
	<p style="text-align: center;">The Order of St James (UK).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Theologia Apologetica: September 2025</p> <p style="text-align: center;">www.orderofstjames.info</p>	
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Matthew 27:38-44: New International Version – UK

38 Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, ‘You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!’ 41 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 42 ‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, “I am the Son of God.”’ 44 In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Luke 23:39-43: New International Version – UK

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: ‘Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’

40 But the other criminal rebuked him. ‘Don’t you fear God,’ he said, ‘since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’

42 Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'

43 Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'

Sometimes, there appears to be differences of opinion in what was remembered by different Gospel writers over the same events, and the events surrounding the crucifixion narrative is just another example.

Matthew records the abuse and humiliation Jesus suffered, and makes clear the charges to which he was accused and condemned for. But he does not record the incident with the penitent thief.

Luke does, and he does it in such an economic way, but he does not deal with the theology behind it. That is left for the reader to work out. Just as well as it is quite problematic.

The words of the penitent thief cover judgement, punishment and justice, (the Judicial Model) and are also a subtle condemnation of those who have condemned Jesus unjustly.

There is intelligence at work here. But the request to be remembered when Jesus comes into His Kingdom?

Did the thief know what he was asking?

Jesus replies, *'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'*

Does it imply that no matter how evil you are, a single act of kindness may get you into paradise, especially when there is no sign of contrition for sins, just a recognition that an injustice has been committed towards another? What about being 'saved' and 'baptised'? Are they theologically necessary?

Based on the very few given facts, apparently not. It doesn't sit well with some church tradition and teaching.

Oh yes, there are lots of traditions around the two thieves crucified with Jesus, but that is just what they are, traditions and stories. They are not 'facts' per se and cannot be counted as evidence when it comes to getting to the truth.

Those few short sentences in Luke do not say whether the thief was either penitent or baptised.

What it does say is

1. they were guilty as charged and deserving of their punishment and
2. Jesus was innocent of the charges made against him and not deserving of the punishment he was subjected to.

The penitent thief's words, 'remember me when you come into your kingdom' **could possibly** therefore be interpreted as 'remember I spoke up for you and told the people you were innocent!'

It also suggests that the penitent thief knew of Jesus' reputation but knew his situation was irretrievable and he must give up earthly hope; hence talk of 'when you come into your kingdom'. It suggests embryonic faith. That does not mean these conclusions are to be considered fact though.

As emotive and captivating as these thoughts are, they are not evidence, and nothing that could support any kind of working applicable salvation theology or be built upon. 'Could's', 'might be's', 'perhaps might suggest's' are not proofs. They remain optimistic and plausible opinions but are not evidential truths on their own.

The penitent thief may actually have been penitent, he may not have been, but whatever he was experiencing Jesus made him a promise, and that was not given without good reason. It had purpose and meaning sufficient to be included in Luke's Gospel and at odds almost with Matthew's account.

Matthew did not include this incident but that did not mean it didn't happen. It just means it was not included in his account.

There is also another possibility in that these verses in Luke were added later.

There is a slight whiff of St Paul's 'salvation by faith and faith alone' in these verses (they were good friends) so this could perhaps be a later revision, but again I counsel caution. One must look at facts rather than conspiracy theories no matter how much more exciting they may appear.

Rather differently I think there may be a different reason for including this text.

It fits perfectly with Jesus own Gospel teaching. The penitent thief teaches in his words the principles of the Great Commandments, 'love God' (a just and righteous God), and his kindness towards Jesus' innocence and the injustice he has endured as 'love your neighbour'.

In this I find sufficient justification in accepting the penitent thief's position and accepting his welcome into the kingdom of God.

The 'remember me....' is very much a 'remember you are not alone, I know you are innocent and have been treated unjustly'. I sense the support and compassion in my mind's eye but that does not make it fact, just a figment of my own creation.

It's not 'fact'. Just an opinion (and this is important). But it would in my mind certainly qualify the penitent thief for fulfilling all that is required by law.

And the reference to the Kingdom, Jesus preached 'the Kingdom is upon you right now'. There is nothing to say that the penitent thief did not recognise or benefit from that in some way. Equally, there is nothing to say that he did.

Only guesswork.... We can only make a best guess but have to be careful we aren't just fabricating something that supports our own personal denominational theology or reinforce our own personal prejudices.

I suppose it is what it says to us as individuals that matters. And I would argue that as being more important is many ways than the combined and definitive theology of the church.

It is the individual brick that goes to make up the building, not the building that makes the brick. The fact it is different in size or colour or texture makes little difference in the end, but without the brick there is no building.

