were directly injured, it could take up to three days for the executed to die, usually from shock or asphyxiation. Therefore, Jesus and the two criminals crucified alongside Jesus had time to interact.

Imagine the scene: two criminals, condemned to die, hanging on either side of Jesus. The first criminal speaks to Jesus with a mixture of bitterness and sarcasm, his words reverberating those of the spectator crowd: "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

His words revealed ignorance and unbelief. Ignorance, because he doesn't understand that staying on the cross was how Jesus could save others. Unbelief because his words are not a sincere request for deliverance but a sarcastic mocking of Jesus' apparent impotence.

While one mocks Jesus, the other criminal recognizes that the man crucified alongside him is innocent and the long-awaited Messiah. This unnamed man reveals a remarkable understanding of who he is and who Jesus is. "We are punished justly," he challenges his fellow criminal, "for we are getting what our deeds deserve." Furthermore, he clearly understood who Jesus was when he pleads, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus' reply, filled with unconditional love and infinite compassion, offers an unquestionable promise of paradise: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Jesus' words challenge our understanding of who deserves salvation. The criminal had no time to make amends or perform religious acts; he simply turned to Jesus in humility and faith. In doing so, he experienced the fullness of God's grace, regardless of his past deeds. It's a humbling reminder that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace.

Jesus' words also reveal the immediacy of salvation. He doesn't promise paradise in some distant future but declares, "Today you will be with me." Salvation is not a distant goal to be attained but a present reality to be enjoyed.

This promise of paradise also speaks to the nature of heaven itself. It's not merely a place of rest and reward but an intimate communion with God. To be with Jesus in paradise is to experience the fullness of his presence, love, and joy for all eternity. It's a restoration of the relationship with God broken by sin, a reconciliation that transcends death and ushers us into everlasting life.

As we reflect on Jesus' words on the cross, may we find comfort in the assurance of his grace, the immediacy of his salvation, and his promise of eternal life.

