



Main point: When we die, we go straight to be with Jesus in paradise.

Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.

Background: Jesus says something profound about heaven as he's dying on the cross. Two criminals who had also been sentenced to death were on crosses next to Jesus. One criminal scorns Jesus, telling Jesus that if he's the Christ, he should save himself and them. But the other criminal says, "we're receiving the due reward for our deeds, but this man Jesus has done nothing wrong." That man then asks Jesus to remember him.

Focus of study:

⁴²And the criminal said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

⁴³And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Questions:

1. *Who are the people in this story, and what's happening to them?*
 - a. Jesus is on the cross, dying.
 - b. Two other men are also there dying on crosses; these were both criminals who were sentenced to die.
2. *What does the second criminal ask Jesus to do?*
 - a. "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." *Let's think about what that means. What does the criminal know is about to happen to all three of them on the crosses?*
 - i. He knows they are all about to die.
3. *We don't know how much this criminal knew about Jesus, but what does he know?*
 - a. "This man Jesus has done nothing wrong."
 - b. Jesus is a king: "When you come into your kingdom."
 - c. The criminal knows that death is not the end; a kingdom comes next.
4. *Based on what this criminal knows about Jesus, what does he ask for?*
 - a. For Jesus to remember him in his kingdom.
5. *Jesus' short response tells us a lot about heaven! Let's break it down. How does Jesus start his answer to the criminal?*
 - a. "Truly ..." *Why do you think Jesus starts with "truly"? When you say "truly," what do you mean?*
 - i. Jesus means what he says. Jesus isn't giving his opinion; he's stating *truth*.
 - b. "... I say to you": Jesus speaks personally to this criminal, one person to another.
6. *What does Jesus say next? What is the timeframe Jesus mentions?*
 - a. "Today." Jesus knows that death is imminent. It's real and inevitable. Death, for them, will happen today.
7. *What does Jesus say will happen in their "today" – that is, after they die?*
 - a. "You will be with me in paradise." *So, who is going?*
 - i. You: the criminal
 - ii. Me: Jesus
 - iii. With: They will be together

- b. Does Jesus say they'll both become nothing or unrecognizable after they die?
 - i. No! "You will be with me." Jesus will recognize the man, the man will recognize Jesus, and they will be together.
- 8. When will they be together?
 - a. TODAY – immediately after death.
- 9. Where does Jesus say they will they be together, today, after they die?
 - a. Paradise. In the Greek, this word is *paradeisos*, which meant a king's gardens.
 - b. *Think of the most beautiful place you have ever seen, a place you would describe as a paradise. What did that place look like, smell like, feel like?*
 - i. Gorgeous, majestic, awe-inspiring, abundant, safe ... (generate lots of ideas)
 - ii. A place of indescribable beauty and peace.
 - iii. Paradise is the picture Jesus wants the criminal to have in his mind as he dies.
- 10. *Best of all, who is in this paradise?*
 - a. Jesus, the king, is there in that place of beauty and rest.
- 11. *Let's think about one more thing: Do we go to heaven because we're "good"? Who was Jesus speaking to when he said, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise"?*
 - a. A criminal! This person was guilty; in fact, the man even reminds the other criminal of their mutual guilt. Jesus wasn't talking to someone who was "good," someone who might expect to go to heaven.
 - b. Going to be with Jesus at death isn't about being good or worthy.
- 12. *As we approach death, what should we say and where should we turn?*
 - a. Like the criminal, turn to Jesus: "Remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus' one-sentence response to the criminal gives us some amazing insights about heaven. When we die, as we trust in Jesus, his words can and will ring in our ears. "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

When we die, we can be without fear, because Jesus says we will be:

- b. Recognized as ourselves.
- c. With Jesus.
- d. In paradise.
- e. Immediately!

13. Ask for prayer requests for today.

14. Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.

15. End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace

Luke 23:42-43

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⁴³And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”