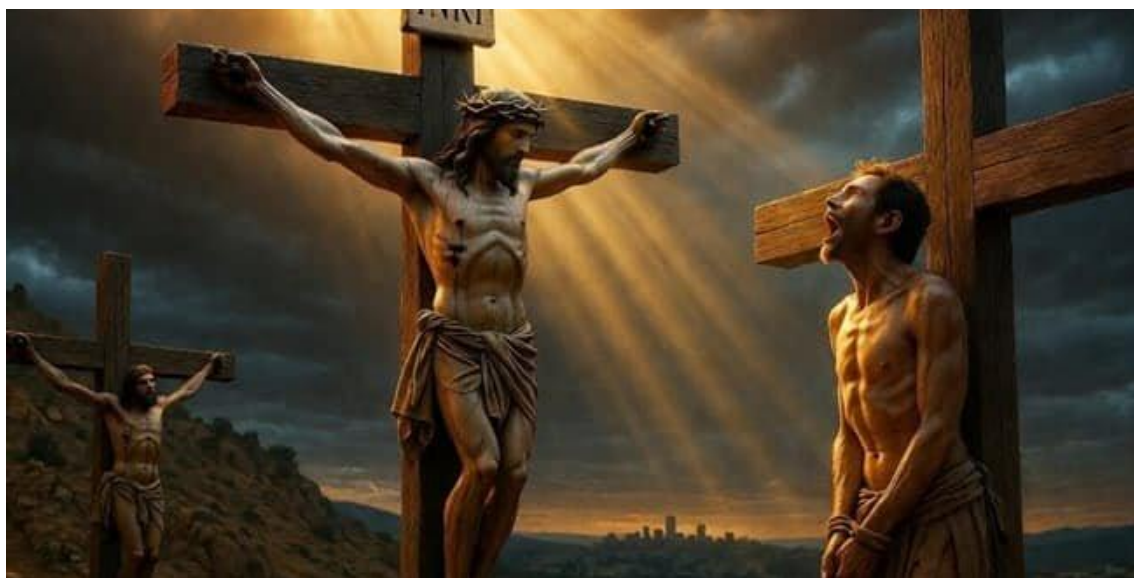


THE THIEF ON THE CROSS



Foreword The Thief on the Cross

The thief on the cross powerfully displays God’s amazing grace: in his final moments, a guilty sinner won the race of faith by fully surrendering to Jesus through genuine repentance and trust, receiving paradise instantly with no time for works or rituals. This same Savior calls every believer to run the **Race of Faith** with endurance, abiding in Christ and persevering to the end (**Hebrews 12:1-2**), revealing the vital balance of salvation by grace through faith alone, the promise of eternal security for those who finish the race, and sobering **conditional warnings** for those still running, as in **Hebrews 10:26-39** and **John 15:6**. May this truth encourage every reader to fix their eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith—surrender fully like the thief and finish strong in His sustaining power.

