

The Power of Repentance – The Thief On The Cross

Teaching – Dec. 7, 2025

Summary

The provided text is an excerpt from a sermon titled "The Thief on The Cross," which focuses on the **power of repentance** and its continuous nature, asserting that it is equivalent to ongoing **change** in a believer's life. The speaker begins by emphasizing that repentance is **central to the Christian faith** and not a one-time past event, directly challenging what are described as modern religious systems that dilute this requirement for present-tense change. A major portion of the teaching analyses the account of the **thief on the cross** (Luke 23), arguing that the traditional interpretation—that the thief went to heaven immediately upon death—is a "lie" that corrupts fundamental Christian doctrines like the resurrection and the future earthly kingdom of God. The speaker uses scriptural context and grammatical analysis, particularly the placement of a comma in Luke 23:43, to support the claim that **Paradise** refers to Christ's future **earthly kingdom** and that the thief, like Jesus, remained dead until the resurrection.

Study Guide

I. Overview: The Centrality of Repentance

The subject of this study is **The Power of Repentance**, a concept often gravely underestimated in many people's minds. The teaching asserts that repentance is **not optional** and must be central to our everyday living as followers of Jesus Christ.

A. Defining Repentance (Change)

- **Repentance equals ongoing change:** We must make a mental switch and substitute the term "repentance" with the term "**change**". Repentance is defined as **ongoing change in the present tense**, not just a historical, one-time act in the past (e.g., repenting at age 16),.
- **Linguistic Imperative:** From a scriptural point of view, the word *repent* is a **present infinitive verb** or a **present active imperative**, which depicts a continuous or ongoing action. It conveys a command to "keep on repenting" or "be repenting".
- **Intrinsic Link to the Gospel:** Jesus Christ began his ministry by correlating repentance directly with believing the gospel (Mark 1:15): "**Repent and believe in the gospel**",. These two truths are **intrinsically**

linked and cannot be separated. If a person claims to believe the gospel but shows no change in their lifestyle, they are being untruthful, as change should be obvious when repentance occurs.

B. Repentance, Conditions, and False Doctrines

- **God's Conditions:** The Bible, from Genesis through Revelation, is jam-packed with **God's conditions**, such as His commandments. The sources emphasize that God is **conditional**, not unconditional.
- **Challenging the "Grace Gospel":** Religious systems of this age often fuel the error of past-tense repentance and dilute the necessity of present-tense change. They teach the so-called "**grace gospel**," which twists the line doctrine of God being unconditional, thereby sidestepping the absolute requirement for **change in the present tense**.
- **Repentance and Good Works:** Repentance (change) is tied to "**good works**," which are highly relevant today. The sources cite the apostle James: "**faith without works is dead**".

II. Case Study: The Thief on the Cross (Luke 23)

The section of scripture regarding the thief on the cross (Luke 23) is often misused to teach the complete opposite of what it communicates—the lie that the dead are alive immediately in paradise or heaven,. The sources contend that this record actually proves the dead are dead until the resurrection.

A. The Lie and Its Consequences

- **Defining the Lie:** The "**lie**" (or the falsehood, referenced in John 8:44) is the erroneous belief that the dead are currently alive in heaven or paradise as **immortal souls** the moment they die.
- **Impact on Faith:** This lie destroys the whole Christian faith because it does away with the explicit hope of life being only in the **resurrection** and negates the need for **judgment before the Lord**.
- **The Thief's Fate:** The thief went to the same place everyone else who has died goes: straight into the grave to turn back to dust and a **long sleep**. He remains dead until the resurrection.

B. The Power of Repentance in Luke 23

- **The Thief's Change:** The thief's last act and words were an act of **repentance**. He initiated this change because **God activated His power**

- on that man, demonstrating the incredible power of repentance.
- **The Thief's Request:** The thief rebuked the other criminal, acknowledging they were suffering justly. He asked Jesus, "remember me **when** you come into your kingdom".
 - **The Nature of Faith:** The thief's faith was stunning; he looked at another dying man suffering shame and believed that man was the king who would rise to rule over his kingdom.

III. Linguistic and Contextual Proofs

To correctly understand Jesus's words to the thief, context and correct linguistic analysis are critical.

A. The Future Kingdom (When)

- **Future Tense:** The thief's request used the word "**when**," indicating **time** was involved,. Jesus spoke of the **future kingdom of God**.
- **Immediate Context (Luke 22):** Just prior to the crucifixion, Jesus made clear that the Kingdom of God was future, stating he would not eat the Passover or drink the fruit of the vine again "**until** it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God", or "**until** the kingdom of God comes". This confirms the conversation on the cross centered around the **future kingdom of God to come**.

B. Paradise vs. Heaven

- **Heaven is Not in View:** The term "heaven" is **never used** in the context of this specific interaction,. Heaven is God's habitation, a completely different word and place.
- **Definition of Paradise:** The term "**paradise**" is **always** directly related to a place right here **on earth**. The Hebrew word *pardes* relates to "garden" and is used in scripture to relate to earthly gardens and orchards. Jesus referred to the thief entering into Christ's **coming restored earthly kingdom**.

C. The Timeline of Ascension

- **Jesus Did Not Ascend That Day:** It was impossible for Jesus to take the thief to heaven or paradise immediately that day because Jesus Himself was heading into the grave to be **stone dead for three days and three nights**.

- **Post-Resurrection Timeline:** After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His apostles over a period of **40 days**, speaking of the things concerning **the kingdom of God**.
- **The Actual Ascension:** Jesus commanded Mary not to cling to him immediately after resurrection because He had "**not yet ascended to my Father**" (John 20:17). Jesus was "taken up from you into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11) **43 days after the crucifixion**. Furthermore, Jesus was exalted into the Holy of Holies at the right hand side of God, a location where **only one man** (the high priest exalted by God) could enter.

