

THE DIFFERENCE THAT JESUS MAKES
LUKE 23:32-43

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Introduction

The **BIBLE** separates all of us into one of two categories this morning. You are either a **BELIEVER** or an **UNBELIEVER**.

John 3:18—“He that believeth on him [JESUS, GOD’S SON] is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

1 John 5:11–13— “11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. 13 These things have I written unto you that **believe** on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may **believe** on the name of the Son of God.”

The Bible also reveals that there are not many ways to get to heaven, just one.

John 14:6—“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

Acts 4:12—“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

Some think that such statements are narrow or extreme, but they are based upon the very **WORD OF GOD**, and **GOD** cannot lie.

No one can afford to **RIDE THE FENCE** when it comes to this subject! To do so or to try to **DODGE THE ISSUE** by just ignoring it will do nothing but ultimately spell **ETERNAL DOOM** for you!

Either you have **TRUSTED** the **LORD JESUS CHRIST** and **HIS FINISHED WORK FOR YOU ON THE CROSS OF CALVARY ALONE** for your **SALVATION** or you haven’t. And on the basis of your **BELIEF** or your **UNBELIEF**, your future is either bright or dismal.

What makes the difference in our future? What makes the difference in our eternal destiny? **JESUS!**

By **HIS SACRIFICE** of **HIMSELF** on the **CROSS**, the **LORD JESUS** provided the only way to **GOD!**

HE is the only way for sinful man to have **FORGIVENESS OF SIN!**

HE is the only way for sinful man to find **PEACE WITH GOD!**

HE is the only way for sinful man to be **DELIVERED** from the **WRATH OF GOD!**

So, according to the **BIBLE**, everyone is in one of these two groups!

You are either a **BELIEVER** on your way to **HEAVEN** or...

You are an **UNBELIEVER** on your way to **HELL**.

And so we could say that the **LORD JESUS CHRIST** is truly the world’s greatest divider. This is clearly seen in our text today!

READ LUKE 23:32-43

Here we see two wrongdoers hanging beside the **LORD JESUS CHRIST**, about to leave planet earth by way of death:

But I want you to notice some things about them:

1) **There was NO DIFFERENCE in the CRIMES they committed!**

Both of these men were equally **SINNERS**:

They were **SINNERS** in the eyes of men!

They were **SINNERS** in their own eyes!

Neither man tried to proclaim their innocence.

Neither man tried to blame the environment, their parents, or society for what they had done!

They were **SINNERS** in the eyes of **GOD!** (e.g. the **LAW**)

The **BIBLE** says in *Romans 3:23*—“For all have sinned. . .”

2) **There was NO DIFFERENCE in their CONDEMNATION!**

Both men were **CONDEMNED TO DIE** by crucifixion!

But more than that, both men owed a **SIN DEBT** before **GOD!**

Ezekiel 18:4—“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

Romans 6:23—“The wages of sin is death.”

3) **Yet, one man is now in HEAVEN and one man is now in HELL!**

What made the **DIFFERENCE**? Only one thing: What they did with the **LORD JESUS CHRIST!**

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One man received the **GIFT OF GOD (ETERNAL LIFE)** through **FAITH** in the **LORD JESUS CHRIST** and one didn't.

Let's take a closer look at these two men:

I. THE UNBELIEVING THIEF.

A. He Was NEAR DEATH, Yet REJECTED CHRIST!

1. He Had Nothing To Lose By Accepting CHRIST!

There are none of the standard excuses people have for not getting saved that would have applied to him.

a. He Would Not Have To Face Ridicule!

Many are afraid of losing face or popularity.

They say, "What will my friends say?"

b. He Would Not Have To Serve Christ!

Some say, "I have my own life to live."

But, his time was about to come to an end.

c. He Would Not Have To Give Up Anything Extra!

Some say, "I don't want to give up my sin."

But, he was about to give it all up anyway.

d. He Would Not Have To Live The Christian Life!

Some folks say, "I don't think I can live it."

But, he would not be called on to live it!

By the way you'll never be able to live it until you get **SAVED!**

You don't get better to get **SAVED**, you **get SAVED** to get better.

2. He Had Everything To Gain By Accepting CHRIST!

a. He Could Exchange DEATH For DELIVERANCE!

How many of you want to live forever?

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b. He Could Exchange HELL For HEAVEN!

How many of you want to go to **HEAVEN**?

c. He Could Exchange SIN For SALVATION!

He had lived his life with nothing to show for it but **SIN** and shame.

Isaiah 53:6—"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

d. He Could Exchange Rags For Riches!

Everything he had lived for was about to be brought to nothing.

Job 1:21—"...Naked came I out of my mothers womb and naked shall I return thither."

1 Timothy 6:7—"For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

He could have done all this, but he didn't!

3. His HEART Was HARDENED Even In The Face Of DEATH!

a. He Probably Intended To Get Right One Day!

Nobody wants to die in a lost condition.

Nobody expects to be cold and indifferent to the things of **GOD** when death comes.

b. The End Was Near, But His HEART Was HARDENED!

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We have no guarantee of **HOW** we will **RESPOND** or even **IF** we will **RESPOND** to **GOD** when we are faced with **DEATH!**

He Was Near Death, Yet Rejected Christ—With Nothing To Lose And Everything To Gain, He Hardened His Heart In The Face Of Death.

