

Sunday Evening - English

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Date: 16 February 2020

Preacher: Rev Andrew Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn back in our Bibles to Luke chapter 23. Let's read verse 42 again.

And he, one of the criminals, said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And he said to him, truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.

There was two other criminals who were led away with Jesus to be put to death on these crossings. And picture that scene as the soldiers are there. They're awaiting their victims. The rulers are awaiting the condemned.

The crowd who have gathered there are waiting for these men to make their final steps on this earth. And then they emerge.

[1 : 14] Three dead men walking. And in the middle of the two, in the middle are these two criminals.

And there is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It's remarkable that there were three crosses at Calvary that day.

Because so long before, the prophet Isaiah said, He, that is, picturing and pointing to Jesus, is numbered with the transgressors, or sinners.

He'll be numbered with the sinners. Now that's true in a general sense. All through the life of Jesus, he was numbered with the sinners.

He was with them at the beginning of his ministry. We see that quite clearly. He was especially numbered with the transgressors during his baptism.

[2 : 18] Sinners were coming there for a baptism of repentance. And Jesus goes and deliberately associates himself with them.

But it's at his dying here, in these verses that we've read, that we see this in a magnificent way. Christ is on the cross, numbered with the sinners, who are also being crucified at the same time. But you know, it's not merely a matter of association. It's not just a matter of solidarity. We'll do this together.

He identifies completely. He allows himself to be recognized as a sinner. He allows himself to be dealt with as a sinner.

Not only by these men and their hands, but by God as well. A man named Martin Luther paints this scene that we have read so graphically for us.

[3 : 32] He writes, Christ was to become the greatest murderer, adulterer, thief, robber, desecrator, blasphemer, that has ever been anywhere in the whole world.

Here on the cross, he not only bears sin, but he becomes it. The gospel writer Luke, he calls the two men either side, he calls them here criminals.

But both Matthew and Mark use a different word, a word that describes the political zealots. The freedom fighters of the day, the gorillas who killed Romans whenever they could.

In our day and age, we would call them terrorists. And between the terrorists is your Jesus.

The rows between the thorns. Most of you, but not all of you, will have read or maybe watched recently *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

[4 : 50] John Bunyan wrote this book, and it's a book depicting the Christian life. And he gave all of his characters, he named all of the individuals by their characteristics, by what they were like.

And tonight, I want to give a figurative name to both of these criminals. I want us to, tonight, have your mind's eye gazed upon Calvary and see the one cross on the left, the cross in the middle, and the cross on the right.

If we call criminal A, if we call him lost, and if we call criminal B, found.

Clearly, lost is the criminal who dies in his sin, and criminal B, found, is the one who has his sin forgiven by Jesus.

I would like our three headings this evening to be these three names of those on their crosses as you're looking at them. Lost, lost, Jesus, and found.

[6 : 14] I've put the order in that way for a specific reason. My points are not alliteration, but I've put them in that order so you're going to remember this.

Lost, Jesus, Jesus, found. criminal A, has lost, lost, lost, lost, lost, Jesus.

He was right there with him. One final opportunity, and he squandered it. He lost, Jesus, and he himself is lost to the depths of hell forever.

he lost, Jesus. But criminal B, Jesus, found.

Jesus, found. It was Jesus who found him. It was Jesus who saved him. It was Jesus who promised him eternal life in paradise.

[7 : 23] It is he, found, who could now sing, I once was lost, but now I'm found. And you know what?

Tonight, in this church in Stornoway, there's no difference. Two thousand years, and it has not changed the fact that human beings are either lost or found.

And the difference is, what will you do with Jesus? So I want us to go through these three individuals, lost, Jesus, found.

So we begin then with criminal A who is lost. Well, having heard and seen all that the crowd had done to Jesus thus far, he then desires to join in.

Initially, they desired to join in. Both of the criminals, lost and found, were heard mocking him with their voices, calling out among the scoffers.

[8 : 35] Both of them were on their crosses, hurling insults at Jesus Christ. But it was criminal lost who persevered in his rebellion to the very end.

Have a look at verse 39. He lost says, aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us. This is remarkable evidence of being men and women who will continually rail against Jesus.

the only thing that concerned him as he was nailed to the cross and dying in the same agony of crucifixion that the Lord was suffering was that he should in that moment mock Jesus.

Isn't it remarkable that this man will take to his deathbed the venom and the hatred for the Son of God?

He knows what pain Jesus is experiencing physically because he's going through the same and yet despite the pain the effort to gather the breath again in his own lungs and if he could strain his neck to the side and look and then speak to Jesus as he looks at him and then he sees him he sees the supposed king if he knew anything of what the prophet Isaiah had written long before perhaps he would have remembered this he had no beauty to attract us to him nothing in his appearance that we should desire him he would have thought he doesn't look like a king he looks just like me he's no better than I am you know criminal lost was as blind on his final day as he was on the day of his birth his eyes were firmly shut from seeing

[11 : 01] Jesus happiness but you know something had changed about him his heart had changed throughout his life his heart had not remained the same it had got harder and harder had how many times had heard about about or even heard Jesus but we know this he heard Jesus himself speak seven times at least on the cross he heard these most gracious and loving words come out of the mouth of Jesus.

