

The Word Of Salvation

Luke 23:39-43

Pastor John Miller

Luke says, "The people stood beholding." Now, Jesus is on the cross and the people standing around the cross beholding him and the rulers also with them saying, "He saved others. Let him save himself if he be the Messiah, the chosen of God." And the soldiers also mocked him coming to him and offering him vinegar and saying, "If thou be the king of the Jews, save yourself." And the superscription also that was written over him in letters of Greek and Latin and Hebrew read, "This is the king of the Jews." Actually, the complete statement as you compile the four gospels is, "Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews." And one of the malefactors that was hanging there railed on him saying, "If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us."

But the other answering rebuked him saying, "Dost thou not fear God seeing thou art in the same condemnation and we indeed justly for we receive the due reward of our deeds. But this man hath done nothing amiss." And when he had said that, he turned to Jesus and said, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus said unto him, this is the second statement, "Truly I say unto you today, you will be with me in paradise." As we come again to the place called Calvary, verse 33, the place where Jesus suffered and died for our sins. We stand looking, but we also must be listening for not only did Jesus suffer, but he spoke. And the words that he spoke are windows that allow us to see the heart of God. Seven statements, seven windows through which we can look and we see the very heart of God. Now, the first word Jesus spoke was in verse 34.

It was a prayer and he said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." The second word that Jesus spoke is in verse 43. And Jesus answered and said, "Truly, I say unto you today you will be with me in paradise." This is the word of salvation. Now it's the amazing story of a conversion. Every conversion is a miracle, but sometimes the circumstances that surround the saving of a soul make it even more amazing, such as the case with the conversion of this convicted criminal on the cross. So as Jesus is still hanging on the cross and he was there six hours, nine in the morning during the afternoon. During the first time of daylight there, Jesus who had cried, "Father forgive them, they know that what they do." He finally turns to this one thief. Now, Jesus was crucified between two thieves and we'll look at it more in just a moment.

One on his right hand, one on his left, and one of the thieves, at first, both thieves railed on him and reviled him and mocked him. And then one of the thieves had a change of heart and he turned to Jesus and he said, "Lord, remember me when you enter into your kingdom." And then Jesus spoke while they were railing him and mocking him and ridiculing him, he was silent. But when this man in repentance and faith and humility and helplessness cried out, "Lord remember me," then it got a response from Jesus. And Jesus said, "Truly, I say unto you, today you will be with me in paradise. This is the second word of salvation that Jesus uttered from the cross. Now, there are four amazing things about the conversion of this thief, this criminal that I want to point out. And if you're taking notes, you can write them down.

The first is the amazing providence of God in his conversion, the amazing providential hand of God in his conversion. You know there were no accidents in the life of Jesus, only appointments. It was God's providence that the cross of Christ was placed between two thieves. As I studied this passage this week, again, I was in awe of the providence of God in placing the Son of God, dying for sinners on a cross between two sinful men, one on his right hand, the other on his left. I believe that this was orchestrated and arranged by God's providence. Now, the word providence does not appear in the Bible, but the teaching is all through the Bible. It means that God sees beforehand and not only that he sees, but that God orchestrates in affairs of our life. God didn't just create the universe like a giant clock, wind it up and then let it run down.

God is working in our world today. Do you believe that? Every time you open the Bible, you see God in heaven. Guess what? He's still on the throne. John says, "I looked and there was a throne and, ah, no one was there." He's on the throne of the universe and I rest in that. Amen. God is in control. So God is working. And then what ultimate purpose God had in bringing Jesus into the world for that purpose of dying for our sins so that he can redeem fallen humanity. So it was all part of the providence of God, but how unique that he would die between two convicted criminals. Two men are dying because of their sin. One man, Jesus is dying for their sin. So you have two sinners and the Savior on those crosses.

Now both the thieves could hear Jesus praying, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." And I believe the Holy Spirit could use providentially, the statements from Christ's lips to begin to soften their hearts. Now, one was hard and the other was soft. And as he began to listen to Jesus and in the Greek it was repeated, father, forgive them. Father, forgive them. Father forgive them. They know not what they do. That faith began to arise in the heart of this thief. And he thought, "Well, maybe God can forgive even me. I'm a criminal. I'm dying for my sin and I'm on the cross, but maybe God can forgive me. Maybe he is the Savior." And they both equally hanging there, heard the words of Jesus Christ even as we begin to hear the word of God and come under conviction, and they could both see the title on the cross. Someone said that title, Jesus of Nazareth, king, king of the Jews. As they would look at one another, Jesus in the middle, they would see that title there over his head.

