

Jesus' Last Words: Paradise

Luke 23.35-43

Key Points:

- There are three people involved in the last moments at the cross, each at the end of their stories and their last words reveal their hearts:
 - The 'Bad Thief' (v.39) feels **sure but he's not secure**. He rejects Jesus and who Jesus claims to be and mocks him - he's sure about that. He wants to be saved, but because he rejects Jesus, his future is not secure.
 - The 'Good Thief' (v.40-41) is **unsure but he's secure**. He throws himself at the mercy of Jesus, recognising Jesus' authority ('*your kingdom*') and being aware of his own sinfulness ('*We deserve to die for our crimes*'). And while he's not quite sure who Jesus is, he sees that there's something about him and puts his trust in Jesus ('*remember me*'), and consequently is secure in his future *with* Jesus.
 - Jesus is **sure and secure**. He understands God's plan, and he knows that he's going to die but that's not the end of the story. It's actually the beginning of a new creation (Paradise = God's garden, representing a new creation). And he promises new life to the good thief, a promise that was sealed three days later when the stone was rolled away.

Questions:

Conversation Starter - Get the group involved with a question everyone can answer

1. 30s Easter-themed challenges (garden object, "rise-ups" (squats) and writing "Jesus is risen" - how did you do? (You could do them again, now!!)

Start thinking - Get the group thinking around the subject,

2. How do you imagine 'paradise'? How might seeing this as meaning 'a new creation' change our view of death/paradise?
3. The 'good thief' trusts Jesus even though he's not got all the answers (or a lot of time to find out). Who's someone you know who seems to trust God no matter what they're facing? What do you think is different about them?
4. Do we need to be sure in our faith in order to be secure with God?

Start sharing - Choose a question to create openness

5. Are you right with God? Maybe you feel unsure or insecure. How might the two thieves and Jesus' last words speak to this?
6. How can you throw yourself upon Jesus' grace, love and mercy in the middle of a difficult situation?

Start praying - Pray together.

7. God, in this moment we choose to throw ourselves at your mercy. We need you Jesus, we recognise you as Saviour. And we receive your promise of life (again) right now. Amen!

Start doing - draw out some steps to do (either in the meeting or this week)

8. To grow in our faith (and our certainty) and to walk in the promise of new life, commit to spending time with Jesus each day this week. Perhaps giving thanks for who he is, for meeting us in our need, or just asking him to minister to you.