D. The Punctuation Error in Luke 23:43

- **The Corrupted Reading:** The majority of translations place the comma after "you," leading to the interpretation that the event happens "today". This modern punctuation was standardized much later (16th and 17th centuries) and was **not** placed there by the inspiration of God.
- **The Corrected Reading: Context and the subject matter** should be the determining factor for punctuation. The verse should read, "Truly I say to you **today, comma**, you shall be with me in paradise". This correction ensures the verse fits perfectly with all other verses related to the whole subject of **death and returning to dust until the resurrection**.

Review Questions

(Note: All answers are found exclusively in the study material derived from the sources.)

A. Short Answer & Definition

- What term should followers of Jesus Christ substitute for "repentance" to enhance their understanding?
- What specific quality of action does the word "repent" (as a present infinitive verb) depict?
- According to Mark 1:15, what two concepts are intrinsically linked?
- Why does the false teaching that souls go immediately to heaven upon death destroy the whole Christian faith?
- What Hebrew word for "paradise" is translated in English as "garden" or "orchard"?

B. Contextual & Chronological Application

- In Luke 23:42, the thief asked Jesus to remember him "when" He came into His kingdom. What concept does "when" depict?
- What evidence from Luke 22 (the immediate context) confirms that Jesus was speaking of the future, not the present, fulfillment of the Kingdom of God?
- How long did Jesus remain dead in the tomb before His resurrection?
- After His resurrection, but before His ascension, for how many days did Jesus appear to His disciples, and what was the main topic of His preaching?
- Where must the comma be correctly placed in Luke 23:43 to ensure the verse aligns with all other scriptures concerning death and resurrection?

C. True or False

- Repentance is an optional add-on to the Christian faith.
- The term "immortal souls" is used in the context of the thief on the cross.
- Paradise, as used by Jesus, refers to God's current habitation in heaven.
- Jesus ascended to heaven directly from the cross on the day of his crucifixion.
- Jesus ascended into the Holy of Holies, a place where only the High Priest could go.

Answer Key

- Followers of Jesus Christ should substitute "repentance" with the term **"change"** to enhance their understanding.
- The word "repent" (as a present infinitive verb or present active imperative) depicts a **continuous or ongoing action in the present tense**.
- According to Mark 1:15, the two concepts that are intrinsically linked are **repentance and believing in the gospel**.
- The false teaching that souls go immediately to heaven upon death (the lie) destroys the whole Christian faith because it does away with the explicit hope of life being only in the **resurrection** and negates the need for **judgment before the Lord**.
- The Hebrew word for "paradise" is *parades* (P A R D S), which is

translated in English to relate to **earthly gardens and orchards**.

- In Luke 23:42, the thief asked Jesus to remember him "when" He came into His kingdom; "when" depicts **time** involved,.
- Jesus confirmed He was speaking of the future fulfillment of the Kingdom of God by stating He would not eat the Passover or drink the fruit of the vine again "**until** it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God", or "**until** the kingdom of God comes".
- Jesus remained **three days and three nights** dead in the tomb, before His resurrection.
- After His resurrection, but before His ascension, Jesus appeared to His disciples over a period of **40 days**,, speaking of the things concerning **the kingdom of God**.
- The comma must be correctly placed **after the word "today"** in Luke 23:43, so that the correct reading is: "Truly I say to you today, comma, you shall be with me in paradise".
- **False**. Repentance is **not optional** and should be central to our lives,.
- **False**. The term "immortal souls" is **never used** in this context, nor anywhere else in scripture.
- **False**. Paradise relates to the **restored Garden of Eden on earth**; it is not God's current habitation (heaven).
- **False**. Jesus died and was in the grave for three days and three nights,., He ascended into heaven **43 days** after the crucifixion.
- **True**. Jesus was exalted into the Holy of Holies at the right hand side of God, a location where **only one man** (the high priest exalted by God) could go.

Exhortation

Key Area	Actionable Insight / Exhortation
Centrality of Repentance	Ensure repentance becomes a central part of all of our lives , recognizing that repentance is not optional .
The True Meaning of Repentance	Make a mental switch to substitute "repentance" with the term " change ". Repentance equals ongoing change in the present tense . We must initiate ongoing change in our lives.

The Imperative for Action	Do not leave repentance in the past tense, but drag it into the present ,. Recognize that the word <i>repent</i> conveys a command to "keep on repenting" or "be repenting".
Repentance and Good Works	Remember that good works are very relevant because they are tied to repentance (which is change). Anyone claiming belief in the gospel without change in lifestyle is being untruthful, as change should be obvious when people have repented.
Rejecting False Doctrines	Be aware of religious systems that fuel the error of past-tense repentance and dilute the requirement of present-tense change. Recognize that the "grace gospel" twists the doctrine of God and sidesteps the necessity of change.
The Danger of "The Lie"	We cannot afford to underestimate "the lie" . It destroys the whole Christian faith because it does away with the explicit hope of life being only in the resurrection and negates the need for judgment before the Lord.
Reading Luke 23 Correctly	Use context and the subject matter —not church theology—to determine the truth of scripture. Understand that the section on the thief on the cross actually serves as a proof text for the truth that the dead are dead until the resurrection at the end of this age.
Understanding the Promise	Recognize that "paradise" referred to Christ's coming restored earthly kingdom , not heaven. Note that Jesus ascended alone into the Holy of Holies, confirming the thief did not go with him that day,.
Emulating the Thief's Faith	Meditate on the dynamic power of repentance shown by the thief,. His request to be remembered was an act of faith, recognizing Jesus as the King who would rule over His kingdom.