

## 7 GREATEST WORDS OF LOVE

# PARADISE!

*“One of the criminals hanging beside Jesus hurled insults at him. ‘ So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you’re at it!’ But the other criminal rebuked him, ‘Don’t you fear God even when you are dying? We deserve to die for our evil deeds, but this man has not done anything wrong!’ Then he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.’ And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:39-43 (NLT)*

We are continuing this series on the Seven Greatest Words of Love. The seven last statements of Jesus on the cross.

Today we get the word of assurance. Jesus speaks to a thief who’s dying on a cross beside him.

As you know Jesus was crucified between two thieves. One of them rejected Jesus. The other trusted Jesus.

Today we’re going to look at the conversation between Jesus and that man.

Jesus was hanging between these two criminals. The Greek word literally means evil doers. They did evil. One of them turned against Jesus. He blasphemed Jesus, the original Greek Bible tells us. And one of them turned toward Jesus. To him Jesus said, **“Today you will be with me in paradise.”**

This is an extremely important text of Scripture, because it tells us in this one passage how you can be certain that you’re saved, with no more doubts in your mind.

I want you to listen to this sermon as if your life depends on it. Because it does. I’m going to explain to you as clearly, and as simply as I know how: What it means to know that you are for certain going to heaven when you die.

I know many people who’ve gone to church their entire lives and still aren’t sure they are going to heaven. They have doubts. Am I really going to get into heaven? Usually that’s because they are counting on themselves – counting on doing enough good in their lives to deserve to get into heaven. But **when we count on ourselves we are never certain: “Did I do enough? Did I do the**

***right things? Did I do too much bad stuff? Did I say the right words? Did I feel the right way? Did I believe strong enough?"***

I don't ever want you to have any doubt again about whether you're going to heaven or not. I want you to be absolutely certain, with zero doubts, zero fears, zero anxieties that if you were to die tonight, or in the next hour, you would go straight into the presence of God. I want you to have that assurance.

And I don't want you to have any misconceptions.

**Misconceptions like: *God only lets people into heaven if He HAS to. God's not too excited about you being His house-guest forever. God chose long ago who He would let in, and who He will keep out.*** So we're going to turn to the Bible and just look at these words clearly.

The Bible says: *"One of the criminals hanging beside Jesus hurled insults at him. 'So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you're at it!' But the other criminal [On the other side of Jesus] rebuked him, 'Don't you fear God even when you are dying? We deserve to die for our evil deeds, but this man has not done anything wrong!' Then he said, [He looks at Jesus and says] 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.' And Jesus replied, 'I assure you, [this is the word of assurance. I assure you. In other words I guarantee it. You can count on it. You can take it to the bank. I assure you...] today you will be with me in paradise.'"*

What does Jesus tell us in this passage? What do we learn about getting to heaven? Because obviously if Jesus says you're going to heaven, *you're going to heaven.* And He told this guy you're going to heaven.

The first truth that saved this dying thief is: **1. I will FACE GOD AFTER I DIE.**

When you die you're going to go straight into the presence of God and you're going to face God after you die.

When the first criminal joins in insulting Jesus because the crowd was insulting Jesus and the soldiers were insulting Jesus, the second one rebukes the first criminal and he *"Don't you fear God even when you're dying?"*

What is he saying there?

Don't you realize the seriousness of your situation? Buddy, you may have run from the police your entire life. You can run from God your entire life on earth. But you are seconds away from meeting almighty God, your creator. Do you not realize this?

The reason why so many people ignore God and live unholy lives is they think death is just the end. They think, when I die, that's it.

It's not. Death is not the end of anything. Death is the beginning. It's the beginning of eternity. You're going to spend far more years in eternity than you're going to spend on this planet. You get maybe a hundred years at the most on this planet. You're going to spend trillions of years in eternity.

One day you're going to stand face to face to God. And you're going to give an account to God of everything in your life. There's going to be an accounting day of my life.

Look at this verse. Hebrews 9:27 *"Everyone must die once, and after that be judged by God."* That is one appointment you cannot cancel ... that is one appointment you will not be late for!

The mortality rate in the world is now one hundred percent. Nobody's going to skip death. We're not all the same color. We're not all the same age. We're not all the same sex. We don't all have the same amount of money. But the one thing we all have in common, everybody here is going to die. That is for sure.

