

JOKE: A preacher, who shall we say was “humor inspired”, attended a conference to help encourage and better equip pastors for their ministry. Among the speakers were many well-known and dynamic speakers.

One such speaker, boldly approached the pulpit, gathered the entire crowd’s attention, and said, “the best years of my life were spent in the arms of a woman that wasn’t my wife!” The crowd was shocked! He followed up by saying, “And that woman was my mother!” The crowd burst into laughter and delivered the rest of his speech, which went quite well.

The next week, the pastor decided he’d give this humor thing a try, and used that joke in his sermon. As he approached the pulpit that sunny Sunday morning, he tried to rehearse this joke in his head. It suddenly seemed a bit foggy to him.

Getting to the microphone, he said loudly, “The greatest years of my life were spend in the arms of another woman that was not my wife!” The congregation inhaled half the air in the room! After standing there for almost 10 seconds in

stunned silence, trying to recall the second half of the joke, the pastor finally blurred out, "...and I can't remember who she was!"

The Second Word from the Cross: The Rich Young Ruler

It is likely that the man who had a sad and disheartening encounter with Jesus known as the Rich Young Ruler was in Jerusalem for Passover on the same weekend that Jesus ended up on the cross next to two thieves. We have no record of his presence on that weekend to be certain.

However, this man was Jewish and all Jews in that day were expected to return to Jerusalem to take part in the Passover celebration that happened once each year.

The initial encounter Jesus had with the Rich Young Ruler is recorded in Mark 10:17-31.

Mark 10:17–31 (NIV): As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

18 “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’” 20 “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” 21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” 22 At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. 23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” 24 The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” 26 The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?” 27 Jesus looked at

them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” 28 Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!”

29 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel 30 will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Imagine what the eternal life seeking Rich Young Ruler might have been feeling had he not only been in Jerusalem for Passover when Jesus and the thieves were being crucified but also if he had stopped to hear the second word that Jesus said to one of the thieves on the cross.

Luke 23:39-43 gives us the scene around the second word and says:

Luke 23:39–43 (NIV): 39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save

yourself and us!” 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” 42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

The second word that Jesus says from the cross in verse 43 may have echoed in the ears of the Rich Young Ruler had he been present to hear what Jesus said. This thief that had broken all the laws, rather than kept them as the Rich Young Ruler had, was being promised paradise later that day.

And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

What the Rich Young Ruler had asked Jesus about earlier in his life, this bad guy next to him is getting good news that he doesn’t deserve.

Perhaps if the Rich Young Ruler were standing there hearing this conversation, his emotions would have gotten the best of him again.

Let's take a closer look at what this second word that Jesus spoke from the cross meant on that day.

When we consider those words, one thing that comes to mind is the world's oldest profession. . .gardening. You thought I was going to say something else didn't you? Shame on you all for thinking that.

In the beginning, when God created the world, He did so with a place that included trees, flowers, green grass, shrubs, animals, birds, rivers, ponds, and lakes. That perfect place was called the Garden of Eden.

God then created Adam and Eve and assigned them with a responsibility. They were to take care of the garden. Therefore the oldest profession on earth is gardening. Not what you all were thinking.

What does “today you will be with me in paradise” have to do with gardening? I’m glad you asked.

Not only was the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve shared their responsibility to take care of the garden, but also it was the place where they enjoyed their relationship with the Creator of the Garden.

God hung out in the garden with Adam and Eve and enjoyed fellowship with the prize of His creation.

Since the beginning of time, life has been meant to be experienced with the ones you love the most. That’s the way God originally set it up from in the beginning.

He created the heavens and the earth and humans to be with Him and with each other in the garden.

God created you and me to experience the Garden Life with Him. You were made for the Garden Life with God.

So, what does the Garden Life have to do with the second

word that Jesus spoke from the cross?

Hang on. We're getting there. However, let's first look at a couple of other things together on our way back to the Garden Life.

Let's remind ourselves of the words from the thief on the cross next to Jesus that prompted Jesus to say these second of the magnificent seven words from the cross.

Look back at the text in Luke 23:42-43.

Luke 23:42–43 (NIV): 42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

In these second words from the cross, Jesus is talking to the thief hanging out next to Him.

And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you...”

Jesus is addressing the thief. It's interesting to observe

that the first words of Christ from the cross were addressed not to us, but His Heavenly Father:

We looked at that last week those words were: “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

And now that Jesus has addressed the Father, His second word is not to His followers, but rather to a thief.

Some scholars even have gone so far as to translate and describe this person next to Jesus on the other cross that He is speaking to as a terrorist.

