

Today

Luke 23:43 (NIV)

Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Dear family and friends of Bob,

Easter is tomorrow. 6 weeks ago, what did your Easter plans look like? Were you going to get together with family, friends? Call Bob up on the phone? Facetime with him? Go down to Florida and visit him? Was he going to come up and spend Easter with you?

And now here we are the day before Easter. How much have your plans changed? I know some of you weren't planning on being in Utah right now; some of you were. Some of you were planning on family get togethers, but not this kind. And maybe some of you are simply wondering where Bob is right now. What's he doing? What are his plans for today?

This is quite the day to be here, this specific day, the day after Good Friday and the day before Easter. About 2,000 years ago, Jesus' body was in a tomb with soldiers standing guard making sure the tomb remained undisturbed. Living in that moment, it had to be a very bleak day for the people who had put their hope in Jesus as their Savior, the Messiah. He was the one who was supposed to make their lives better. Now he's dead, gone, buried. What hope could they have? What comfort? What plans could they now make?

The disciples had been planning on celebrating the weeklong Passover festival with Jesus, just like other years. They would remember God's great deliverance of his people some 1500 years earlier, that they were saved from death by the blood of the Lamb, the Passover lamb that was sacrificed in their place. But how could they enjoy any of it now? The lumps in their throats. The songs that were supposed to be full of joy. They lack any appetite. Tears were their food. Cries of mourning were their songs. And where was Jesus? What was he doing?

Actually, we know where Jesus was the Saturday after Good Friday and the day before Easter Sunday. Yes, his body was in that tomb opposite Mount Calvary, Golgotha, where he was crucified. But like all people, his soul, his spirit had returned to God. Listening to Jesus on that Good Friday while he was on the cross, he told us where he was going to be. After one of the criminals being crucified with Jesus had asked him to remember him when Jesus came into his kingdom, Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43)

You will be with me in paradise. Jesus was in heaven on this day, this Saturday, some 2,000 years ago. He was in heaven because he had actually lived that perfect life, had fulfilled the commands and expectations of his Father in heaven, expectations and demands of perfection. Jesus actually did them all. He was perfect in all his thoughts, all his words, and in everything he ever did. He actually deserved to get into heaven, to be in paradise.

That was the whole point. Jesus was in heaven on that Saturday because he had lived a perfect life not for himself, but for us. He lived that perfect life for you and for me and for Bob. He lived that perfect life for that criminal on the cross, the one who had done a bad enough thing that warranted the most cruel and painful form of capital punishment ever devised by humans. Jesus had also lived that perfect life for those who mocked him, spit on him, couldn't be bothered to pay any attention to him. Jesus lived this perfect life for everyone even if they would hate him for it or just plain be indifferent to him.

And tomorrow is Easter Sunday. That's the one day of the year when Christians around the world celebrate that Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus didn't come just to experience and taste death to know what it was like, to relate to us better. He experienced death so that everything wrong we have ever done, all the ways that we don't measure up to perfection, all our mistakes, all our shortcomings, all our failures, all our lack of love, all our hateful words, all our indifferent attitudes, these are paid for.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead proves that God accepted Jesus' payment on our behalf. So we know that Jesus was in heaven, paradise, on this Saturday all those years ago. This is how we know that the criminal on the cross is up there with him right now. This is how we know where Bob is right now.

Bob is with the risen Jesus in heaven right now. He is before the Almighty God. God didn't cause Bob to die 6 weeks ago to take him away from you so that you wouldn't get to see him or talk to him on Easter, or to ruin your plans and just throw you a curveball in life. He did this because he wanted Bob to enjoy now a life in paradise, free from all his sins, all his failures, all his mistakes, all his

health problems, from his diabetes, from his COPD. God decided to take Bob from this broken world of pain and suffering and death to now be with him where he will never again experience any of those things ever again, never cry another tear of sadness, never hurt again. We know that this is where Bob is because our Redeemer lives.

That's why we celebrate Easter. It wasn't just to have some nice thoughts, to wish that Bob was now in a better place, to have him live on in our memories, to say things like at least he's with Mom again. I mean, he is in a better place. He is enjoying heaven sitting before God along with Karen. You do still have your memories with him, and please do cherish those. But Jesus rose from the dead so that we would have a firm confidence to know what comes after this life, to know that God has done everything so that we would be with him in paradise. He fought and won for you the same things that Bob is enjoying right now, the same things that the criminal on the cross is enjoying right now. He wants us to have and experience forever the paradise of heaven. He went through pain and suffering and death of the worst kind for us, so that we can enjoy what he lived for, died for, paid for, and still lives for.

So, I'm kind of glad you asked me to do this for you all on the Saturday after Good Friday, the day before Easter. Yes, death is on my mind, and I know it's on yours. I know it's coming for me and for you. But we have a God who loves us so much that he said that he would take death head on for us, that he would live the perfect life that we never could, all so that we could enjoy the benefits, so that we could know without a doubt that Bob is in paradise right now, so that we know a day is coming when Jesus will kill death itself. On that day, God will personally dry every tear from our eyes. Today, we can look forward to being in paradise with Bob and Karen and most importantly, our Redeemer Jesus, who lives triumphant over the grave for us all! Amen.

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