

A Criminal In Heaven

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[0:00] Turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 23. Luke chapter 23. And we're going to begin reading at verse 26 and read through verse 43.

! Jesus turned and said to them, Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me.

Weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.

Then they will say to the mountains, Fall on us. And to the hills, Cover us. For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him along with the criminals, one on his right and the other on his left.

[1:23] And 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.

[2:29] And Jesus answered him, I tell you the truth. Today you will be with me in paradise. Well, there is a man in heaven today whom many folks would say doesn't deserve to be there, shouldn't be there.

In fact, there are people in hell today who were far more religious than he. They had prayed more. They had given more. They had attended church more.

They had tried harder to be a good neighbor. They had done many more good deeds than this man had ever done in his lifetime. Nevertheless, the facts are these.

They are in hell, and he is in heaven. Who is this man? And how did he get there? Well, God tells us in the 23rd chapter of Luke, he put it there for us.

These things were written for us. And if you have any desire to be in heaven when you die, listen for your life this morning as we hear about this man who made it to heaven.

[3:41] The first thing we're told about this man is that he was a criminal. He was a criminal. That word is not something that means he was guilty of a few misdemeanors.

This was one who had committed serious crimes. The word is used outside of biblical literature of bandits and pirates. Kids, you know what bandits and pirates do.

They steal and kill. And so when this man saw something, he took it, even if it didn't belong to him. And if someone would try to stop him, he would kill them in order to get it. That's the word. He's a criminal. And that word characterizes him.

Some men are cooks. Some men are truck drivers. Some men are farmers. Some are teachers.

This man was a criminal. He had lived a life of crime.

[4:42] And now at last, he's in trouble with the law. He fought the law, and the law won. And the law now has him. He was caught. He was tried.

He was found guilty. He was condemned to death. Indeed, he was given the greatest punishment. Punishment. What we call capital punishment.

In other words, his crimes were not small. They deserved the very worst kind of punishment that they, that Rome could come up with. Death by crucifixion. That's our man.

So he's obviously lived a very wicked life. But he's not only in trouble with the Roman law, he's in trouble with God's law.

You say, but Pastor John, maybe you never read God's law. It's the same law that was written on his conscience. God says, you shall not steal.

[5 : 39] And he says, I will if I want to. And God's law says, you shall not murder. And he says, I will if it will serve my interests.

He had no regard for God or his law. No sense that God's authority is over me and I am under him. No fear of God. No love for God. No love for neighbor as himself.

He lives supremely for himself. So he not only has death by crucifixion awaiting him, that will only usher him into a far greater punishment where he must meet the judge of all the earth and be consigned to unending torments in hell forever.

What a horrifying prospect to wake up to. Death by crucifixion and then hell waiting for you afterwards.

And we're going to see things this morning. Notice the first one, a gracious providence. We don't know how long this man was on death row. We don't know how long he was awaiting execution.

[6 : 50] But finally, the day arrives and it's Friday morning. And as he leaves his prison cell, he knows he will not be coming back again. He's led through the streets of Jerusalem and he's carrying his own cross.

Now, the cross has become a religious symbol of Christianity in our day, but it meant no such thing in his day. The cross meant one thing, an excruciating, slow, agonizing death.

And he's carrying his cross. So all the children turned aside from their plane to catch a sight at this man carrying his cross.

And mothers must have drawn their little children close to them as he passed by. Even fathers would have shuddered to think of the death that this man was going to die.

So he's led outside the city gates to a place called Golgotha, the place of the skull. And there he's nailed to his cross and hoisted into the air to die that death of torture.

[7 : 55] But he's not alone this day. Indeed, we're told that there was another criminal being crucified with him. But perhaps it was his partner in crime.

We don't know. But there was another man there that day that is more to the point. The sign above his cross said, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

This is the eternal Son of God sent from heaven to save his people from their sins. What a scene. The sinless Savior hanging between two great sinners. But that's why he came. He came to save sinners.

What it looked like to the physical eye was that there were three bad men that day. For Jesus was numbered with the transgressors to his great shame. And everyone who saw him would have seen he's beside two other very wicked men.

[9 : 00] He must also be a very wicked man. But what a difference between them. They're getting what they deserve. Jesus is getting what his people deserve.

God's wrath punishing their sins that they might be forgiven and made right with God and have a home in heaven. Think how close this criminal was to eternal damnation.

A life of crime has brought him to the moment of execution. Satan was leading his captive and he had him within one step of hell.