It is foolish to spend your entire life unprepared for something you know is inevitable. That's just dumb! So this thief knows the truth that everybody's going to die and after that you're going to go face to face with God.

The second truth that saved this guy is: **2. I have SINNED AGAINST GOD.**

The criminal says this *"We deserve to die for our evil deeds..."*

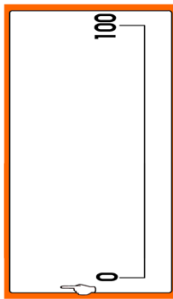
There's a word for that. That's called confession. He's admitting I have sinned. We deserve to die for our evil deeds.

Confession is to agree with God. *Yeah God you're right. I was wrong.* I admit it. I say the same thing that You do, God. My gossip was wrong. My anger was wrong. My pride was wrong. My cheating was wrong.

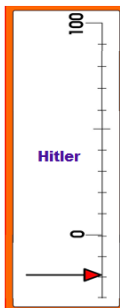
The Bible doesn't tell us what this guy did. Wouldn't you like to have read the *National Enquirer's* juicy story on what this guy did? But it doesn't really matter because James 2:10 says if you commit one sin in one area, you're guilty -- if you've committed one sin that makes you a "sinner."

How many laws do you have to break to be a lawbreaker? One. How many times do you have to lie to be a liar? One. How many sins do you have to commit to be a sinner? One.

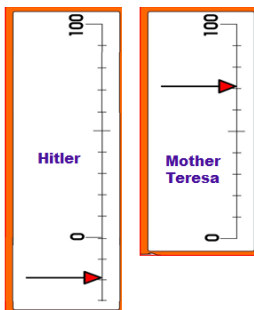
So, let me ask: Who here has ever committed one sin? Who here admits that you're NOT 100% perfect? ALL of us. ALL of us are in the same boat!



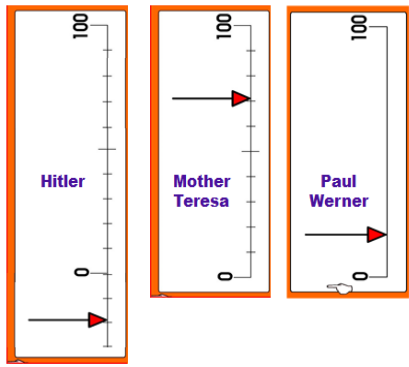
God does not judge on a scale one to a hundred. He just doesn't. But let's just use this for illustrative purposes. Let's say we've got a thermometer here from zero degrees to a hundred degrees. You've got to make a hundred to be absolutely perfect. At hundred – you've never done anything wrong in your life. And let's say zero is absolute incarnate evil.



Let's play a little game here. Let's name some people and rate them. Hitler? We'll give him a minus 20. Absolute incarnate evil. Killed six million Jews in the holocaust. Hitler gets a negative number. Absolute evil.



How about Mother Teresa? Mother Teresa cared for the sick and the dying. I'm going to give Mother Teresa maybe an eighty. But even Mother Teresa would admit that she was a sinner. That she wasn't perfect. That sometimes she got impatient, and angry, and sometimes she doubted. Let's give her an eighty.



Now let's get serious. Paul Werner. Let's give him a fifteen. He's trying hard but he keeps stumbling over his own dumb mistakes. So maybe I'd get a fifteen. Okay?

Let's say you. I'm just going to say how about forty five for you. You're probably at least 3x as good as me. I don't doubt that.

The point is some people are better than others. But nobody is perfect.

Here's the problem. Heaven is a perfect place. So there's not a snowball's chance in hell that I'm going to get into heaven because I'm not perfect. And you're not either. You will never deserve heaven. You couldn't do enough good in your life to deserve heaven. Does that make sense? We're all in the same boat. We're all sinners. We're all under the 100% perfect mark.

If God let imperfect people into heaven, heaven would not be perfect any more. It wouldn't be heaven. It would be filled with jealousy and gossip and ego and pride and impatience and heaven would be just like earth. That would be hell. And since heaven is God's home, even God couldn't live there because then He'd be imperfect and sinful too.

God's not being unfair in insisting on 100% perfection. You know this. I do too. But, I want to go to heaven. I bet you, too, don't want to live forever with all the sorrow and sickness that is normal for life in this world.

