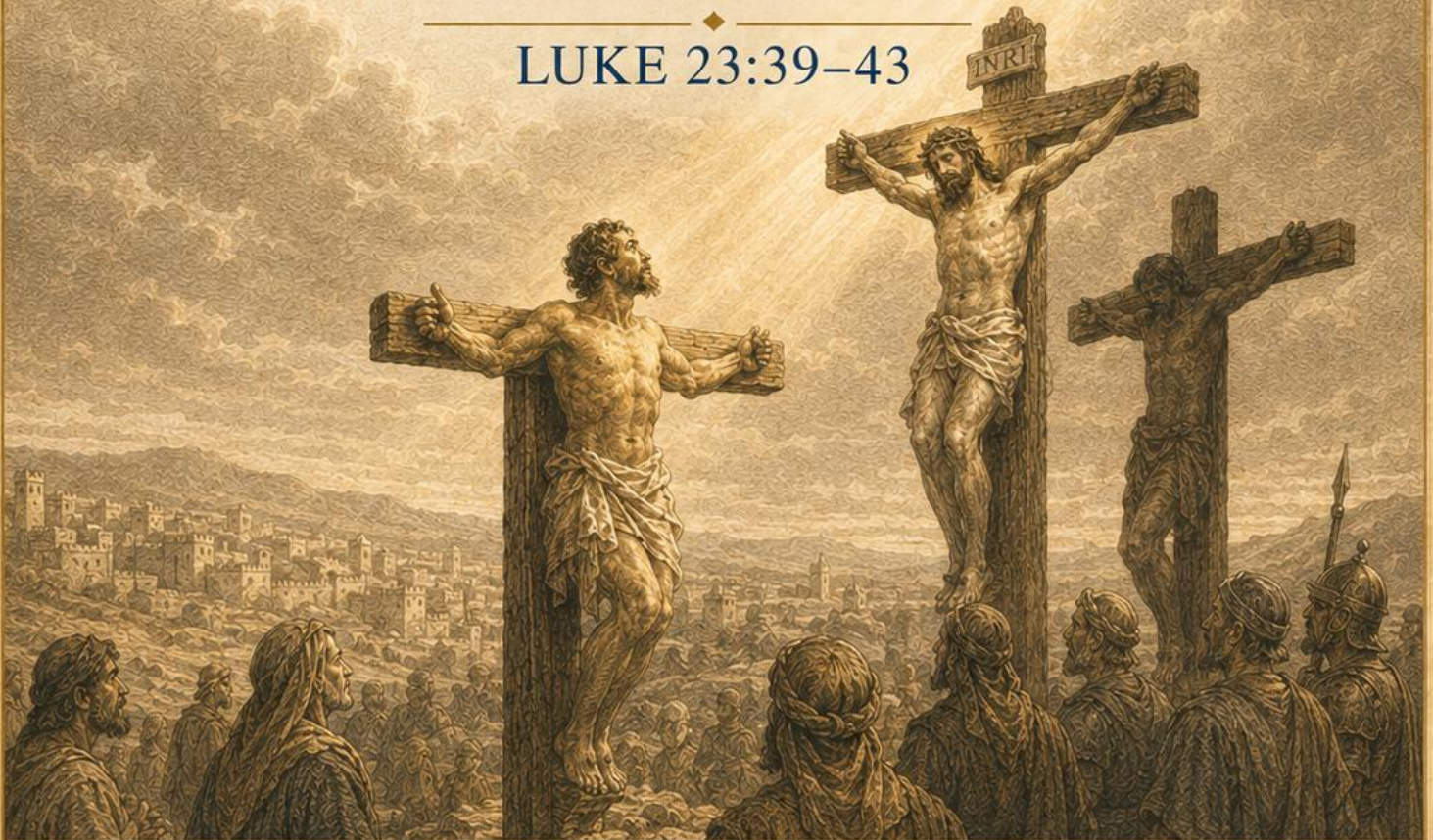




REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

DID THE THIEF ON THE CROSS REPENT?

LUKE 23:39–43



SERMON & PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

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Aloha, church family.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Whether you are worshiping with us here today or joining us online, we are grateful that you are here.

At Reason Together Church, our invitation is always the same:

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Today we are going to examine a familiar event from the crucifixion of Jesus.

Most of us know about the thief on the cross.

We know that he spoke to Jesus.

We know that Jesus promised him paradise.

But today we are going to ask a question that reaches far beyond those final moments on Calvary:

Did the thief on the cross repent?

And through that question, we are going to examine something every one of us needs to understand.

What is Biblical repentance?

What is it not?

What does it look like?

And what does it mean for you and me today?

Before we begin, let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father,

Thank You for allowing us to gather around Your Word.

Thank You for giving us a Bible that does not hide the guilt of sinful people and does not conceal the greatness of Your mercy.

As we examine the final moments of a dying thief, help us to see more than an ancient event.

Help us to see ourselves.

Teach us what genuine repentance is.

Protect us from false assurance, empty words and religious substitutes.

If someone listening today has never turned toward You and trusted Jesus Christ for salvation, use Your Word to bring that person to repentance and faith.

For those of us who already belong to You, give us hearts that remain tender, honest and willing to turn whenever Your Word corrects us.

May everything said today be faithful to the Scriptures and pleasing in Your sight.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Please open your Bible to Luke chapter 23.

We will begin reading with verse 39.

Luke 23:39 says:

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.”

Verse 40:

“But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?”

Verse 41:

“And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.”

Verse 42:

“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

And verse 43:

“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

May God bless the reading of His Word.

Before we continue, I want to explain something to those visiting Reason Together Church for the first time.

We do not pass an offering plate during our services.

If you are a guest, we encourage you to support your home church.

Our members may give through the giving opportunities provided by the church, but no guest should ever feel pressured to give.

If this is your first time with us, we would love to know that you were here.

Our guest card asks only for your first name and email address.

That allows us to thank you for visiting and keep you informed about Reason Together Church.

Following the service, please join us in the Reason Together Café.

We have free locally grown coffee in our RTC mugs and, as we like to say, free refills on conversations.

Now let us return to our question.

Did the thief on the cross repent?

The word repentance is familiar to most Christians.

Preachers tell people to repent.

Churches call sinners to repentance.

The Bible commands repentance.

But if we asked ten people to define repentance, we might receive ten different answers.

Some would say repentance means feeling sorry.

Some would say it means admitting that you did something wrong.

Some would say repentance is asking God to forgive you.

Others would say that it means promising never to do it again.

Some believe repentance means stopping a particular sin.

