



A New You Ministry

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The Penitent Thief on the Cross

The story of the thief on the cross is found in the following Bible verses: Matthew 27:38, Luke 23:32-43 and Mark 15:27. This story is in many ways one of the most touching stories in the Bible. A dying penitent thief accepts Christ as Lord and Master and is assured by Jesus of a place in paradise. Many people have also asked the question, what is the name of the thief on the cross? Unfortunately, the Bible doesn't give his name, but the story of this thief gives us a beautiful picture of God's love as shown through Jesus and the mercy freely given to all mankind.

But many are wondering:

- (1) Did the penitent thief go to heaven with Jesus that same day?
- (2) Is there a contradiction between what Jesus told the thief and what He told Mary on Sunday?
- (3) Does paradise mean something other than heaven?

Today You Will Be With Me In Paradise

Let's take a look at several verses in Luke 23 to find the meaning of this phrase: "Then one of the criminals who was hanged blasphemed Him, saying, If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us. But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not even 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).

One of the thieves, after joining with the other thief in mocking the Lord (Mark 15:32), recognized that Jesus was the Son of God and decided to ask for mercy and pardon. He offers up the simple prayer, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Jesus accepts His repentance and gives him the promise that the thief on the cross will be with him in paradise. Is Jesus promising that the repentant criminal would be with Him that day in paradise? It would appear so on the surface, but let's take a deeper look.

Luke 23:43 - The Thief On The Cross Contradiction

In Luke 23:43 we read of Jesus saying, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." But in John 20:1-17 we read that Jesus meets Mary in the garden on the first day of the week and says, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17). Additionally, John 19:31-33 states that the religious leaders asked for the thieves legs' to be broken and taken down from their crosses. They didn't want the thieves to hang on the crosses over the Sabbath.

We can see that Jesus could not have been with the thief in heavenly paradise that Friday if He

had still not ascended to the Father on Sunday. Is this a contradiction? It would seem to be so on the surface. But what if the comma was after the word today instead of before it? The meaning would change completely. Let's read the passage again, what if Jesus was saying, "Verily I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). If the comma is placed after the word today, it shows Jesus being emphatic on that day of his crucifixion, saying, today when I am dying on the cross with no apparent hope, I am promising that you will be with me in paradise eventually. However, if the comma is inserted before the word today, Jesus would then be promising that the thief would be with Him that very day in paradise; thus making Jesus a liar and also contradicting John 20:17.

The Thief On the Cross & the Comma

It makes a big difference where the comma is placed. There is a story of a wealthy man whose wife sent him a telegram asking if she could buy a very expensive item. He sent the reply, "No, price too high." Unfortunately the telegraph operator left the comma out of the message. When the wife received the message, "No price too high," she happily went and bought the expensive item. This story illustrates the importance of correct punctuation. If the punctuation is off by even one word it can mean something entirely different.

As we compare scriptures one with another we will find apparent contradictions, but if we look carefully at the clearest texts and the overwhelming evidence in the scriptures on a certain subject, we will find the truth (see Isaiah 28:10). Often it's our preconceived ideas that lead us to think a certain verse means a specific thing. We must be careful never to take a verse out of context. The question now is, how can we harmonize this verse with the rest of the Bible?

Is the Comma Inspired?

Is the punctuation in the Bible inspired? In the original Greek text of the New Testament there was no punctuation, in fact, there was no spacing between words. Here is a quote from the Greek language expert Michael W. Palmer. "The ancient Greeks did not have any equivalent to our modern device of punctuation. Sentence punctuation was invented several centuries after the time of Christ. The oldest copies of both the Greek New Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament are written with no punctuation" (<https://www.greeklanguage.blog/?p=657>).

When the translators of the English Bible translated this verse and others they had to decide where the punctuation should be. The translators themselves were not inspired. God definitely helped them translate the Bible, but the punctuation is not inspired since there was no punctuation in the original manuscripts. Translators made the simple mistake of placing the comma in the wrong position, perhaps because of their traditional beliefs about what happens when you die.

Is the Paradise that Jesus Referred to in Heaven?

This may seem like a surprising question to include, but there is a theory that paradise is not heaven but another place altogether. People generally come up with this theory to clear up the apparent contradiction between what Christ said to the thief on the cross and what He said to Mary two days later.

Where does the Bible say paradise is?

Christ promises to the faithful in the church of Ephesus: "To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7).

So where is the tree of life? The answer to this question will help us know where paradise is. In

Revelation 22:1-4, we learn that the tree of life is in the New Jerusalem. So we can know for certain that paradise is in the New Jerusalem where God reigns. It is not some place in the underworld or in the subterranean regions. Paradise is the garden of God, which is in heaven.

Conclusion

The Scriptures are clear that Christ had not ascended to the Father on Sunday morning. Therefore, He could not have been with the thief in paradise on Friday. This means that the Bible translators incorrectly placed the comma before the word today instead of after it.