

Homeward Bound

"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Luke 23:43 (NIV)

It was many years ago now when I was in sales for a large multinational company. From time to time I had the privilege of sharing my faith in Jesus to different people in the office and on the sales force.

One fellow heard me out one day and then responded in some anger with the words, "I could never believe in a religion that allows people to live evil lives and then have all their sins removed at the last minute and off they go to heaven."

Of course he was referring to the story in Luke's Gospel about the repentant thief who called on Jesus at the last for salvation from his life of crime. I suppose this is one of the most memorable stories in the Bible simply because it seems so dramatic and, to some people, unjust.

I was taken back by the passion in his voice. I thought it best not to seek to defend the story except to mention to him that when we speak of amazing grace the story is a good example of just how amazing God's grace really happens to be.

The person who spoke so vigorously to me happened to be a fine husband, father and employee. I had no doubts about his integrity on a human level.

He was really a solid citizen. However, that was his problem. He truly believed that the good works he performed in society at large and in his personal life would some day merit him going to heaven.

What my friend did not understand was that God does not only look at our outward behaviour. He also sees inside our hearts, into the recesses of our being. What does He find there? Jesus spoke clearly to this point one day when He said that we can murder people with our words Matthew 5:21-22.

When we shout in anger at someone and call the person names we verbally abuse them and in God's sight it is a form of murder. Jesus also said a person can commit adultery without a physical act being done.

In Matthew 5:27-28 (NIV) Jesus says,

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

When sin is defined in this manner we are forced to recognize that we all fall far short

of the mark in life regardless of how good we are externally. The man on the cross who got into heaven after a life of crime sinned in other ways than law abiding citizens, but all come short of the mark to a greater or lesser degree.

Jesus offers to anyone the privilege of being absolved of their sins regardless of whether they are external or in our thoughts.

There is only one story of a person being delivered from their sins at death that no one should despair, but only one so that no one should presume. It was a wise Anglican bishop named J.C. Ryle who made that telling comment.

If you struggle with some particular temptation or sin in life, Jesus can deliver you from it if you are willing. You can call on Him to remove your temptation and He will certainly show you how to overcome. But you must come. Come today and be homeward bound.

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