Why do some consider this person a terrorist? That is pretty strong language. It is because the word used in the text to identify the thief on the cross is the word kakourgos and can be translated as one who is an evil working person, a violent person or one working for destruction and evil ways.

We are not talking about a guy taking two tooth-picks or mints instead of one after a meal at the restaurant on the

way out the door. We're talking about a violent criminal who is described literally as a worker of evil.

Do you remember what was said after the terrorists hit the Twin Towers in Manhattan on 9/11? It was stated that now "evil has a face." What kinds of people were being described? TERRORISTS!

Think about that with me for a minute. What is the makeup of a terrorist? It is someone who murders innocent people and lives a life that is in an uprising against a nation of different ideals in ways that bring about death and destruction thinking that by doing so they will attain a fast track to paradise.

That pretty much describes the guys next to Jesus hanging on their crosses together.

And the reason Jesus is having a conversation with a terrorist is that he was the one close by in Jesus' darkest hour.

William Willimon describes it so well when he says that we keep having difficulty with Jesus' reach, particularly when its scope is beyond the bounds of the inner circle, the church, us.

Let's be truthful now: few of us, His disciples, was close enough for Him to address. We had made it very lonely up there, at the top of Calvary.

Humiliated, naked, reviled by the world in the most public and degrading of tortures, Jesus had to talk to whoever was close at hand. His ministry, His sermons, and His actions had now cast Him among the very worst of people, in the middle of the commonest of criminals. Family, friends, and disciples were nowhere to be found when the going got rough and the beating began. Jesus was alone.

There was no one there to comfort Him in His need. Peter, "The Rock" ...had disappeared. There was nobody to talk to but this terrorist.

"Lord, we will stand by you," they all said at the Last

Supper dinner table on that last night. But that was in the quiet and comfort of family.

And truth is church that many in the church family are great about professing and lifting Jesus up inside the walls of the church. However, how are we doing out there in the world? In our culture, or our workplace? Are we lifting up Jesus as we go about our everyday walking around lives in our community, neighborhoods, businesses, and schools?

Out there, with a howling mob and the Romans at last taking action, we say nothing, and Jesus hangs there alone...with two terrorists.

Do you remember what Jesus said about two people?

Matthew 18:20 (NIV): 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

Have you ever thought about Calvary being one of the first places that Church broke out? All three were gathered under the name of Jesus...King of the Jews...when they

gathered on that hill. And to His dying day, Jesus was true to His own words. Where two are gathered in My name, I am WITH YOU.

The second word that Jesus speaks from the cross to that thief that echoes down to us is a relevant and personal word because we all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his or her way. We all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory; it could have and would have and should have been us on that cross next to Jesus.

But the word Jesus speaks that the thief heard and that we need to hear is this: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me..."

Sometimes when we are hanging in pain and experiencing the darkest, most difficult days of our life that we never could have imagined we would be suffering through, we need to hold fast to the reality that the nature and the character of Jesus is that He is the God who today is WITH US.

- When you are hanging on the cross of foreclosure: Jesus is with you.
- When you are hanging on the cross of marriage problems: Jesus is with you.
- When you are suffering through the terrible twos and potty training your kid is about to kill you: Jesus is with you.
- When your teenager hits puberty, and their voice changes and their hormones kick into high gear, and you wonder who it is that won't say a word to you but expects you to finance their life: Jesus is with you.

Teenagers, when your mom and dad jump in head first to a midlife crisis, you are not alone. Even if they leave you in the wake because they can't handle the responsibility, you still are not alone. It's not your fault they are being goofy.

However, you're getting drilled in the heart and home isn't like it was when you were five years old. Please remember: Jesus is with you.

Grandmother and Granddaddy, when you wonder if your

kids and grandkids even care and you can't understand why they don't pay cash instead of racking up debt that will wreck their lives: Jesus is with you...and with them.

Deuteronomy 31:8 (NIV): 8 The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

Hebrews 13:5 (NIV): 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

And that was the Rich young rulers issue. He was a lover of money more than a lover of God.

Psalms 20:7 (NIV): 7 Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

Church where are you placing your trust?

On the cross, Jesus is with the terrorist thief. He says the words many terrorists long to hear because it is often why

he or she did what they did in the first place even if it was with radically wicked and evil motives.

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Many terrorists have hopes of being in paradise at the end of their heinous crime against humanity.

And the difference in every terrorist and the one next to Jesus on the cross is that this one turned to Jesus.