The problem isn't that God's being unfair in demanding that heaven stay a sinless, perfect place. The problem is in me. It's in you too. The problem is I stopped battling a thousand the moment I was conceived. The moment I became just one living cell. The Bible says, ***"For I was born a sinner— yes, from the moment my mother conceived me."*** Psalm 51:5 So I need a plan. And God came up with a plan to make me perfect in his eyes. And to make you perfect in his eyes.

Notice this next verse on your outline. Romans 6:23. It's a very famous verse. ***"The wages of sin is death,***

I hope you know the difference between wages and gift. Let's say your employer came into your office, wherever you work. When

you get your paycheck, he says, "I have a really great gift for you. You're going to love this gift. You're going to like me for this gift." And he hands it to you. And it's your paycheck. And you're going, "Buddy! This is no gift. I earned this paycheck. I earned these wages. I deserve this. You're not doing anything special for me. I deserve this. These are my wages. They're not a gift."

Sin pays it's wage ... it's death. *"The wages of sin is death."* What you earned is death, you earned hell. If you sinned just once, you're a sinner. That's what you deserve, not heaven.

But here's the good news... *but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

You don't deserve heaven. You can't earn it, and you never will deserve it. It is a gift of God. *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* Heaven is a gift. Underserved. Earned by Jesus, not by you. And He GIVES it to you.

That leads us to the third truth that assures you're going to heaven is: **3. Jesus is MORE THAN A MAN.**

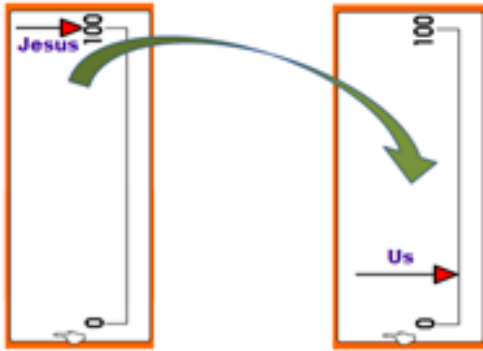
Jesus is more than a man.

Notice the third thing the thief says. He's uneducated but he said: *"this man has not done anything wrong!"* I want you to circle on your outline the word "anything." This man - talking about Jesus - has not done anything wrong.

Notice what he doesn't say. He doesn't say, this guy Jesus hanging here on the cross... He's not as bad as we are. He doesn't say that. He doesn't compare. We deserve it but he doesn't deserve it. In the original language it literally means Jesus has never done zero, nada, nothing, zip, -- He's never done *anything* wrong.

Question: Has anybody ever said that about you? No. Or me. Do you know if it's ever been said about anybody? No. Because you can't say that about a mere human being.

So when this guy says, He's never done anything, not one thing in his life wrong. He's saying Jesus is not a mere man. This is not a human we're dying next to. Yes he's human in human flesh. But he's God. He's more than a human.

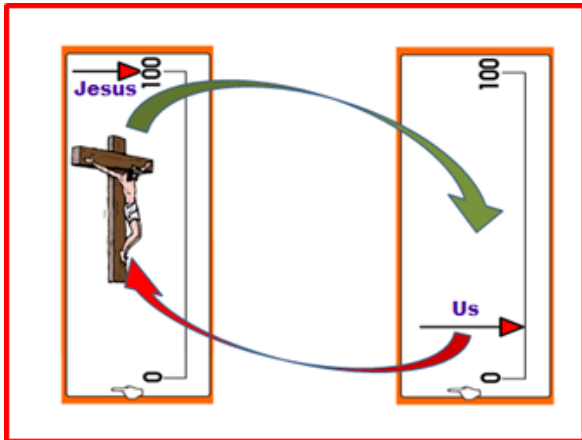


Let's go back to our thermometer for a minute. You have to be perfect to qualify for heaven. And buddy, you aren't perfect! So God figured out a way to make you perfect.

Jesus is not just a man. He's God. And He did what no human can do. Jesus lived a

perfect, sinless life. And He GIVES His perfection; GIVES His innocence; GIVES His record ... to ... YOU! *"God had Christ, who was sinless, take our sin so that we might receive God's approval through him."* 2 Cor. 5:21 (GW)

All your sin that had to be paid for, Jesus paid for that all, completely, 100%, once-for-all, on the cross. *"God had Christ, who was sinless, take our sin...."*



That's what you call a great trade! A great deal! The greatest exchange ever!. Jesus says I have never sinned but I'll take your sin. Jesus has never done anything wrong but He takes everything you've done wrong and He pays the price. I'll serve the time. Because somebody's got to pay for

your wrong doing. God loves you so much that Jesus said *"I will pay for all the things you've done wrong."* That's how much God loves you.