Others describe it as turning around and traveling in the opposite direction.

Some say repentance is changing your mind.

Others imagine repentance as walking down a church aisle, kneeling at an altar or repeating a particular prayer.

Several of those ideas may touch some part of repentance.

But none of them, by itself, gives us the complete Biblical picture.

Repentance can include sorrow.

But sorrow is not necessarily repentance.

Repentance can produce changed behavior.

But changing one outward behavior is not necessarily repentance.

Repentance involves a change of mind.

But it is far more serious than changing your opinion about an ordinary subject.

Repentance may be expressed in prayer.

But merely repeating the correct words does not prove that repentance has occurred.

That is why the thief on the cross is so important to this question.

We believe that repentance is necessary for salvation.

Jesus said in Luke 13:3:

“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

In Mark 1:15, Jesus preached:

“Repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

Acts 17:30 says that God:

“Now commandeth all men every where to repent.”

Second Peter 3:9 tells us that the Lord is:

“Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

The call to repent is unmistakably Biblical.

We also know that the thief on the cross was saved.

Jesus said to him:

“To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

Jesus did not say, “Perhaps.”

He did not say, “If you can prove yourself.”

He did not tell the thief that he would have to spend years correcting his past.

Jesus gave him a definite promise.

“Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

If repentance is necessary for salvation and the thief was saved, then the thief must have repented.

But where is his repentance?

He never said, “Jesus, I repent.”

He never used the words, “Please forgive me of my sins.”

He never walked down a church aisle.

He was never baptized.

He did not join a church.

He could not return anything he had stolen.

He could not apologize to those he had injured.

He could not spend the next twenty years demonstrating a changed life.

His hands and feet were fastened to a cross.

His life was almost over.

If our definition of repentance requires any of those things before a person can be saved, then our definition leaves the thief without hope.

Yet Jesus promised him paradise.

Therefore, the thief forces us to look carefully at what the Bible means by repentance.

Second Corinthians 7:10 makes an important distinction.

It says:

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”

Notice that godly sorrow works repentance.

That means sorrow and repentance are related, but they are not identical.

Sorrow may lead to repentance.

But a person can feel sorrow without repenting.

There is a sorrow that is centered upon God.

And there is a sorrow that is centered upon ourselves.

Worldly sorrow says:

“I am sorry that I got caught.”

“I am sorry that people know.”

“I am sorry that this damaged my reputation.”

“I am sorry that I lost my job.”

“I am sorry that my family is angry.”

“I am sorry that this became painful.”

Those consequences may bring real tears.

They may produce deep emotional distress.

But being sorry about the consequences of sin is not necessarily the same as turning from sin toward God.

A person may hate what sin has done to his life without changing his mind about the sin itself.

He may want God to remove the consequences while continuing to resist the authority of God.

He may want relief without repentance.

That is worldly sorrow.

Godly sorrow is different.

Godly sorrow recognizes that sin is not merely a mistake that caused trouble.

Sin is rebellion against a holy God.

David expressed this understanding in Psalm 51:4:

“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.”

David had certainly sinned against other people.

He had sinned against Bathsheba.

He had sinned against Uriah.

He had sinned against his family and his nation.

But he understood that, above all else, his sin was against God.

That realization did not merely make David uncomfortable.

It turned his heart toward God in confession.

We also see the difference between regret and repentance in the life of Judas.

Matthew 27:3 says that Judas “repented himself” after seeing that Jesus had been condemned.

Judas felt terrible about what he had done.

He returned the thirty pieces of silver.

He said:

“I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.”

Those were serious words.

But Judas did not turn toward Jesus for mercy.

He turned toward despair and took his own life.

The sorrow was real.

The regret was real.

The admission was real.

But sorrow, regret and admission are not the same as repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.

Pharaoh also said:

“I have sinned.”

He admitted that the Lord was righteous.

But when the immediate judgment was removed, Pharaoh hardened his heart again.

The words “I have sinned” can be spoken without a surrendered heart.

A person can admit a fact without turning toward God.

A person can apologize because the pressure has become unbearable.

A person can make promises while desperately trying to escape consequences.

Real repentance is deeper.

Acts 20:21 gives us one of the clearest Biblical summaries.

Paul described his ministry as:

“Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Repentance has a direction.

It is repentance toward God.

Faith also has an object.

It is faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Repentance and faith are not enemies competing against one another.

They belong together in our response to the gospel.

Repentance is not an additional work that we perform so that faith can become effective.

It is not something we contribute toward the purchase of our salvation.

Repentance turns toward God.

Faith rests upon Jesus Christ.

We could define Biblical repentance this way:

Biblical repentance is a genuine change of mind and heart about God, sin and self that turns us toward God and leads us to place our faith in Jesus Christ.

Let me say that again.

Biblical repentance is a genuine change of mind and heart about God, sin and self that turns us toward God and leads us to place our faith in Jesus Christ.

Repentance changes how we see God.

It changes how we see ourselves.

It changes how we see our sin.

And it changes how we respond to Jesus.

Repentance does not mean that we successfully remove every sin from our lives before Christ will receive us.

If we could completely clean ourselves before coming to Jesus, we would not need a Savior.

Repentance means that we stop defending ourselves before God.

We stop pretending that we are righteous.

We stop claiming that our good deeds can outweigh our guilt.

We stop demanding that God accept us on our terms.

We agree with God about our condition and turn to Jesus Christ as our only hope.

Now let us return to Calvary.

Jesus was crucified between two criminals.

One was on His right and the other was on His left.

The Bible does not give us their names.

Tradition has assigned names to them, but Scripture does not.

We know only what God chose to reveal.

They were guilty men.

They had been condemned by the governing authorities.

They were suffering the same cruel form of execution as Jesus.

But Jesus was not there because He was guilty.

First Peter 2:22 says that Jesus:

“Did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.”

The criminals were dying because of their own deeds.

Jesus was dying for the sins of others.

Isaiah 53:5 says:

“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.”

The innocent Son of God hung between two guilty men.

And at first, the Gospel accounts appear to indicate that both criminals participated in mocking Him.

Matthew 27:44 says:

“The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.”

Mark 15:32 says:

“And they that were crucified with him reviled him.”

Luke later tells us that one criminal continued to rail against Jesus while the other rebuked him.

The most natural way to bring these accounts together is that both criminals initially participated in the mockery, but one of them changed.

At the very least, the group is described as reviling Jesus, while Luke allows us to see that one man eventually responded differently.

We are not told exactly when that change occurred.

We are not told precisely what first reached his heart.

