

What Happened to Jesus After He Died on the Cross? What Happens to Believers When We Die?

Luke 23:26-46

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And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." - Luke 23:42-43, ESV

It's amazing how much we can learn from a very brief conversation recorded for us in Luke's Gospel. When Jesus was crucified, He was on a cross between two criminals, one on His right and the other on His left. While Jesus was surrounded by mocking crowds of people, one of the criminals joined in the mockery. Even as this man was hanging on his own cross, fighting to breathe, he chose to use some of his last breaths to ridicule Jesus. Meanwhile, on the other side, the other criminal was aware of the fact that he deserved death and Jesus didn't.

Then, amazingly, this dying criminal looks at the dying Jesus of Nazareth and believes. He believes that Jesus is the Christ and that, even though He is dying on a Roman cross, He will still come into His kingdom, and so he asks Jesus to remember him when He does come into His kingdom. Jesus responds simply, humbly and powerfully: *"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."*

In this brief exchange between dying men, we have three vital questions answered:

1. What happened to Jesus after He died? It is evident that after Jesus died, His body was taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. However, Jesus Himself, in His soul, went to paradise. We know this because He promised the criminal, "today you will be with me in Paradise."

2. What happens to believers when we die? Do our souls sleep in the grave, unconscious until the Day of Resurrection? No, like Jesus, while our bodies are buried, our souls are with the Lord in Paradise. This proves that we have a soul that lives apart from our body when our body dies, and that we go to the presence of God when our bodies die, if . . .

3. What must we do to be saved? The criminal on the cross could do nothing but believe in Jesus and ask Him for salvation. He could do no works. He could not be baptized. Thus, He shows us the minimum and essential requirement for salvation: saving faith. Saving faith is the God-given ability to see Jesus for who He is and to trust in Him alone for salvation. So we, too, will be with the Lord in Paradise when we die, if we believe in Jesus and trust Him alone for our salvation.

One of the ways we can see that the Bible is the word of God is how much we can learn from what seems like such a simple conversation. In reality, a whole world of answers opens up to us in every line of God's amazing book!