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Good Friday

Luke 23:39-43

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”

⁴⁰ **But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”**

⁴² **Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”**

⁴³ **Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” (NIV 84)**

Theme: I tell you the Truth: Today you will be with me in Paradise.

1. The Innocent One Died
2. So that the Guilty may live.

Here in America we value fairness. We want everyone to be treated the same; we don’t like it when someone gets preferential treatment. And we hate it when we see someone getting the short end of the stick—getting treated unfairly, getting picked on. Discrimination is a hot button word right now. There are countless protesters throughout the country making demonstrations for one thing or another—they are complaining about discrimination of some group from another. In short, what do they want? They want fairness, they want justice. But when it comes down to it; there are times when we do want to be treated fairly; when we don’t really want justice. Because if we did get what we deserve; then we would suffer forever. That is what we see tonight. I tell you the truth: today you will be with me in Paradise. The Innocent One died so that the guilty may live.

We often talk about the physical pain that Jesus endured on the cross. And while he did suffer a lot on top of being flogged, beaten, and crowned with thorns, it’s not as if crucifixions weren’t uncommon 2000 years ago. In fact, it was the favored method of capital punishment for the Romans. At times hundreds and even thousands of people were crucified at the same time. The people of the ancient world considered it to be the most shameful, the most painful, and the most abhorrent of all executions. Yet, it wasn’t unique for Jesus—

Holy Cross, Standish, MI.

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thousands upon thousands of people were put to death in this most excruciating way.

Jesus wasn’t alone on Calvary that Friday almost 2000 years ago.

Two criminals were crucified with him—one on his right and the other on his left. Matthew informs us that they were robbers. We don’t know exactly what they did; but they were guilty—one of them even admitted as such. And Jesus was crucified with them. It reminds us of Isaiah 53, **he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.**

Where was the justice, how is that fair—that Jesus was crucified along with a couple of robbers? Last week we heard the account of Jesus before Pilate. Pilate himself said again and again that Jesus was innocent—not guilty of anything worthy of death. But Pilate caved under the pressure of the Jewish leaders. He sentenced an innocent man to death.

Not only was Jesus not guilty of any crime. He wasn’t guilty of any sin. In 2 Corinthians Paul refers to Jesus as, **him who had no sin.** In chapter four The Writer to the Hebrews says about Jesus that he was **tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.** Jesus was completely innocent, he had done absolutely wrong. Not once did he sin, let alone was he guilty of any crime.

And yet this innocent man died. The only one who never did anything wrong was put to death—crucified along with two common criminals. Where is the justice in that? How is that fair? It’s not; but that is what God wanted and that is what Jesus willingly let happen. He gave up his life and shed his innocent blood on the cross.

We want justice and God is a just God who demands payment for sin. But instead of demanding it from us, Jesus gave it to him. He suffered and dies so that he could save us—so that he could pay for our sins and die as our substitute.

One of the criminals who hung there with Jesus mocked him along with some of the others; he said, **Aren’t you the Christ, save yourself and us,** but he wasn’t sincere in the least. But the other criminal defended Jesus saying, **Don’t you fear God since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what**

our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. And then he turned to Jesus and asked him, **Lord, remember me when you enter into your kingdom.**

It was a plea for God's mercy—a plea for his grace. And Jesus promised him just that, **I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.** Jesus, obviously, isn't talking about some tropical location; he was talking about heaven. Today, Jesus said—that very day both Jesus and this criminal would be together in heaven!

This man was a wicked criminal. He had earned death for his sins—not just death by crucifixion, but an eternal death, damnation—an eternity in hell with the devil. He is just like the rest of us—we have earned for ourselves eternal damnation. For each and every one of our sins God demands payment—and that payment is our life, for eternity. And yet, Jesus promised that he would join him in heaven. What does that indicate? Two things; the first is that Jesus paid for that criminal's sins. Whatever crimes that criminal committed, for every robbery that took place, for all the other sins that this man committed were paid for by Christ. And the same stands for us.

Jesus did this by taking our sins upon himself and becoming guilty of everything we have done wrong. That is why he cried out, **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.** When he took our sins upon himself The Father left his Son—God forsook God because Jesus became a sinner separated from his Father. And this is where Jesus suffered his greatest pain and agony. This is what made his death far worse than every other death by crucifixion. Also upon the cross, he gave us his perfect life. What he did and obeyed his credited to us. The complete verse from Paul in 2 Corinthians 5, **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** Jesus' suffering and death paid for our sins and made us righteous or holy in the sight of the Lord.

But weren't their two criminals? Why was only one saved and not both? Did Jesus pay for this sins of the whole world on the cross? So why was only one criminal saved and the other wasn't—they were guilty of the same crime after all? Here is the difference: the one didn't want it; he didn't want to be saved. Oh sure, he told Jesus to save him; but he wasn't sincere, he was mocking Jesus. He wanted to be saved, alright; but he was concerned about his physical life—he didn't care about his spiritual life. He didn't believe in Jesus as true God or the Savior of the world.

But the other one did. Look again at the words of the one criminal, **Don't you fear God since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong...Lord, remember me when you enter into your kingdom.** This criminal was repentant—knowing that what he did was wrong and he was getting what he deserved. And yet he also believed that Jesus was his Lord and true God. And that Jesus could save him. Through faith he pleaded to the Christ for mercy and compassion. He is saying, "I deserve an eternal punishment; but if you, O God, choose to save me—then great." And as we know, it is through faith in Jesus as the one and only Savior that we receive the blessings he won for us on the cross. It is faith that holds on to and clings to the blessings of salvation. Through faith we too will live in heaven along with Jesus and the criminal.

So let us not be like the other robber. Let not this world and all this world has to offer be our only concern. Let us worry about our spiritual lives far more than our physical lives. Let us, instead cling to what was won for us by the blood of the Lamb through faith knowing that we haven't lifted a finger to be saved because the innocent one became guilty in our place.

For we know what awaits us. Paradise—not on a tropical island, but in a place far greater: heaven! A perfect place, far better than we can ever think or imagine; a life free from sin and its effects; a life with our Savior forever.

It's not really fair is it? That the Innocent one died and we live? It's not; but we don't want what's fair. If we got what we deserve we'd suffer forever. So Jesus suffered through what he didn't deserved in our place, as our substitute. And he takes us where we don't belong—Paradise. And unlike a tropical vacation, from which you eventually have to return; this Paradise is a lasting Paradise, far better than any place on the face of this earth. For there we will be with our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ, forever. Amen.