But God had other plans for him from eternity past. Plans of mercy. Plans of sovereign grace. Plans of salvation. Plans of salvation. And it all begins to unfold in this kind providence that on this Friday morning this convicted criminal should find himself dying just a few feet away from the only Savior of sinners.

From the only one who could give him eternal life. The only one who could forgive his sins and make him right with God and save him from the coming wrath.

[10 : 19] And he's right there beside him at his dying moments. Think how much turned on that fact alone. His eternity turned on that fact, didn't it?

If this thief had been executed a day earlier, he'd have missed Christ. If he had been executed a day later, he would have missed Christ, died in his sins, and would have been in hell today. But what a kind providence that they should both be executed on the same day in the same place. What a strange way to be brought together.

But there they are. A needy sinner and the gracious Savior side by side. It wasn't luck. It wasn't chance.

It was God's providence working all things according to his good pleasure. Now, that was him. But let's think of you. Some of you here today are more like this criminal than you may realize.

[11:22] Maybe you're not in trouble with the law of the land, but you are in trouble with God's law. Because the living God has laws. And he enforces his laws.

And he's prepared eternal damnation for those who disobey his laws. And have you not broken God's laws? The Bible says that's what sin is.

Everyone who sins breaks the law. Have you ever broken the law? That's sin. God's law? That's sin. James says whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all.

So we're all lawbreakers. The Bible goes on to say cursed is everyone who does not obey everything written. Does not continue to obey everything written in the book of the law.

And because of that some of you are just like this criminal. You're just one step away from hell. You're one breath away from hell. And in that important way you are like this criminal.

[12:36] He was a breath away from hell and so are you. But there's another way in which you're like him. Because what a kind providence that you're still alive in the land of the living and within earshot of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What a kind providence that you and Jesus should be found side by side today. Because the Bible teaches that wherever the gospel is preached Christ himself is present.

And he's present to offer himself and eternal life to whoever's hearing. So in another sense you're like this man. A breath away from hell and yet side by side with Jesus.

He's here. He's offering himself to you in the gospel. Well what happened that day on Golgotha? Though this needy sinner this criminal was so close to Christ what we find is that he was not seeking mercy from the Savior.

He was rather mocking him. What a hard heart you say that in his dying moments he would use his last breaths to mock the Lord Jesus and to increase his pain.

[13:56] Now Luke doesn't tell us this fact. Both Matthew and Mark do tell us this in their gospels. They speak of the two robbers that were crucified with Jesus.

One on the right and one on the left. They speak about the crowd and the way the crowd mocked the Lord Jesus. All the Passover pilgrims who were in Jerusalem and as they pass by they mock Jesus.

They tell us how the religious leaders mocked him. How the soldiers mocked him. And then Matthew adds in the same way the robbers plural who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

In other words Matthew and Mark are telling us that they all lifted up their voices to blaspheme Jesus. And both criminals got in on the act.

They both were mocking him. But it's then that something incredible happened to one of the criminals and here we come to the second point.

[15:01] We've seen a gracious providence. Now an amazing transformation takes place. An amazing transformation because as he hung there on his cross beside Jesus a wonderful change came upon this criminal.

It's the word conversion. A saving change. The grace of God came upon him and made him a new man. Different from the man who got up on the cross is now this man as he hangs on the cross. His hardened heart was softened. He's enabled to repent and to believe on Christ. His mocking stopped. He condemns himself and defends Christ.

He believes in Jesus and prays to him for mercy. Luke alone in the gospel writers tells us about his conversion. He quotes the different insults that were directed at Jesus of Nazareth.

Here they are. He saved others. Let him save himself if he's the Christ of God the chosen one. If you are the king of the Jews save yourself.

[16:15] And then Luke says 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're under the same sentence. We are punished justly for we're getting what our deeds deserve but this man has done nothing wrong. And then he turned to Jesus from his cross and said Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.

In this account of Luke we have the two indispensable parts of conversion. Now when we say something is indispensable we mean you can't do without either one.

They're both absolutely necessary. There is no salvation apart from both of these. Repentance, and faith.

And we see them here upon the cross of this thief. In this thief. They're like two sides of a coin. Kids when you have a coin you have both heads and tails in the one coin.

[17:20] And wherever you have true conversion you have both repentance and faith. If you have one supposedly without the other you can know you don't have either.

You say I have faith but you have no repentance you can know that you don't have anything.

Because wherever you find faith you find repentance. Wherever you find repentance you find faith.

