

Faith in the Marketplace: Fear and Insults 2

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Lord, bless this meeting, this gathering with your presence. Incline our hearts to hear your word. May we be very, very quick to hear.

Lord, we lift up Harry to you today. And the blessing that he has brought to us already, may it continue. The glory of your name, in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen. I want to welcome you. There's a lot more seats up here. And please help yourself to lunch as you walk in. That's fine. Some of you miss soup. You can catch up with it.

I want to introduce new people. Is anyone here new for the first time? Yes, great. This is who you are and where you plug in in the city. Love Q. What's the Thirling Street?

He's the Thirling Street. All right, love. I have Glenn Tully. West Vancouver. West Vancouver, great. My name is Ian Daniel, and I'm working downtown, living in Burnaby.

[0 : 57] Great. Well, welcome. Lovely to have you. Anyone else? Did I miss? Yes, I see. Yes, Polly. Tell us about yourself. Polly, I'm from West Vancouver.

And Mills College. First Vancouver. And let's see. Is this your first time? Oh, so you're safe. You're safe. Great.

Lots more people at this time for the first time. One prayer request that we need to mention, and that is Herb Reetzer was in a car accident.

Was it this morning or last night? Where is it? This morning? Moment ago. Moment ago on the way here. I got hit by a young driver with a car full of stuff. He's in the hospital, and you know he does the lunches for us, and you can tell when he's not here.

It was a calamity. I'm mixed on whether I wanted him just to be healed or to be healed and help us out. Either prayer, God will hear. But he's okay. His neck hurts a bit. And I think the only release you have to take an x-ray.

[1 : 57] Is that right? Let's, maybe Harry, when you wrap up the day, you'll pray for Herb in the midst of your last prayer. Let's pray for him. Are there anything else I have forgotten?

I don't believe so. In fact, let's just pray for Herb right now. Father, we thank you for Herb, sir, and we thank you for how he has served so many of us in this lunchtime. We lift him up to you and pray that he would be healed, his neck would be okay, and he will be back with us next week.

And we particularly now just also pray for ourselves as we try to build bridges between our job and our Christian faith in the marketplace. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Welcome back, Harry. We missed you. Thank you. I'm glad you prayed for Herb, because I'm going to be talking about deathbed conversions today.

So I... If Herb got the word, he might think we were unduly pessimistic about his prospect. The passage, which I hope you all have in front of you, Luke 23, verses 39 to 43, and it carries on the series that we're doing in the 23rd chapter of Luke, where we've looked at Herod, and we've looked at Pontius Pilate, and we've looked at the chief priest, and we've looked at Barabbas.

[3 : 28] And last week, the crowd that stood watching at the crucifixion as they watched it take place, and then today we're looking at one of the criminals, one of those who was crucified with Christ.

You will remember that the way the procession left the praetorium wandered through the streets of Jerusalem, probably less than a quarter of a mile, to a quarry.

I mean, this is how they put it together, the archaeologists, that there was this quarry, and in the quarry there was an area like this, where the stone was badly cracked, so it wasn't quarried, it was just left there.

And that it was on this hill, shaped like a skull, where the three men, the two who perhaps were those who accompanied Barabbas when he led his insurrection against the Romans, and thereby

won the support of the Jews, who were against the Romans as well, but who were thrown into prison, and only released because Pontius Pilate, in accordance with a tradition, whereby at the Jewish festival of the Passover, one person was released to the crowd as an amnesty was granted, and he was released, and Pontius Pilate asked if they would like Jesus, Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called the Christ, and the crowd asked for Barabbas.

Jesus was turned over to the detachment of Roman soldiers, led through the street, and last week, in very simple language, he was crucified.

[5 : 21] That's all it says. It doesn't go into any detail about it, just that he was crucified, and in the process of that prayed, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

And now this passage opens with the three men, as it were, on the crosses, and that's how it begins.

Well, one of the criminals railed at him. Now, Mark and Matthew says they both did, but Luke carries the story a little further and sees what the consequence of what they did was.

And so, the one said to him, are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us. Well, it's interesting, you see, that if you trace the story, you find that everybody was anxious for Jesus to save himself.

Save yourself. The criminal said, save yourself and us. The chief priest had said, if you are the Christ, the Son of God, save yourself.

[6 : 41] The Roman soldiers gave him vinegar and mocked him and said, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself. And so, this word save recurs over and over again through the passage.

And now you get one of the criminals saying, if you are the Christ, the king of the Jews, save yourself and us. Well, I think that it would be fair to point out that typical of most people, he had a wrong expectation of Christ and how this was going to work out.

That what we imagine God should do is not necessarily what God has eternally purpose to do.