Think 'the corner stone that was rejected'.

One little fly in the ointment is the word 'paradise' in Jesus' own words, *'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'*

There are those who argue that 'paradise' is different to 'heaven'.

What do you think? Nitpicking? Are they the same or different?

Or is this someone trying to say that they are different and one is better than the other? Or even a pre-judgement version of sorting out saints and sinners?

Words are a theologian's archaeological treasure trove and a source of many unimportant and insignificant doctorates and publications. They delight in controversy and the novel and can make much of textual nuance that the common man would just ignore as not worth his attention.

So have a look at this as being typical of a theologian's view of the Luke text. This unbelievably focusses on something as little as the placing of a comma.

'It is common knowledge that punctuation, including commas, was introduced into the biblical manuscripts centuries after the books were completed.'

Therefore, commas are not authoritative.

However, the placement of commas can affect our understanding of a text. For example, in [Luke 23](#), one of the [thieves](#) crucified next to Jesus says, ““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](#)’” (verses 42-43). Commas help us keep the original phrasing intact.

Was Jesus saying, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me . . .” (meaning that “today” is when the thief would be in paradise)? Or was He saying, “I tell you the truth today, you will be with me . . .” (meaning that “today” is when Jesus was speaking”)?

*First, we note that every major Bible translation inserts the comma **before** the word today. Thus, the KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV, ESV, and RSV all agree that Jesus was speaking of the time that the thief would enter paradise. The thief would be in paradise with Jesus on that very same day.*

*Also, Jesus prefaced His response with the phrase, “I tell you the truth” (“[Verily](#) I say unto thee” in the KJV). Many scholars have noticed that Jesus uses this as a **prefix phrase** when He is about to say something that should be listened to with care. Seventy-six times in the New Testament, Jesus uses the phrase. Interestingly, no one but Jesus ever says it.*

When the Lord says "I tell you the truth," He is affirming that what He is about to say is worthy of special attention. It was Jesus' way of saying, "Listen up! What I'm about to say is very important and should be listened to carefully." We're too used to hearing the phrase to appreciate the astonishing authority it expresses and the often solemn nature of the announcement that follows. In every one of the 76 times Christ uses this introductory phrase; He simply says it and then makes a startling statement.

It would be strange indeed if, in this one instance, Jesus departed from His normal way of making His signature statement by adding the word today to it.

*In every case where this sort of introductory phrase is used, Greek scholars add a punctuation break **after** the phrase in question and **before** the rest of the statement. So, the translators have it right. The comma in [Luke 23:43](#) belongs where they put it.*

Source: [What did Jesus mean when He said, "Today you will be with me in paradise"? | GotQuestions.org](#)

Useful theology should clarify, not confuse. Our God is not one of confusion and chaos but of stability and clarity. More on this topic.....

Is 'paradise' different to 'heaven'?

Paradise is a place of blessing where the righteous go after death. The word paradise is usually used as a synonym for "heaven" ([Revelation 2:7](#)).

When Jesus was dying on the cross and one of the thieves being crucified with Him asked Him for mercy, Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" ([Luke 23:43](#)). Jesus knew that His death was imminent and that He would soon be in heaven with His Father.

Therefore, Jesus used "paradise" as a synonym for "heaven." The apostle Paul wrote of someone (probably himself) who "was caught up to paradise" ([2 Corinthians 12:3](#)). In this context, paradise obviously refers to heaven.

There has always been a separation of believers and unbelievers after death ([Luke 16:19-31](#)).

The righteous have always gone to paradise; the wicked have always gone to hell.....

There are cases in which paradise can refer to the Garden of Eden, such in the Douay-Rheims translation of [Genesis 3:8](#), which speaks of Adam and Eve hiding "amidst the trees of paradise."

The context of the word will determine whether it refers to heaven or Eden. Paradise is a place of blessing where the righteous go after death. The word paradise is usually used as a synonym for "heaven" ([Revelation 2:7](#)).

A great lesson I learned from the Jesuits is that much theology is unnecessary and if it doesn't help you live your Christian life day by day then it is a burden and encumbrance. It has its place but don't leave it unattended or it will wander off and cause much trouble. And remember, many of our leaders and teachers get confused when it comes to their opinions and biblical fact.

I'll give you an example.

Whatever you extrapolate from Luke's short and very economic recounting of the penitent thief's story, it does have some bearing on last month's newsletter on assisted dying.