There are two parts indispensable parts of God's work of salvation. Now notice the first mark of his repentance. A simple definition of repentance would be change of mind that affects a change in our life.

A change of mind that affects a change in our lives. And what we see is first of all a change of mind towards sin. Not many minutes earlier this man had found pleasure in making fun of this Jesus guy beside him.

but no more. He's lost his taste buds for blaspheming Jesus. He now finds it repulsive.

[18:37] He now turns away from his sin. That's repentance. And he stops mocking Jesus and he actually reproves his fellow criminal two crosses over for his mocking of Jesus.

Something that he had just earlier been doing himself. Don't you fear God? He says since you are under the same sentence. The sentence of death. Don't you know we're not coming down alive from these crosses?

Haven't you thought that we're about to appear before God the judge and we must give an account of him for what we've said every word? Don't you fear God?

It's like he just woke up to the reality of God. He himself had been doing this earlier. But now suddenly there's a God to live before. We speak in his presence.

We think in his presence. We live in his presence. And indeed that's what conversion is. We wake up to spiritual realities. The unseen God that we didn't give a thought to.

[19:47] We suddenly have different thoughts about God. We are now front and center with God. And other unseen things, heaven, hell, the judgment to come.

There's a change of mind that takes place. And sin that was nothing before now becomes exceedingly sinful.

He can't imagine. How can you go on like that? He says to his fellow criminal. a change of mind with regard to sin.

And that happens whenever the saving grace of God changes a man or woman, a boy or a girl.

There's a different attitude towards sin. That which was once loved is now hated.

That which was once reveled in is now found repulsive to the new nature. Do you have a different view of sin? Has that change happened to you whereby sin has become huge rather than the little thing that you easily dismissed before?

[20:59] If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is passed away. Behold, all things are become new. And one of the things that becomes new is your view of sin.

We see this criminal taking a whole new view of his sin. But then there is also a change of mind towards self. Instead of a high view of self, he now has a low view of himself.

You say, John, how do you know he had a high view of self? Because he made fun of others. When a person makes fun of others, when a person mocks or sneers at others, they show just how arrogant they are.

only those who view themselves as superior look down their noses with scorn on others. Mocking is an arrogant sin.

You say, I don't think I'm proud. You are proud. If you mock another person, you're proud. This man was so proud that he was mocking the Son of God.

[22:06] But listen to him now. He's humbled. He's condemning himself. He says to his fellow, we're being punished justly. We're getting what our deeds deserve.

We deserve these crosses for what we've done. He's making a public confession of his sin. The last place where we like to be known as sinners is in public.

We'll confess our sin to God in private, but in public, we'd like to be thought better. This man publicly owns his sin and deservingness of the worst punishment.

During college, I did some prison evangelism and have spoken with others who do the same, and they tell me the hardest thing to find in prison is someone who deserves to be there.

Just ask them. No one's guilty. They all got a bad rap. It was a bad judge. It was a bad jury.

[23:10] It was this. It was that. It wasn't their fault. They've got the wrong guy. And it is the nature of sin to do that, to excuse ourselves, to blame others, to deny how sinful and guilty we are.

We memorized it recently from Psalm 36 and verse 2, speaking of the wicked, which is what we all were, that they flattered themselves too much to detect or hate their own sin.

We flattered, we had a high view of self, you see, so high that we couldn't even see our sins. We saw everybody else's but not ours. That's the nature of the sinner.

But this is a criminal. Oh, how he's different from the others that we perhaps have met in prison.

This is a criminal who condemns himself.

I'm guilty. He makes no excuses. He owns it. Do you know everyone that I've baptized has said, if I got what I deserved, I'd be in hell.

[24:23] That's a low view of self. That's a right view of self. It's right. It's true. And that's what God gives us when this transformation called conversion happens to us.

We go from high thoughts of self to condemning ourselves before a holy God. A different view of self.

How do you view yourself? How do you think of yourself? A hell deserving sinner? Oh, that's too much. I'm better than that.

I've done some good. This man on the cross has a new view of himself. So he had a new view of sin, a new view of self, and last, a new view of Christ.

He had a change of mind with regard to Christ. Now, this is one of the new things that replaced the old. It's how we view Jesus Christ. This man started with a low view of Jesus.

[25:27] High view of himself, low view of Jesus. And the holy Peter taught her was tipped to a low view of himself and a high view of Jesus. But he starts with a low view of Jesus.

He saw nothing in Jesus that he should desire him. Why should I change my life and live for him? Why should I even listen to this man?

