

“Jesus, Remember Me,” Luke 23:42
Tom Johnson, March 28, 2010

We don’t know exactly when this one criminal first met Jesus. Maybe he was baptized by John the Baptist. Maybe he was baptized by Jesus or one of his disciples. Or maybe he met Jesus earlier that day when Jesus stood before Pilate.

He may have witnessed how Barabbas—a murderer—was set free by the angry mob. He may have witnessed how Jesus was condemned to die—even though Pilate himself believed he had not done anything worthy of death.

This one criminal was crucified—nailed to a wooden cross—with Jesus and another criminal. This one criminal heard people mocking Jesus. He remembered how they made fun of Jesus’ kingdom—he saw how they put a sign above Jesus head which said, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

This one criminal, who was also feeling the agony of the crucifixion, remembered. He pushed the pain out of his mind and remembered what Jesus said to the angry mob laughing at him—he remembered what Jesus prayed while the Roman soldiers drove nails into his hands and feet—he remembered Jesus’ words: **“Father, forgive them. Forgive them because they don’t know what they are doing.”**

This one criminal remembered how Jesus extended his Kingdom of love and forgiveness to those who did not deserve it—even those who crucified him.

This one criminal, on the other hand, also remembers his own guilt that put him on the cross. Maybe he remembered how he murdered someone—or how he knifed a Roman citizen in the public square which was a common crime of terror of the day.

He remembers his sin and finds no peace or solace there. He says, “We are condemned justly. We are receiving the due rewards of our deeds.” He hears the other criminal joining in the mockery of Jesus. “Jesus, if you are the Messiah, get off that cross and save us all!” This one criminal may have heard and remembered Jesus’ words to Pilate:

“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world” (John 18:36).

When this one criminal remembers the words and actions of Jesus...when he remembers the nature and realities of the Kingdom of Jesus...when he fills his mind with the truth of who Jesus is, God strengthens his faith. The Holy Spirit gives him faith and courage to pray these bold and powerful words:

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” “Jesus, you remembered those who mocked you. You remembered even those who condemned you and crucified you. You prayed to the Father ‘Forgive them.’”

“Jesus, remember me—extend that same forgiveness to me. They did not deserve forgiveness. I do not deserve it. But I know you to be a King who forgives the unworthy—who extends his Kingdom of love to sinners.”

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” “I don’t believe that hanging on the cross is the end of the story. I don’t believe that death will have the final word. I believe that you will conquer death just as you conquer sin. I believe that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”

“I believe that when you hang your head in death next to me on that cross, you will raise your head in triumph as you enter into your heavenly kingdom.” “I believe that when your ears close to the mocking crowds on Calvary, your ears will open to the cheering of angels, archangels and all the company of heaven. Your eyes will close to the wagging of heads and be opened to the waving of banners and palm branches.”

When this one criminal remembers—and we remember—we remember who Jesus is, what he has done, and what he will do for us. We remember that Jesus is King and Savior. But when a king remembers, it results in action. When a king remembers he bestows favor, he gives gifts, and he honors.

When Jesus enters in his kingdom, the criminal hopes that he will remember him—perhaps prepare a place for him...that his story will also not end at the cross and death—that he too will be able to conquer death and his own sin.

And so he prays, **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”**

This courageous, bold, and faith-filled request is answered by and even more courageous, bold, and radical answer: **“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”**

“No, my friend hanging on the cross next to me, I will not just remember you when I enter into my Kingdom. I will give you the assurance of forgiveness while you are still on this side of the kingdom.” “You will not fear as you walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I will give you certainty of eternal life now. Today, today you will be with me in paradise. I will remember you now.”

It’s remarkable that Jesus is not too busy or preoccupied with his own suffering that he remembers a broken, sinful, and condemned person next to him on the cross. Jesus’ love and good news here is direct and personal.

And so, when we remember our sins...and when we remember our mortality like this criminal whose mind is filled with the evil he has done and his imminent death—we also need to remember our King and his Kingdom.

We remember the true King who died to bring forgiveness for our sins. We remember the Messiah who promises to bring us into his eternal Kingdom.

He is not too busy or preoccupied to hear our prayers. He knows the number of hairs on our head. He knows the number of our days. He is just as direct and personal with us as he was with that man on the cross next to him ages ago.

When Jesus comes back again in glory—in the glory of his true Kingdom—or when we close our eyes to this world in death—on that day, he will say those same words to us as he did to this one criminal: **“Today, you will be with me in paradise.”**

Until that day, we remember him who will remember us. And yea though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will not fear...for we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.