And again, someone said, "This is the first gospel track ever printed." And maybe that one thief began to look at that Jesus, Yeshua can save, God saves. Maybe he is our deliverer, he's the king. Maybe he can be my king, maybe he can save me. And then we also see thirdly that they could hear the crowd. Look at back at verse 35, "The people stood beholding the rulers also with them derided him saying, 'He saved others. Let him save himself. If he be the Christ, the Messiah, the chosen of God.'" Then notice verse 36, the soldiers also mocking him, coming to him, offering to him vinegar. So you have three groups. You have the people and the rulers, verse 35, and then verse 36, you have the soldiers. So you have these groups and you have these two thieves and you have the Savior, but they could hear the people mocking him and ridiculing him.

But what were they saying? Verse 35, he saved others. And I believe that that penitent thief

heard that first part, he saved, he saved others. And again, faith began to strengthen his heart. Faith began to arise stronger in his heart. He saved others, perhaps he can save me. I need to be saved. I need a Savior. And he heard those words and his heart began to respond. Perhaps he can save me. So each of the thieves had access to Jesus. They heard him, they read the placard. The same is due true of today for us. God in his providence brought you here to church today, I'm absolutely convinced that there's not one person in this sanctuary by accident that God brought you here. You're going, "No know that's not true. My husband dragged me here. My wife made me come or my parents brought me." And you can thank God for that. You're not here by accident.

You know that before the world was ever created, before you were ever born, God knew that you would be right here, right now listening to this sermon. You are busted. And in his providence, he loves you. He cares about you. He wants to forgive you. He wants to give you hope. He wants to give you life. And I'm convinced that no one's here by accident. God is organized and maybe someone's been witnessing to you on the job. Maybe there's a Christian between you and the other heathen there in the office. And every time you tell this muddy joke, the Christian's sitting there and you get convicted or he's sharing the gospel with you or you see him reading his Bible, you hear him talking on the phone. And God's spirit is speaking to you, maybe a husband or a wife or a family member or a friend.

And God providentially has orchestrated that you be here today, that you hear his word. As the thieves called back and forth to each other, they had to look at Jesus. And as they looked at Jesus, they saw something different about him. I believe that that cross that Jesus hung on was intended for Barabbas. Remember Barabbas that was let to go free and Jesus was crucified in his place. I believe the two thieves and Barabbas were partners in crime and the Barabbas being the leader of their little crime enterprise should have been hanging on the center cross. But God providentially had it though that Barabbas was taken away. Jesus was hung on the cross. He was innocent as all through the testimony of the gospels his innocence is preserved. And yet he's hanging there between two guilty criminals, convicted of crimes for which they were being executed.

This is the providence of God. And I want to say to you today that the circumstances of your life have been orchestrated by God to bring you to this time and place so that you too like this penitent thief in just a moment will turn in faith and trust Jesus Christ. From the time you were a child to your present age, whatever it might be, God has had his hand on your life and he brought you here today to hear this message, the amazing providence of God. But there's a second point I want to bring out, and that is the amazing prophecy fulfilled. So as I look at Jesus hanging on the cross between the two thieves, I see the providence of God in that, but I also know that it was a prophecy fulfilled. Mark 15:27-28 it says, "And when they had crucified two thieves, the one on the right hand and the other on his left, the scripture was fulfilled with sayeth. He was numbered with the transgressors."

Isaiah 53:12. Now the prophecy was 700 years before Jesus died and it said that as he was crucified, he would be numbered with the malefactor. He would be numbered with the criminals.

So 700 years before his death, God prophesied that Jesus would be crucified between two thieves. So we need to remember that the death of Jesus Christ was not only the unrighteous plot of man, but it was also the fulfillment of the righteous purposes of God. Do you know that God's word is sure? Do you know that what God has spoken cannot be broken? Do you know when God makes a prophecy, guess what? It will be fulfilled. That you can build your life on God's word, it's a solid rock of scripture. And so God spoke and just like he spoke, Jesus died between two thieves. And his very name at his birth that was given to him means God saves.