Jesus could have taken away the pain endured by the thieves crucified either side of him. It would have been an act of mercy to have ended their lives so quickly rather than let them linger and suffer greatly as their deaths were designed to be as publicly humiliating and as painful as possible as a warning to the people of Jerusalem. Rome ruled and it could be very cruel and merciless in the way it enforced its presence. The two thieves went on I believe to suffer further pain in the breaking of their legs to hasten their deaths (not an act of compassion but convenience) rather than conflict the rules about Sabbath observance and offend Jewish sentiment and feeling.

Jesus could have acted to end their suffering but he did not. Instead Jesus shared their pain and suffering until his own death.

You could argue then that Godly compassion is not about terminating life/suffering but about end of life care, and Assisted Dying is just wrong.

But it remains opinion, even if it has all the hallmarks of truth and holiness.

Another example.

What there is no doubt about is that, somehow, the penitent thief was promised he would be with Jesus that same day.

Depending on one's beliefs it would be easy to fill in the gaps with one's own personal experience and theological hopes, but they would be assumptions, however plausible, and not based on the recorded facts. To do such a thing would make us guilty of manipulating and reshaping the truth to our own conveniences and desires, and there is great danger in doing that.

So, depending on your own denominational teaching, doctrine and belief of salvation, what are the facts that lead you to believe the penitent thief was 'saved'?

Where is the account of confessing Jesus as Lord or the overwhelming sense of guilt and release or tears of remorse?

Where is the believer's baptism one is required to have to be 'saved'?

Where even was the request or intention to be 'saved'?

Was the penitent thief even 'penitent' even though he had confessed his guilt?

They are simply not there in the account. We have filled in the gaps.

All we can say about this particular incident without distorting the truth is

1. the penitent thief accepted his punishment as a just and righteous one,
2. he recognised Jesus was innocent, his punishment was unjust, and spoke out against that injustice,
3. he asked that Jesus remembered him,
4. and Jesus responded with those wonderful words of promise. His decision.

Those are the facts regardless of what personal view of salvation we have, and

5. this is unique in the Gospels. There is nothing like it elsewhere.
6. Unusually for Luke, he only gives us the bare essentials and no explanation.
7. We therefore cannot know why it was included or what he intended us to learn or draw from it. He didn't tell us.
8. What we can say is it was important enough to be included even if dismissed by the other Gospel writers.

The same goes for our views on salvation and being 'saved'. Our model regarding the mechanism of salvation may not fit the penitent thief model facts, but what I do know is that we will every attempt to make it fit our own understanding by adding in our own pieces to the story to make it work.

We may argue the case that our model of salvation is the correct one doctrinally but unless clearly stated in Holy Scripture it remains just opinion. However ardently we might believe, plausible argument does not make our opinion biblical fact however convincing it may seem at the time.

In the end only God can judge us and decide who is 'worthy', and it is not our job to do that for Him. We may have opinions based on what Holy Scripture states but they are nothing more than opinions and cannot be counted as God's Word.

Our best guesses and interpretations of Holy Scripture will remain what they are and must not be considered or treated as 'the truth' however plausible or believable they sound. Ever. To do so is a betrayal of our responsibilities as priests, and a betrayal of God and His people.

And we must be exceptionally careful to preserve biblical truth and not distort it with our own prejudices and desires, however holy the intent may seem.

At the present time the church seems to be more opinion led rather than be led by true doctrine and sound biblical teaching. And the world is suffering because of this. We appear to have lost our way and our leadership.

As priests, our job is to let the bible inform and lead our thinking, not as so often is evident these days, to make Holy Scripture fit what people want to hear and give justification to do what is unGodly.

For them, popular opinion has little to do with God on the whole, only 'self'.

We are here to preserve the truth, not teach and lead others into error and lead them into eternal damnation. And that inevitably means we and the biblical truths we speak will never be globally welcomed, even rejected.

Even amongst those who ought to be considered 'our own kind'. I'm sure we have all experienced that at some time.

Nobody really wants to hear the truth when they have different opinions.

(Just as an aside, when Jesus said, 'the truth shall set you free', there is an interesting implication that untruths will bring you into bondage.)

And finally, referencing the reading from Matthew, applying the same principles as were applied to Luke, is Matthew's version a contradiction of or even a denial of Luke's recount?

No.

The two accounts within the period of the crucifixion period are different and recall different things from different perspectives and even possibly with some differences in time as viewed by different authors. That is all that can safely be said about the content relationship.

One can infer that the accounts have different purposes and are recounted accordingly, but it is the factual content that is the key.

Anything else is opinion or interpretation or hypothesis or exposition and whilst based on 'fact' may not be factual at all.

Example:

From the two texts we can infer that Matthew and Luke were personally at odds with one another and publically denied the truth and substance of the other's account in their respective Gospels.

