

Good Friday
Luke 23: 32-43

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with Him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified Him, along with the criminals—one on His right, the other on His left. Jesus said: Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. And they divided up His clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at Him. They said: He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ of God, the Chosen One. The soldiers also came up and mocked Him. They offered Him wine vinegar and said: If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself.

There was a written notice above Him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Him: Aren't You the Christ? 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: I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise. (Luke 23:32-43)

Why did God execute his own Son between two thieves? One explanation is that God is making an important point here. These thieves are a kind of representation of the human race - thieves!

You've probably never thought of yourself as a thief. But when I ask myself: "Do I live as a giver or a taker?" That's something that makes me stop and think about it a little bit more.

Often we see life as a possession that we own. We assume that my life belongs to me and I am the focus of it all. However, God has a plan for your life and when you don't live it, then you have in effect stolen your life away from the God who gave it to you.

"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord (Jeremiah 29:11)

According to the Bible, your life is not your possession to take. You do not own your life. Your life is given to you as a gift from God. And when we live like we own our own lives, we live like thieves. Not unlike the men who were crucified alongside Jesus.

In one sense these two men were the same, they were both criminals. However, they are also very different. What differentiates them from each other is their response to Jesus.

One is a cynic so he looks at Jesus and with hostility he spits out:

Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us" (Luke 23:39)

He's a taker; only concerned about himself.

The second thief is different. This criminal decides to speak up for Jesus

"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. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom (Luke 23:40-42)

This thief has given up taking. He knows he's guilty and he surrenders to Jesus – he gives his life, his future to Jesus. He becomes a giver.

Jesus goes way beyond the criminal's request. Not only will this man be remembered but, Jesus said, ...

Today you'll be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23:43)

WHAT NOW?

The question is not “Are you a thief? We all are.” The most important question is, which side of the cross are you on? Are you the cynical thief? Do you resist God because things haven’t gone your way? Or do you see that “Yes” you are a thief – you have stolen control of your life away from God – yet here is Jesus holding out the gift of forgiveness? Will you receive it? You don't have to steal it, it's a gift. All you need to do is pray to him and receive it.