He was born to save sinners. He lived to save sinners. He said, "I have come to seek and to save that which is lost." He died to save sinners. The Bible says it like this, "Christ died for our sins." Why did Jesus die on the cross? For our sins. So he was born to save sinners. He lived to save sinners. They called him a friend of publicans and sinners. He died on the cross to save sinners. Guess what? There's hope for you and I. Amen. God loves and saves sinners and he sent Jesus for that purpose. And so he fulfilled prophecy as well as God orchestrated providentially his dying between two thieves. The death of Jesus Christ was God's plan for redeeming sinful man. But there's a third point I want to make and that is the amazing prayer that was prayed, the amazing prayer that was prayed.

I want you to notice that both the thieves were equally close to Jesus and both the thieves actually prayed. We only look normally at the one prayer. Lord, remember me when you enter into your kingdom. But you know that both the thieves hanging by Jesus prayed a prayer. Notice in verse 39, in verse 39, some are one of the malefactors which were hanging nailed on to Him saying, "If thou be the Christ, save thy self and us." If you are the Christ, save yourself and us. Now, that was just particular petition. That was his prayer. But there's some problems I have with it and I want to point them out. First of all, he did not pray in faith. Notice in verse 39, "If you are the Christ, if you are the Messiah." The Bible says, "He that comes to God must believe that he is and that he's the rewarder of those who diligently seek him." So he didn't believe that Jesus was the Christ. He was saying this in derision.

He was sneering it. "Oh yeah, if you're really the Christ, then save yourself in us too." So he did not pray in faith. Secondly, he was not praying in the will of God, "Save thy self." This was not God's will. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane. Father, if it'd be possible, let this cup pass for me. The cup of suffering, the cup of the cross could not pass. Jesus must die on the cross. This is what Peter told Jesus. No way you're going to die. That shall not be far from thee. Lord. You're not going to die on the cross. And what did Jesus say to Peter? "Get behind me Satan, for you're saying the things that be of men, not of God." God's purpose, God's plan, God's will was the cross of Jesus Christ. So he was not praying in faith. He wasn't praying according to the will of God. And thirdly, it was not to be saved from sin. He said, "Save yourself and us." He was speaking for his other friend, "Save us as well." So he only wanted deliverance from his suffering but not from his sin.

A lot of people are like that today. "Lord, be my Savior, but I want a nice car. I want a nice house. I want a nice job. I want health. I want wealth. I want a nice marriage. Lord, save me not from sin, not from hell, not from death, not my soul, but save my life. Now, those can be the

byproduct of spiritual salvation, but we come to Jesus to be saved from sin. I've gone to prisons and talked to inmates there, and they're only sorry because they got caught. And if they could be released, they go right back to their life of crime. They just be a little more careful. They didn't get caught this time. And then there are those thank God who come under conviction and they don't care if they get out or not as long as they get right with God. I only want to know that I'm right with God. I don't care if I get out of prison. I don't care if I get jail.

I don't care if God heals me. I don't care if God gives me a job. I don't care if God does this or that. I only want to be saved. I only want to be right with God. A lot of people would turn to God in the time of crisis. They turn to God in the time of trouble. But they don't come in faith. They don't come born out of a sense of sinfulness. They don't come in humility and they don't want to be saved from their sin. They only want God to fix their life or to patch it up. God's not just going to fix your life or patch you up. He needs to forgive you of your sin. This is the word of forgiveness. And then fourthly, he did not pray in humble fear. Verse 40, when his companion and crime said, he said, "Does thou not fear God seeing thou art in the same condemnation?"

Don't you fear God? That's the man's problem. He wasn't really fearing God or reverencing God. Now, a lot of people again today don't pray in faith. They don't pray according to the will of God. They don't pray to be saved from sin and they don't pray with a humble fear and reverence and respect for God. And guess what? God doesn't answer their prayer. God doesn't answer their prayer. How do you expect God to answer your prayer when you are not coming to him in faith? You're not praying according to his will. You're not coming born out of a sense of sin and helplessness and crying out to him. But there's another thief that prayed. What a difference was the prayer of the penitent thief. The penitent thief. Notice how he prayed. Verse 40, he prayed with fear of God. He says, does not thou fear God seeing that we aren't in the same condemnation?

