

## Today in Paradise

One of the two men that were crucified with Jesus is now in heaven. His relatives and friends did not need to offer prayers and sacrifices in suffrage for his soul after his death. There was no need because he was with the Lord on the same day he left this world. We know this because the promise of Christ cannot fail. Since Jesus told him, 'Today you shall be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:42, 43), we can be certain that 'today' - the day of his death – he was with Christ in heaven.

But *why* did he go to heaven? Was he without sin? Was he a righteous man who had lived a good and holy life?

Whether or not he was without sin, the Bible tells us plainly that he was a criminal; he was a thief! He openly admitted his sinfulness and that he deserved the death penalty. He rebuked the other thief, 'We are punished justly,' he told him, 'for we are getting what our deeds deserve.' So he did not enter the glory of heaven because he was without sin; on the contrary he is in paradise *despite* his many sins!

Can we say, perhaps, that after his conversion, he lived such a godly life that he deserved eternal life? No, by no means, for this man repented on the very last day of his life. He did not have the opportunity to dedicate his life in obedience to God. If he had the opportunity, undoubtedly, his lifestyle would have radically changed because God gives a new heart to those he forgives and empowers them to walk in holiness. But in the particular circumstances of this man, it is clear that he had few good works to take with him. He is in heaven *despite* the lack of personal merit.

Here then is a man burdened with guilt and devoid of any merits, and yet he is in heaven. Where can we find the reason for his salvation? He did not find it in himself, or in anything he did, but in the Man crucified in the middle, in Jesus Christ! The sinner appealed to the sinless one, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He found pardon and merit in the Lord, and we, if we do likewise, we will find our redemption in Christ too. For he bore our sins in his body on the tree; he who is just, died for us the unjust to reconcile us to God.

Ask yourself about your hope of salvation. 'Will my hope stand fast on my deathbed?' Maybe I will be able to say, 'I merit heaven because I'm not a sinner,' or perhaps, 'I merit heaven because I'm a righteous person'? No, most definitely no! Like the thief on the cross, I confess, and will continue to confess to my last breath, I am a sinner, I'm guilty, I deserve condemnation and hell; and with the apostle Paul, and with all those who had the privilege to live many years in the service of the Lord, I will confess, 'he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy' (Titus 3:5).

What will my confidence be as I walk the dark valley of death? My confidence is Jesus, the Lord Jesus is my only hope! I have called on his name, 'Jesus remember me', and I am convinced that on that day the Lord will not forget me; he will remember me; he will take me with him to heaven. For glorious and true is his promise, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'