And that happens to most of us when we come up against the fact that God's agenda and our agenda are quite different. And God's purpose and our purpose are quite different.

And basically, they're in conflict. But there was a coming together here because this was a conversation between three men under the same condemnation and suffering the consequences of that condemnation as they hung on the cross, the most lingering, conceivable kind of death.

[8 : 00] And this conversation took place between them. When one of them railed at him and said, are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us.

Well, the other criminal. And this is Luke's story. I met a retired doctor this week. I had a conversation with him that lasted about 20 minutes.

And it was just one of those conversations in which I blithered away and thought he was blithering away back at me. And we blithered away this way. And then a third person came into the room and sat down.

And the doctor turned to him and said, this is what we've talked about. Point, point, point, point, point. These are the decisions. He'd taken everything that had been said in what I thought was a random conversation and reduced it to all its essential points and communicated it to the other person in three minutes.

Well, this is Dr. Luke we're talking about. And he's looking with a kind of incisive awareness of his training as a doctor. And he sees something happening here, which he has recorded for us in the repentance of the other criminal.

[9 : 12] The other criminal speaks across to this one and says these things. First, do you not fear God? I suppose that one of the most profound maladies in our society is that we have lost any sense of the fear of God.

It just isn't there. We're so in control that we've lost any sense of the fear of God. I mean a holy fear of an eternal God who is absolute sovereign and by whom we live our life, by whom we draw each breath.

Well, this criminal was in that condition when the one turned to him and said, do you not fear God? It is so entirely appropriate that we should have a profound fear of God.

It's entirely appropriate that that profound fear of God should give expression in the love and worship of God as someone entirely other than ourselves.

Someone totally different. We consider God to be largely the product of our minds and our thinking and our fears and suspicions. But this is a totally other person than that whom we are bound to fear and to whom we owe our whole heart's praise that he is so utterly different than we are.

[10:50] See, we have, like everybody else, made him in our own image and despised him because of it. That's what's happened. The second thing that he says to him, you are under the same sentence of condemnation.

Now, condemnation is, the condemnation they were under, of course, is that all of them were condemned to death on the cross.

And Paul, when he picks up on this reality, universalizes the condemnation which belongs to humanity and says, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God so that all are under the same condemnation.

The equality that we all have as people before God is that we are all condemned by him. And each of us equally. Now, some of us, you may think, are more deserving of it, but all of us are under that universal condemnation.

That is the way that our world works. Now, you may find that, in fact, I suppose, I hope partly that you find that unacceptable. But having found it unacceptable, listen for a few minutes to see how that's working out.

[12:08] What happens then is, the criminal, turning to the other one, says, we indeed are justly, under this condemnation. You know, we live, he recognizes that this condemnation is just.

Some of you may have heard this. I just heard it last night for the first time. That some enormous statistic, like 70% of people, perhaps it was businessmen, suffer the fraud syndrome.

Have you heard of that? Tell me about it, somebody, because I need to know more about it. But what it sounded like, what I was listening to, was that 70% of us are afraid that somebody, at some point, is going to come along and say, you're a fraud.

You shouldn't be where you are. You're in a position of monstrous pretense. And somebody has to blow the whistle on you and show that you're getting away with something that you don't deserve to get away with.

You are a totally inadequate person. And 70% of us live in the fear of that. Well, if you take this story, that fear is more than justified. But that doesn't make it easy for us to acknowledge it.

[13:25] But what he says, the one criminal, we indeed are justly condemned. We want people to think better than the truth of us.

And we give them whatever encouragement we can to have them think better than the truth of us. We know that some people think less than the truth of us. And we despise them for it, rightly, I think. I mean, they can't do that to me. And to try and maintain some kind of balance where the reality of who we are is there. I mean, talking to an alcoholic, really struggling with alcohol.

You know, not just struggling this week, but having struggled for years and years and years and maintained a reputation in business and maintained a reputation in his home and among his friends, that he was really in command of the situation and a conspiracy which was all around him to keep him living that lie so that he never acknowledges that he's utterly defeated by it.

That kind of artificial structure is what's being cut through here. When this man says, we are under the same condemnation and we are justly under that condemnation.

[14:42] You know, to acknowledge that the problem is there and it's real and we're beaten by it and we have no appeal against it. Hard place to come from. But that's where one criminal was urging the other criminal to recognize that reality in himself.

So, he goes on to say, we are receiving the due reward of our deeds. The whole question of what you do about that.

How you... Like when you take this Duban inquiry about Ben Johnson and the things, you see, the way that it's being heard and the gradual...

I mean, the appeal is obvious that since everybody's guilty, nobody's guilty. You know, that kind of thing. And we live in that kind of world that accepts that kind of verdict.