So the implication and the inference is what? He feared God. The first thing he did as the Holy Spirit began to work in his heart was he rebuked his friend and said, "Don't you fear God? I fear God." You ought to fear God. I'm fearing God right now. I'm not fearing this execution. I'm fearing God because when I die, I'm going to stand before God and we're going to give an account to God. So this man prayed, mark it well, "Born out of a fear or reverence for God." And secondly, the penitent thief prayed with a sense of sinfulness. Notice verse 41, "We indeed justly for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man that is Jesus has done nothing wrong." So he prayed out of a fear for God and out of a sense of sinfulness, we are being punished for our sin. Jesus said it like this, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are they who mourn over their sin for theirs is the kingdom of God."

So the gateway into the kingdom is mourning over your sin and God purifying your heart. But notice that he also prayed in faith, verse 42. When he prayed to Jesus, he said, "Lord, remember me," emphasis on Lord. He believed that Jesus Christ was the Lord in spite of the crowds mocking him, in spite of what he saw and what he heard. Now to me, this is absolutely amazing. He's being executed for his crimes. He's hanging on a cross. He looks next to him and there's a man in the same place he is. He's being executed by the Roman authorities. He's

being crucified. He's hanging on the cross, nails in his hands, nails in his feet, crown of thorns. He's been whipped and beaten and bloody. He's hanging on the cross and this guy calls him Lord, what amazing faith. He turns to Jesus and says, "Lord, remember me." He believed that Jesus was the Lord. And then fourthly, he prayed for mercy. This is one of my favorite prayers in the Bible.

He said, verse 42, "Remember me. Remember me." Had you notice that he didn't plead his goodness? He didn't say, "Hey, remember me. I went to Sunday school when I was little. I got a lot of stars in my Bible for perfect attendance. Remember me. Remember me, Lord, I'm the one that went on that mission trip and remember me, Lord, I'm the one who was baptized. Remember me, Lord, I was the one that was confirmed when I was just a little boy. Remember me, Lord, I took communion. Remember my first communion, Lord, remember me when you enter in your kingdom." This man's prayer is so profound and so insightful. He's pleading for mercy when he simply says, "Remember me." The last person we want to forget us is God, right? When we get to heaven, you want God to go, "I've never seen you before. What's your name? Who are you?" "Lord, you know me. I gave to the poor. I did all kinds of good stuff. You know me, John Miller. I used to pastor at church. How can you forget me?"

That's the last thing we want is the Lord to say, "Ah, depart from me. I never knew you." He said, "Remember me. Born out of a sense of sinfulness, born out of humility, born out of a fear for God. He humbly just cried out, 'Lord, remember me.'" What he's praying for is mercy. Lord, don't give me what I deserve. And then he prayed for God to give him what he didn't deserve. That is salvation when you enter into your kingdom. So he prayed for salvation. Verse 42, "When you come into your kingdom." Now, can you imagine that this guy's hanging on the cross, he's being crucified, they're spitting on him, and the guy believes that he's going to have a future kingdom. What amazing faith this thief had with his little bit of information, his little bit of knowledge, and the last moments of his life, he turns to Jesus and he said, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom."

What an amazing prayer he utters. He's praying there for salvation. "Give me eternal life. Let me spend forever in paradise with you." And lastly, and sixthly this amazing prayer he prayed earnestly. He prayed earnestly, verse 42, you say, "Well, I don't know where you get that idea of earnestly from that prayer." In the Greek, which is not detectable in the English language, in the Greek, in the tense of the Greek, the prayer is repeated over and over and over and over again. "Lord, remember me when you enter your kingdom." A few minutes later again, "Lord, remember me when you enter into your kingdom." Perhaps an hour later, "Lord, remember me when you enter into your kingdom." And over and over and over humbly and earnestly he prayed that prayer, "Lord, remember me as you enter into your kingdom." How did he know that Jesus could save him? He heard Jesus pray and he saw the placard and faith swelled in his heart and he turned in repentance to Jesus Christ. Now, do you think that Jesus answered his prayer?

