



## WEEK 3

by Steve Zacchigna

*One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"*

*But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "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."*

*Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."*

– Luke 23:39-43

Paradise?! What! The man next to Jesus is a criminal hanging on a cross as punishment for his crimes. He had his chances to repent and reform himself, to become a productive member of society. It's too late now, he has wasted his life and is not deserving of any sort of paradise. Why would Jesus be willing to bestow such a lavish grace upon such an unworthy subject?

As someone who attempts to live a "good Christian" life, these are some of the thoughts of indignation that pop into my head when I read the account of the criminal who is promised paradise right before dying on a cross next to Jesus. I try to follow the teachings of the Bible, I help other people. Why would this criminal be worthy of the same life everlasting as me? I imagine many of the Jews watching, who dedicated their entire lives to following the Old Testament law were even more miffed by the idea that this man could ever enter the presence of God.

However, this event at the very end of the life of Jesus shows us how serious he was about the things he taught and modeled for us. Jesus' spent his entire ministry openly spending time with sinners, giving them

dignity and grace even while calling them out of their sin. Now Jesus is dying a shameful death alongside two sinners that I am sure he would have shared a meal with had he met them earlier in his life.

These two criminals show us the two postures that we have the choice to take before God. The first criminal mocks Jesus, assuming that if he was really the Son of God, he never would have ended up on a cross. The other criminal realizes what all who come to faith in Jesus must know, “We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” (V.41)

We are all sinners and all deserve just punishment for our sins. The beauty of the cross is that Jesus was willing to take all of the punishment and pain on himself to save us, and all we need to do is admit our guilt, acknowledge Jesus’ majesty and accept his mercy.

Even in the midst of excruciating agony Jesus still has the patience and love to offer undeserving grace to a sinner just like us.

#### Questions for Reflection:

1. Why would Jesus be willing to bestow such a lavish grace upon such an unworthy subject as you and me? What does that say about who God is? What does that mean for who I am in light of faith in Jesus?
2. Who do we think is beyond such a lavish grace? Do we have neighbors, co-workers, family, friends who we have looked at as being “too far gone”? What would it look like to help them explore who Jesus is? Consider sharing with your small group, or friend what this could look like.



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