



# Tell me the stories of Jesus

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## Small group questions

*Mary and Martha - Luke 10:38-42 and the thief on the cross Luke 23: 38-43*

Leaders – if the questions make no sense or you don't know the answer – please contact the preacher!

**Mary and Martha** – read Luke 10:38-42

1. What was your first reaction to the passage? To whom did you most readily relate? Mary or Martha?
2. What was radical about Mary sitting at Jesus' feet and listening?
3. We read that Martha was distracted by all the preparations. She was distracted because of her desire to serve. It was a good thing she wanted to do! So what was the issue?
4. What does Jesus' tone in his answer to Martha indicate? Why didn't he intervene and tell Mary to help?
5. What distracts you (even good things) from drawing close to God through his word?
6. What will spending time in God's word result in for us? Why is it worth prioritising? Why should it take precedence over other areas of service in our lives and what impact will it make on our service?

**The thief on the cross** – read Luke 23: 38-43

1. What has been your reaction over time to so called 'death-bed conversions'?
2. What was the irony of the first thief's taunt to Jesus 'save yourself'?
3. The second thief's challenge, "don't you fear God" hits the mark. What does it mean to 'fear God'?
4. Mark said you are either 'honouring Christ or mocking Christ'. Read over that part of the message and discuss.
5. The second thief, recognised his sin, feared God, honoured Jesus and through himself on Jesus' mercy. Discuss these as the necessary steps to come to Jesus and be welcomed by him.
6. On what basis could Jesus assure the thief that he would be with Jesus in paradise? What are the implications for us?

**Date:** 25 June 2017  
**Service/s:** 930 and 630 T  
**Series:** Tell me the stories of Jesus  
**Title:** Words of life from the Cross  
**Passage:** Luke 23: 38-43  
**Aim:** To reveal the irony in Crim #1's mocking of Jesus; to show that the fear of God is the key to salvation; and to show the richness of the assurance Jesus gives.  
**Outline:** Save yourself!  
Don't you fear God?  
Today you will be with me!

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## Introduction

- \* what do you make of death-bed conversions?
- \* we've all heard of stories where someone in hospital in the last days of their life, are visited by the minister and having spent a life time resisting God and doing their own thing; they hear the news of Jesus' death and resurrection and decide - yes - Jesus is Lord!... and they repent at that moment and are assured of their forgiveness and eternal life....
- \* part of us says - "that's great... how wonderful that they came to know Jesus at that point - at the last minute"
- \* but there's also part of us isn't there that feels a little cheesed off...?
- \* we've spent our whole life serving God - we've served at the table, sung in the choir, helped at the soup kitchen, made morning tea, joined Mothers' Union, volunteered for the cleaning roster, ran the youth group, mowed the lawns, read the Bible, was a welcomer, counter, flower arranger... cleaned the brass, raked the leaves, led a small group, ran the Sunday school, led on youth camps... served the Lord my whole life - and this person - makes a death-bed confession, receives forgiveness.... Passes "Go" and gets straight into eternity!!
- \* or what about those on death row who find Jesus in the last days of their life?
- \* they've committed some horrific crime... tried, convicted and sentenced to execution... and then go and find Jesus... and are forgiven and reconciled to God...
- \* what do you make of that?? /
- \* what does **Jesus** make of that??
- \* well today we see exactly what Jesus thinks of that...
- \* the scene - Jesus himself at the scene of an execution
- \* two criminals are being hung on a cross
- \* Jesus is watching on
- \* ...but not only is Jesus watching on... he's also being executed....
- \* he's **innocent** - but has been stitched up in a mock trial headed by religious leaders who were **blind** to his **true identity** as God on earth - and **envious** of the **crowds** he was pulling..
- \* the religious elite saw **their** influence dwindling - their power **waning**... and from very early on in Jesus' ministry - they wanted rid of him...
- \* Without a doubt, we see humans at their worst, mankind at his lowest; sin at its worst as we see Jesus on the cross

- \* but as we listen to the interactions of these three players that day – we have a lot to learn...
- \* and three key comments in their interactions will help us unpack this account:

**1st Comment from one of the thieves** - *Save Yourself!*

**2nd Comment from the other thief** - *Don't you fear God!*

**3rd Comment from Jesus himself** - *Today you will be with me!*

## 1. "Save Yourself"

- \* Well, you'll notice that the criminal wasn't very original in his insults.
  - **religious people** v.35 - if he is Christ the Son of God, His chosen One
  - saved others - can't save himself.
  - **Roman soldiers** v. 37 - familiar claims of his Kingship
  - said "what sort of King are you if you can't save yourself?"
  - in other words - well, **now** we'll see what you're made of won't we!
  - complete cynicism: ARE YOU NOT THE Christ?
- \* Oh:
  - they thought they were being so clever!
  - if you think you're so great Jesus, just come on down;
  - take the nails out and step down.
  - these were terrible things to say, hard to think of anything more cruel.
- \* I tried to think of a modern day example of just how cruel their words are.
- \* Can you imagine someone saying to Chris O'Brien – the Australian head and neck surgeon who himself developed and died from a brain tumor - ah - he saved many others - but he can't save himself....
- \* But there is an important and significant difference.
- \* because... while Chris O'Brien could not rid himself of his cancer, Jesus **certainly could** have saved himself.
- \* They were actually too blind to realise that anyone who stilled the wind and waves, healed the lame, give blind people their sight, actually raise people from death - could have **easily** escaped from death himself at any point:
  - in the **garden** when he was arrested.
  - at the **trial** he could have completely argued his innocence.
  - on the **way to the cross**.
  - on the **cross**.
- \* Jesus - Yes, **indeed** the **Christ** - **indeed** the **chosen one**, indeed the **King**, not only of **Jews**, but the **King of Kings** - **could** have saved himself! //
  - but the truth of the matter was/is, (and here is the real issue), if Jesus had saved **himself** that day, he could not – he would not - have saved **you** and **me**.
- \* Jesus **willingly** died - in obedience and surrender to His Father; that we might live.
  - "He himself, took our sins, in His body on the tree."
- \* And the salvation which Jesus offers, is not a simple matter of salvation from temporary consequences of sin as the criminal was looking for - get me off the cross; but salvation from the **deep** and **serious** and **eternal** consequences of sin.
  - "Save yourself Jesus!" - "**no I won't so**; that I might offer salvation to the world!"

## 2. Don't You Fear God?

- \* Well the 2nd criminal has a response to the insults that his friend is dealing out and puts his finger on the problem of the first criminal immediately: - **don't you fear God?**
  - you mock and insult Christ - because you have no fear of God.
  - here we are, undergoing just punishment for terrible things we've done wrong - we're both about to die and face God - yet you don't care!
- \* and having no fear of God is as deep a problem **now** as it was at the cross.
  - what does it mean to fear God?
    - certainly not being petrified and shivering in a corner somewhere - but having a clear grasp of who God is - his power, majesty, authority, holiness and claim on our life.
- \* on our holidays in Tasmania, Susan and I walked out to Cape Hauy down near Port Arthur
- \* this is a cliff we were near - there was a sign near by which warned of - "unprotected cliff edges".
- \* It is right and proper to have a fear for the danger at such cliff faces.
- \* "Fear" meaning "healthy respect" - knowing the danger and the reality of going too close to the edge - knowing the reality of the law of gravity and **living in the light of that knowledge**,
  - **that is just something** of what it means to fear God - knowing Him and acting appropriately.
  - and that's exactly what this 2nd criminal did.
  - will you look with me and see the steps that he took:
- **Firstly, he freely admitted his wrong.**
  - v. 41 - *we are punished justly, we are getting what our deeds deserve* (note there is no sense of personal sin/guilt when you don't fear God) - only pride at how good you really are!
- \* God says we are moral failures. No one does right! This criminal admitted it!
- \* **Secondly**, he acclaimed Jesus' innocence ie. recognised Jesus for who he was (when there is no fear of God - Jesus doesn't matter; he's irrelevant, just a teacher or prophet).
- \* **Thirdly**, there is a dependence on Jesus for the future - remember me (when there is no fear of God - than we are dependent on our own good efforts).
  - We don't know exactly how much this man knew of Jesus, perhaps he'd heard some of his teachings; perhaps just in the last day he'd heard the accusations and now understood their significance. But he knew Jesus wasn't just a man. That there was more to him than this. He knew Jesus would be a King in a Kingdom and in humility he asks to be remembered, nothing much, just to be remembered.
  - Now those 3 steps:
    - acknowledgment of his sin
    - acknowledgment of Jesus
    - acknowledgment of the need to depend on Jesus
    - those are the - **necessary** steps for **anyone** to be put right with God! - and they will flow from having that appropriate fear of who God is...
- \* two criminals respond to Jesus:
- \* one in arrogance and mocking; the other in humility and contrition.
- \* **Mocking** Christ or **honouring** Christ - those are the two options - and it seems to me that every person is either doing one or the other.
- \* it is the **same** two attitudes to Jesus that are **prevalent** today!
- \* you may say "mocking"? - who mocks Jesus?
- \* But people mock Jesus today by giving him but a casual place in their lives.
- \* People mock him by proclaiming with their lips that he is Lord, but living as if **they** are Lord.
- \* People mock him treating him merely as an interesting historical figure; or a myth or anything else than the Son of God.