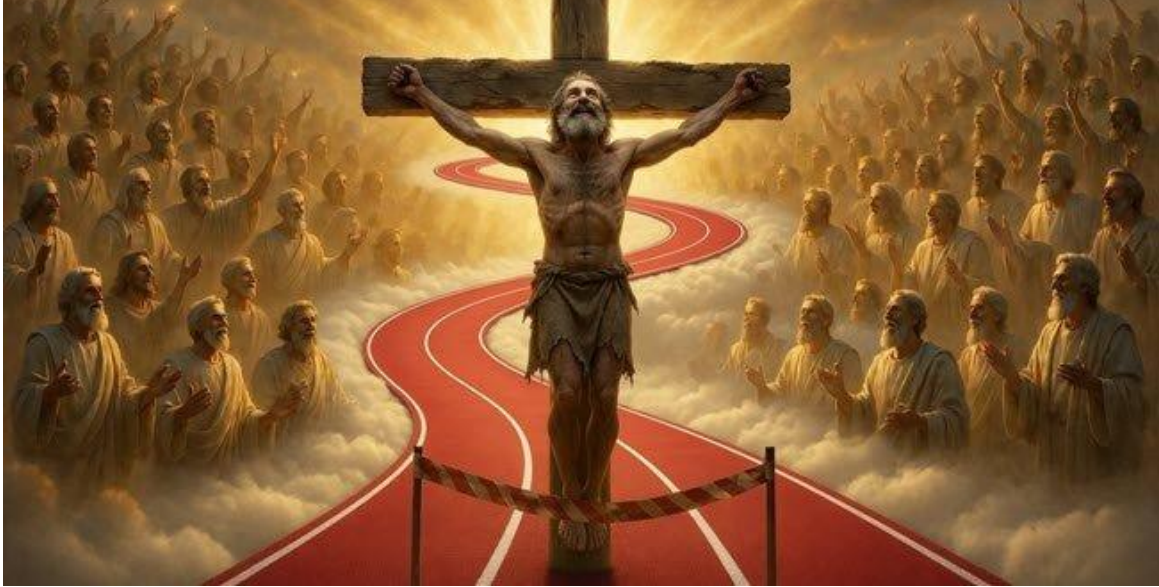


The Thief's Final Moments (Luke 23:39-43)

Crucified alongside Jesus were two thieves. One joined the mocking crowd, hurling insults at the Savior. The other, however, experienced a dramatic change of heart in his dying breaths. He rebuked his fellow criminal, 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" (**Luke 23:40-41**).

In those words, we see true repentance: an honest acknowledgment of his own guilt and sin, coupled with a clear recognition of Jesus' innocence and divine lordship. Turning to the Lord, he pleaded, "Jesus, **remember me** when you come into your kingdom" (**v. 42**). Jesus' response is one of the most astonishing statements in the Gospels: "**Truly**, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" (**v. 43**).

This dying thief had no opportunity for baptism, restitution, church membership, or a long record of good deeds. He entered the **Race of Faith** in the final seconds and **crossed the finish line victorious**.

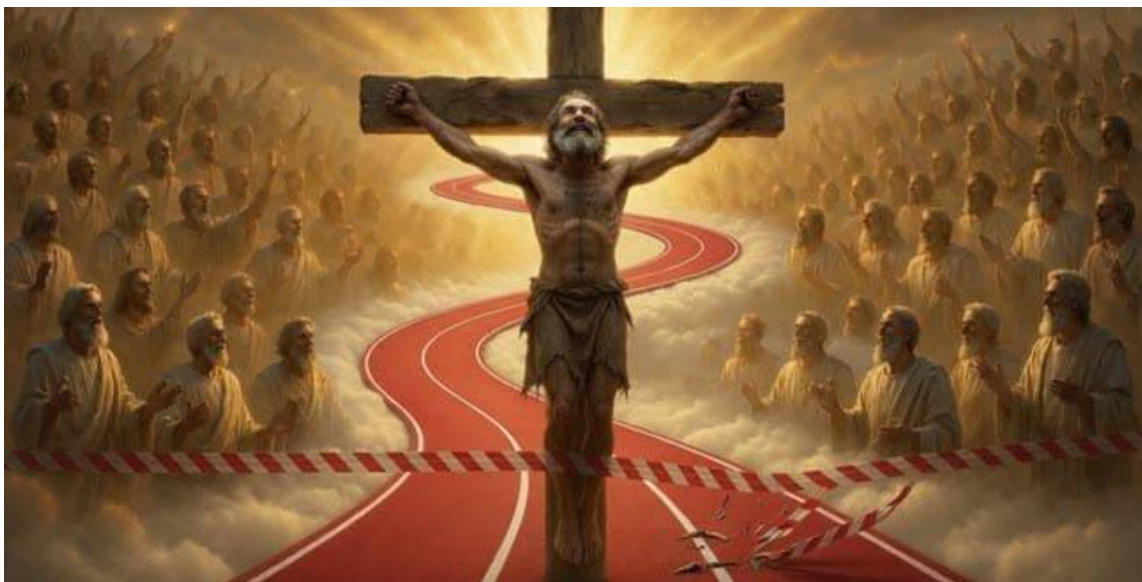


Entering the Race Late, Finishing Strong

The writer of Hebrews urges us: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

The thief on the cross demonstrates that it is never too late to enter this race while breath remains. Though he began at the eleventh hour, he fixed his eyes on Jesus and trusted in Him completely. In that moment of sincere faith, Jesus became both the author and perfecter of the thief’s faith. The man who had lived a life deserving death received eternal life as a free gift of grace.

