

Recap

Have you ever experienced a moment that completely changed the course of your life? A pivotal instant where everything shifted, and you were never the same again? In the Bible, we often see these transformative moments described with one simple yet powerful word: "Today."

Throughout Scripture, "today" isn't just a marker of time. It's a declaration of a significant spiritual change. It's the moment when the angels proclaimed to shepherds, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you." It's when Jesus began His ministry, reading from Isaiah and declaring, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." It's the instant when Jesus told Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house."

But perhaps one of the most poignant "today" moments in the Bible occurs in an unlikely place - on a cross, between two criminals and the Son of God.

Picture the scene: Jesus, nailed to a cross, with two criminals crucified on either side of Him. Both men are guilty of serious crimes. Both are facing certain death. Both can see the sign above Jesus' head proclaiming Him "King of the Jews." Both hear His words, "Father, forgive them."

Yet their responses to Jesus couldn't be more different.

The first criminal hurls insults at Jesus, challenging Him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" His words drip with mockery and self-interest. He doesn't truly believe in Jesus; he just wants to escape his predicament. He's trying to use Jesus as a get-out-of-jail-free card, with no real faith or repentance in his heart.

But the second criminal? His response reveals a profound transformation:

"Don't you fear God," he rebukes the first criminal, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he turns to Jesus and says, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom."

In this brief exchange, we see three crucial elements of genuine faith:

1. Fear of God: The second criminal recognizes God's supremacy and authority. He understands that we are accountable to our Creator.
2. Recognition of Jesus' uniqueness: He sees that Jesus is righteous, a true King whose kingdom transcends this world, with the power to grant eternal life.
3. Admission of guilt: Unlike the first criminal, this man acknowledges his wrongdoing and accepts the justice of his punishment.

How did this criminal come to such profound realizations in his final moments? It wasn't due to superior intellect or religious predisposition. No, this was a divine revelation - a "today" moment where God opened his eyes to the truth.

And Jesus' response? "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

This exchange on the cross beautifully illustrates the heart of the Gospel. We are all sinners in need of God's forgiveness. Like the criminal, we can do nothing to earn our salvation. It's not about our good deeds or religious observances. It's about recognizing our need for a Savior, believing in Jesus, and calling out to Him for mercy.

The criminal couldn't attend church, get baptized, or perform good works. He simply admitted his sin, believed Jesus could save him, and asked for forgiveness. And that was enough.

This story reminds us that it's never too late to turn to Jesus. The criminal was moments from death, yet Jesus promised him paradise. Why? Because what makes heaven truly "paradise" isn't its perfection or beauty - it's the presence of Jesus Himself.

But here's the challenge: We don't know how many "today" moments we'll get. James 4:14 reminds us, "How do you know what your life will be like

tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone." That's why 2 Corinthians 6:2 urges, "Today is the day of salvation."

If you're sensing God speaking to your heart, don't brush it aside. Don't say "maybe tomorrow." Open your heart today. You might feel unworthy, ashamed of past mistakes. But remember, Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). The same Jesus who forgave a criminal on the cross stands ready to forgive you.

Your "today" moment could be right now. Will you, like the criminal on the cross, admit your need for forgiveness? Will you believe in Jesus - that He died for your sins and rose again for your salvation? Will you call out to Him?

If so, you too can hear those beautiful words: "Today, you will be with me in paradise." Not just a promise of a future heaven, but an invitation into a relationship with Jesus that starts right now and lasts for eternity.

Don't wait. Your life-changing "today" is waiting.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What stood out to you most from the sermon? Why?
- 2 The sermon mentions several "today moments" in Scripture. Can you share a "today moment" from your own life when you experienced a significant spiritual change?
- 3 How do you relate to the two criminals on the cross? Have you ever found yourself identifying with either of their attitudes towards Jesus?

- 4 The second criminal demonstrated three key things: fear of God, recognition of Jesus' uniqueness, and admission of guilt. How do these elements play a role in our own faith journeys?
- 5 How does the story of the thief on the cross challenge or affirm your understanding of salvation by grace?
- 6 The sermon emphasizes that heaven's greatest joy is being with Jesus. How does this perspective impact your view of eternity and your current relationship with Christ?
- 7 Discuss the urgency of responding to Jesus' invitation today. Why do people often say "tomorrow" when it comes to spiritual matters?