- \* People mock him by claiming his name in the title **Christian**, but never **knowing** him - never taking him **seriously**
- \* Paul warns that God cannot be mocked; he will have the last word! //
- \* the appropriate attitude you see is humility - acknowledging who **Jesus** is and who **you** are - acknowledging **your** sin and **His** innocence - **your** need and **His** answer.
- \* are you mocking Christ or honouring Christ? //
- \* Finally, Jesus' answer to 2nd criminal's request. "Remember me when you come in your kingly power" - or "when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus answered:

### 3. Today you will be with Me (in Paradise)

- \* Jesus' reply was short and to the point AND it promised more than the criminal asked for or imagined!
- \* That **very** day - at the time of his death, he would go straight to Paradise to be with Jesus - not just "remembered" in a kingdom in the distant future, but in the matter of a few hours he would find himself sharing Paradise with Jesus.
- \* On what basis does Jesus offer this man such rich assurance?
- \* Same basis as it is offered to anyone. Certainly not basis of good things he'd done or was going to do - he was after all, nailed to a cross.
- \* Certainly not on basis of his baptism or communion or church attendance! No time for any of that!
  - No - **only** on the basis of Jesus' saving work.
  - This guy's sin had been paid for!
  - Jesus had died for this man!
- \* Some: shock, surprise, scandalised - at this death bed confession
- \* - because they're so locked in to the thinking that a good person will go to heaven and a bad person will go to hell! - based on the effort you've been able to put in and not doing anything major wrong.
- \* when will we understand that everyone who ends up eternity will all be there on entirely the same basis...
  - the work of Christ... the work of Jesus on the cross where sacrifice was made, sin was paid, death was conquered for us...
- \* it's the only way... there is no other way - no other name by which we can be saved
- \* the thief was promised a place with Jesus in paradise on exactly the same basis as **you're** promised it - his saving work on the cross...!
- \* Because of Jesus' death on the cross - I can go to **anybody** on their deathbed and no matter how much they did wrong in the past, if they acknowledge: their sin, if they recognize who Jesus is, if they turn in utter dependence on Jesus - then I can wonderfully assure them their slate is clean; the record of wrongs is empty and that upon their death, they too will be with Jesus in paradise.

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- \* 3 comments from the cross.
- \* "**Save yourself**" - from a criminal who cared only for himself and remained blind to his sin and blind to who Jesus was. "Save yourself" - but if he had - we would be lost.
- \* "**Don't you fear God**" - from a man who feared God, acknowledged Jesus and knew Jesus was his only hope for a future - and if **you** or **I** don't fear God - **we** haven't a hope in the world - but when we do - and turn to Jesus - wonderful peace and assurance!
- \* "**Today you will be with me**" - from a Saviour who in dying on the cross bore our sin - became sin for us - and the result of his sacrificial death - is that with punishment taken and sins forgiven, he opens the gates of paradise to each one of us - "Today you will be with me in paradise!"