B. He Was NEAR CHRIST, Yet REMAINED LOST!

1. He Had The Opportunity To **EXAMINE THE ACTIONS OF CHRIST!**
2. He Had The Opportunity To **HEAR CHRIST!**
3. He Had The Opportunity To **ACCEPT CHRIST!**

Could I tell you that there are many folks today who are **NEAR CHRIST**, yet they are **NOT IN CHRIST!**

Many folks have been **NEAR CHRIST** all or most their lives!

Some Attend Church Regularly.

Some Have Been Baptized.

Some Are Church Members.

Some Are Even Church Workers.

*Romans 8:1—“There is therefore, now no condemnation to them who are **IN** Christ Jesus.”*

He Was Near Death, Yet Rejected Christ.

He Was Near Christ, Yet Remained Lost.

C. He WANTED DELIVERANCE, Yet REMAINED IN BONDAGE! (Vs. 39)

Romans 10:13 says “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” It appears that this man “**called**” on

CHRIST, so why is it that this man was not saved?

(The context of that verse shows that it is speaking of **CALLING UPON THE LORD IN FAITH!**)

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1. **He Was Thinking Only About Physical Deliverance.**
His interest at the moment was simply to get down from that rugged, painful cross.

Today, many people come to **CHRIST** only because they are in a tight jam and want out of the jam, not because they really want **CHRIST** in their lives.

2. **His Plea For An Escape Was Not Genuine.**
The **SCRIPTURE** says that he “**railed on**” **CHRIST!** “**Railed on**” means “*to vilify or blaspheme.*”

His petition was not rendered with **TRUE FAITH**, and therefore it could **NOT** bring **HIM SALVATION!** “***IF thou be Christ, save thyself and us.***”

3. **He Didn’t Want SALVATION By WAY Of The CROSS!**

He refused **deliverance** through the death of **CHRIST!**

What he didn’t realize was that if the **LORD** had come down from the **CROSS**, **HE** could **NOT** have **SAVED** others.

Romans 5:8—“But God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Hebrews 9:22—“Without shedding of blood is no remission.”

In spite of the clear teaching of **GOD’S WORD**, many people still want nothing to do with the **BIBLE** message about the **SACRIFICE OF CHRIST!**

They talk about **JESUS’** life, **HIS** teachings, and **HIS** example, but they ignore **HIS SUBSTITUTIONARY** and **ATONING DEATH.**

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SALVATION is only available through **CHRIST'S DEATH, BURIAL, and RESURRECTION!**

1 Corinthians 1:18—“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

THE UNREPENTANT THIEF.

II. THE REPENTANT THIEF.

His experience suggests certain characteristics of those who have made **SURE** of **HEAVEN!**

A. He ADMITTED His SINFULNESS! (Vs 40-41)

He gave no alibis! He made no false claims of innocence!
He didn't try to cover his transgression! He didn't try to explain it away!

Proverbs 28:13—“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”

This man openly admitted he was **DESERVING OF DEATH!**
Until you admit you are a **SINNER**, you can never be **SAVED!**

Luke 5:31-32—“31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. 32 I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

As long as someone thinks they can gain **GOD'S** favor through their own merit and works, they'll never **experience FORGIVENESS** of their **SIN** or receive the **BLESSINGS** of **SALVATION!**

The Bible says:

Romans 3:10—“There is none righteous, no not one.”

Romans 3:23—“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”

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Isaiah 64:6—“But we are all as an unclean thing. . .”

He **ADMITTED** His **SINFULNESS!**

B. He BELIEVED That CHRIST Could SAVE Him!
(Vs 41-42)

CHRIST'S sinless life is what qualified **HIM** to die for others.

1 Peter 1:18-19—“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot.”

Just **ONE SIN** would have disqualified **JESUS** from being our **SAVIOUR!**

C. He PROFESSED FAITH In The RESURRECTION.
(Vs 42)

To those around the **CROSS** it may have seemed insane!

This thief recognized the true identity of the **ONE** on the center **CROSS**, and therefore he received the **ASSURANCE** that **DEATH** for **CHRIST** could not be the end.

Romans 10:8-10—“But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; 9That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. 10For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

The **SAVIOUR'S** response. . .”Today thou shalt be with me in paradise.”

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CONCLUSION

1 John 5:12—“He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”

John 3:36—“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on Him.”

Three men died that day. One was the **SON OF GOD!** Two were **SINNERS!**

The **SON OF GOD** was buried and three days later **HE AROSE FROM THE GRAVE!**

Of the other two men, only one went to **PARADISE!**

He didn't go because he deserved it.

What made the difference in his life? **JESUS CHRIST!**

He went to **PARADISE** because he placed his **FAITH** and **TRUST** in **JESUS CHRIST!**

JESUS made the **DIFFERENCE!** Has **HE** made a **DIFFERENCE** in your life?

If not, why don't you come to **HIM** today and let **HIM** make a **DIFFERENCE** in your life!

If **CHRIST** has made a **DIFFERENCE** in your life, is that **DIFFERENCE** shining through in your life such that **HE** is making a **DIFFERENCE** in the life of your family, your friends, or others you come into contact with?

We are to be **LIGHTS** in this world because we have been **LIT** by the **LIGHT OF THE WORLD!** Is your **LIGHT SHINING** or is it under a bushel?

1 John 4:17—“...as He is, so are we in this world.”