



The Key to Paradise:

That flaming, flashing sword was keeping Paradise safe. No one could open the gates Christ closed. The thief was the first to enter with Christ. His great faith received the greatest of rewards. His faith in the kingdom did not depend on seeing Christ. He did not see him in his radiant glory or behold him looking down from heaven. He did not see the angels serving him. To put it plainly, he certainly did not see Christ walking about in freedom, but on a gibbet, drinking vinegar and crowned with thorns. He saw him fastened to the cross and heard him begging for help, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"...The cross of Christ is the key to paradise. The cross of Christ opened it.

—St. Jerome

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Around the Word Bible Study

Lent, 2017

The Seven Words of the Cross The Second Word

Lesson Overview:

In the popular Advent hymn we sing these words:

*O Come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!*



Now in the season of Lent we see the fulfillment of these words in the events of Holy Week. As Adam was overcome by the serpent and the tree of the garden, Jesus, the second Adam overcomes Satan by means of the tree of the cross. And as Adam and Eve were barred from returning into paradise by the Cherubim's flaming sword, Christ has opened the gates to an eternal Eden by his death on the cross.

Many of the early church fathers confessed: *Crux Christi clavis Paradisi*, that is, the cross of Christ is the key to paradise. This was true for the thief on the cross. And it is true for you as well. The cross of Christ is your key to paradise. Jesus, the innocent one, takes on all our guilt, shame, sin, and death in our place, and in exchange gives us his righteousness, holiness, life, and salvation. By his death, Jesus has opened the kingdom of heaven to all you and all believers. In Holy Baptism Jesus gives you the same promise he made to the thief on the cross: *today you will be with me in paradise*. Jesus' second word on the cross also reminds us of his word to us in Revelation 1:17-18: "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."

Opening: Psalm 32

¹Blessed is the one whose transgression is
for- | given,*
whose sin is | covered.

²**Blessed is the man against whom the
LORD counts no in- | iquity,*
and in whose spirit there is | no deceit.**

³For when I kept silent, my bones wast- | ed
away*
through my groaning | all day long.

⁴**For day and night your hand was heavy
up- | on me;*
my strength was dried up as by the
heat of | summer.**

⁵I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my in- | iquity;*
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to
the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity |

of my sin.

⁶**Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you |
may be found;*
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not | reach him.**

⁷You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from | trouble;*
you surround me with shouts of de- | liver
ance.

⁸**I will instruct you and teach you in the
way | you should go;*
I will counsel you with my eye up- | on
you.**

⁹Be not like a horse or a mule, without under-
| standing,*
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay | near you.

¹⁰Many are the sorrows of the | wicked,*
but steadfast love surrounds the one who
trusts | in the LORD.

¹¹Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O |
righteous,*
and shout for joy, all you up- | right in heart!
**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son*
and to the Holy | Spirit;
as it was in the be- | ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

Read Luke 23:35-43

vs. 35: And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"

Who are the "rulers" voicing this mockery at Jesus? What is the temptation veiled in these words mocking Jesus? Why does Jesus not give in to their jeering?

vs. 36-37: The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"

In the crucifixion account in Matthew 27:34ff, Matthew records that Jesus was offered sour wine mixed with gall, but he would not drink it. Why doesn't he drink of it? What kind of king do the Roman soldiers have in mind as they ridicule Jesus?

vs. 38: There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

What kind of king were many Jewish people looking for in the Messiah? In what ways did Jesus differ from their false expectations?

Although the sign above his head was made as further mockery, how does it speak the truth about who Jesus is? How does John's Gospel add to the account of the sign above Jesus at his crucifixion? See John 19:17-22.

vs. 39-41: One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condem-

nation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." What does it mean to fear God? See also Proverbs 9:10; Psalm 111:10; Psalm 103:11-13.

What is so remarkable about the confession of the thief concerning Jesus' sentence on the cross? Read Isaiah 53 and 1 Peter 3:18. Considering the thief's confession of Jesus' innocence, why is Jesus' crucifixion frequently called "the great exchange"?



vs. 42: And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Where in Jesus' life is he referred to as king? Read Matthew 2:1-12; Matthew 4:12-17; Matthew 6:10; the parables of Matthew 13; Matthew 21:1-11; Matthew 27:32-44; Matthew 28:18-20; Revelation 5; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20.

How is the cross the clearest picture of Christ's kingdom? What is the thief asking of Jesus? Where does Jesus' kingdom come among us today?

vs. 43: And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." To what is Jesus referring by the word "paradise"?

How is Jesus' work on the cross a work of new creation? See Romans 5:12-21.

What is significant about Jesus' use of the word "today"?

What is comforting about Jesus' words to the thief on the cross? Where do we hear similar words of promise today in the context of Sunday morning worship?

Closing Prayer: Jesus, in Your Dying Woes (LSB, 447:4-6)

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