

How to tell the “two thieves” story

Wow! So, someone has just asked you about your shirt. What do you do now?

1. Introductory questions:

When Jesus was crucified, how many crosses were there? (Three)

Who were on the other two? (Two thieves, Jesus in the middle.)

What crime was Jesus officially executed for? (Claiming to be king. Sign above him read: “Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews”)

Do you remember what the attitude of the crowd on the ground around Jesus was like? (Mocking. “If you’re the king, save yourself!” “Come down from the cross and we’ll believe you.”)

2. Tell the story:

(Hands out as if on a cross, looking to one side as if at a neighboring cross.) **One of the criminals who hung on a cross next to Jesus verbally attacked Jesus:**

(Sound harsh, mocking, angry, loud.) **“Aren’t you the King? If you are, save yourself, and save us!”**

(Hands down and then back out to indicate a change of crosses, looking the other direction, back at the first thief) **But the other thief rebuked him:**

(Firmly and clearly, but not angrily.) **“Don’t you fear God, since you are a condemned criminal about to die?”**

(Persuasively.) **“We are getting what we deserve for our actions, but this man *(nod your head toward Jesus)* has done nothing wrong.”**

Then he said to Jesus:

(Humbly, softly, looking at Jesus.) **“Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.”**

(Hands down and then back out to indicate a change of crosses, looking back toward the second thief) **Jesus said to him:**

(Kindly, confidently, pausing between phrases as if in pain.) **“I tell you the truth, today, you will be with Me in paradise.”**

3. Walk back through, in sections

First Thief

How did the first criminal treat Jesus? (He verbally attacked him.)

Do you remember what he said? “Aren’t you the... (King)? If you are, save yourself, and save (us)!”

How else could the first thief have treated Jesus?

What else could he have said? (Possible answers: silent, encouragement, or act like second thief. You don’t need to get a “right” answer here.)

What does the first criminal’s choice of attitudes and words show about him?

- (He didn’t believe Jesus was really the King.)
- (He was cruel, taunting a dying man.)
- (He wasn’t worried about facing God.)

Second Thief

What did the second thief choose to do then? (Rebuke the first thief.)

Do you remember what he said? “Don’t you fear (God) *(point upward as a hint)* since you are a condemned criminal about to *(die; hint: hang head to one side, eyes closed, tongue hanging out)*? We are getting what we *(deserve)* for our actions but this man has done *(nothing wrong)*.”

What else could the second thief have done? (possible answers: stay silent, continue acting like the first thief)

What do the second thief's choice of attitudes and words to the first thief show about him?

- He feared God
- He knew he deserved to die for his sins
- He knew Jesus was innocent.
- He was willing to "go public" with his faith in Jesus in front of a hostile crowd.

What did the second thief say to Jesus?

"Jesus, remember me when you come in your (kingdom: *hint, hold hands around head with fingers pointing up like the spires of a crown*)."

What other things could he have said? (Possible answers: "Forgive me." "Give me another chance, I'll do better." "I was abused as a child." "I'm basically a good person.")

What does the second thief's choice of words to Jesus show us he believed?

- Jesus really was a King.
- Jesus and the thieves would be alive after they died.
- Jesus would come to rule His kingdom sometime in the future.
- Jesus was gracious.
- Jesus could help him in life after death.

Did Jesus look like a king at this point? (No, he looked like a bloody mess!)

What did the second thief ask for? Was this more or less than forgiveness? (Asking Jesus to remember him when He came in His kingdom was asking for more than forgiveness. It was asking for Jesus' favor.)

Jesus

What did Jesus choose to say in response to the second thief?

"I tell you the (truth), today you will be with (Me, hint: point to self) in (paradise)."

What other things could Jesus have said? (Possible answers: Nothing. Rebuke. "Oh, now that you're about to die you finally come asking for help?")

Did Jesus give the thief more or less than forgiveness? (Being with Jesus in paradise is far better than mere forgiveness, for the same reason that living in the White House is better than simply being out of jail.)

What do Jesus' words show us about Him?

- He does not forgive everyone.
- He knows who will be in paradise.
- He is gracious to sinners who repent and trust Him.
- He will be physically present with His people in paradise.
- He does not require us to do anything to earn His favor. (Did the thief have to pray the rosary? Get baptized?)

Conclusion

What did the two thieves have in common?

- Sinfulness
- Immanent death
- Close to Jesus

Which of those are true of you?

How would you describe the difference between the two thieves?

- One was repentant for his sinfulness, the other was not.
- One acknowledged Jesus as king, the other did not.
- One relied on Jesus for help after death, the other did not.
- One is spending eternity in paradise with Jesus; the other in hell, without Him.

Which of those describe you? Which thief are you more similar to?

Practice by telling the story to your friends!