

Hebrews 3:7-8, 13 NLT - 7 That is why the Holy Spirit says, "Today when you hear his voice, 8 don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled, when they tested me in the wilderness. ... 13 You must warn each other every day, while it is still "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God.

With me- From the time God placed man in the garden of Eden it was His desire to dwell “with us”, but we have been separated by our sin. *How did the announcement of His birth indicate that, through Jesus, God was still working to restore that relationship “with us”?*

Matthew 1:23 NLT - 23 "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"

Paradise- Rather than assuring the thief he would be in Jesus’ kingdom, or in heaven, he was going to “Paradise”. This word describes the walled garden of a king and it would be an honor to be invited to join the king there.

What do you think it will be like walking with Jesus in paradise?

WRAP-UP

There were two sinners on Calvary- one repentant, the other not. Jesus’ words to the repentant sinner were above and beyond his expectation. He was welcomed to join Jesus in paradise immediately upon his death. That is the promise to every believer. Jesus wants us to walk with Him, and we can begin a close walk with Him today, that never has to end.

MEMORY VERSE

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. ...

- Matthew 25:34 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members’ needs: _____

Challenge- Is Jesus prompting you to do something “today” that will draw you closer to Him?

“Left or Right?” **7 A Lenten Series #2**

INTRODUCTION

Scripture tells us Jesus was not the only one crucified that day. He was hung alongside two criminals: one on His right and one on His left. The Gospels record some of their exchanges as the end of their lives drew near. When we piece together what was said, we find a picture of two decisions, one leading to eternal life, and the other to eternal separation from God. Both literally and metaphorically, one was right and the other one was left.

Ice Breaker

Are you right-handed or left-handed?

Key Verse

Luke 23:43 NLT - 43 And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Who was on Jesus’ left and right?

We may wonder about the two criminals in the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion who died alongside Jesus. We often hear them referred to as thieves. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark they are referred to as “robbers” (*lēstēs*), or those who openly plundered by violence. Luke simply calls them criminals (*kakourgos*) or evil doers.

Philippians 2:8 NLT - 8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Jesus was no stranger to sinners (Mat 11:19). He spent most of his earthly ministry among them. Why is it significant that Jesus died the death of a common criminal? What does this tell us about His character and compassion for the lost (Phil 2:8)?

Matthew 11:19 NLT - 19 The Son of Man, on the other hand, feasts and drinks, and you say, 'He's a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and other sinners!' But wisdom is shown to be right by its results."

Calvary is not the only place in scripture we see people separated on Jesus' right and on His left. On the Mount of Olives Jesus taught His disciples about His second coming and the end of the world.

Matthew 25:31-34, 41 NLT - 31 "But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. ... 41 "Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons.

In these verses who is separated into the left and right sides? Based on this account, which thief do you think was on the left and which on the right at Calvary?

2. Responses from the left and right

From the account in Matthew 27 it appears that both robbers began with the same attitude towards Jesus.

Matthew 27:42-44 ESV - 42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

How would you describe their attitudes, feelings and emotions toward Jesus in the above verses? How does that parallel the response of some people toward God when they feel hurt, betrayed or hopeless?

Luke 23:39 NLT - 39 One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself--and us, too, while you're at it!"

Apparently, in the course of time one of the criminals changed his mind about Jesus.

Luke 23:40-42 NLT - 40 But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? 41 We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

What do you think contributed to this change of heart? What elements of the "sinner's prayer" do you see contained in the words of this man?

3. Destinies of the left and right

The Gospels record no response to the unrepentant thief's scoffing remarks to Jesus.

How might Proverbs 1:28-29 explain this?

Proverbs 1:28-29 NLT - 28 "When they cry for help, I will not answer. Though they anxiously search for me, they will not find me. 29 For they hated knowledge and chose not to fear the LORD.

But to the repentant thief Jesus did respond.

Luke 23:43 NLT - 43 And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Jesus was on the cross for this very purpose, to pay for our sins and offer the repentant a restored relationship to God. And that access to God would be secured only through His death and resurrection.

Jesus statement to the man was in three parts-

Today- Jesus' assurance was not for some far distant time, but immediately, that very day, the man would be with Him in paradise. *How was this offer over and above what the man requested or expected from Jesus?*

Jesus' desire was for the man to be with him that day, without delay, upon his death. Jesus always wants to walk closely with us, but sometimes we fail to take action necessary to stay near Him, and we put off doing what we know we should until "tomorrow".

What warning are we given in Hebrews 3 about that sort of delay?