You think that Jesus answered your prayer? Well, kind of a trick question. You already know the answer from the Bible, right? You go, "I don't know man. You tell me you're the preacher." I love

it when I ask questions and people look at me like, "I don't know you're getting paid to do this, man. You tell me." The answer is yes. And it's in verse 42 where Jesus cried out, verse 43, excuse me, where Jesus cried out and said, "Today, you shall be with me in paradise." I love that. Do you know why Jesus answered the prayer? Because Jesus came to save sinners like you and like me. Jesus came to save sinners and this is what Jesus said in his earthly ministry before the cross, Jesus said this, "All who come to me, I will in no way cast out. Whoever comes to me, I will in no way cast out." And so when this thief turned to him in these last moments on the cross, Jesus could not say to him, "No, I won't remember you when I come into my kingdom, you're a bad, bad person."

What if it read like that in the text? Or what if the text read, "No, I won't remember you when I come into my kingdom. You haven't been baptized." What church did you go to? Have you been confirmed? Have you lived a good life? Obviously the dude was dying for his crimes. He was a criminal. More than just a thief, he was probably a political zealot trying to overthrow the Roman government and he was being executed for it. He had lived a sinful life. He was dying for his crimes. So think of what Jesus could have said to him. He said, "You deserve to die. You are a bad person. It's too late." I've met people that have told me, "Pastor John, it's too late for me to be saved. I've lived a sinful life. You don't know how bad I've been." One of the things we learned from the story as we looked through this window into the heart of God is that no one's too bad and it's never too late. You got that.

No one is too bad to go to heaven and it's never too late. Praise God for that. Jesus turned to him and said, "Yes, truly. I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." What an amazing promise Jesus made to this man. Now, let me break this down for you. Number one, salvation is totally by grace. This thief on the cross was saved by the grace of God, certainly not by works. The 10 Commandments say, "Thou shalt not steal." He was dying for being a thief. "Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not lie. Thou shalt not murder. Thou shalt not covet." And on the list goes, you will not have any other gods before me. So the law condemns all of us as guilty and the wages of sin is death. So this man was saved as you and I are saved totally by the grace of God, he was saved by God's grace, not by baptism. Jesus didn't say, "Well, if you can get off the cross and get baptized, I'll take you with to paradise."

Jesus didn't say, "Oh, well, kind of difficult to give you communion right now, but if you could take communion, then maybe you could go with me to heaven." Jesus didn't say, "Have you lived a good life?" The Bible says in Ephesians 2:8-9, "By grace you have been saved. Through faith not of works lest any man should boast." We are saved by the grace of God, not by our works, and that's what this story teaches us. And so we all can be saved because none of us are good enough. None of us are righteous enough. None of us are religious enough and can't get you to heaven. It teaches us that salvation is by grace. It's the second thing we learn here and that salvation is certain. Notice what Jesus said in verse 43. He said verily, my King James translation or truly or can be translated, amen. You know what the word verily means?

It means truly or amen or so be it. Did you know I believe in assurance of salvation? I believe in the doctrine of assurance in the Bible. I believe the Bible teaches that you can know beyond any

shadow of a doubt that when you die you will go to heaven. I have people from time to time to say, "Well, pastor, that's just too prideful. And who do you think you are, and you think you know you're going to heaven?" No one's going to know they're going to heaven until they die and then they'll find out. That's too late to find out. That's real risky. I want to know before I die. When Jesus said, verily, when Jesus said, truly, you know what it was? It was a confirmation number. When you travel around on vacation, don't you love having a confirmation number? I do. When they say, "Sorry, Mr. Miller, we don't have a room for you." "I have a confirmation number." Then I forget I'm a pastor, so I calm down a little bit.

"I have a confirmation number. What do you mean you don't have a room for me? I have a confirmation. What are confirmation numbers for? Other than you are keeping a room for me, I've confirmed, I have my number." When you get to heaven, you got a confirmation number. Isn't that cool? It's a note stained with the blood of Jesus Christ written in his own handwriting, forgiven. It's your confirmation number. Just write this down. 1 John 5:11-14, John teaches the doctrine of assurance. He said, "This is the record," I'll read it to you, "that God has given to us eternal life." Notice God gave us eternal life, that it is a gift and this life is in His son. "He that hath the son has life, he that has not the son of God has not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know there it is that you have eternal life." And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he what? Hears us. Amen.

