

Today You Will Be With Me In Paradise  
Luke 23:39-43  
February 25, 2015  
2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday in Lent

*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."*

Tonight, we examine another of Christ's seven words from the cross. This is the word of Jesus from the cross, when Jesus said to the thief also hanging on another cross, "Today, you will be with me in paradise."

Where is paradise for you? Where is the place of perfection?

I think there are five qualities that are necessary for paradise. That is, if there was a recipe for paradise, I think there would have to be these five ingredients.

**Paradise is a place of enormous beauty** and you have to use the word, enormous or some similar word. When you are at a place you call paradise, wherever it may be, there is incredible beauty all around you; 360 degrees of beauty. The Bible says that no eye can see no, mind can imagine the good things God has planned for us. The beauty of paradise is overwhelming.

**In paradise, you see and feel the Presence of God.** You sense that God has left his footprints in paradise; you can see the creativity of God. You can see God, the artist, having been at work and this place is part of God's artistic painting. God used brilliant colors when he painted the mountain flowers of summer. This winter, God created snow crystals and you could see billions of them glowing in the sun.

**Paradise is a place you want to share with another person.** Yes, there are many animals in paradise: Deer, bear, birds, a vast array of living creatures. But none of these creatures share your language, share your intelligence, and share your sense of beauty and God. You want another human being to be with you in paradise, someone you love and can share paradise with.

**In paradise, there is no pain, conflict, or evil,** because it wouldn't be paradise if there was a war going on or people were starving or people were hurting each other.

**In paradise, your heart is filled with thanksgiving and praise to God.** The awesomeness of paradise leaves no room in you for anything other than praise and thanksgiving.

When you add up numbers one to five you get paradise. Because paradise is all around us, we can understand the Bible when it talks about paradise. Paradise is found in the beginning of the Bible, at the end of the Bible, and in the middle of the Bible.

The Bible begins with stories about paradise. In the Old Testament, paradise is the Garden of Eden. The Greek word for paradise, “paradysos,” sounds like our English word for paradise. The Greek word for paradise simply means a garden, and in the second and third chapters of Genesis, we hear about God’s paradise, God’s garden of Eden.

In these Genesis stories, we hear that God planted the garden, and put a man in that garden. God planted trees for beauty and food. God also planted two exotic species of trees in that garden paradise, the tree of life and if you ate of that tree, you would live forever. The second exotic tree in the middle of the garden was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God thought that man should not be alone in that garden, so God created all the living creatures of the world. But man was still lonesome, so God created a woman for the man, so both the man and the woman could truly enjoy that garden paradise together. But there was also a snake in paradise. There was the potential for evil lurking in that garden. There was the tree of good and evil, and the snake.

At the end of the Bible, we once again encounter paradise. We discover the eternal city of God, the eternal paradise of God. Paradise is described as being a heavenly city with streets paved with gold and with gates made of pearl. All the animals, all the angels, and all the people will be praising God.

There is no snake and there is no tree of the knowledge of good and evil in this paradise. In the paradise described in the book of Revelation, evil has been destroyed and there will be no more pain, no more crying, and no more death. This paradise will last forever. Furthermore, there is only one tree in this paradise: the tree of life.

So paradise is found at both ends of the Bible, in Genesis and in Revelation. In the middle of the Bible, between Genesis and Revelation, we hear Jesus’ words from the cross about paradise.

The scene unfolds like this. Two thieves were hanging from their crosses, one on either side of Jesus. All three men were in enormous pain. The first thief kept hurling insults at Jesus, “If you are God, save yourself and us.” You might say this was the bad thief.

However, our focus is on the second, or the good, thief. This thief demonstrated five positive characteristics, and these same characteristics are found in Christians today.

**The good thief did not scoff at Jesus or make fun of God.** The bad thief did, and so did the religious leaders who were there. They all poked fun at Jesus. Today, many people don’t fear God or worship Jesus. Instead ridicule people who believe in God and

in Christ. The good thief didn't mock God or make fun of Jesus. So it is with Christians. Many of our friends may mock God and make fun of Christ, but we as Christians do not join in their taunts.

**The good thief feared God.** He said to the other thief, "Don't you fear God? For we have received the due rewards of our deeds." In other words, the good thief stood in awe of God, in reverence for God. He worshiped God as powerful Lord of the universe. Christians fear God and stand in awe of God.

**The good thief knew that he was guilty and deserved punishment.** He said, "We are receiving the just rewards for our deeds." Christians feel that way about themselves. We know that we are guilty of sin and we deserve punishment. We are guilty of all the sins we have done and all the good things we didn't do. We are keenly aware that we have sinned against God and others, and we deserve punishment. None of us deserve eternal paradise with God.

**The good thief knew Jesus.** This is the only time in the Bible that the name, Jesus, is used with no other title. Normally, the New Testament refers to him as the Lord Jesus Christ or Jesus Christ. There is always a title associated with his name, but here in this moment from the cross, the good thief simply calls him Jesus. The name Jesus means "Savior." When he called Jesus by name, he formed a personal relationship with Jesus. We are to do the same. We are called to have a personal relationship with Jesus and call him by his personal name.

**The good thief believed in Jesus.** He said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." This thief not only believed in Jesus, he also believed that Jesus was establishing a kingdom of his own. You can't be a Christian without believing in Jesus.

And so when you add it all up, when you add up all the things the good thief said, you realize that he becomes a model for us of the Christian life. In other words, in this short moment, the thief had become a Christian.

Then come the words from the cross. Those glorious words that echo across the centuries, into our sanctuary, into our homes, into our hearts. Words two thousand years old: "Today, you will be with me in paradise."

Briefly, let us focus on four words or phrases of these powerful words of Jesus.

**Today.** Immediately. Instantaneously. Now. Not tomorrow. Not in a hundred years, or a thousand years, or a million years. But today. Immediately. We don't understand it. We can't prove it. We can't tell you where paradise is. But Jesus said, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

In Romans 8, which some people say is the greatest passage in the whole Bible, we hear that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Not principalities or powers. Not the devil and his angels. Not disease. Not death. Nothing. Nothing can separate us from

the love of God which is found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**You.** That means you and me. We, too, will be in paradise with God when we leave this earth. At Christmas time, we say your name needs to be on the present for you to receive the gift. Christ's promise is not only for the thief on the cross, but it's also given to you and me. As a Christian, you need to realize that God's gift is for you personally.

**With me.** In the Bible, the emphases of paradise is not on being reunited with our loved ones; our mother, father, brother, sister, spouse, those who have died before us. That is not the emphasis in the Bible. But what the Bible emphasizes is much better.

We will be with Christ, and when we are in paradise with Christ, we will understand the full impact of the forgiveness of all of our sins. When we face our holy God, we will stand covered with the perfect righteousness of Christ.

**In paradise.** There's that word again, that word which is found at the beginning of the Bible and at the end of the Bible. Paradise. We will see incredible beauty all around us. We will see the face and glory of God. We will be with our loved ones. There will be no war, or starvation, or evil for these things will have been all destroyed. And our hearts, knowing all of this, will be filled with praise and thanksgiving.