Perhaps he heard Jesus pray in Luke 23:34:

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

Perhaps he watched the way Jesus endured suffering.

Perhaps he heard the religious leaders mock Jesus by describing the very things He had done.

They said:

“He saved others.”

They meant those words as ridicule.

But perhaps the dying thief began to wonder:

If He saved others, could He save me?

Perhaps he looked at the accusation written over Jesus:

“THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

Perhaps he considered the strange darkness that covered the land.

We can imagine many possibilities.

But we must not turn imagination into Scripture.

The Bible does not tell us exactly which human observation God used.

It tells us what happened afterward.

Something changed in that man’s understanding.

Something changed in his heart.

Something changed in his response to Jesus.

He began by being associated with those who reviled Christ.

He ended by entrusting his eternity to Him.

That change is what we need to examine.

Luke 23:39 says:

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.”

Listen carefully to what this thief wanted.

He wanted Jesus to save him from the cross.

He wanted Jesus to change his circumstances.

He wanted the pain to stop.

He wanted to escape death.

But there is no admission of guilt.

There is no recognition of God’s justice.

There is no confession of who Jesus is.

There is only a demand.

“If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.”

Prove Yourself by giving me what I want.

Prove Yourself by taking me out of this situation.

Prove Yourself by ending my suffering.

Many people still approach God that way.

“God, if You are real, fix my finances.”

“God, if You love me, repair this relationship.”

“God, if You are powerful, heal my body.”

“God, if You are there, remove this consequence.”

There is nothing wrong with bringing our needs to God.

The Bible tells us to pray.

But wanting God to improve our circumstances is not necessarily repentance.

A person may want deliverance from suffering without wanting deliverance from sin.

A person may want Jesus as a rescuer from earthly trouble without receiving Him as Savior and Lord.

The first thief wanted Jesus to get him down from the cross.

Then the other thief spoke.

Luke 23:40 says:

“But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?”

The first evidence of change is found in those words:

“Dost not thou fear God?”

This man had become conscious of God.

He was no longer looking only at Roman soldiers, wooden crosses and approaching death.

He understood that he was about to stand before God.

The fear of God had entered his thinking.

Proverbs 9:10 says:

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”

The thief began to see something the other criminal still refused to see.

They were not merely victims of Rome.

They were guilty men approaching the judgment of God.

Real repentance begins when we stop measuring ourselves only by other people and recognize that we stand before a holy God.

As long as I compare myself to someone worse, I can make myself appear righteous.

I may say:

“I have made mistakes, but I am not as bad as that person.”

“I have sinned, but everyone sins.”

“I have problems, but at least I have never done what he did.”

The thief could have looked at the man on the other cross and tried to appear better.

But he did not.

He looked toward God and acknowledged his own condition.

Then he said:

“Seeing thou art in the same condemnation?”

In other words:

We are both dying.

We are both guilty.

We are both approaching eternity.

How can you continue mocking God at a moment like this?

The repentant thief did not become perfect.

He did not suddenly obtain years of theological education.

But his view of God had changed.

Then his view of himself changed.

Verse 41 begins:

“And we indeed justly.”

Those four words contain more genuine confession than many long and impressive prayers.

“And we indeed justly.”

He did not offer an excuse.

He did not blame his parents.

He did not blame society.

He did not blame poverty.

He did not blame the Roman government.

He did not blame the people who arrested him.

He did not argue that the sentence was too severe.

He said:

“And we indeed justly.”

We are guilty.

Our condemnation is deserved.

That is repentance speaking.

Repentance does not mean that every difficulty in our lives is necessarily the direct punishment for one particular sin.

The Bible does not teach that every suffering person is suffering because of some specific personal act.

But when God exposes our sin, repentance stops arguing.

Repentance agrees with God.

First John 1:9 says:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

The word confess carries the idea of agreeing with what God has said.

It is not informing God of something He does not know.

God was not waiting for the thief to provide new information.

Confession meant that the thief stopped denying the truth.

He agreed that he was guilty.

He continued:

“For we receive the due reward of our deeds.”

The thief did not confess every individual sin he had ever committed.

He probably could not remember every sin.

He did not have time to produce a complete list.

But he acknowledged the truth about his life.

“We receive the due reward of our deeds.”

This is important because some people fear that they cannot be saved unless they remember and name every sin they have ever committed.

The thief did not do that.

None of us could do that.

We have sinned in actions, words, thoughts, attitudes and motives.

We have committed sins that we have forgotten.

We have sometimes sinned without immediately recognizing what we were doing.

Salvation does not depend upon the perfection of our memory.

Repentance does not require us to produce a flawless inventory before God will listen.

It requires honesty about our sinful condition.

The thief knew that he was guilty.

He knew that God was righteous.

And he stopped defending himself.

Then his view of Jesus changed.

He said:

“But this man hath done nothing amiss.”

Consider the courage of those words.

The religious leaders had condemned Jesus.

The crowd was mocking Jesus.

The soldiers were ridiculing Jesus.

The other criminal was railing against Jesus.

Jesus appeared helpless.

He was bleeding.

He was suffering.

He was dying.

From a merely human perspective, this did not look like the moment to place your confidence in Him.

Yet the thief declared:

“This man hath done nothing amiss.”

How did he know that?

We are not told everything he knew about Jesus.

Perhaps he had heard of Him before.

Perhaps he had heard the accusations and recognized their emptiness.

Perhaps he saw something in Jesus during those hours that convinced him.

Whatever the path, his conclusion was right.

Jesus was innocent.

The thief was guilty.

Jesus was receiving what He did not deserve.

The thief was receiving what he did deserve.

That is the gospel displayed on three crosses.

A guilty man.

An innocent Savior.

And the guilty man turning toward the innocent One for mercy.

Then Luke 23:42 says:

“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

Listen to the faith contained in those words.

He called Jesus “Lord.”

He believed Jesus had a kingdom.

He believed death would not end the authority of Jesus.

Everyone else saw a dying man.

The thief saw a King.

The soldiers saw someone under Roman authority.

The thief saw One who possessed eternal authority.

The crowd saw defeat.

The thief believed in a coming kingdom.

Jesus did not look like a king according to the standards of this world.

He had no palace.

He had no visible army.

His clothing had been divided among the soldiers.

His hands were nailed to wood.

A crown of thorns had been placed upon His head.

Yet the thief said:

“Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

That is faith.

He placed his hope in Jesus when almost everyone else had abandoned hope in Him.

He asked to be remembered.

He did not present a list of accomplishments.

He did not claim that he had always been misunderstood.

He did not bargain.

