

Introduction:

1. A River Runs Through It is a thought-provoking movie based on a true story about a small family living in Montana in the early 1900s.  
a) Norman (Craig Sheffer) and Paul Maclean (Brad Pitt) are two young brothers who have a very close relationship.  
b) Tom Skerritt co-stars as the boys' Presbyterian father, who is the preacher at their local church.  
c) All three men love fly-fishing, and this bond keeps them close for many years.  
d) Norman, the older son, is more serious.  
e) Paul, the younger brother, is impetuous, free spirit who drinks too much and gambles in card games, and wants nothing more than to stay in Montana all of his life, working for a newspaper.  
f) Norman has more serious aspirations; he wants to teach literature.

2. Each boy chooses his path in life.  
a) Norman grows up and becomes an English-teacher at a university.  
b) Paul, on the other hand, is more wild and reckless, drinking away his life in bars.  
3. The story shows in a very realistic way what sin does to our lives.  
a) They both grew up learning the same lessons, hearing the same things, seeing the same things.  
b) But the results in their lives are very different.

B. How will you die?  
1. There are many ways that you might die.  
a) It might be an accident, it might be disease, or it might be old age.  
b) But it probably will not be on a cross!  
2. Though there are many means by which you might die, there are only two possible conditions in which you can die.  
3. We see each of those two conditions in the text for today.  
4. We also see the two different conditions in the lives of these two brothers.  
a) They had been given opportunity to do well.  
b) They came from a good home.  
c) Their parents loved them.  
d) They were brothers, biologically, but the young men were by choice of a different spirit.  
5. A similar situation shows up in Luke 23:33-43.  
6. In spite of all Jesus' grace, intent, desire and ability to save we see one person rejecting Him at death.

C. The Passage  
1. The scene in this passage of scripture is only a brief mention in the Word of God, but it is an accurate picture of the religious history of the whole human race.  
2. We see two criminals and in them two great classes of people into which the human race is divided.  
a) The believing thief represents those who are saved by the grace of God through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.  
b) The unbelieving thief represents those who live and die in rebellion against Christ and perish still in their sins.  
c) The cross in the center of the 3 crosses is the great dividing force of human history, dividing all mankind into these two great groups.  
c) And the answer to the question of 'Were you there?' must be answered, 'Yes!' by every person who has and will ever live!

I. The Man Who Died in Sin (v. 39)

- A. The Cross of Rebellion
- 1. The left-hand cross might well be called the cross of rebellion.
- a) On this cross, we see a man dying in sin.

b) The thief dying on this cross has sinned greatly; he remains fully responsible for his sins (and will remain so forever).

2. This thief joined the others mocking and abusing Jesus verbally. His heart was not softened by the certainty of his impending death.

3. Many maintain that same careless, hard-hearted attitude today.

a) They say, Nobody tells me what to do! I make my own choices, call my own shots, determine my own direction! (Just like the scene in the movie where Paul stubbornly refuses to eat his oatmeal.)

b) Their philosophy is, If I want to do it, the I will do it, no matter what the consequences!

c) Their god is their body, their money, their popularity, and their pleasure.

4. To all who think and live that way, Jesus says,

a) John 8:24 I told you that you would die in your sins,

b) Luke 13:3 I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

c) Hebrews 9:27 And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,

d) To die in sin is to face sure condemnation and eternal separation from God.

## B. The Characteristics

1. The first characteristic reveals certain characteristics that mark him for hell.

o be saved.

a) He said to Jesus, Save yourself and us. v. 39

b) He wanted release from the nails that were shooting pain through his flesh.

c) He was unwilling to confess that it was his own sin and guilt that brought him there, but he wanted deliverance from the cross.

d) He did not care about salvation from sin, but he did want salvation from the consequences of his sin.

e) If he had been delivered according to his request, he would only have gone back to a life of robbery and murder.

f) And there are many today who have a secret fear of the result of sin, a secret fear of hell, but they have no desire to be saved from sin in this life.

g) This kind of person cannot be saved until he becomes willing to commit his total life to Christ, not only for saving, but for governing, and using.

2. This man is also characterized by unbelief with regard to Christ.

a) He said to Jesus, If you are the Christ, save yourself and us. v. 39

b) To approach Christ with an if means to not come in faith.

c) True faith never has an if on its lips when it comes to Jesus.

3. Another characteristic which condemns this man is rejection of Jesus in spite of total freedom of his will to choose Christ if he had wanted to.

a) Never is his soul so plainly earmarked for hell as it is at this point.

b) He had seen the conduct of Jesus on the cross.

c) He had noticed that Jesus did not curse like a condemned man.

d) He had seen the women weeping for Jesus near the cross.

e) And above all, he had heard Jesus when He prayed for those who crucified Him, father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

f) The central event of all time was unfolding in his very presence.

g) He was alongside the Son of God from whom he might have received mercy. h) But he stubbornly rejected Christ even in his death. i) He died as he lived sinful, superficial, sarcastic, spiteful and stubborn all because of his selfishness.

## II. The Man Who Died to Sin (vv. 40-42)

### A. The Cross of Repentance

1. Now we pass all the way to the other side of Jesus, to the other criminal.

a) His cross might be called the cross of repentance, for on it we see a man dying to sin.

b) This man also had sin IN him, but when the episode of Calvary was finished, he miraculously did not have sin ON him.