

Dismas was a professional thief of the highest caliber. He didn't bother with small jobs like pick-pocketing or petty larceny. Dismas only dealt with large sums of money or precious objects like jewelry, art work, and museum pieces.

Every Wednesday night, Dismas and three other professional thieves would gather for a game of cards. One week after their game while sipping wine--the finest wine, mind you, stolen from a Roman procurator--one of the three posed a challenge to Dismas. Dismas, you see, was the most honored among thieves for he had made an art of stealing.

"Dismas," his friend said, "I have a challenge that you can't refuse. There is one thing that not even you can steal, and I'll bet my life on it." Dismas on the edge of his seat now, twirling his wine goblet by its stem, was pensive: "What could it be? Pilate's robe, Herod's gold throne, or maybe the ring off Caesar's finger?" With the confidence of an experienced tradesman, Dismas took the bait. "Tell me, what is it that I, Dismas, the world's greatest thief, could not steal?" "Paradise," came the answer. "Let's see you steal your way into eternal life." Dismas slumped back in his chair, a long frown on his face. His friends laughed at him. "You have finally met your match," one said. But Dismas sat back up like a man with a mission and said, "You're on, I will steal it." Silence covered the room.

The next day, Dismas as with all his other jobs prepared his attack. He spent hours upon hours reading the Torah, attending prayer services and sabbath meals, seeking insight on his task, to find an unlocked door or an open window into paradise.

One day, he heard a young rabbi who spoke like none other. This rabbi spoke with authority. He heard the rabbi say, "Blessed are those who show mercy, for mercy will be theirs. Judge not and you shall not be judged." "That's it," said Dismas, "that's the unlocked door I'm looking for. If I can show mercy and not judgment toward others, I can steal my way into paradise."

The next Wednesday Dismas and the boys gathered for their weekly card game. With a broad confident smile Dismas announced that he knew how to break into paradise itself. The others perched on the edge of their seats, waiting to hear Dismas. Suddenly, the door burst open and in walked a group of Roman soldiers. It was a raid and Dismas and one other thief were arrested. The two were tried and convicted the next day and sentenced to hang from a cross that Friday.

Dismas couldn't believe his eyes when he saw that along with his friend the young rabbi who spoke with authority would also be crucified. As they hung there, the other thief and those on the ground mocked and judged the young rabbi, "If you are the Savior, come down from there." Dismas thought, "Now's my chance to steal paradise." And so, with a sincere and contrite heart he said, "Rabbi, you are innocent and you don't deserve this. I don't judge you. I judge myself. I am guilty of many sins. I deserve my punishment. I only ask that when you enter your kingdom that you take me with you." And the Rabbi said, "I promise you this day you shall be with me in paradise."

And with that, Dismas had truly found the unlocked door. By practicing mercy Dismas stole paradise.

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