**Thesis:** Who do you say Jesus is? How we answer this question is a decision of life and death. Paul tells us in *Romans 3:23 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* and in *Romans 6: 23* he says *“the wages of sin is death.”* On our own, we all face the penalty of death for our transgressions. But if we know Jesus to be the Savior sent from heaven, we can find the hope for freedom from sin and the promise of eternal life.

**Introduction:** You’re listening to The Jesus Podcast, a year of stories showcasing the depth of Christ’s love and the glory of God’s truth. I’m \_\_\_\_ your host from Pray.com.

**Context:** After His trials before Pontius Pilate and Herod, it was finally time for Jesus to be punished, though unfairly so. With no real crimes to convict Him for, the people’s anger was enough for Pilate to condemn Jesus to death on the cross. Crucifixion was Roman’s evidence that they had mastered the craft of torture. Jesus was beaten, spat upon, and then strapped to a wooden beam. He was sent to carry this burden to the place of His execution, where He would be hoisted up. Just high enough for the spectators to see Him, but not so high that He didn’t look into the very eyes of those who mocked Him. For years He had only poured out love and tender care for a lost, hurting, and broken world. He preached of peace, and lived a life that modeled it. A man without fault now hung in shame to die the death of a sinner. While the Jews may have thought they had finally got the best of Jesus, we know Jesus wasn’t forced into this moment. As He obeyed His heavenly Father, Jesus willingly hung on the cross to fulfill the word of God and accomplish His incredible plan to save the world.

**Message:** On the day of His crucifixion, Jesus didn’t hang alone. Two men, murderous criminals facing judgment for their crimes, hung on His left and His right. While these men could relate to Jesus in their present circumstances, even they began their time on their crosses by joining with the spectators in their mocking and blaspheming of Jesus. But in his final moments of life, one of these men would learn that it’s never too late to turn your life around. Though he may have allowed himself to fall into a life of corruption, he made the choice that mattered most. The choice to turn to Jesus. In just a few verses that equate to a short-lived conversation, the story of the robber on the cross next to Jesus is a beautiful presentation of the gospel.

The word gospel means “good news”. But good news is only good in comparison to bad news. The bad news in this case is that sin is deserving of death and we’ve all sinned against God. In ways both big and small, we’ve done, said, and thought things that go against the character of God. We’ve missed the mark. We’ve strayed from God, and a life apart from the Giver of Life can only mean death. In the gospel accounts, we learn that both the thieves had initially joined in with the spectators in mocking Jesus. But in watching an innocent man in the same agony he was experiencing, he knew that his face was completely deserved. The gospel requires us to admit our sins and understand the price that must be paid for them.

But we don’t have to allow sin to have the final say over our lives. Jesus’ ministry was centered around calling sinners to repentance. And the thief who finds himself next to Jesus shows us what that looks like. As he rebukes his fellow convict, he physically demonstrates repentance. He speaks one final time to the man that represented his life of sin, but this time with the fear of God in his heart. A deep conviction that his life needed a change, even if it was in the final moments. So he turns from the man and turns his eyes to Jesus. Repentance must be preceded by acknowledging the ugliness of our sins because it helps us to see our need to turn from it to find something better. But we can’t turn from our current sins only to seek out more sin. We have to turn from our sin and turn to Jesus.

When we turn to Jesus, we’re turning to the One who can take away our sins and give us new life. This is the heart of the gospel. That good news that Jesus came to bring! Even in the face of death, there is new life in Jesus when we invite Him into our lives. The humility of the robber in this action is admirable. All he asks is that Jesus would remember him when He came into His kingdom. No demand for salvation. No strong arming for grace to have what he didn’t deserve. Just a small request that sought out but a morsel of mercy. But Jesus, seeing the man’s heart of genuine repentance, offers him something greater. He wouldn’t just be remembered by Jesus in His kingdom; Jesus offered him the fullness of the gospel - an invitation to join Him in the paradise of heaven.

This same invitation is made available to anyone who calls upon the name of Jesus. Dismas knew he deserved his fate of execution. The punishment more than fit the crime. But the gospel that he now clung to in his final moments is scandalous. An innocent man was dying his very same death, so that he could receive the gift of new life. Not just another chance on this earth, but life everlasting in a glorified body, apart from his old ways of treachery and evil.

Isaiah prophesied the scandalous nature of God’s salvation plan in *Isaiah 53:5 “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”*

No one deserves it, but everyone can receive it. The brutality of the cross was the selected method for God’s beautiful plan for redemption. Though death ruled the day on this hill called Skull, Jesus would reign in heaven forever as He crushed the head of the serpent of old.

The day Jesus died on the cross has come to be known as Good Friday. A day of pain and agony, of torture and mockery. This day we call good. And for us, it certainly was. It was the day God promised in Genesis 3 as Adam and Eve stood in shame for their sins. The day generations of men and women had waited for for thousands of years. This was the day God put an end to sin’s power over His creation. The day that death would no longer be something to fear. The day that the veil between God and man would be torn in two. The day the earth would shake as God’s wrath was poured out on our sins that Jesus took upon Himself. This was the day that changed the trajectory of humanity for good.

We read in *Hebrews 12:1b “And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”*

The shame of the cross is nothing to take lightly. Allowing yourself to understand and feel the weight of the brutality Jesus willingly took on on our behalf gives us a deeper appreciation for the life He bought for us. The price was high, but He was willing to pay it. Though He despised the shame, Jesus endured the cross because He knew the joy that lay waiting on the other side. The joy of glorifying His Father in heaven. The joy of taking His rightful place at the right hand of the throne of God. The joy of seeing His beloved creation free from sin. The joy of knowing you and I and countless others could receive salvation.

The gospel is messy, but it’s beautiful. It’s never too late to turn to Jesus. Wherever you find yourself in life, if you call upon His name He will answer you.