

The King of Paradise

Luke 23:33-43; Revelation 2:1-7

Christ the King Sunday, November 20, 2022 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction

I remember visiting a man back out east who claimed that he was once a tenured professor of a local university. This fellow was in his 60's, with disheveled clothes, matted hair and an appearance that made him look as if he had not been gainfully employed in a long time, if ever. I visited him after he asked the church for help with some of his bills. I listened politely when he spoke of his years in academia but I didn't believe him. Then one of the elders of the church I served at that time took me aside one day and told me that he was, in fact, telling the truth. He had an earned PhD in sociology and had pioneered the department of the study of popular culture at the university. He was a learned and respected professor, that is until he became addicted to heroin and then had a terrible heart attack. He was never the same after that.

Jesus would not have looked like a professor on the cross. He would not have looked like a king either, yet when one of the thieves dying with him asked to be remembered when He comes in His kingdom, Jesus makes a response only a king could make, in fact, a response that only the King of kings could make: "this day you will be with me in Paradise."

- Set the Stage

Luke 23 describes the terrible scene of the crucifixion, with Jesus position between two thieves. They were most likely robbers who laid in wait for people on lonely roads, who they then beat and robbed. They were notorious for not leaving witnesses, so these men may have been career criminals and murderers. One of them had the nerve to join in the jeering aimed at Jesus, led by the religious leaders and others. "If you are the Christ, save Yourself, and us!" he yelled. But the other thief rebuked him and then made the plea for which he is now famous. Jesus promised him Paradise, and then later died. The two thieves died after him. What happened to them, and what is Paradise?

Main Point Heaven, or at least part of it, is likened to the Garden of Eden, forbidden from humanity long ago.

Paradise can be synonymous with heaven, but there may be a little more to it than that. The word for "paradise" usually referred to an estate or a park or a garden lined with trees, kept in immaculate condition, similar to the description of the Garden of Eden described in Genesis 2:4-7. In Revelation 2, Jesus makes a promise to those who overcome (who are faithful till death) that they will eat of the Tree of Life that is in the Paradise of God. Could heaven include the ancient Garden of Eden, which included the Tree of Life that was denied Adam and Eve after they ate of the forbidden fruit? Does it cause us to look at Scripture differently when we consider that we may actually see and experience what we find described in this book? Perhaps heaven is Paradise, and perhaps heaven includes Paradise which is the Garden of Eden renewed and restored?

- Application

Life with an understanding of the transition is braver and sweeter than living in the constant fear of death. Because of this, the death of the saint is precious to God (Psalm 116) and our souls are transported promptly into heaven when we die (2 Corinthians 5). There is the presence of heaven even in the here and now because of the Holy Spirit, who brings us in constant contact with the King of Paradise.

- Conclusion

Life is a journey, and Paradise is the destination. Jesus spoke of it literally as he was dying on the cross to a thief condemned to the same fate. It is where the potential of our all hopes and dreams come to pass. They do in part during this life, but there fulfilled completely. It is our final home where we will finally see our King face to face.