Why should I love him? There was nothing in him that he saw glorious. But now all that's changed. He was just a religious fanatic to poke fun at and to insult.

But now he sees Jesus in a different light. It's like he has new eyes. Indeed, the Spirit of God has opened his blinded eyes to the most important thing, and that is to Jesus Christ, who he is.

Now he sees glory in Jesus where he saw none before, and so he goes from mocking Jesus, to speaking in his defense. This man has done nothing wrong.

[26:28] He's honoring his obedience, his righteousness, his innocence, and he stands up for Jesus when it's not popular to do so. When the whole crowd's mocking Jesus, he's found praising him.

Oh my! One or two worldly people in your presence, you find it hard to praise Jesus? Jesus, what must it have been to have everybody mocking the Son of God, and then to be the lone voice speaking well of him?

That's not something this man is born with. You see, the grace of God has come and made him a new man. He's different from what he was just moments earlier.

a changed man with a new view of Jesus. So here's a man repenting. Would you know what repentance looks like? Look at this thief on the cross. It's a changed mind towards sin, towards self, and toward the Savior that is seen in a changed life and behavior concerning all three.

An amazing work of God. A miracle wrought in his soul as he hangs there dying. But I told you the coin has two sides.

[27:46] There's repentance and there's also faith. And we see faith in this criminal as well. We see it or hear it, we might say, in his cry for mercy. What does he cry?

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Your kingdom. Calvin says that since the world was created, there's never been more, a more remarkable example.

of faith. So let's learn faith from this criminal on his deathbed. What do we see about faith here?

Well, first of all, he trusts in Jesus as a mighty king with a coming kingdom. The sign above the cross said Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.

But that only fueled the mockery of the crowd. If you are the king of the Jews, then save yourself. But what they mocked is false.

[28:45] This man believes is true. Jesus is a real king. Amazing faith. He sees what no one else seemed to see that day.

He doesn't believe for a minute that the death of this man will be the end of him. But rather believes that beyond death he has a coming kingdom. kingdom. And so he commits himself and his eternal salvation to the protection of this king.

Jesus, remember me. Have mercy on me when you come into your kingdom. That's a remarkable faith. It's remarkable when you think what everybody else was saying about him.

It's also remarkable when you think of what he saw when he looked over at the middle cross. It was the emaciated form of a man pummeled and battered beyond recognition, nailed to the cross in naked shame, his blood streaked body heaving in pain, dying in apparent weakness.

There was absolutely nothing kingly about his outward appearance that day. You say, oh, what about the crown? Well, yeah, that was a crown of thorns to mock his claim kingship.

[30:06] And yet it was precisely then that this man sees in Jesus of Nazareth that he is a true king. Now, haven't you come to see that, dear believer?

That Jesus reigns. Jesus is the king. He is supreme. And this man sees that from his dying cross. So he sees with new eyes of faith. He sees with eyes given to him by God and taught by the Holy Spirit.

He sees in Jesus the majestic king that he is and he values a place in his kingdom as more important than life itself. And he casts himself upon the mercy of this king.

Remember me. Remember me. But secondly, also trust in Jesus as a gracious and forgiving savior. Not only a mighty king, but a gracious savior. Where do you get this information about Jesus?

[31:11] We know that the kingship was posted on the signboard above him. But where did he hear that Jesus was a savior? We don't know that this man never heard Jesus preach.

But we do know that he heard Jesus pray. Because it was even as men were crucifying and mocking him that Jesus from his cross turns his heart heavenward and says, Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.

This man heard Jesus pray. That. what words of grace, what words of undeserved kindness for people who were crucifying and mocking him.

And could it be that this man thought if this Jesus has such grace for them, could he not only also have grace for me?

He puts faith in Jesus as a great king and a gracious savior. Jesus remember me and he hangs all of his hopes for heaven upon this crucified king.

[32:27] He has nothing to offer him. Only grace and mercy to beg. So he sees Jesus as the savior. Where did he get this information?

Perhaps from the very taunts of Jesus' enemies. Have you thought about that? We don't know this guy. Ever heard Jesus preach? How does he know enough about Jesus to put faith in him?

I think he hears enough from the taunts of the crowd to put faith in him. There's gospel in their blasphemy. What do they say about Jesus?

He saved others. Let him save himself. God. Ah, he saved others. This man is a savior.

At least that's what he claims to be. They don't believe it, but God gives faith to believe he's a savior. If he is the Christ of God, the chosen one, let him come down and we'll believe.