He did not say:

“Lord, if You save me, I will spend the next thirty years serving You.”

He did not have thirty years.

He may not have had thirty minutes.

He brought nothing except guilt and faith.

He entrusted himself to the mercy of Christ.

And Jesus answered:

“Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

The thief asked to be remembered sometime in the future.

Jesus promised that he would be received that very day.

The thief asked for mercy.

Jesus gave him assurance.

The thief could do nothing to earn salvation.

Jesus did everything necessary to provide it.

Did the thief repent?

Yes.

He did not say the words, “I repent.”

He showed us repentance.

His view of God changed.

His view of himself changed.

His view of his sin changed.

His view of Jesus changed.

His response to Jesus changed.

He feared God.

He admitted his guilt.

He accepted God's judgment as righteous.

He confessed the innocence of Christ.

He recognized Jesus as Lord.

He believed in His kingdom.

He entrusted his eternity to Him.

That is Biblical repentance joined with faith.

The contrast between the two thieves makes the truth even clearer.

One thief wanted Jesus to change his circumstances.

The other thief had experienced a change in his heart and mind.

One wanted to be rescued from the cross.

The other wanted to be received by Christ.

One wanted relief from pain.

The other wanted mercy from the King.

One continued speaking to Jesus as though Jesus needed to prove Himself.

The other spoke as a guilty man who knew that he needed grace.

One wanted deliverance without surrender.

The other turned toward the Savior.

Wanting God to remove the consequences of sin is not necessarily the same as repenting of sin.

That does not mean that the thief's repentance remained completely invisible.

Sometimes people say:

"The thief did no works."

It is true that he performed no works that could earn salvation.

No one does.

Ephesians 2:8 and 9 says:

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

"Not of works, lest any man should boast."

But repentance immediately produced fruit in the thief's remaining moments.

His speech changed.

His attitude toward God changed.

His confession changed.

His view of Jesus changed.

His treatment of the other criminal changed.

His allegiance changed.

Before, he participated in the rejection of Jesus.

Now, he defended Jesus.

Before, he joined in mockery.

Now, he addressed Jesus as Lord.

Before, he stood with the unbelieving world.

Now, he placed his hope in Christ's kingdom.

Matthew 3:8 says:

“Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”

Acts 26:20 speaks of people who:

“Should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”

The works do not purchase salvation.

They are not the root of repentance.

They are its fruit.

We are not saved by changing our behavior.

But when God changes our heart and direction, some evidence of that change should eventually appear in our behavior.

The amount of fruit depends partly upon the time and opportunity God gives us.

The thief had very little time.

But even in that little time, fruit appeared.

If he had been taken down from the cross and allowed to live, we should expect that his new direction would have continued affecting his life.

But he was not given years.

He was given a promise.

“Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

The thief could not be baptized.

He could not join a church.

He could not receive communion.

He could not repay what he may have stolen.

He could not repair every relationship he may have damaged.

He could not perform charitable works.

He could not build a Christian reputation.

He could not demonstrate decades of faithful service.

But he could repent and believe.

This does not mean that baptism is unimportant.

Jesus commanded believers to be baptized.

A person who has trusted Christ and has the opportunity to be baptized should obey Him.

It does not mean that church fellowship is unimportant.

Christians need one another.

It does not mean that restitution is unimportant.

If we have wronged someone and have the ability to make it right, repentance should affect what we do.

It does not mean that obedience is optional.

Those who belong to Christ should desire to follow Him.

But baptism, church membership, restitution, service and obedience are not the price of salvation.

Jesus paid that price completely.

The thief could offer none of those things.

Jesus saved him by grace.

This also helps us understand what repentance is not.

Repentance is not cleaning up our lives before coming to Christ.

If we wait until we are worthy, we will never come.

Repentance is coming because we know we are not worthy and because we believe Jesus is merciful.

Repentance is not promising God that we will never sin again.

That would be a promise none of us could keep.

Repentance is a genuine turning that changes our relationship to sin.

Before repentance, we defend our sin.

Afterward, even when we struggle, we can no longer peacefully call evil good simply because we desire it.

Repentance is not sinless perfection.

Christians still struggle.

Christians still fail.

Christians still need correction.

The presence of struggle does not necessarily mean that repentance was false.

Sometimes the struggle itself demonstrates that our relationship to sin has changed.

Before, we embraced it without resistance.

Now, we grieve it, confess it and seek God's strength to resist it.

Repentance is not a particular emotional experience.

Some people weep when they come to Christ.

Others do not.

Tears may be sincere, but tears cannot save.

A quiet response can be just as genuine as an emotional one.

The question is not how loudly we cried.

The question is whether we turned toward God and trusted Christ.

Repentance is not walking down an aisle.

Many people have genuinely repented while walking toward the front of a church.

Others have walked an aisle without turning toward God.

The physical movement may express an inward decision, but the movement itself cannot save.

Repentance is not repeating a particular prayer.

Words can express faith and repentance.

Romans 10:13 says:

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

But a prayer is not a magical formula.

A person can repeat every correct word while refusing to surrender his defense before God.

The thief did not repeat a prayer written by someone else.

He spoke from a heart that had recognized the truth.

Repentance is not penance.

Penance attempts to pay for wrongdoing through punishment, religious activity or good deeds.

Repentance abandons the attempt to pay for what only Jesus could pay.

Repentance is not merely exchanging one bad habit for a better habit.

An unbelieving person can stop drinking.

An unbelieving person can stop gambling.

An unbelieving person can repair a marriage.

An unbelieving person can become more disciplined.

Those changes may be good, but moral improvement by itself is not salvation.

A person can turn from one destructive behavior without turning toward God.

Biblical repentance is repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Repentance is also not confessing every forgotten sin by name.

The thief acknowledged the truth about himself:

“We receive the due reward of our deeds.”

He did not hide behind the fact that he could not remember or repair everything.

He came as a guilty man to a sufficient Savior.

Repentance is not giving Jesus a list of reasons He should accept us.

It is admitting that our only reason for hope is Jesus Himself.

First Thessalonians 1:9 provides a beautiful picture of conversion.

Paul said that the Thessalonians:

“Turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”

Notice the direction.

They turned to God from idols.

We often describe repentance only as turning away from sin.

That is part of the picture, but the emphasis must remain upon the One toward whom we turn.

A person can turn away from one sin and toward self-righteousness.

He can give up one idol and replace it with another.

Biblical repentance turns us toward God.

When we turn toward Him, we necessarily turn away from everything we had trusted in His place.

The thief turned away from mockery because he turned toward Jesus.

He turned away from self-defense because he turned toward Jesus.