We do know that Matthew and Luke probably disliked one another. Luke was close friends of Paul and sided with Paul when he fell out with the Apostles.

Matthew went so far as to deny some aspects of the truth of Luke's account of the crucifixion, which is why Luke's story is not included in Matthew's account.

However, Matthew may not even have been present at the crucifixion, or some safe distance away, because he reports the populist and priestly account of the events, omitting the clearly important story of the penitent thief.

On the other hand, Luke wrote intimately of the event and therefore must have been present. He must have been standing very close to the cross on which Jesus was crucified to have witnessed this event.

Matthew on the other hand, if he had been present at all, stood some distance away, obviously afraid to reveal his presence, being the coward he was.

This is pure conjecture, and I ask you not to be taken in by it.

It might make for good reading but, given the gaps I have filled in the existing and incomplete factual detail in the texts, it is ultimately a corruption of the truth and highly misleading and damaging. It is not a true representation.

Key principles in misrepresenting the truth:

1. Start with the facts and join the gaps between them with a possible theory or plausible opinion.
2. Build on this by adding further theories of opinions to strengthen your first theory.
3. Begin to merge the theories and opinions together and make them self-evidencing. Use words like 'obviously', 'unquestionably', 'research states (not suggests)', 'we already know that....', 'undeniably', etc.
4. Ignore the textual facts that no longer work with your theories.
5. Suggest that these were added later and were not present in the original text if questioned. If necessary discredit any contradictory source material and/or the person and their qualifications and authority to challenge you.
6. Present your theories and opinions as conclusively researched facts.

My example may be based on some facts but it is not factual and is a misrepresentative construct of small sequenced opinions. And that dear friends, is mostly why a lot of theology isn't worth the paper it is written on.

Most theology is little more than opinion, often based on the previously formulated opinions of others, and is often focussed on proving or validating particular (denominational?) doctrine based on selective texts or achieving a particular outcome rather than trying to understand what God is saying to us in Holy Scripture (true exegesis).

It often doesn't help us live our lives and face the daily problems that beset us in any way. If it did I would look upon it much more kindly, but it is in the end it remains largely opinion and interpretation and a distraction from our true calling. We need to be sure and be clear about what we believe and that it is truly worthy of God and of our own dedication and efforts. Otherwise why bother?

Finding the truth is more than an academic and intellectual exercise. It is also a significant and deeply spiritual one also, otherwise why would Jesus say, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Light'? (John 14 v 6)

Also see John 18:

³⁷ *"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.*

Jesus answered, "..... the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

³⁸ *"What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him."*

Pilate's question is a good one and one we should all be searching for an answer to. Just who can you believe or trust in the end?

Many will tell you they can be relied upon to tell you 'the truth' but that is not a good enough qualification these days. 'The truth' is a commodity to be traded, manipulated, turned into propaganda, used against the innocent and hidden to protect the guilty.

Not even 'the church' tells 'the truth' any more. It may hold 'the truth' but it may not live by it. It is just as corrupt as the rest of the world we live in.

Worse still, it has tried to water down or re-write Holy Scripture to appease a largely Godless society (that actually has no interest in the church), and allow and justify things forbidden by the Bible. There was a time the church tried to please God by its actions and consistent teaching, and the churches were full. Not now.

I can almost guarantee that the search for spiritual truth won't include much of the opinion or interpretation that is being forced upon us by the Woke and LGBT+ etc. brigades and their infiltrators into our churches, cathedrals, parishes, dioceses and seminaries, as they peddle and promote their unscriptural deceptions in the name of compassionate inclusivity and progressive social change.

It won't include the feminist movement which has resulted in the deaths through abortion of millions of children either. The silence on this matter alone is deafening. Why so when the injustice is clear?

They and other such groups have done so much damage already. Not just to the church but to all of society, and they do not want us to know the truth about their hidden ideologies. They just undo the fabric of society for their own ends, not for the benefit of society as a whole.

My belief is that it is these groups who have pushing increasingly for more stringent 'hate crime' laws to further protect their own interests.

They want to stop any discussion that may question their agendas and silence all objections as they attempt to increasingly destabilise society and social structure. Their aim is to corrupt the truth until it is powerless to stop evil.

They see 'the church' in particular as a great threat as the last remaining moral stronghold of the country. Yes, they want us quiet, subdued, subservient, and to accommodate their views and behaviours. That is why the church and its leadership at all levels has been infiltrated. As a consequence, the pews are emptying because they see what is going on and won't be a part of it.