[33:36] He's the Messiah, the anointed, the Christ of God, the chosen one of God. Sent to save his people from their sins. This is he. And faith looks to Christ as God's chosen savior for sinners.

So what they mock is false. He by the spirit believes is true. He is the savior. He is God's chosen Messiah, the savior. Of sinners. Don't think God is not sovereign and mighty to save when he can use the mockery of wicked men to preach the gospel.

to this needy sinner even on his deathbed. So he trusts in Jesus, the one who's able to save him, even though he doesn't save himself like everybody wanted to see.

Well, in fact, he could only save him if he doesn't save himself. It's because Jesus didn't save himself that there was salvation for this needy sinner and for this needy sinner and these needy sinners.

sinners. He is the savior and everyone who comes through this work of God called conversion comes to believe that and trust in him to save them from their sins.

[34 : 54] Have you repented? Have you believed on Jesus to save you from your sins? are you repenting?

Are you believing? We've seen a gracious providence, an amazing transformation, and now we see an assuring promise, an assuring promise.

This man's repentance and faith is met by the most comforting words any dying man has ever heard. For Jesus says to him, I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.

what a scene. A wicked sinner crying for mercy and a gracious savior promising heaven. Now that scene has been repeated millions of times over.

A poor sinner crying for mercy and a gracious savior promising heaven. But he hasn't done that.

[35 : 59] Have mercy. God like I don't deserve. Today you will be with me in paradise. If you're going to heaven, you've been there.

Have mercy upon me, Jesus. And he has promised you to be with him forever. Sweet assurance from the son of God himself.

never was a deathbed made more sweet than by those words of the son of God. Let's look at each precious word. He first starts with the formula, I tell you the truth, verily, verily.

Amen, amen. And it's a formula Jesus used to introduce a statement that was often very hard for people to understand or to believe rather, to accept.

and indeed he's about to say something that's unbelievably good news for this man. So he prefaces it with, I tell you the truth.

[37 : 06] Jesus always told the truth, but he's assuring him, I'm about to say something very unbelievable, but you can believe it's truth. I tell you the truth.

To say what he says to a man who had lived his whole life in crime, and only in the eleventh hour had repented and believed, he needed that, I tell you the truth.

And it stands there on Scripture's page for any of us who are trusting in the Savior. This is the truth of the gospel. I tell you the truth today.

Today you will be with me in paradise. Is today the day you will die? Then today you will be with me in paradise. Death brings the believer into the immediate presence of Christ.

When they die they go to be immediately with the Lord. There is no waiting place. There is no purgatory where you work off your suffering that your sins deserve.

[38 : 11] To die is to be with him. Today you will be with me in paradise. paradise. There is no suffering left for us.

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. And by his stripes we are healed. There is no debt outstanding for us to pay off in purgatory.

Jesus paid it all. There is no wrath remaining. He drank the cup himself to the bottom. So he says to this dying thief today before the sun that is beating on our heads goes down you're going to be with me in paradise.

To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord for those who repent and believe. You is the next word. Today you will be with me.

Jesus is talking to a man who had been a criminal until his conversion just moments earlier and he says you yes I'm talking to you murderer and robber that you've been and I know that your years of unbelief outnumber your minutes of trust in me and I know that your bad deeds totally outweigh any good deeds done in faith in me I know all about your life yet trusting in me you are forgiven and so today you ex con man you will be with me in paradise notice the next two words with me you with me what a combination you the sinner with me the savior but that's why I've come to seek and to save that which is lost that's why I'm dying on this cross that's why I'm here suffering to save my people that they might be with me where I am and see my glory forever and ever so that by dying this death in their place when they die they might be with me with me the believer at death goes to be with the

[40 : 20] Lord the next words are in paradise today you will be with me in paradise that's heaven in a place where there's no more death no more crying no more pain no more sin man once lived in

such a paradise it's where God put the first man and the first woman and it was paradise until sin entered the world and then instead of being holy and happy they became sinful and miserable and they were chased out of paradise it was paradise lost paradise forfeited by sin and here is Jesus talking about paradise restored won by Jesus death upon the cross today today you and anyone else who repents and believes in me will be with me in paradise what what an assuring promise if you're dying and you have one promise from the son of

God what else would you want to hear than this on the cross it was hell for him that it might be paradise for us unspeakable torments for him that there might be unspeakable glories for us forever and ever hallelujah what a savior just two observations and we're done the first is this that this passage perhaps more than any other conversion demonstrates salvation is not based upon good things we have ever done over our lifetime but upon the unmerited favor of God in Jesus Christ this man didn't have a life of good works to bring to God and to plead for salvation God because I've done this and this and not done that and that please let me he didn't have that he lived a life of crying he lived for himself he didn't live one day for the glory of God he didn't live one moment out of love to

