

Lastly, he believed that Jesus is Lord, the Christ, the King who would come into His Kingdom – Luke 23:42. And it was his faith that obtained salvation. Faith and faith alone in the Lord Jesus alone is what God demands if we would enter Paradise. If we try to add anything to faith, we rob it of its power, we destroy it, we replace it. That it is through faith alone that we can be saved is in complete agreement with the teachings of the Lord Jesus in other places in the New Testament.

For example, **“He who hears my words and believes on Him who sent me has everlasting life and will not come into judgment, but is passed from death to life”** – John 5:24. See also John 3:16, 36; 7:38.

We should see also that the thief went directly to Paradise. There was no intermediate place, such as purgatory, where he had to spend time before he was ready for heaven. But how can it possibly be that all of this robber’s criminal activity and other sins were immediately forgiven, blotted out, forgotten? Because the Lord Jesus Christ took all of his sins (and ours) on Himself and suffered the required penalty for them. Peter wrote:

“He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree”.
“Also Christ suffered for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” – 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18

When we turn to Jesus in repentance and simply trust Him to save us we are completely, eternally forgiven and made ready for Paradise. Then we can begin to live the true Christian life.

This is what we can learn from the thief on the cross – *Paradise, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, heaven – these are all free gifts of God obtained through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus alone.*

This is the clear teaching of the Bible, and no one ever put it more clearly than the apostle Paul. Here are his divinely inspired words in Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8,9:

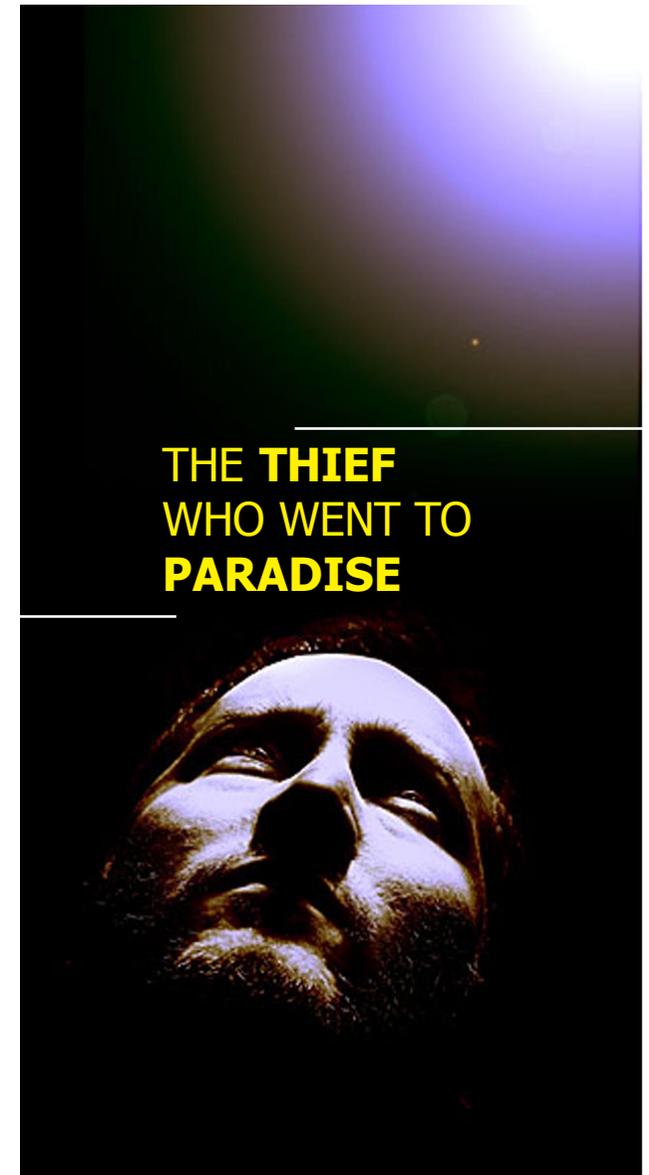
“For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

The words of Jesus are for us now – **“Repent and believe the Gospel”** – Mark 1:15.

Bob Crow

crowbabu@juno.com

GRACE MINISTRIES



THE THIEF WHO WENT TO PARADISE

Paradise! – Perfect peace, perfect health, perfect delight, perfect love! Sorrow, pain, decline, death all gone forever! Who does not wish to go there? Thieves also might want to, but is it possible for them?

Here is one who did go to that place of joy. He was one of two thieves crucified with the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the record in the Gospel according to Matthew:

“Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads. . . Even the two robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him” (Matthew 27:38-44).

The Gospel according to Luke tells us how the story developed – **“Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If you are the Christ, save yourself and us.’ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this Man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise’”** (Luke 23:39-43).

This is a very remarkable thing. A thief going from death directly to Paradise! And the question comes to us – what did this robber, this condemned criminal, do to get there? Or, to put it in different words, how did he gain salvation? How did he get eternal life? How did he have his sins forgiven? For it is evident that if he went to Paradise he obtained all of these. These questions are important, for if we wish to obtain the same things for ourselves, we must do as he did.

First, let us see some things that had no part at all in his being taken to Paradise.

It is clear that this did not happen through membership in any church or by any sacrament or ordinance of any church, such as baptism or Communion or the Mass. In this account of the thief we are reduced to the basic thing that saves people, and churches, their customs and practices had nothing to do with it. In fact, he was not even a member of a church. You say that he would have been had he lived on and that he would have observed the ordinances of the church also. But this is beside the point. The point is how a person gets to Paradise, not what he may do after becoming a Christian.

It is also clear that his efforts and his deeds had nothing to do with Paradise being opened to him. He had works, but they were bad. He was a thief, a robber, a criminal, worthy of death on a cross (as he himself admitted). So the forgiveness of his sins, the promise of Paradise, his salvation from beginning to end was a free gift of God.

This record was put in the Bible for our understanding. We are to learn from it the basic things God requires of us if we would go to heaven. And the truth, obvious as it can be in the case of this thief, is this: salvation cannot be earned by anything we can do. After a person has been saved, received the forgiveness of sins and the new birth – in other words, after a person becomes a true Christian, he or she should do good works and glorify God by them. But they are the result of salvation, not the way to gain it.

It is clear too that he was not saved by much praying, or by getting others to pray for him. He uttered one, simple, direct prayer to Jesus which revealed his faith, and that was all. And that was enough. It revealed a profound change in him.

Then what do we need to do? The same exact thing that this thief did. And what was that?

First, he had direct dealings with the Lord Jesus Christ. At first he reviled, insulted, rejected Him. Then he turned directly to Him with a different attitude altogether, and made a prayer to Him. There was no mediator involved. No apostle, no saint living or dead, not the mother of Jesus, no one at all had anything to do with his salvation but Jesus alone. Jesus is all we need. There is no one in heaven or on earth as loving, as compassionate, as merciful as He. He is the all-powerful Son of God with all authority in heaven and earth. And He granted to this thief salvation that was immediate and complete and eternal. Jesus is the Way to God and Paradise, and the only one, as He Himself plainly said. **“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me”** – John 14:6.

The teaching of the apostle Peter is in complete agreement with this: **“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”** – Acts 4:12.

And the apostle Paul wrote, **“There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus”** – 1 Timothy 2:5.

Then the thief acknowledged his sins, and turned from them to the Lord Jesus. His words of repentance are seen above.

Jesus taught, **“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish”** – Luke 13:3,5. The thief did not make excuses for his sins, did not try to hide them. He accepted the just punishment for them and turned away from them to Jesus. Would we follow Him to Paradise? We must do as he did.