He turned away from confidence in himself because he turned toward Jesus.

He had nothing in his hands.

In fact, his hands were nailed open.

He could bring no offering.

He could perform no ceremony.

He could make no contribution to his salvation.

He could only receive mercy.

And Jesus received him.

There is another dangerous lesson people sometimes draw from this account.

They say:

“The thief was saved at the last moment, so I can wait.”

“I will live as I please now.”

“I will enjoy my sin.”

“I will deal with God when I am old.”

“I will repent just before I die.”

The thief proves that a person can be saved in the final moments of life.

He does not prove that you will have such a moment.

You do not know when your final moment will come.

You do not know whether your mind will be clear.

You do not know whether you will be able to speak.

You do not know whether continued rejection will leave your heart harder tomorrow than it is today.

There were two thieves at Calvary.

One repented.

The other did not.

Both were equally close to Jesus.

Both saw the same cross.

Both heard the same words.

Both witnessed the same suffering.

Both faced the same approaching death.

Yet one turned toward Christ and the other continued rejecting Him.

The account does not encourage delay.

It warns us against presumption.

Hebrews 3:15 says:

“Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

Second Corinthians 6:2 says:

“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

Do not assume that because God has given mercy to someone else at the final hour, you are entitled to reject Him until yours.

Now we must bring the question closer to home.

It is easy to stand at a distance and examine the thief.

It is more difficult to examine ourselves.

Have I confused regret with repentance?

Am I sorry about my sin or merely sorry about what it has cost me?

Do I want God to change my circumstances while resisting what He wants to change within me?

Have I admitted that I am a sinner while still defending the particular sins I want to keep?

Have I trusted in church attendance, baptism, charitable deeds or religious language instead of trusting Jesus Christ?

Did I merely repeat a prayer once, or did I genuinely turn toward God and place my faith in Christ?

Those are serious questions.

They are not meant to cause genuine believers to live in constant terror that they did not use the correct words.

The thief did not use a prescribed formula.

Jesus understood his heart.

Our assurance does not rest upon the eloquence of our prayer or the intensity of our emotions.

Our assurance rests upon the promise of God and the finished work of Jesus Christ.

But these questions do protect us from resting our eternity upon an empty religious experience that never involved repentance toward God or faith in Christ.

Repentance also remains important after salvation.

A Christian does not need to be saved again every time he sins.

Jesus does not repeatedly adopt and abandon His children.

But a genuine relationship with God includes continuing honesty.

When the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to expose sin, the proper response is not to defend it.

It is not to redefine it.

It is not to blame someone else.

It is not to say that our circumstances made obedience impossible.

We confess it.

We turn from it.

We return to obedience.

First John 1:9 was written to believers:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

A repentant heart is not a heart that never fails.

It is a heart that remains tender enough to agree with God when He shows us that we have failed.

There is a great difference between struggling against sin and settling comfortably into it.

There is a difference between falling and deciding that we no longer care what God has said.

A Christian may stumble many times.

But God calls us to keep turning toward Him.

The thief teaches us that no one is beyond the reach of grace.

We do not know everything he had done.

Rome did not crucify people for minor offenses.

His crimes were serious.

His remaining time was short.

His ability to make restitution was gone.

Yet the mercy of Jesus was greater than his guilt.

That means no one listening today should say:

“I have gone too far.”

“I have sinned too much.”

“I have waited too long.”

“Jesus would never receive someone like me.”

The thief had no argument except mercy.

And mercy was enough because Jesus was enough.

But the other thief teaches us that proximity to Jesus is not salvation.

You can sit in a church and remain unrepentant.

You can hear the Bible and remain unrepentant.

You can know Christian language and remain unrepentant.

You can face death and remain unrepentant.

You can ask God for help and remain unrepentant if what you want is merely relief without reconciliation.

Two men were beside Jesus.

One was saved.

One was not.

The difference was not that one had lived a better life.

Both were condemned criminals.

The difference was not that one had time to perform more works.

Both were dying.

The difference was their response to Jesus.

One continued to mock.

The other turned toward Him.

One demanded proof.

The other confessed faith.

One died near Jesus.

The other died in Christ.

So did the thief on the cross repent?

Yes.

His repentance was not expressed through a religious ceremony.

It was revealed through a transformed understanding and a new direction.

He saw God as One to be feared.

He saw himself as guilty.

He saw his condemnation as just.

He saw Jesus as innocent.

He saw Jesus as Lord.

He saw a kingdom beyond the cross.

And he entrusted himself to the King.

That is what Biblical repentance looks like.

Biblical repentance is a genuine change of mind and heart about God, sin and self that turns us toward God and leads us to place our faith in Jesus Christ.

The thief's words were few.

But the direction of his heart was clear.

Now the question is not merely:

Did the thief repent?

The question is:

Have you?

Whether you are sitting here with us today, watching this message online or reading this study somewhere far away, these next words are for you.

You do not have to wait until the end of the service, be inside a church building or have a pastor standing beside you to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior.

You can come to Him right now, wherever you are.

First, admit to God that you are a sinner and cannot save yourself.

Believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He died on the cross for your sins, that He was buried and that He rose again.

Turn toward God in repentance and place your faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

Romans 10:9 says:

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus,

“and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead,

“thou shalt be saved.”

Romans 10:10 continues:

“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness;

“and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

You may call upon Him in your own words.

You can tell Him that you know you are a sinner.

You can acknowledge that you cannot earn forgiveness or save yourself.

You can tell Him that you believe Jesus died for your sins and rose again.

You can turn toward Him and place your faith in Jesus Christ alone.

The prayer does not save you.

The pastor does not save you.

The church does not save you.

Baptism does not save you.

Jesus Christ saves.

Romans 10:13 says:

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

The repentant thief had no time to build a religious record.

He simply turned toward Jesus and entrusted himself to Him.

And Jesus did not reject him.

Jesus will not reject the sinner who comes to Him in repentance and faith.

If you have trusted Jesus Christ today, please let us know.

We are not asking so that we can embarrass you or display you before anyone.

We want to pray for you, encourage you and help you begin growing through the Word of God.

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father,

Thank You for allowing us to stand at the cross through the words of Scripture.

Thank You for showing us two guilty men and the two different ways they responded to Your Son.

Thank You that the repentant thief was not saved by his accomplishments, because he had none to offer.

Thank You that he was saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Help us understand genuine repentance.

Keep us from confusing sorrow over consequences with a heart that has turned toward You.

Keep us from trusting ceremonies, promises, emotions or religious words.