Jesus he lived for self all of his life and if salvation is by works then this man can't be saved he can't come back down from the cross and do enough good works you see it just shows us that salvation is by grace through faith it's by faith in the works of Jesus for sinners not in our works or this man could not hear from Jesus these great words today you will be with me in paradise he would have said heard today you'll be in hell where you your works deserve to be but I'm not trusting in my works I'm trusting in you alone to save me today you'll be with me in paradise what a what a story is a true story put in the scriptures for us that we might forever be done with this idea straight from the pit of hell that we are saved because we have done something good no no never this man clearly didn't deserve to be saved and neither do you neither do

I and that's the kind of people Jesus saves those who have been humbled to see they deserve hell and cast themselves upon him for mercy we have nothing to contribute but our sin and neediness we have everything to receive and that's what faith is it's the empty hands that receives salvation and receives Christ and life in him faith the empty hands!

Surprises because of who's not there well she was in church every Sunday strange that she's not here he was such a good neighbor I thought for sure I'd see him here heaven will have surprises people that live far more outwardly righteous lives than this criminal will be in hell they won't be in heaven but heaven will be full of surprises because of who is there like this criminal anybody that knew this man would be shocked to learn that he's in heaven perhaps the greatest shock will be that you're there my greatest shock will be that I'm there heaven full of surprises some people are offended that this criminal is in heaven today it's not fair

[45 : 28] I've worked harder trying to be better than that he is in heaven and you're saying I'm not going there unless I come to this savior that's right you've got to come and be willing to stand with this criminal side by side and beg Jesus have mercy on my soul with not one good thing to claim any more than this criminal you've got to come empty of any goodness of your own and claim Jesus it's all what you have done please save me and you'll be saved but if you think yourself too good for that the doors of heaven are barred shut forever come this morning along with this thief and cast yourself upon the mercy of God there's a second observation and I turn to J.C.

Ryle for it there is in all the Bible just one account of a deathbed conversion one that none might despair but only one that none might presume it's the only account of a man woman boy or girl being saved on their deathbed one account of that I think we have thousands and tens of thousands of people thinking I'm going to get saved in the end on my deathbed oh that you would read your Bible and look for such this would be the only one you find and it's here it's here for any poor sinner who's lived his whole life in sin and in his dying moments comes to see he's a holy God I need a mediator I need someone to bring me before God in heaven and present me holy because I don't have any holiness and if in such a moment one puts faith in

Jesus Christ you will be saved it is not too late for you so let whoever you are however long you've lived without Jesus whatever you've done there is hope for you in Jesus Christ down to your last breath that's why we go on praying for people to their last breath let us take this up and use it to encourage us to seek to the very end the conversion of sinners but don't you make this one example a reason to procrastinate and to put off what you know you should do today don't boast about tomorrow you do not know what a day will bring forth this might be your last day remember

there were two men on either on the crosses that day beside Jesus not just the one there were two criminals they both saw the same thing they both heard the same words one believed and is in heaven today the other did not believe and is in hell today don't assume that in your dying day there will be grace for you to repent and believe you don't know that grace is the gift of God that man did not receive it this thief did receive and if in the preaching of the word Christ is near offering himself to you this morning don't put it off till you get home seek him now while he may be found call on him while he is near let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord and he will have mercy on him and to our God for he will abundantly! He is risen from the dead he is in heaven and he reigns and he is still this great king and gracious savior and he delights in mercy call on him for mercy even now let's all pray silently if you need salvation you call on this Jesus and what he's done for sinners living a perfect life that we could never live and then dying the death under God's wrath that we should have experienced forever let's all pray silently oh holy God and judge of all the earth how thankful we are for the Bible that records this conversion of a criminal in his last hours and we thank you for what we see of our savior in this account and how he rules and reigns even from a cross and even as he's dying he's given life to others full of compassion full of willingness to forgive calling sinners to look and to live we thank you for the grace of the

[50 : 48] Holy Spirit that flooded this criminal in his last hour and brought him to that place that many of us have come to where we we look away to Jesus alone for life we look to him for pardon and cleansing and for power and so we pray you would do that great miracle afresh in our midst here and send us from this place rejoicing!

in the Savior who reigns in grace we ask in his name Amen Amen Amen.