

P550

Grace Notes Program

THEME: How to get to heaven

INTRO: Heaven...we've all heard about it and have probably drawn a picture of it in our minds. In the middle of a crisis, we've even dreamed we're there to get us through. But is it a state of mind or a real place? Will we all go there when we die? If not, then how do we get there? Today on Grace Notes, Barbara Sandbek will relate a Biblical story of a man who was granted issuance into Heaven and share how anyone can join him there.

It occurred to me the other day that one of the reasons we may not understand Jesus' teaching is because of its simplicity - we tend to make things complex. Something in our human nature dictates that we must add something to his words so we can feel like we've had a part in our own salvation.

While mediating on Jesus' words about Heaven, I came across a familiar story in Luke 23. Jesus was being taken to be executed on a cross. Verse 32 says two other men, both **CRIMINALS, were also led out with him. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified Him, along with the criminals – one on His right, the other on His left.**

The soldiers and the crowd sneered at him, asking Him to prove He was who He said He was by coming down off the cross. Verse 39 says that one of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself AND US!" BUT, the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you FEAR GOD...since you are under the same sentence? We are punished JUSTLY, for we are getting what our deeds DESERVE. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom." What did Jesus say?

"I tell you the TRUTH: TODAY you will be WITH ME in PARADISE."

How simple is that! Since we're all about DOING, let's look at what the thief DIDN'T do and what he DID do to receive salvation.

The word PARADISE is a synonym for Heaven, which is the final abode of the RIGHTEOUS. But, Isaiah 64:6a says ALL of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our RIGHTEOUS acts are like FILTHY rags. That means that NO ONE qualifies for entrance into Heaven, regardless of how good a life they lead.

The man on the cross was a convicted CRIMINAL – he broke the law. His GOOD works didn't earn HIM admission into heaven. Romans 3:20-25a states...

.....no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness FROM GOD, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness FROM GOD comes through FAITH in Jesus Christ to all who BELIEVE. There is no difference, for ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.

**Yes, we've ALL broken God's laws – we're all criminals, so to speak. We can't tip the scale in our favor by doing good deeds. Romans 10:4 clearly states...
Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who BELIEVES.**

The criminal believed. It was evident by his words – He said...

We're getting what we deserve (or I'm a sinner).

This man has done nothing wrong (or I believe He's God).

He also believed Jesus would be resurrected and asked Jesus to remember him when he entered into His Kingdom.

The thief's mode of dress certainly didn't make him acceptable, either. He was NAKED. Now, I have nothing against looking your best for a worship service, but proper attire will not make us more pleasing in God's sight. We are naked before Him. Hebrews 4:13 says...

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

You see, man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.

The thief wasn't a member of a church! I doubt if anyone would have wanted him on their roster anyway. But he was included in the body of Christ, which is His church, because he asked to be. This story proves that church membership is not a prerequisite for Heaven.

Another mistaken addition to salvation is Baptism. Several verses include baptism when speaking of salvation, but most don't. And when it is included, it is never listed first. *Mark 16:16 is an example.*

“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Notice, it does not say, but whoever is not BAPTIZED will be condemned. It says whoever does not BELIEVE. Baptism is merely identification with Christ and His Kingdom. It's an outward sign of an inward change and a way of publicly claiming Jesus as Lord.

If baptism were a required act for salvation, Jesus would never have allowed Himself to be baptized. There was no sprinkling or emersion performed for the thief that day. There was NOTHING the thief could physically do for the Lord. He was pinned to a cross and about to die.

Once when Jesus had fed the 5000 people with five loaves and 2 fishes, they asked him what they needed to DO to DO the works God requires. Jesus answered in John 6:29, “The work of God is this: to BELIEVE in the One He has sent. “

You see, it's not about SERVICE – it's about SURRENDER. The thief believed in his heart, surrendered himself to the Lord, and opened his mouth to confirm his decision.

He didn't WORK FOR his salvation, WORK AT his salvation or WORK THROUGH his salvation, rather he WORKED OUT his salvation in the confession required in Romans 10:9-10...

...if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

The thief spoke no long petitions, repetitive prayers or chants – just a few simple sentences. But in those repentant words he acknowledged Jesus as King of the Kingdom with the power to save him.

It's been said that the way to Heaven is so easy even a child can understand it. Then why do we make it complicated? Just follow the ABC's: A – ask Jesus to save you from your sin, B – Believe that He died to pay the penalty for your sin and rose again. C – Confess Him as Lord of your life. That's all you need to do.

Jesus didn't tell the thief he'd have to wait awhile to be with him either, or that he'd have to burn off his sins in some holding place. No, He said, "TODAY YOU will be WITH ME in Paradise."

Maybe you need assurance that you'll go to Heaven when you die or when Christ returns. Let's conclude now with a prayer you can say before God to receive this FREE gift of salvation.

God, in Heaven, I have sinned against You. I believe Jesus died for my sin, rose again and wants to save me. I ask Him to forgive my sin, come into my life and be my Savior and Lord.

If you prayed that prayer – you, too, are a member of the Kingdom of God, right NOW. You're a child of the King with the promise of eternity to be spent in His presence the moment you leave this earth.

What a blessed assurance we have in these SIMPLE truths. Jesus took our place on that cross – He took our sin on Himself. He was wounded for our transgressions. Why not thank Him now as you ponder His atoning grace.

***** ISAIAH 53 *******

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P.O. Box 581 Fallston, MD 21047

or email us through our web site at www.gracenotesradio.com. We'll send you some information to help you in your new life with Christ.

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