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. He will say in a moment to his partner in crime, Today you will be with me in paradise.

About Mary, woman, behold your son, son, behold your mother. In the three hours of darkness, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? To fulfill the scriptures, I thirst to mark the work completed.

It is finished. To breathe his last, Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit. And yet, nothing.

It meant nothing to him when he heard Jesus. It only hardened his heart as he encountered him.

[12 : 39] And what about you? This evening, encountering Jesus. What's happening to your heart? Is it hardening?

Or will you come? And will you hear what Jesus is saying? Come. Come to the shepherd. Lord, in our congregation in Tain and Fern, one of our retired ministers, I was sitting with him recently and he shared this story with me of his own ministry in Perth.

He was going to this particular fellow who was associated with his congregation there in Perth who was terminally ill. And he arrived at the house and he was very surprised to find that the gentleman

who had gone to see was sitting up in his bed.

He had some nice new pajamas on, his face had been washed and his hair had been combed over. And Donald said, Oh, I didn't expect to find you like this.

The man's wife replied to Donald and said, Yes, today he's waiting to meet with his Lord. Maybe you respond like I did.

[14:08] How wonderful. Here is a fellow brother waiting and knowing he's going to meet with Jesus, the Lord, today. But Donald knew otherwise.

You see, the Lord that this man was waiting to see that day, he was not our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but the Lord of Scone Palace in Perth.

This man had a great association with the palace throughout his whole life and he was given the honor of the Lord of the palace coming to see him on his deathbeds.

He was all prepared on the outside to meet a Lord of this earth. But he was not prepared at all on the inside to meet the Lord of heaven and earth.

All dressed up, but literally dying inside. What about you? Maybe you've dressed up to be in the Sunday night of the communion.

[15:21] All dressed up on the outside. But what is happening on the inside? Bring it. Come to the Lord Jesus and ask him into your hearts.

This is criminal lost who we see. Let's move into the middle and let's look at Jesus. Secondly, let's look at Jesus. He has been scourged.

He's been spat upon. His clothes have been pawned off in a raffle. He's been abused, shouted at, ridiculed on all sides. What is the response of our Lord to all of this?

Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Despite his own body wracking with pain, he does not forget his people.

He prays for his murderers, the onlookers, the fellow sufferers. It's impossible to know the fruit of this wonderful prayer that he made.

[16:21] How many souls on that day and in the days following were drawn away from hell and into heaven because of these words that he prays?

One thing we know is that the Father always hears the sound. And in some ways that prayer is still echoing throughout the world and into this church and through your ears.

Father, forgive us. forgive them, forgive him, for they know not what they do. I want you to notice this evening the threefold attack, verbal attack, that Jesus came under.

Look first of all at verse 35. This is the first attack he receives. The rulers, they even scoffed at him and they said, he saved others.

Let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, his chosen one. They laugh at the whole idea of him being the Messiah as he is in that moment spiked on a Roman cross.

[17:39] And then secondly, in verse 36, the soldiers, the soldiers then come up and mock him, offering him sour wine and saying, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.

Some king you are. Stuck up there with thorns for a crown and a cross for a throne. And then the third verbal attack is in verse 39.

One of the criminals who were hanged, railed at him, saying, this is criminal lost. Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us.

You have one last chance to prove you really are the Messiah. Save yourself and save us while you are at it. You know, there was more than just the verbal abuse.

They were attacking Jesus at the very foundation of his obedience, his faith in the Father. But the mockery is also one of the final assaults of Satan that he could fling upon your Jesus.

[18:57] There is a parallel between the very beginning and the end of Jesus' ministry on this earth. Remember, after his baptism, Jesus was driven into the wilderness and he was attacked three times by Satan.

He was attacked by Satan on the basis of his identity. He said to him in the wilderness, as Satan said to Jesus, if you are the Son of God, do this, do this, do this, prove it.

And here on the cross he says to the rulers, soldiers, and the criminal, if you are the Son of God, if you are, if you are, if you are, then come down from the cross.

the temptations lasted throughout Jesus' ministry. His own family urged him to come home and stop getting into trouble.

Pilate wanted to release him, therefore avoid death. He himself in the garden of Gethsemane begged to be spared of what lay ahead of him, but he resisted that option and instead was obedient.

[20 : 15] Father, not my will, but yours. And now he is nailed to the cross and the temptations return with fierce force, with triple repetition.

If you are who you say you are, then just show us and come down from the cross. The irony is he could have come down.

He could end the agony. he could have silenced the roaring lions. He could end his own silence and show who he really was. He could and yet he couldn't.

To show himself the Son of God to be your Savior. He had to hang on the cross. He had to do the Father's will and this was it.

He had come to save the world and even to save you from your sins and with unfailing obedience he must and he didn't persevere to the very end upon that cross.

[21 : 28] Jesus, our substitute. let us come then thirdly to look at the second criminal to look at Fount as we have so named him.

You know he woke up that morning in his prison cell a lawbreaker condemned to death but also a sinner condemned to hell.