If we ask according to his will, he hears us so we can know that we have eternal life. This life is in his son. He's given it to us as a gift, "And he that hath the son has life, he that has not the son of God has not life." The doctrine of assurance. Do you know that when you die, you will go to heaven? Any question in your mind, any doubt in your heart right now? Don't leave here today without assurance. Don't leave here today without knowing beyond any shadow of a doubt that you are a Christian, that you've been forgiven, that if you die, you'll go to heaven. Jesus turns to this thief, this convicted criminal. He said, "Truly, amen. You will be with me today in paradise." God wants you to have assurance. But I see a third thing about the statement of Jesus there in verse 43. The salvation is a present salvation. It happens instantaneously. We don't have to wait to be saved, but we have salvation immediately.

Notice in verse 43, Jesus used the word today. The thief in verse 42 said, when, future tense, "When you enter your kingdom, remember me." But Jesus said, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Salvation is not a process. Jesus didn't say, "Well, we'll put your name down. We'll keep an eye on you and see if you make it." I've had people say, "Well, I'm trying to be saved." That's like saying, "I'm trying to be an elephant." God saves you, you let him save you. And it happens instantaneously. It's not a process. "Well, I'm being saved." He saves you immediately. "Shall have present possession, eternal life," says John 3:16. Today, not tomorrow, not next month, not next year, "Today you'll be with me in paradise." And I'll come back to that thought in a minute. But I want you to know fourthly, salvation is a person. Salvation is a person. Jesus used the phrase with me, verse 43, truly it's sure, today it's not a process, and it's a person with me. You know what makes heaven, heaven? Jesus going to be there.

Can you imagine getting to heaven and Jesus is not there? Bummer. Jesus said, "If I go to prepare a place, I'm going to come and receive you to myself that where I am there you may be also." Listen carefully, before heaven is a place, heaven is a person, and that person is Jesus Christ. And Jesus said, "You're going to be with me." And the moment a Christian dies, they go immediately to be with the Lord. And that's why I say fifthly heaven is a place. So first it's a person, then it's a place. And what does he say in verse 43? With me in what? Paradise. And the word paradise literally means a walled garden, a beautiful walled garden with great pleasure. You know, heaven's going to be awesome. Some people get the eye. "What are you going to do when you get to heaven? Sit on the cloud, watch little fat baby angels with wings, fly around, play a harp." That's boring. Well, think of the alternative.

Where else are you going to go? So if that all heaven were, I'd rather go to heaven and watch little babies fly around with wings and sit on the cloud, but that ain't the case. Jesus is going to be there and he's all the glory of Emmanuel's land. We're not going to look at our garments, we're not going to look at the glassy sea. We're not going to look at all the gold and all the cherubim and seraphim. We're going to be looking right into the face of Jesus Christ and faith will turn to sight and we can reach out and touch him and he will touch us. We will be with him. Jesus said, "Today, you'll be with me in paradise." Now, for you Bible students out there, again, this is one of those sermons, I can't exhaust all that can be brought out of this text, but I realized that prior to the cross, prior to the resurrection, and Jesus yet hasn't died, he hasn't been buried, hasn't risen from the dead.

That all the Old Testament saints went to a place called Sheol in the Hebrew and in the Greek New Testament, it's called Hades. And Luke described it as having two compartments. One a place of torment, one a place of comfort called Abraham's bosom. Now, you might not think of a cool thing to go to Abraham's bosom, but they're all the faithful saints. When they died, they went and they were waiting for Jesus to die on the cross and to be buried, resurrected. And then he would empty Abraham's bosom, that compartment of Sheol or Hades and he would take them to heaven. This is what Paul talks about in Ephesians where it says, "Before he ascended, he descended and he led captivity captive, and then he gave gifts to men." I understand all that and we could get sidetracked talking about paradise and where it is and what it is and when it is.