Teach us to agree with You about our sin and to rest completely in the finished work of Jesus.

For anyone who has called upon Christ today, give assurance through Your Word.

Help that person grow, obey and openly identify with Jesus Christ.

For those of us who already know You, keep our hearts tender.

When we sin, help us confess rather than defend.

When we wander, draw us back.

When we encounter someone who believes he has sinned beyond the reach of grace, help us remember the thief and point that person toward the Savior who receives repentant sinners.

Thank You that Jesus died for our sins.

Thank You that He was buried.

Thank You that He rose again.

Thank You that because He lives, everyone who belongs to Him has the promise of eternal life.

We ask all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.

If this is your first time worshiping with us, please remember to complete the guest card with your first name and email address.

And please join us in the Reason Together Café for free locally grown coffee and free refills on conversations.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

May the Lord bless thee and keep thee.

May the Lord make His face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee.

May the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

To our church family, aloha.

And to those worshiping with us for the first time, Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

DID THE THIEF ON THE CROSS REPENT?

Luke 23:39–43

“Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” Luke 23:42

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

Commentary in Brief

CENTRAL CONCLUSION The thief never said, “I repent,” but his words reveal genuine repentance. He feared God, acknowledged his guilt, accepted his condemnation as just, confessed the innocence and authority of Jesus and entrusted his eternal future to Christ. Biblical repentance is not a payment, ceremony or formula. It is a genuine change of mind and heart about God, sin and self that turns a sinner toward God and is joined with faith in Jesus Christ.

The question begins with an apparent difficulty. Jesus and the apostles commanded repentance, yet Jesus promised the dying thief, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” The thief had no opportunity to rebuild his life, be baptized, join a church or produce years of good works. He did not even use the word repentance. If he was saved, where do we see that he repented?

Luke answers by allowing us to hear the man’s final words. The thief’s view of God changed. His view of himself changed. His view of Jesus changed. His demand for physical escape gave way to an appeal for mercy. He moved from the company of those who reviled Christ to faith in the crucified King. The repentance is not found in a formal sentence. It is found in the direction of the man’s heart and confession.

This commentary examines the difference between repentance and regret, the relationship between repentance and faith, the evidence found in the thief’s words and the meaning of his salvation for us today. The final purpose is personal. The question is not only whether the thief repented. The question is whether we have turned toward God and trusted Jesus Christ.

1. The Question Hidden Inside the Question

Repentance Is Necessary

The Bible does not treat repentance as an optional subject. Jesus said, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” He began His public preaching with the command, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel.” After the resurrection, He said that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations.

The apostles continued the same message. Paul summarized his ministry as “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” At Athens he said that God “commandeth all men every where to repent.” Any explanation of salvation that makes repentance unnecessary has difficulty with the plain language of Jesus and the apostles.

A Saved Man Who Never Said, “I Repent”

The thief creates the right kind of pressure upon our definition. Jesus gave him a certain promise: “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” If repentance is necessary, the thief must have repented. Yet he never repeated a standard prayer, named every sin or promised a lifetime of improved behavior.

The difficulty is not in the thief. It may be in a definition of repentance that depends too heavily upon religious vocabulary or outward opportunity. The passage invites us to look for the substance of repentance rather than one expected form.

READING QUESTION If our definition of repentance excludes a man whom Jesus promised to receive, the definition must be examined more carefully.

2. Repentance Is More Than Feeling Sorry

Godly Sorrow and Worldly Sorrow

Second Corinthians 7:10 says, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” Paul distinguishes sorrow from repentance. Godly sorrow may produce repentance, but sorrow by itself is not repentance.

Worldly sorrow can be intense. A person may cry because a marriage is damaged, employment is lost, a secret is exposed or punishment is approaching. The tears may be sincere. The pain may be overwhelming. Yet sorrow centered only upon consequences can leave the person’s relationship to God and sin unchanged.

Judas and the Limits of Remorse

Matthew says that Judas “repented himself” after Jesus was condemned. Judas returned the silver and said, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” He experienced regret and admitted wrongdoing, but he did not turn toward Jesus for mercy. He turned toward despair.

The KJV wording is important because it prevents us from treating the English word repent as a magical guarantee. Context must show what kind of change occurred and where the person turned. Judas changed his feeling about what he had done. The thief changed his direction toward Christ.

PASTORAL DISTINCTION Regret asks how to escape the pain produced by sin. Biblical repentance turns toward the God against whom we have sinned.

3. Repentance Turns Toward God

A Change with a Direction

The New Testament word commonly translated repent involves a change of mind. That statement is true but incomplete when it is made to sound casual. Biblical repentance is not like changing one's preference about food or travel. It is a changed understanding of God, sin, self and Christ that produces a new direction.

Acts 20:21 gives that direction: "repentance toward God." First Thessalonians 1:9 describes conversion as turning "to God from idols to serve the living and true God." The primary movement is toward God. As the sinner turns toward Him, he necessarily turns from the rivals, defenses and false hopes that occupied His place.

Repentance and Faith Belong Together

Repentance and faith are distinguishable, but Scripture does not present them as competing requirements. Repentance turns toward God. Faith rests upon Jesus Christ. Repentance without faith can collapse into despair or self-reformation. A claim of faith without repentance can become empty agreement that leaves the heart opposed to God.

Neither response earns salvation. The sinner does not contribute repentance as his portion of the payment while Jesus contributes the rest. Repentance abandons the attempt to defend or save oneself. Faith receives what Christ alone has accomplished.

BIBLICAL DEFINITION Biblical repentance is a genuine change of mind and heart about God, sin and self that turns us toward God and leads us to place our faith in Jesus Christ.

4. Two Guilty Men Beside an Innocent Savior

The Setting at Calvary

Jesus was crucified between two condemned criminals. Luke calls them malefactors. Matthew and Mark use language often translated thieves or robbers. Scripture does not give their names, precise crimes or personal histories. Later traditions may attempt to fill those gaps, but the Gospel writers direct our attention to their responses to Jesus.

The contrast is immediate. The criminals were guilty. Jesus was innocent. They suffered because of their own deeds. Jesus suffered for the sins of others. The repentant thief would soon state that contrast in plain language: "We indeed justly," but "this man hath done nothing amiss."

Did Both Men Initially Mock Jesus?

Matthew says, "The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth." Mark similarly says, "They that were crucified with him reviled him." Luke later records one criminal continuing to rail against Jesus while the other rebuked him.

