

March 28 & 29

# UPEND

## Thief on the Cross

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### Introduction

Eternity. Life beyond the one we're living here on earth. Sometimes it's almost intimidating to consider as reality. Discussions on where we're headed after we die are literally larger than life, difficult to wrap our human-bound minds around and tend to lead to some pretty tough questions. Often, well-intended attempts to comfort give us a view of Heaven that maybe isn't a true reflection of what scripture tells us. Why can't all people go to Heaven? Isn't good 'good enough'? Luke recounts Jesus' interaction with two criminals as they all near their deaths on the crosses. As we listen in on this conversation, we learn we each have the opportunity to choose our own response to what Jesus offers; this choice has a lasting impact on our eternity. This fourth and final week of the Upend series covers the story of the thief on the cross and God's radical grace, which brings clarity to our "forever" and an assurance of hope in the One who is our Forever.

### Discussion

1. **Read Luke 23:39.** At Prairie Lakes Church, we want to make it impossible for people to get to Hell from Iowa, but we know some will choose to mock and reject Jesus. Would you rather receive love from someone by choice or because they had no other option? Share your thoughts on why God would choose not to force us to love Jesus.
2. Think of some people you imagine might be in Heaven. How would you describe them? In **Luke 23:43**, Jesus tells a thief—someone who we can understand from scripture was not "good" but a convicted, guilty criminal—He will be with him in paradise. How does this turn the assumption that getting into Heaven simply requires you to be a "good" person? Does this change or expand your description of who will be in Heaven?
3. The first thief mocked and rejected Jesus, filled with stubborn pride and an attitude of entitlement to Jesus' power. The second thief acknowledged he was guilty of sin and recognized his need for Jesus. How do these responses of pride and humility differ? Does one response or the other show up in your own life?

### Think About It

The overall idea of Heaven is comforting to most. This picture of something greater, bigger, better than what we're experiencing now is a calming security that makes death seem less final. What's interesting is how easily we might cling to the perceived safety of assumptions our culture has made about eternity, fearful at the possibility that any alternative would leave us hopeless. Scripture tells us what can feel like some harsh truths: not everyone enters Heaven, and those who enter heaven aren't there solely because they met a set standard of self-achieved "goodness." But, when we hear that truth with hearts that take into account God's character— His perfect love, complete authority, His desire to bring us faultless into His presence—what once felt like harsh reality softens into gracious, radical hope. Let's be willing to exchange our assumptions for truth that reflects the full glory and power and hope of Jesus, the One who crushed death and offers life to all who choose to believe.

### Do Something

1. Write down some things you believe about Heaven. Does Jesus' interaction with the thief on the cross change any of them? Process this with someone who has chosen Jesus.
2. **Read 1 Peter 5:5-7** and **Psalms 18:27**. Spend some time this week asking Jesus to show you what areas of your life you can have an attitude of humility. Invite a friend to do the same, and check in with each other next week.
3. **Re-read Luke 23:40-43**. This confident hope of life with Jesus beyond death on earth is available to everyone. Is there someone you've assumed is "too far gone" to choose life with Him? Be in prayer this week for that person and look for opportunities to bless and invite.

## Sermon-Based Curriculum Use Survey

We are assessing the need for and effectiveness of our sermon-based curriculum. Based on your feedback, we may continue or stop providing this resource. Please email your answers to [group@prairielakeschurch.org](mailto:group@prairielakeschurch.org).

1. Which campus do you attend [Cedar Falls, Fort Dodge, Grinnell, Osage, Waterloo, Other/Watch Online only]?
2. What do you use this resource for [personal use, small group, other]?
3. How often do you use the sermon-based curriculum [weekly, every other week, monthly, other]?
4. Does the sermon-based curriculum meet your needs/the needs of your group?
5. What suggestions do you have to improve the effectiveness of the sermon-based curriculum?

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey so we can make this resource the best it can be!