This dying thief discovered the truths that : I'm going to face God after I die. I've sinned against God. Jesus is more than a man. He lived a sinless life. He died to become your sin and pay for it all. So, **4. Don't RELY ON YOURSELF, BUT RELY ON JESUS' GIFT.**

We see this in verse 42. *"Then [the thief on the cross... he said...] Jesus remember me..."* Jesus, remember me. Jesus remember me. That's all he says.

He can't get off the cross and he can't go do a bunch of charity work. He can't make up for all the bad things he's done wrong. There's no way he can repay the people, or God, or anybody else. He's hanging on the cross. He's in his final moments. He knows he can't save himself. He knows he's made a mess of his life. He's wasted it. He's got nothing to offer to God. Zero. Zip.

And hanging there on the cross he doesn't say, Jesus, I'm a lot better than some people. He doesn't compare.

He doesn't try to make excuses for his sins.

He doesn't say, *"Give me more time. Let me go to a made-up place after I die where I can keep doing for as long as it takes until I finally do enough good things to be perfect and save myself."* (That's a popular belief called purgatory. But that's not God's truth).

He doesn't say, *"Let me call in a life-line and ask someone else – someone dead - to help me out."*

He's hanging on the cross with no hope. So he turns to Jesus! He throws himself on the grace of God, the mercy of God. And he just says two words: Remember me.

Friends, You don't have any hope either, if you count on yourself. Without Jesus you have no hope of getting into heaven.

I want you to listen very closely. I want you to hear this. There are some people out there, well-meaning people. They are part of Christian churches, and they love God. But their church has told them to rely on saying certain words. Say these prayers over & over & over. Go to church, take communion – those are things you do to pay off some of your mistakes. Have a lightning-bolt experience where God zaps you, feel a certain way, speak in an unintelligible way. All that is relying on themselves.

This simple crook, uses 3 words, and he teaches us a profound truth. "Jesus, remember me." When the chips are down, count on Jesus. Count on Jesus alone. Rely on Jesus. Trust Jesus. Take the free Jesus pre-paid way to heaven; not the uncertain, relying on yourself way.





If you're a parent, there was probably a time when you came home and your children came running to meet you and give you a hug. Maybe they just jumped, trusting that you'd drop whatever was in your arms and you'd catch them. They were that excited to see you, and that confident of your love.

The dying thief believed the truth that God loved him and wanted him. Not only did he NEED Jesus. He was drawn to Jesus' love. **5. Jesus WANTS TO SAVE ME.**

You, too, will have assurance when you trust that Jesus WANTS you!

“Remember me... when you come into your Kingdom!” He believes Jesus is God. The thief knows Jesus is not a poser. He's not a prophet. He's not a good man. He's not an imposter. He is who he says he is, the Son of God. The Savior of the world. And this Savior of the world, WANTS HIM!

God's goal is not to keep people out of heaven. Instead, God wants EVERYONE IN heaven. God will let anyone into heaven who can stand it. Anyone who can stand an endless life of truth, purity, only noble thoughts, only thinking of OTHERS before yourself. In heaven there's no place to run for a quick fix on a favorite sin. God wants ALL people. He wants YOU. It's we who aren't too excited about an eternity with God. We're the ones who reject God's offer.

The Bible says: “Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:13 (NLT) Circle the word “anyone.”

Like a child running and jumping into Daddy's arms, run to Jesus. Don't run away. Run to Him. Trust Him. He loves you. He WANTS YOU!

So: **HOW CAN I BE SURE I AM SAVED?**

Rely on **THE PROMISE OF GOD'S WORD.**

**Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:43**

Jesus promised it. Rely on Him. Jesus doesn't lie. He won't lie. He can't lie. He promised it. It's true. Believe Him. ***“I assure you, - assure you! Assure you! - today – not after a long, long time. TODAY you WILL - not possibly, not might be, not “I hope so.” You WILL be with me in paradise.”***

Jesus looks at the man next to Him and says “I've got this! You're in. I'll see you in heaven before the day's over.”

**WHEN can I be saved? TODAY.**

***“This is the hour to receive God's favor! Today is the day to be saved!”*** 2  
Corinthians 6:2

Don't put off trusting in Jesus. Tomorrow just might be too late for you. THIS is the hour. TODAY is the day.