But I do know that if Jesus descended in the Hades, Abraham's bosom, and he declared to the saints there that he died on the cross, accomplished his work, he took them to heaven. It's now vacated that that thief then went to heaven with Jesus. Now, maybe that day, technically he was in paradise, Abraham's bosom. But after that was done there, he went to heaven. So here's my position. Wherever you view paradise, however you view paradise, the bottom line is its heaven with Jesus. We're going to heaven. Amen. Let's not quibble as to where it is and how it all works. We are going to heaven. Now, this puts to rest the doctrine of soul sleep. When Jesus said to the thief, today you will be with me in paradise, we have to dismiss the doctrine of soul sleep. That's the teaching that when you die, you just kind of go, "Poof." I don't know what it sounds like, but kind of poof like that. And you are just two little eyeballs floating around the cosmos. You know the medieval church taught that when unbaptized babies die, they became

fireflies.

The Bible teaches 2 Corinthians 5 that a Christian when he dies to be absent from the body is to be what? Present with the Lord. You know that verse, the moment I leave this tent and this tent's getting rickety, it's bending right now, it's all tipped. The moment I leave this tent, I go to a building not made with hands, eternal in the heaven,. A new body, a new place with the Lord forever, and a reunion with my friends and family that have died and gone before me. I've got family in heaven right now. I can't wait to see them. I've got friends and family. I can't wait to see them. Paradise. This guy's hanging on the cross, dying for his crimes. One moment and the next moment, because he simply said, "Lord, remember me." Jesus said, "Today you're going to be in paradise."

You talk about an amazing conversion. The Bible also says that Paul, the Apostle, was in a pickle between two desires, Philippians 1, he said, "I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better, or to stay here in my body and to minister to you." So Paul acknowledged that if I leave my body, I go to be with Christ. So where is paradise? It's in heaven with the Lord. Now, J. Oswald Sanders said, looking at this man's conversion, "What certainty, truly I say to you, what speed today? What glory in paradise? What company with me? Sinners who cast themselves into the arms of Christ, go into the presence of God." I love that. Now, granted, this man had a deathbed, or in his case, a death-cross conversion. And I believe that you can be saved in the last seconds of life if you will call out to the Lord, "Lord, remember me. Lord, I believe in you. Lord, I trust you that even on your deathbed you can be saved." I've seen people saved on their deathbed.

Woo, praise God. Thank you, pastor. I'm just going to do that. That's going to be my plan. I'm going to live however I want. I'm going to do whatever I want, and then just before I die, I'm going to get saved. So I'm going to have fun and then get saved and go to heaven. That's foolish because you never know when you're going to die, and you never know if you have an opportunity when you die. Now, think about this thief on his deathbed conversion. This is his first opportunity and he seized it. It was his last opportunity, but he also believed his first chance that he had to believe in Jesus Christ and be safe. So don't wait till the last seconds to be converted. But suppose, this is kind of preaching with imagination, but Harry Ironside brings this out. I think it's kind of cool. Suppose that this thief who had lived a wicked, sinful and reckless life had a Christian mother and she was praying for her son. And she wasn't there at Calvary that day, she wasn't watching him die.

She was brokenhearted and she was home kneeling over her bed, weeping tears, "God save my son. God save my son. Lord, I just pray that somehow you'll send someone to him." She didn't know perhaps it would be the son of God himself, but send someone to him. And Lord, I pray that he would come to know you and perhaps her son died and she never knew that her son accepted Jesus before he died. If you have a family member, and I mean this, if you have a family member that you're praying, don't stop, don't stop. And sometimes they can cry out to the Lord. Sometimes they can pray out to the Lord, and you don't even know that they've trusted Christ in their last moments of life and they've gone to heaven. And unbeknownst to you, you

have no idea that they were saved until this mother went to heaven and saw her boy in heaven and realized that God saved him. And God answers prayer. I believe God answers prayer, and we should never stop praying for our loved ones.

Now, two thieves equally close to Jesus, one calls out, "Lord, remember me," and he's taken to paradise, the other mocks, and he dies in his sin and he goes to hell for all eternity. Same choice as yours today, you are equally close to Jesus Christ. You can call out to Him, you can believe in Him, you can turn to Him, and you can be forgiven, or you can reject Him and die in your sins and perish, the choice is yours. One man was saved so that we could have hope, the other man was lost, so that we would not presume upon the opportunity to believe. I want to give you an opportunity before you leave here today to make sure that you are forgiven, to make sure that you are saved, to make sure that you have eternal life. And if you are here and you don't know for sure that you have been saved, then today I hope that you will make that commitment to believe in Jesus Christ and be saved. Let's pray.