And we, in a sense, cluster together in order to prove that everybody being guilty, nobody's guilty. Nobody has to bear the responsibility. Nobody has to stand up against it.

[15:55] So, we are receiving the due reward of our deeds, but we're no worse off than anybody else. And I'll probably get through without being caught.

That kind of sense of... See, that takes us back to that point that I was at at the beginning. That you are under the same sentence of condemnation.

You know, the story in the penitentiary is always that the difference between the people on the inside and the people on the outside are that people on the inside got caught. But that's the only

difference.

But the kind of sense that what it is we were created for, what God has purposed in us, we failed. And that we are under the just condemnation of a sovereign God.

Now, you know that this situation here is a situation where three men are facing death. When the sun goes down, they'll be done.

[16:58] They'll be finished. The agony of their death on the cross. And you know that it's proverbial that a man facing death cuts through a lot of the nonsense that he lives with on a day-to-day basis when he's happily engrossed in the business of living.

Things become much clearer then. And you understand them much better. And so he said, we are receiving the due reward of our deeds.

You know, that's a tremendous place to come to. To be able to recognize your condemnation and to recognize that it's due to you. Now, the difficulty with this statement, I think, is, in our society, is that we have too small a view of God and too large a view of ourselves.

And that we need to reverse those so that we have a very high view of God and a very small view of ourselves so that we recognize the reality of our condemnation by God.

That's the grounds on which we live. Well, the criminal goes on to say then, but this man, referring to the person of Jesus Christ, has done nothing amiss.

[18:20] You know, that there is something quite unique about this person in the midst. And he then turns to Jesus and says to Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.

You see what's happening here? At this moment in history, the moment of Christ's death on the cross, the first person to recognize what it's all about is a criminal on the cross next to him.

And he sees what's happening. He sees what countless of people have never seen. He recognizes this man has done nothing amiss.

This man is really different than we are. He recognizes who Jesus is. And you know that most, I mean, I would say most of the religion on the face of this earth is a human conspiracy not to recognize who Jesus is.

Not to acknowledge who he is. But this man cut through it. And he is the one who cut through it first, in a way. When he said, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

[19:50] There's a lovely line that we're going to deal with next week, but I want to give you a preview of it this week just so you can anticipate it.

We're talking next week about Joseph of Arimathea. And it talks about his position in the government, his position in society, his spiritual stature, all the things that were good about him. And it says that he was a man who was looking for the kingdom. In the midst of all his human attainment, all his involvement, all his engrossment, the thing that he was looking for in the midst was the kingdom.

And I would say, if this noon hour on Wednesday has any real function, it should be to encourage you in the midst of your busyness, in the midst of the stress, in the midst of the responsibility, in the midst of that wonderful dog-eat-dog world that you live in, that in the midst of all that, you will be one who is looking for the kingdom.

And this, of course, was what the criminal on the cross recognized when he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

[21:04] He didn't have a very clear idea of what that would mean. And it was certainly an appropriate thing for him to say. Remember Joseph when he was in prison in Egypt and interpreted the dreams of the baker and the butler.

And the baker was going to be put to death, so he didn't ask him anything. But when he told the butler that he was going to be restored to the presence of the pharaoh, he said, when this happens, remember me.

And the story goes on. When it happened, he did not remember Joseph. But Jesus, somehow this man recognizes that this man who was dying on the cross next to him will stand before the throne of God and remember him.

And that's the only hope we have, really. He has nothing in himself except that Jesus should honor that request and remember him before the throne of God.

And of course, that's what our faith is about, that Jesus will remember us before the throne of God. And Jesus says to him, today you will be with me in paradise.

[22 : 25] That circuit, the whole circuit of human history comes to its fulfillment. the garden with which it all began and which man went out seeking to escape from the presence of God.

And all the whole history of the people of God and the history of the people of our planet comes around to this momentous time in history when the one man says, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

And he says, today you will be with me in paradise. The circuit will have been completed and man will stand again in the presence of God. Christ recognized that this is what his death meant.

That he, as man, would go to stand in the presence of God and there he would remember us.

That's why Christians are such a miserable lot and keep insisting that Jesus Christ is important.

You know, that they could have such broad and general and happy ethical ideas about how the world works. And they keep insisting, but it's Jesus that's important.

[23 : 32] It's Jesus that's important because he died. And it's Jesus alone who can, as man, remember us before the throne of God. And that's that's our hope.

Well, in the first parish I was in was in Portsmouth outside of Kingston. And that's where the Kingston Penitentiary is. And that's where the Roman Catholic Church called the Church of the Good Thief is.

And the Good Thief is by, this Good Thief was called St. Dismas. I don't know why, where he got that name, but it wasn't out of the Bible. Well, can I just sort of bring this to a bit of a conclusion by pointing this out to you?