One of those charges was dropped by the end of the day. A change came upon this man who we were praying about earlier on.

Transformation. There's so many stories throughout years of change transformation. being born again being saved by Jesus encountering him and responding to him asking him into their lives. Dramatic change in every one of their lives. There was a change in this man in this criminal. He began the day mocking Jesus along with the others but as the time went by he stops mocking him.

[22 : 55] Suddenly his conversation changes. One of the thieves criminal lost he railed at Jesus aren't you the Christ save yourself and us.

We see that in verse 39 aren't you the Christ save yourself and us and then in verse 40 but the others. There was a change in the other. He stopped mocking him.

He stopped reviling him. Suddenly the two criminals weren't on the same page singing the same songs using the same language. There was a big change.

You know it's quite remarkable that before criminal found turned to Jesus with his great prayer for mercy that he should actually look past Christ.

Again taking the breath in his lungs and if he could look past Christ and rebuke the other criminal. Do you not fear God?

[23 : 59] Are you ready to die and face him? That's a question. Suddenly the evidence of grace in his life becomes very obvious.

He has come to experience the fear of God. Whatever they were before many has come to realize that they were dying justly before the Lord because he realized I am a sinner.

He is now able to do what so many others fail to do. He answers that overriding question of Jesus' ministry of the gospel of the whole Bible.

Who is this man in the middle? Who is he? this was Satan's great objective to attack the identity of the Messiah but he failed.

Jesus in his ministry asked his disciples who do you say that I am? Peter responds you are the Christ the anointed one.

[25 : 11] Similarly the found thief now sees himself as a sinner and Jesus as his saviour. he has concluded that Jesus is the spotless sinless son of God.

That Jesus had done nothing wrong. How did he recognize this? By the Holy Spirit transferring him from being lost to being found from being blind.

now to being able to see. And this is why he comes with the prayer in verse 42. Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.

Again you'll notice there's no question mark in your Bibles. That's not a prayer seeking grace. Grace is not sought by sinners. Grace finds sinners.

And when it does they seek the saviour. We do not say to people we don't say to any of you here this evening come and seek grace.

[26 : 32] We say come to Jesus. It is grace God's grace that is seeking you out. the evidence that grace has found you, found the sinner, is that you the sinner begin to seek the saviour.

Have you begun looking for him? Have you asked why you're looking for him? Maybe his grace has found you already and grace has its perfect work at Calvary when this criminal found finally says Jesus remember me.

It struck me in my study as I thought about this verse what the scene in heaven is at this point. You can think about it in your fellowships later but I won't say too much.

There is rejoicing in heaven, isn't there, over this sinner being saved. And yet at the same time the way his sin was being forgiven was the Son of God bearing his sin on the cross.

There is rejoicing in heaven over the sinner saved and yet at the same time Jesus the Son of God was dying on the cross.

[28 : 08] I leave it with you. The sweetest words this man has ever heard in his whole life were perhaps the last words he ever heard in his whole life. Jesus says to him, today you will be with me in paradise.

The word paradise really means a garden. Its use is reminiscent of the place God made for man to begin with, the garden of Eden.

Adam was the first soul to be saved under what we call the old covenant. The thief on the cross was the last. Again amazing symmetry, wonderful symmetry.

The first person to be redeemed under the old covenant was redeemed when he lost paradise. And now the last person to be redeemed under the old covenant is about to enter into paradise.

That's where they are, in paradise, to use our time. The forgiven criminal has been there over 2,000 years.

[29 : 18] Reminds us of the hymn that most of us will know, the last verse of amazing grace, when we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first began.

We started with a mention of the pilgrim's progress. If you've not read it or seen it, then you're going to go and seek it out this week. But let's finish there too. We know that the main character in that story was a man named Christian as he goes on his lifelong journey, just like so many of the Christians in here are doing as well, all the way until they make it to glory, to heaven.

But it makes no difference. Whether you are a Christian for 50 years or 50 minutes of your life, the result is the same, eternity with Jesus Christ.

But the warning to that, if you squander your 20 years or your 50 years or your 70 or however many years your life will be, there is no guarantee that you will have the opportunity to be saved in the last 50 minutes.

you may not be this evening on your deathbed, but you are this evening walking to your death.

[30 : 55] This congregation tonight and every individual is represented by one of these two men. You are either this evening lost or you are found, lost in your sins.

and lost to the depths of hell forever. Or if you encounter Jesus, you will be found, found by Jesus. Your sin will be forgiven and you will be saved to eternity forevermore. The question then, are you lost or where are you found?

And what will you do with this man, Jesus Christ? Let's pray. Almighty God, we thank you and praise you for the gospel that so many of us for so long in our lives were so blind to.

And yet, Lord, you have sought us out, you have found us, you have opened our eyes. We thank you for the gospel that gives us hope, hope, that our confidence and assurance for a future and glory forever and ever with you is anchored through because of Jesus Christ.

[32 : 33] And so, Lord, that is our prayer for those who are here this evening who don't have that promise, who don't have that assurance. That is our prayer for the families of those represented, of those they have left behind in their homes this evening, of those who have no interest and no thought of Jesus Christ.

Lord, come, have your way among us. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.