The most natural harmonization is that both men initially participated and one later changed. Another possibility is that Matthew and Mark describe the criminals collectively without requiring both to continue throughout the entire crucifixion. Either understanding removes a contradiction. The first provides a particularly vivid picture of repentance, but it should be presented as the most natural reading rather than a detail Luke explicitly timestamps.

READING PRINCIPLE Use what Scripture reveals to understand the thief's change. Do not replace the Gospel record with traditional names, invented histories or certainty about an unrecorded moment.

5. The First Thief: Relief Without Repentance

“If Thou Be Christ...”

The first criminal said, “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.” His demand echoed the mockery surrounding Jesus. Prove who You are by doing what I want. End my suffering. Remove me from this cross. Change my circumstances.

There is no confession of guilt, recognition of divine justice or appeal for reconciliation. The man wanted Jesus to rescue him from death, but the text gives no indication that he wanted Jesus to rescue him from sin.

When Need Is Not Yet Repentance

It is right to bring physical, financial and relational needs to God. Scripture encourages prayer. Yet a request for help is not automatically repentance. A person may ask God to heal a body, restore a relationship or remove a consequence while continuing to resist His authority.

The first thief reminds us that desperation can use religious language. He spoke directly to Jesus and asked to be saved from his circumstances. Physical closeness, correct vocabulary and urgent need did not by themselves reveal faith.

PASTORAL WARNING Wanting God to remove the consequences of sin is not necessarily the same as repenting of sin.

6. The Other Thief: Evidence of a Changed Heart

“Dost Not Thou Fear God?”

The second thief began by directing attention to God: “Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?” He understood that Roman execution was not the final judgment. Both criminals were approaching the presence of a holy God.

The fear of God changed the frame through which he saw the moment. He was no longer measuring Jesus by whether Jesus would remove the cross. He was considering guilt, justice and eternity.

“We Indeed Justly”

The thief admitted his guilt without qualification. He did not blame Rome, his upbringing, society or the people who arrested him. “We indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds.” Repentance stopped arguing and agreed with the truth.

He did not name every deed. He could not have produced a complete account of every sinful action, word, thought and motive. His confession was nevertheless honest. He acknowledged the character of his life and the justice of his condemnation.

“This Man Hath Done Nothing Amiss”

His view of Jesus had changed. The man hanging beside him was not another criminal or a failed pretender. Jesus was innocent. The guilty man understood that a profound moral difference separated him from Christ.

“Lord, Remember Me”

The KJV records the thief addressing Jesus as Lord and asking to be remembered when He came into His kingdom. Some modern translations read, “Jesus, remember me,” because of a manuscript difference. The central conclusion does not depend upon that single word. The thief’s appeal to Christ’s kingdom already reveals extraordinary confidence in His authority.

Jesus appeared defeated. His hands were nailed to wood, His clothing had been divided and a crown of thorns had been placed upon His head. Yet the thief saw a King whose authority would survive death. He brought no accomplishments. He entrusted himself to the mercy of Jesus.

TEXTUAL EVIDENCE The thief’s repentance appears in his fear of God, confession of guilt, acceptance of justice, changed view of Jesus and personal faith in Christ’s kingdom.

7. He Never Said, “I Repent”

The Reality Is Greater Than the Formula

The thief never said, “I repent.” That omission does not weaken the case. A person can speak those words while remaining resistant to God. Another can genuinely repent without knowing the expected religious sentence.

The same caution applies to a sinner’s prayer, an altar response or any other outward expression. Words and actions may faithfully express repentance and faith. They cannot create the reality they are meant to express. Jesus understood the thief’s heart through his brief and imperfect appeal.

He Did Not Confess Every Sin

Some sincere people fear that salvation depends upon remembering and naming every sin. No one could meet that requirement. Human memory is incomplete, and much sin occurs before we recognize its full character. The thief confessed his guilt in the words, “We receive the due reward of our deeds.”

Confession does not provide God with information He lacks. It agrees with what God already knows and has said. The thief stopped defending himself. He did not offer a flawless inventory. He came honestly to a sufficient Savior.

INTERPRETIVE RULE Look for repentance in the changed direction toward God and Christ, not merely in the presence of expected religious words.

8. Fruit in a Life with Minutes Remaining

The Thief Did Produce Fruit

It is sometimes said that the thief produced no works. He certainly performed no work that earned salvation. Ephesians 2:8–9 excludes boasting and makes salvation the gift of God. Yet the final moments of the thief’s life did display fruit.

His speech changed. His attitude toward God changed. He rebuked the unbelief of the other criminal. He admitted guilt, defended Christ and confessed allegiance to His kingdom. Before, he stood among those reviling Jesus. Now, he entrusted himself to Jesus.

Fruit Reveals Life

John the Baptist commanded people to bring forth fruits suitable for repentance. Paul spoke of repenting, turning to God and doing works suitable for repentance. The order must remain clear. Fruit does not create the root. Works do not buy grace. Changed conduct reveals the direction of a changed heart.

The quantity of visible fruit depends partly upon time and opportunity. The thief had minutes or hours. A believer who receives many years should expect the new direction to shape those years. The two people may display different quantities of fruit, but the source remains the grace of God.

FRUIT PRINCIPLE The fruit is not the root of salvation, but genuine life should produce fruit when time and opportunity remain.

9. What the Thief Could Not Do

No Opportunity to Build a Religious Record

The thief could not be baptized, join a church, receive communion, return property, repair relationships, serve the poor or demonstrate decades of obedience. His hands and feet were fastened to a cross. His earthly opportunities were disappearing.

Jesus did not therefore give him a lesser salvation or a period in which to prove himself. He said, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." The assurance rested upon the word and mercy of Christ.

Important Fruit Is Still Not Payment

The thief should not be used to dismiss baptism or obedience. Jesus commands believers to be baptized. Christians need the fellowship and instruction of the church. Repentance should lead to restitution when restitution is possible. Grace does not make these responses meaningless.

The passage establishes their proper place. They follow salvation as obedience and fruit. They do not cause Christ to save. The thief's lack of opportunity prevented the outward acts but did not prevent repentance and faith.

GRACE PRINCIPLE The sinner does not cleanse, repair and prove himself so that Jesus will receive him. He comes to Jesus because only Jesus can save him.

10. What Repentance Is Not

Not Penance

Penance attempts to compensate for sin through punishment, religious activity or good deeds. Repentance abandons the attempt to pay for what Christ alone could pay. Sincere restitution may address harm done to another person, but it cannot remove guilt before God.

Not Pre-Salvation Reform

A person may stop drinking, repair a marriage, become disciplined or exchange one destructive habit for a healthier one without turning toward God. Those changes can be valuable, but they are not the same as reconciliation to God through Christ.