This idea that everybody wanted to be saved, even the railing criminals that save yourself and us.

And this is the problem, you see, of deathbed conversions.

People who've lived all their life religiously, you know, never smoked, never drank, never did any of the immoral things that people enjoy so much doing. And he'd lived that way all his life.

[24 : 44] And then at the end, some scoundrel gets forgiven and comes into the kingdom. God, you cannot do that. You know, I've given all this up.

And this guy who's lived it up and liquored it up all his life comes into the kingdom with me. That will never do. And that's why a lot of us give up on God and we set up our own little system.

But the reason that, the fact that it needs to be seen and understood is because it alone acknowledges the sovereignty of God in a way that we all need to.

Alan Richardson writes that the future destiny of man is determined by his present standing before God so that it is possible to speak of a man as already saved.

This is, that is, accepted by God and secured against condemnation in the final judgment. Now, most of us, I mean, the word saved is so religious a word.

[25 : 57] And most of us are, I mean, we're self-centered enough not to want to be saved because being saved is something somebody has to do for you. You know, the picture is that you're drowning and you're thrashing about and a lifeboat comes drifting in beside you.

In the wonderful words of the new age, somebody reaches over to you and says, I know you can do it and putts away. But, the reality is that somebody needs to reach out and pull you in.

You know, that saving is something God has to do for us. And the whole picture that this man on the cross, not Jesus, but St. Dismas as he's called, the thing that he recognized was that Christ could do for him what he couldn't do.

And, he had to accept that. And, you see, the way it works out, in fact, is that you are saved because of what God has done for you in Christ.

You are accepted by God and secured against condemnation in the final judgment. He has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. You see, and that, that, I always get hung up at this point because I, I feel that it's so obvious and yet, how do you, how do you express all that it means?

[27 : 35] That, the reason within, within the whole realm of Christianity that we've talked about deathbed conversions and I think depended rather heavily on them for the most part, even though we may feel a bit superior to that.

and I don't feel a least bit superior to that. I mean, I think that that is a wonderful symptom of the grace of God that a man can turn and say, Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom and the sovereign God of all the earth can say, this day you will be with me in paradise and make himself responsible for that rather than leaving a responsibility with you.

He says it to you. He has done it. It's His sovereign purpose that that should be the case. And so you in the midst of the circumstances of your life can say, I am saved.

And the response of the world around you is, what makes you think you're any better than me? And then they'll go to work to prove that you're not. But you could have helped them by telling them that you're not.

It is the activity of the grace of God by which we are saved through Christ's death on the cross. That's how it works. And that's the thing that we have to come to.

[29 : 00] And you see, what happens when we come to it is the recognition that we are suddenly free to, in a sense, recklessly throw our lives away.

It doesn't matter what we accomplish. It doesn't matter what goals we achieve. None of those things matter anymore. The only thing that matters ultimately is that we have been set free to be recklessly obedient to Jesus Christ.

And all those other standards don't count for a lot. And we are set free because God has done for us what most of us are duped into thinking we have to do for ourselves and spend most of our life trying to do it.

Or to deceive ourselves into thinking that we're trying to do it. Or to deceive ourselves by thinking that we've done it. Or to deceive ourselves by thinking that we can do it.

We're not burdened with any of those things within the purpose of God. We suffer this universal condemnation in order that we may be a demonstration of the grace and mercy of God who reaches out and saves us out of his grace alone by reason of Christ's death on the cross.

[30 : 22] That I think is what makes Christianity really I think it's the thing that you've got to get hold of and it's the thing that's got to get hold of you.

Because the way the world the world is just like the first criminal. Turns to Jesus and says save yourself and us we're in trouble. But we have a very limited idea of what we want to be saved from. And Christ recognized that the work that God had given him to do was that he saved us not by avoiding death on the cross but by enduring death on the cross.

That a far deeper work was done. The basis of our salvation is established through that work of Christ on the cross. And that we are literally set free to be, as I suggest to you, recklessly obedient to Jesus Christ because he's done for us what we can't do for ourselves.

And that was the terrific sort of breakthrough that took place. When this man, under the same condemnation, hanging on a cross parallel to Christ, turns to him and says, Lord, remember me when you come in your kingdom.

[31 : 47] And Christ says, this day shalt thou be with me in paradise. Well, let me say a prayer real quick.

God, when we confront this story and entertain even for a moment the implications of the story, acknowledging we don't fear you as we should, we are under condemnation, we are justly under condemnation and that we have no foundation in ourselves to claim what we most need.

What we most need you have done for us through Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. Help us to accept this. Help us to share it, the fact of it, with those around us without shame.

We ask in Christ's name. Amen.