When he turned to Jesus, and when you and I turn to Jesus, and repent of our sin, confess our sin and walk into the forgiveness that Jesus offers to all who will turn and run into Him, the result not only is that Jesus is WITH US TODAY, but that we will be with Jesus in Paradise.

The word “Paradise” is an interesting word. It is the word paradeisos in the original language. It is an old word that was first used by the Ancient Greek Historian named Xenophon of Athens who was born in 430 B.C. His writings were in the 4th century B.C. He was a contemporary of and

admirer of Socrates, ancient Greece, and the Persian Empire.

When Xenophon of Athens used this word: paradeisos...paradise...it was a word used to talk about, describe, and refer to the Gardens of the Kings.

Paradeisos is a word that has hung around throughout the centuries. And it was a word that a first century Jew, be it Jesus or the terrorist next to him, would have been very familiar with as it pertained to the word picture of a Garden of the Kings.

With that historical context in mind, look back again at the conversation on the cross between Jesus and the terrorist.

Luke 23:42–43 (NIV): 42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

The thief was talking to Jesus about a kingdom. And the

Kingdom is about a King. And just to make sure everybody understood the truth about Jesus, God allowed Pilate to have a sign marked and written out that declared who Jesus was: THE KING OF THE JEWS. THE KING.

A KINGDOM IS ABOUT A KING.

Our KING has a Garden. And when Jesus said, “Today you will be with me in paradeisos” ...in paradise...a first-century Jewish mind would have known exactly what He was talking about: the Garden of the King...the Garden...with the King.

Jesus was telling this terrorist: “Today you will be living the Garden Life with Me. You were made for the Garden Life.”

The word Jesus uses for Paradise here in Luke 23:43 is the same word that is used in the Septuagint, which is a Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament. Paradeisos is the same word used in Genesis 2:8-10 to describe Eden...the Garden of Eden. The paradeisos of Eden. The paradise of Eden. The Garden of the King and Creator of the world and everything in it.

Genesis 2:8–10 (NIV): 8 Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. 9 The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. 10 A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters.

This terrorist was invited by Jesus to go back to Eden...back to the Garden of Eden...back to the way it was before the fall...back to the Garden life with God...with Jesus...with the KING... Back to the Garden of the King.

From Genesis through Revelation Jesus is talking about living the Garden Life with Him and getting back to the Garden Life. He talks throughout about paradise where we are with Him.

Revelation 2:7 Jesus says:

Revelation 2:7 (NIV): Whoever has ears, let them hear

what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

In the “GARDEN OF GOD” means you were meant for the Garden life.

The second magnificent word from the cross means this: Today, you can begin to live the Garden Life with God regardless of what kind of sin you have done, what kinds of stuff you have been involved with, what kind of past you may have. Because until we turn to Jesus, we are all a bunch of terrorists in deep need of forgiveness and a fresh start with God that allows us to live the Garden Life with God.

You and I were made for the Garden Life with God.

What is the Garden Life with God? It's the way God dreamed all this up in the beginning before sin entered the picture and fractured our relationships with all those we were intended to live within the Garden. It is about our

relationship with God and our relationship with each other.

Living the Garden Life with God is the whole theme that runs through the entire Bible. It is about us getting back to the Garden Life again. It is about being back in a healed, whole, and right relationship with God and being back in a healed, whole, and right relationship with each other.

Romans 5:9–11 (NIV): 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! 11 Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

The Garden Life is about loving God and loving others.

Can you imagine what it would look like if you were experiencing life where you were right on target with God and right on target in your relationship with your spouse,

your family, your boss, your neighbors?

That is a glimpse of the Garden Life. And that is in part why Jesus died on the cross: to make a way back to the Garden Life with God where sin no longer messed it all up.

Show video - The Rich Young Ruler (www.skitguys.com)

The Rich Young Ruler missed it and was sad and frustrated. The thief next to Jesus got it and enjoyed the Garden Life with Jesus the King in His Garden later that day and throughout eternity. May we not miss what God has had in mind for all of His creation since the time of creation. May we always make our way back to the Garden Life as we respond to Jesus and His words.

That is the news news of the gospel. Nothing you can do will ever be good enough to earn your ticket to paradise. Nothing you ever did will stop His love from wooing you to the cross, for at the work of the cross is our opportunity to know the Garden life.

Romans 5:8 (NIV): But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV): For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8–9 (TPT): For it was only through this wonderful grace that we believed in him. Nothing we did could ever earn this salvation, for it was the gracious gift from God that brought us to Christ! 9 So no one will ever be able to boast, for salvation is never a reward for good works or human striving.

Join us next week as we look at John the Beloved