

*Are You not the Christ?**We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at [Jesus], saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed **justly**, for we are receiving the **due reward** of our deeds; but this **Man has done nothing wrong.**" And he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And He said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise."<sup>(ESV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.* (John 17:17)

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

People Loved by God,

Three weeks ago, we heard the Chief Priest, Caiaphas ask Jesus a similar question, **Are you the Christ?**

At that time, He put Jesus under oath and Jesus truthfully acknowledged that He was.

That put an end to the mock trial by the Sanhedrin and the Chief Priests.

They went straight away to Pontius Pilate and called for Jesus' crucifixion.

Today we have come to our final question of these Lenten Midweek services: **Are You not the Christ?**

Like many of the previous questions, the man who asked it wasn't really looking for the answer.

It is a rhetorical question used to mock Jesus.

That thief on the cross, suffering with Jesus, wasn't expecting a response.

In fact, he expected not to get a response from this helpless Fellow nailed to the cross next to him, gasping for air with anguished strains.

**Are you not the Christ?**

He obviously had learned of the anticipated Christ/Messiah, perhaps in childhood.

In his next mocking statement, "**Save Yourself, and us!**"

he shows some knowledge of the office and work of the Christ, that He was to save, to redeem His people... even from death?

But he says this in order to challenge Jesus' claim

and in order to get Jesus to use His supposed divine power in selfishness

and for his temporary relief.

How sad that his catechesis only led him to believe in a selfish christ.

And a trifling christ who was concerned only about this life, temporary as it is.

How sad that some of the last gasps and words of this man were as defiant against the Lord as his life had been.

This is something for us to note too, because his words are not too far from our own thoughts at times.

We can challenge God in this manner when we or a loved one are in distress.

"God, why do you let others bully me?"

"If you are a merciful God, why don't you spare my parent from this disease?"

"God, how dare you let this precious child suffer/die?"

“If You love me, then why am I struggling to pay the mortgage or the rent?”

“If You are good, why do You let the world get more and more evil while You idly look on?”

“Are You not the Christ? Why won’t you do what Your people want... what I want?”

And I’m sure that many of us know someone who has left the Christian faith over such difficulties.

These, and others like them, are very natural questions to us.

Like the thief, we naturally reason that if God is truly good then He must save us by stopping every bad or evil experience from ever happening to us.

And if He were truly good, He would use His almighty power to give only blessings to His people.

But these thoughts are not God’s thoughts, nor are our ways His ways,

And they betray an air of superiority, as if God owes you something.

Just a few hours prior to our text, Jesus was praying earnestly in the garden of Gethsemane that the Lord would “**Let this cup pass from Him.**”

He did not want to suffer this most unjust sentence of all time.

And yet, He also prayed, “**Not My will, but Thine be done.**”

Though Jesus Himself had the power as the Christ, as the Son of God,

to do literally anything He wanted, He submitted to His Father’s will and trusted it to be good.

Though the Father had the power to do literally anything He wanted,

He wanted His Son to bear the punishment of your doubt, or your fear, or your unbelief in order to save you,

not just from a bully, or a disease, or from mortgage payments, but from sin and death.

Not just from these temporal, passing issues, but for all eternity.

...

### **Are you not the Christ?**

Like many of the questions that were put to Jesus during His trial,

Jesus didn’t answer the mocking question by the thief... but the other thief did.

Now, to see the full picture of Christ’s salvation, it’s good to consider that these two men where both mocking Jesus as first.

Matthew and Mark both record them as reviling Jesus. Matthew27:44; Mark15:32

It was not the case of one being truly evil and the other guy was simply caught in a bad situation.

They both had turned their backs on God.

They both had lived a life of robbery, stealing what God had blessed others with, to take it for themselves.

But as the second robber witnessed Jesus’ patient suffering, without reviling in return, as he heard Jesus’ prayer for His executioners and His care and concern for His mother, as he heard Jesus praying the Psalms from the cross, praising God,

confessing His mercy and goodness, even while He Himself was suffering,

he recognized the divine compassion that he had no doubt heard in his youth in Bible history class.

And the shame of his ungodly life and the guilt of his own sin came upon him.

And he realized that he was under the same sentence of condemnation, though justly.

It was the **due reward for his deeds.**

What did God owe to him? Who was he to make any demands on God?

There, that day, with his final breaths, that thief confessed his sins before Almighty God.

There, his Judge hung beside him, receiving the same punishment,  
though He **had done nothing wrong**.

There the Christ hung within speaking distance, to save, not Himself, but the world of sinners.  
Not simply from the physical death of the cross or any other torture,  
but from eternal death, from unquenchable flames and undying worms.

Quite literally, that thief and robber was saved that day as the Holy Spirit rekindled the faith given to him earlier in his life, though it had been rejected.

We can see this in the petition of this repentant thief:

**“Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”**

For what kingdom did this crucified Man next to him have?

For all appearances, His throne was His cross, His crown was thorns, His subjects His executioners.  
And yet, the thief knew of the kingdom of heaven and desired to be remembered... remembered like Noah of old, when God remembered him on the ark after the judgment of the flood.  
Like Israel in Egypt, when God remembered... and came down to redeem them  
and by the blood of the sacrificial lamb passed over them in judgment.

And as the Lord had opened the door of the ark for Noah to a new world,

And as the Lord brought Israel into the promised land

So now the Lord promised, **“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.”**

...

Let us pray: Lord, remember us in Your kingdom.

Are You not the Christ? Do You not see all things?

We indeed would deserve every sentence of condemnation and every evil to fall upon us  
as our due reward, for we have sinned against all of Your commandments.

We have not only taken the honor and respect we owe Your established authorities,  
but have robbed You of the fear, love, and trust we owe You.

We have not only taken the blessings that You have so graciously given to others,  
but have robbed You of the gratitude for the blessings You have mercifully bestowed upon us.

But are You not the Christ? Are You not the one Redeemer of the world?

Did You not stay upon the cross to suffer our condemnation, our wrath from Your Father  
to save us from our sin and death?

Truly, You did!

Remember us, Lord, now in Your kingdom and have mercy upon us.

Teach us to fear You rightly, to love You unconditionally, and to trust You without hesitation  
for You have never done anything wrong.

Remember us, Lord, now in Your kingdom and until the day when You return to take us  
into Your kingdom to live and reign with You forever and ever. Amen.