This account powerfully refutes any notion that salvation can be earned by human merit. The thief brought nothing but his guilt and a broken, believing heart. Grace met him there. It also refutes the idea that a **deathbed conversion** is somehow suspect or insufficient. Genuine faith, even in the final moments, **saves**.



Conditional Security for Those Still Running

While the thief's story gloriously displays the instantaneous power of saving faith, the New Testament teaches that security for believers who are still running the race is **conditional** upon continued faith, abiding in Christ, and perseverance. Eternal security belongs fully and finally to those who finish the race—**the overcomers who endure to the end, Born Again.**

Jesus Himself taught this reality in the vine and branches metaphor: "If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned" (**John 15:6**). The apostle Paul echoed this when he wrote, "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel" (**Colossians 1:21-23**, emphasis added).

The most sobering warnings come in **Hebrews 10:26-39**. After describing the new and living way opened by Christ's blood, the writer warns:

"For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment... But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls."

These warnings are not hypothetical. They underscore that genuine saving faith is persevering faith. As Jesus declared, "The one who endures to the end, winning the **Race of Faith**, will be saved" (**Matthew 24:13**).



The Thief and the Race: Both Grace and Perseverance

The thief on the cross illustrates the beginning of genuine faith—initial justification by grace through faith alone. In his final moments, he acknowledged his guilt, confessed Jesus' innocence and kingship, and cast himself upon the Lord's mercy. Jesus' immediate response, "Today you will be with me in paradise," stands as a powerful testimony that salvation is

granted solely by grace through faith, not by personal merit, religious rituals, past reformation, or accumulated good works.

For those of us still running the Race of Faith, however, the New Testament teaches that conditional security is tied directly to our continuance in that race. Authentic saving faith is living and active. It demonstrates its continuance through ongoing obedience to the law of Christ—which is the law of love (**Galatians 6:2**)—through fruitfulness, vigilance against willful sin (**Hebrews 10:26-31**), perseverance, and daily abiding in Jesus (**John 15:1-11**). Ultimately, surrendering fully to Christ Jesus is crossing the finish line of the race of faith—the moment of surrender to Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior that brings us safely home to the One who both began and will complete our faith (**Hebrews 12:1-2**).

Grace sustains — The same grace that saves us also trains and empowers us to run with endurance, denying ungodliness and living soberly and righteously (**Titus 2:11-12; Hebrews 12:1-2**).

Grace perfects — At the finish line, grace will present us faultless before the presence of God's glory with great joy (**Jude 24**).

There is no contradiction in the New Covenant. Grace does not replace works; it produces them as the natural evidence and fruit of living faith (**Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:14-26**). The thief had no further opportunity to bear visible fruit in this life, yet his repentant, trusting faith was the root. For those of us still running the race, fruitfulness, perseverance, and continued abiding become the biblical evidence that our faith is genuine and not a temporary profession.

The account of the thief on the cross, therefore, offers profound hope to every sinner who turns to Christ in true faith, no matter how late the hour. At the same time, it serves as a solemn warning and encouragement to all who have begun the race: we must lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, and run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith (**Hebrews 12:1-2**).

May every believer now running the Race of Faith continue to fix their eyes on Christ Jesus, persevering by the sustaining power of God's grace, becoming like those who have already crossed the finish line—truly **Born Again**, steadfast in Christ, and secure in Him forever

For further clarification on this topic, consult Servat of Christ's essay on "Once Saved Always Saved."