But there is a problem regarding 'the truth'. It won't go away. It is a question of authentication being based on Holy Scripture rather than opinion. Much of what is currently being peddled is inauthentic theological opinion and theory rather than scripturally fact and some of it down right deviant and unchristian.

And 'the truth' certainly won't be popular when it comes to light, in or out of church. All that is hidden will be revealed.

I see a fight to regain the church for God and to regain biblical orthodoxy.

There will be many innocent souls caught up in this conflict who will suffer because of their faith, and much that has been done will need to be undone.

I also fear it will be in 'the church' that the most vicious and merciless and most difficult battles will take place, even if they are not taking place as I write.

OSJ has already experienced some of this and has not escaped unmarked. There have been many battles in OSJ to stay true to the Word of God and there have been many casualties and betrayals on the way. It has not been easy.

I still struggle to find forgiveness when it comes to the actions of a number of priests who rejected their calling, betrayed trusts and tried to destroy OSJ from within. I speak from experience when I say that the wounds will heal but the scars will remain.

Forgiveness and reconciliation will be a huge problem that we will all have to face and deal with. Whether we ever learn to trust our church leadership again is another matter. For some churches it is already too late.

As Christ served, so we should serve.

As Christ loved, so we should love.

As Christ believed, so we should believe.

As Christ lived, so we should live.

As Christ died, so we should die, in the hope of certain resurrection.

As the near future unfolds, I sadly expect that many of us will find as we seek to reclaim the church for God that those we have trusted as friends may turn out to be our enemies, but also those we thought were enemies may indeed turn out to be good friends in our need.

It would be good to know who our friends (as well as our enemies) are, so let's keep an open mind. Maybe this is why we are bound to pray for our enemies for God really does work in mysterious ways.

Matthew 5:44: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you".

Luke 6:27-28: "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you".

Romans 12:20: "To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink..."

Proverbs 25:21: "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink".

These verses emphasize the importance of love and prayer towards those who oppose us, and are in line with the Two Great Commandments. It does not in any way condone their actions but at least allows for the possibility of change and reconciliation.

However, a bad grape will always be a bad grape whatever you do to it and we have to recognise that reconciliation is wasted on those who have no intention of being reconciled to God in their actions. Whatever they say they will do, their actions give clear testimony to the truth.

A question of discernment in knowing when to say enough is enough perhaps.

Let the truth light our way and sustain us against the darkness.

But all in good time.

A good wine is not just the pressing of the grape harvest but a whole process depending on many steps and many people all pulling together. Just praying for a good harvest, whilst right, is not enough and it won't happen on its own.

If we are serious about bringing about the Kingdom and making it a reality, it won't happen by prayer alone. It involves direct involvement and engagement.

If we are serious about biblical truth then that involves watchfulness and a willingness to speak out against those who would corrupt. It is not enough to leave it for others to deal with it.

We have to make it happen. Godly love is a participation sport, not a spectator sport.

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Orchestrated attack on marriage and family. (live links in blue – click to activate)

'An orchestrated campaign to silence Christian teaching on marriage is well underway in the UK, led by secularist groups like the National Secular Society (NSS).

Just [last week](#), activists reported Speke Baptist Church in Liverpool to the Charity Commission for a sermon delivered nine years ago.

Pastor Steve Casey had simply taught biblical views on marriage, pointing out that many people "don't feel any peace" about laws permitting same-sex marriage.

Carryduff Free Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland was [reported](#) for a sermon titled "The myth of gay marriage", which affirmed longstanding Christian teaching. Likewise, Tabor Baptist Church in Wales [faced investigation](#) simply for preaching traditional marriage doctrine.

Current attacks coincide with a major symbolic shift witnessed recently within the [Church in Wales](#), which last week appointed its first openly lesbian Archbishop. This troubling development emphasises just how far institutional attitudes to marriage have moved away from the historic position.

Echoing the original Gay Liberation Front [manifesto's aim](#) of “abolition of the family”, the NSS [openly seeks](#) to strip churches that proclaim traditional views about marriage and sexuality of their charitable status. Such actions are a direct assault not just on Christian doctrine, but on marriage itself and our fundamental freedoms.

As a former US Attorney General [has observed](#), “This is not decay; it is organised destruction. Secularists and their allies among their ‘progressives’ have marshalled all the force of mass communications ... in an unrelenting assault on religion and traditional values.”

Report Extract from C4M 06/08/2025

I have done my best and you are forewarned. It is up to you.

Please don't let this be the moment that your children and grandchildren will point with regret at your failures for not doing enough to protect their interests and their future.

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We (OSJ) will continue to support Christian teaching on marriage, gender, family, abortion and assisted death. That is why we remain a committed Christian community!