Not Instant Perfection

Repentance does not mean promising God that we will never sin again. No one can guarantee sinless performance. A believer may struggle, stumble and require repeated correction. The changed direction appears in a new relationship to God's authority and to sin.

Before repentance, the sinner defends rebellion as a right. After turning toward God, even continuing struggles are brought beneath His verdict. The believer may fall, but he cannot find lasting peace by demanding that God rename evil as good.

Not an Emotional Measurement

Some people weep when they come to Christ. Others respond quietly. Tears can be sincere and meaningful, but their volume is not the measure of repentance. The question is not how intensely a person felt. It is whether the person turned toward God and trusted Christ.

PASTORAL LIMIT Do not require perfect words, perfect memory, perfect emotion or immediate maturity. Require no substitute for an honest turning toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.

11. What Repentance Means for Us Today

For the Person Seeking Salvation

The thief removes the excuse that a person must first become respectable enough for Jesus. He came guilty, condemned and unable to repair his past. Christ received him. No one should conclude that a ruined history places him beyond the reach of grace.

The other thief removes the excuse that physical need or nearness to Christian things is enough. A person may attend church, know Biblical language, ask God for help and remain resistant to His authority. Salvation calls us beyond admiration or desperation to repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.

For the Person Planning to Wait

The thief proves that Christ can save at the final hour. He does not promise that anyone will receive such an hour. No one knows whether death will provide warning, whether the mind will remain clear or whether years of rejection will leave the heart even harder.

Two thieves hung beside Jesus. One repented and the other did not. The correct application is not, "I can wait." It is, "To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

For the Christian

Repentance begins in conversion, but a repentant posture continues in Christian life. Believers are not saved again whenever they confess sin. The finished work of Christ remains sufficient. Yet children of God should remain tender when His Word exposes failure.

First John 1:9 calls believers to confession and promises forgiveness and cleansing. Christian repentance refuses the exhausting work of defending sin. It agrees with God, receives correction and returns to obedience.

MINISTRY POSTURE Offer grace to the guilty, truth to the self-deceived, urgency to the delaying and patient correction to the believer who is struggling toward obedience.

12. Two Thieves, Two Responses

The Same Jesus Was Between Them

Both men were guilty. Both were condemned. Both suffered beside the same Jesus. Both heard His words and faced approaching death. The difference was not that one had lived a respectable life or possessed time to build a better record.

One continued demanding that Jesus prove Himself through physical rescue. The other feared God, admitted guilt and entrusted himself to the King. One wanted deliverance without surrender. The other appealed for mercy.

Near Jesus or in Christ

Physical nearness did not save the first criminal. Religious surroundings do not save us today. A person can be near a Bible, church, pastor or Christian family and remain outside of Christ. The saving question concerns our response to Jesus.

The thief's final words were brief, but their direction was clear. He turned toward Jesus. Jesus answered with more grace than he had requested. He asked to be remembered in the coming kingdom. Jesus promised that he would be with Him that very day.

ENDURING COUNSEL One thief wanted Jesus to change his circumstances. The other had experienced a change within himself. One died near Jesus. The other died in Christ.

13. Conclusion: Did the Thief Repent?

Yes. The thief did not merely ask for a place in paradise. His appeal came from a changed understanding of God, guilt, justice and Jesus Christ. He stopped defending himself and entrusted his eternal future to the mercy of the crucified King.

His salvation does not make repentance unnecessary. It shows us the essential reality of repentance when ceremony, restitution and years of visible conduct are impossible. His remaining moments displayed the inward turn through changed words and allegiance.

The account leaves every reader with a personal question. Have I confused regret with repentance? Do I want Jesus Himself or only relief from consequences? Am I trusting a prayer, ceremony, improved behavior or religious history? Or have I turned toward God and placed my faith in Jesus Christ alone?

FINAL ANSWER The thief never said, "I repent." He showed us repentance. The question now is whether we have responded to Jesus as he did.

A Personal Invitation to Receive Jesus Christ

Whether you are sitting here with us today, watching this message online or reading this study somewhere far away, these next words are for you.

You do not have to wait until the end of the service, be inside a church building or have a pastor standing beside you to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior.

You can come to Him right now, wherever you are.

First, admit to God that you are a sinner and cannot save yourself.

Believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He died on the cross for your sins, that He was buried and that He rose again.

Turn toward God in repentance and place your faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

Romans 10:9 says, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

Romans 10:10 continues, “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

You may call upon Him in your own words. You can tell Him that you know you are a sinner. You can acknowledge that you cannot earn forgiveness or save yourself. You can tell Him that you believe Jesus died for your sins and rose again. You can turn toward Him and place your faith in Jesus Christ alone.

The prayer does not save you. The pastor does not save you. The church does not save you. Baptism does not save you. Jesus Christ saves.

Romans 10:13 says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

A Closing Prayer

Our Heavenly Father,

Thank You for showing us the mercy of Jesus through the thief on the cross. Thank You that salvation does not depend upon our ability to repair the past, perform religious works or produce perfect words.

Teach us to understand genuine repentance. Keep us from confusing sorrow over consequences with a heart that has turned toward You. Keep us from trusting ceremonies, emotions or our own improvement.

For anyone who has never trusted Christ, use Your Word to bring that person to repentance and faith today. For those who already belong to You, keep our hearts tender, honest and willing to return when You correct us.

Thank You that Jesus died for our sins, was buried and rose again. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Selected Sources

Primary Scripture

Luke 23:32–43 KJV, with Matthew 27:38, 44 and Mark 15:27, 32 used for comparison.

Supporting passages include Isaiah 55:6–7; Matthew 3:8; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3; Luke 24:46–47; Acts 3:19; Acts 11:18; Acts 17:30; Acts 20:21; Acts 26:20; 2 Corinthians 7:9–10; Ephesians 2:8–10; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 2 Timothy 2:25; Titus 3:5; 2 Peter 3:9 and 1 John 1:9.

Language and Translation Resources

The Greek terms commonly associated with repentance, turning and regret were examined to distinguish a changed mind directed toward God from remorse alone. The King James Version remains the controlling text. The manuscript difference between “Lord, remember me” and “Jesus, remember me” was noted without making the conclusion depend upon it.

Pastoral Note

This commentary is designed to accompany the approved Reason Together Study, not replace the sermon transcript or internal Study Vault. Its purpose is to provide a readable public explanation of the major Biblical reasoning, preserve important pastoral distinctions and help readers apply the question personally.

REASON TOGETHER Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let’s Reason Together the Word of God.