



"No change of circumstances can repair a defect of character."  
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

24-Apr-15

## *What Happened to the Thief on the Cross? (Part One)*

In [Luke 23:43](#), [Jesus Christ](#) tells one of the criminals being crucified next to Him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." This statement forms the foundation of belief for the majority of professing Christians that they will [go to heaven](#) as soon as they die. The common interpretation is that Jesus promises the malefactor he would be with Him in "Paradise"—assumed to be heaven—later that day, after both had died. From this scenario, they extract the theory that *all* of the faithful are likewise caught up to heaven immediately upon death. This verse has become the modern pillar of the ancient pagan belief that our soul lives on after the death of the body and finds its way to heaven to be with God.

The only problem is that [Luke 23:43](#) does not support this at all!

Jesus gave only one sign that He was the One He said He was: that He would be in the grave for three days and three nights:

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was [three days and three nights](#) in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ([Matthew 12:38-40](#), emphasis ours throughout)

If Jesus was not in the grave for three days and three nights, He is not our Savior! But since we know He was telling the truth, He must have been in the grave for exactly three days and three nights—thus, He could not have been in Paradise that day. Following this through, if *He* was not in Paradise on the day He died, neither was the criminal hanging next to Him.

The apostle Paul corroborates that Jesus did in fact fulfill His prophecy. In [I Corinthians 15:3-4](#), he tells Christians: "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, how that [Christ died for our sins](#) according to the scriptures; and that *He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures.*" Notice that Paul says *Jesus* was buried, not that the body was buried and His consciousness went to Paradise. It reads that He—Jesus, Himself, entirely—was buried. He was dead for three days. He died for our sins, "slept" in the grave for 72 hours, then came back to life after being resurrected by the Father.

John gives further proof of where Jesus was: "Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there [in the tomb, the grave] they laid Jesus . . ." ([John 19:41-42](#)). Similarly, Peter told those present on Pentecost, "[David], foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that *His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption.*" ([Acts 2:31](#)) This states that Jesus' body and soul were in "Hades" (the grave), not in Paradise.

Jesus Himself tells us He was not simultaneously in the grave and in Paradise. When Mary Magdalene stood outside the tomb, she encountered the resurrected Savior ([John 20:14](#)). After He identified Himself (verse 16), He told her plainly where He had *not* been: "Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to Me, for *I have not yet ascended to My Father*; but go to My brethren and say to them, "I *am* ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My [God](#) and your God.'" ([John 20:17](#)). Clearly, He had not been in Paradise with the Father during the time He was in the grave, thus the criminal was not either! Nevertheless, the time is coming when that man will eventually enter the Paradise of God promised to come to this earth.

What exactly is the "Paradise" Jesus was talking about? The Greek word translated "Paradise"—used only three times in the New Testament—has the basic meaning of "park" or "garden." It describes an Eden-like setting. Additionally, by usage it is shown to indicate the presence of God's throne. This is seen in [II Corinthians 12:1-5](#), where Paul relates the incident of "a man" (actually Paul himself) having a vision where he was "caught up to the third heaven . . . caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible

CGG Weekly: What Happened to the Thief on the Cross? (Part One) (24-Apr-15)

words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." "Paradise," then, refers to where God's throne is.

[Revelation 2:7](#) also mentions Paradise: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from *the tree of life*, which is in the midst of the *Paradise of God*." This gives us another indicator—the Tree of Life is shown to be in the Paradise of God just as it was in "Eden, the garden of God" ([Genesis 2:8-9](#); this particular phrasing is used in [Ezekiel 28:13](#)).

Notice also [Revelation 22:1-2](#):

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from *the throne of God and of the Lamb*. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was *the tree of life*, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

The context of this is "*a new heaven and a new earth*, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . . Then I, John, saw the holy city, *New Jerusalem*, coming down out of heaven from God . . ." ([Revelation 21:1-2](#)). We see, then, that after the Millennium (see [Revelation 20:1-5](#)), the New Jerusalem descends, and it not only contains the Tree of Life, but also God's throne—for God Himself will be reigning on the new earth. This is (will be) Paradise, and the repentant criminal will be there with Jesus Christ.

There is more to relate on this subject, which we will cover in Part Two.

- David C. Grabbe

---

## *From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

### [Sin and Overcoming \(Part 3\): The Battle For Eternal Life](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Martin Collins, reflecting on an incident years ago when a member of God's church exclaimed 'I don't mind being Laodicean; they are part of God's church too,' felt an inward horror that one would not mind remaining lukewarm and subject to being vomited out. The Laodicean temperament falls seriously short in promoting the processes of

CGG Weekly: What Happened to the Thief on the Cross? (Part One) (24-Apr-15)

overcoming and repentance. Spiritual growth and godly behavior take tremendous work, demanding that we renounce Satan's ways and follow Christ's ways by exercising God's Holy Spirit and the faith of Christ, enabling Christ to live within us. As sin begins as a simple thought impulse, it is most successfully overcome with godly thought impulses, prompted by continuous Bible study and prayer. Only by humbling ourselves and yielding to God will we receive the strength to resist the wiles of Satan the Devil and to keep God's Law in the spirit and the letter. As God's called out ones, in our attempt to glorify God, we will always experience conflict with the world, our flesh, and Satan's power, inspiring evil thoughts and attitudes. We cannot allow ourselves to be conformed or transformed by the world, but we must be transformed into Christ's image, destined to enter God's family at our resurrection.

---

## *From the Archives: Featured Article*

### [Is Heaven the Reward of the Saved?](#)

by Staff

Most of Christianity believes humans go to heaven or hell after death, but is this so? This belief does not originate in the Bible—and in fact, the Bible reveals a very different Christian destiny.

---

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).

---