

He Spoke a Word of Promise ¹

✦ **So much more than the thief deserved.**

✦ **So much more than the thief expected.**

In the name of Jesus, our suffering Savior, dearly redeemed believers:

Introduction: Promises too good to be true. Mortgage offers leave out taxes, etc. – usually less than half of actual payment.

Challenge this year: Christ’s words from the cross. Study the seven words of our Lord in the four Gospels, you will notice that the first two and the last one are recorded in Luke’s Gospel. You might say that Luke records the *Father – paradise* first and last words of Christ.

Today Christ’s second word also recorded in Luke is spoken to the penitent thief on the cross. These words must have seemed too good to be true! **“Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’” He Spoke a Word of Promise.**

I. So much more than the thief deserved.

A. One thief’s change of heart.

1. Background of two thieves. Both scoffed, etc. (Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:32; Luke 23:39)
2. One changed by God’s grace. Heard about Jesus (Word)...baptized (?). Fruits of faith: admit guilt, rebuke sinners, pray by faith in Jesus.
3. Soldiers heard it. But had heard “confessions” before. Didn’t care; wouldn’t remember.
4. Passersby, pilgrims heard it. Glad to be rid of the thief. They wouldn’t remember.
5. Nobody else, not even religious leaders, would remember, but Jesus would.

B. Jesus came for criminals like the thief: “Nothing in my hand I bring....”

1. Jesus came **“to seek and to save the lost.”** Even badly lost! Hopelessly lost.
2. Hopelessly lost like us. We are like the thief.
 - a) We don’t like to admit it, but we are all like the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable.
 - b) Chinese and other Asian language translators struggled to find a word for “sinner.” Had to settle for “criminal.” Does not sit well with Asians either.
 - c) But God’s Law condemns us all. No discrimination. No favoritism with God. Romans 1:25-32. We must see ourselves in that thief!
3. Marvel that Jesus would hang between two criminals.
 - a) Our tears of joy, glad hearts.
 - b) How undeserving we are to have the Holy One even associate with sinners like us.
 - c) **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst”** (1 Timothy 1:15)

Transition: His gracious presence would be enough to bring kindness, love and caring. But Jesus also **Spoke a Word of Promise** that was....

¹ Adapted from 2006 NPH Series: Seven Words He Spoke, Rev. Glenn L. Schwanke.

II. So much more than the thief expected.

- A. The thief's simple prayer.
1. **"Remember...."** Asked for crumbs of grace.
 2. Compare to Canaanite woman's prayer. (Matthew 15:25-27)
 3. Both asked for crumbs. Both received a feast!
- B. Jesus gave so much more.
1. **"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."**
 - a) **"Today"!**
 - b) Not tomorrow. Not after a few thousand years in purgatory.
 2. **"With me..."**
 - a) Young man asks girl, "Will you marry me?" Wants to spend rest of life with her.
 - b) Believer's dream: As the bride of Christ to spend forever with our Groom. (Revelation 21:2)
 3. **"In paradise..."**
 - a) Sweet words to the thief. Far from Golgotha, Gehenna – place of unending torment according to Isaiah 66:24.
 - b) Far from his sins. Guilt. God's judgment.
 - c) Eden regained. No more death, crying, pain. (Revelation 21:3f)
 - d) ***The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.*** (Revelation 21:23 NIV)
 - e) So much more than the thief expected.
 4. Overwhelming! So much more for us too.
 - a) Shack in heaven. I know I don't deserve even that much.
 - ✠ Reminds me of John Lunn, "shoveling up behind the last elephant."
 - b) But Jesus gives so much more.
 - ✠ Gold-paved streets, etc. (Revelation 21:21)
 - ✠ ***"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die...."*** (John 11:26f)
- C. Is Jesus' word of promise too good to be true?
1. A few hours later, Jesus would be dead. How could he keep this promise?
 2. A dead Savior couldn't. A living Savior can. A living Savior has!
 - a) Easter is our proof.
 - b) The resurrection is our receipt!
 3. To the thief? To us? Paradise! Eden regained. Heaven. Perfect and complete. (Revelation 21)

Conclusion: The thief enjoys paradise even now. One day you and I will too. We have our Savior's word on it. Amen.