**November 20, 2022 Luke 23:33-43**

***Who Is Your King?***

**Scripture:** Luke 23:33-43 NRSV

*(33)When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. (34)[Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. (35)And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" (36)The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, (37)and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" (38)There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." (39)One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" (40)But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? (41)And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." (42)Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." (43)He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*

**Notes:**

1. How does the crucifixion of Christ give me ***hope***?
   1. Jesus is God’s Son, he is ***everything*** that God is.
   2. Jesus is also ***head*** of the church.
   3. God’s Son, died on a cross for all His ***enemies***.
   4. Jesus doesn’t just dress up to be like us, he is ***one*** of us.
2. Only one person ***saw*** something in Jesus no one else ***saw***.
   1. The criminal recognized Jesus for the ***king*** he is.
   2. Jesus hears this man’s plea and responds with a ***promise***, “…*today you will be with me in Paradise*.” *(v. 43)*.
3. Jesus' death gave us the ability to be ***friends*** with God.
   1. God wants to tear down ***barriers*** separating us from Him.
   2. Through Jesus' sacrifice, we are ***forgiven*** and ***redeemed***.
   3. If we ***live*** according to Jesus teachings, ***believe*** that Jesus has forgiven us, we will be sinners saved by ***grace***.
4. There is nothing to be ***afraid*** of, Christ has died for us.
   1. If we walk with Jesus, we will be ***welcomed*** into heaven.
   2. Jesus is truly a ***king***.
5. All who have believe will be ***welcomed*** into Paradise
   1. We have a ***living*** King.
   2. DO you stand in the ***light*** of the Lord?

**Script:**

I am so thankful for the life I have been given. Every day I am able to find new blessings if I am willing to look for them. I love my wife and family, given to me by my father in heaven. I was blessed with parents who raised me to know what is right, what is wrong, and the knowledge that just because I made a mistake I do not have to be condemned for eternity, because if I ask for forgiveness with a sincere heart, my father in heaven will forgive me. My earthly parents are very much the same way, I may have made mistakes but if I apologize with a sincere heart I am forgiven, that is how much they love me. I try to live my life with this same attitude to my children, as well as my nieces and nephews; and I hope each of them know that the Lord would very much like to have a sincere relationship with them, their spouses and their children.

I love living on this earth, I love the smell of springtime and summer with its blossoms. I love fall and the crispness in the air. I love the winter with the freshly falling snow and the excitement that follows as you break a trail in the blanket of white that covers this earth. I love riding my motorcycle in the warm of summer and the breeze in my face. I love the taste of fresh fruits and vegetables straight off the plant; green beans right off the stalk, potatoes fresh from the dirt, tomatoes right off the vine, ripe apples directly off the tree. There is so much about this world I enjoy, because the Lord made it especially for us. The Lord created this world and then he created us, mankind, to care for it and rule over it. When you think about it, what do you especially like about our home here on this planet?

But as I shared last week; one day this world will be no more, because of sin in this world, this world will be destroyed, the Lord will come again, and he will take all of mankind away, where we will be sorted like the sheep and goats, like the good fish and the bad. Peter writes, “*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. 2 Peter 3:10 NRSV*” Many people have tried to decipher when this will be, but to no avail. Some even asked Jesus, to which he responded, “*But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Mark 13:32 NRSV*”

Not only will this last day bring about the end of everything we hold special and dear. Everything in this life, on this earth; but there will also be a final judgment. God will ask how my faith has affected my daily life. Have I fed the hungry, did I give food to those in need? Have I given a cup of water to the thirsty? Have I visited the sick? God will examine my heart and my faithfulness to Jesus. He will look closely at the trust I exhibited when I faced a difficult moment in my life. He will listen to all of my excuses and smile and simply say “I know better than that Kevin.” He will look into my heart and determine how sin had influenced my actions. How sin ruled my decisions. This can be a scary thought when you really think about it.

What hope will we have as everything we have gathered and hold precious disappears as we stand face to face with the creator of this universe, our righteous God. Where will we find comfort, where will we find help, where will our hope come from, as this final day approaches? The thought of leaving everything we worked so hard for is difficult. It can be frightening, even very depressing. We like it here and do not want to leave what we are comfortable with. Join me as we share in the reading of Luke 23:33-43

*(33)When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. (34)[Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. (35)And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" (36)The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, (37)and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" (38)There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." (39)One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" (40)But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? (41)And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." (42)Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." (43)He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."* ***Luke 23:33-43 NRSV***

Now some of you are probably wondering, how does the crucifixion of Christ give me hope? How does this passage help me? Of all of the passages found in scripture I find these to be the most despairing and sad. What can we glean from today’s passage to help us understand more about what will happen on our last day? Why would you choose this portion of Christ’s passion to preach from on the Sunday before thanksgiving? This would be better suited for Good Friday.

Luke traveled with Paul and in many ways was a student of Paul’s. They see Jesus not just as a man who was wrongly condemned and badly treated. They describe him as lord and king, someone who has authority and power but so different to the kings and rulers of this world. Kings are usually figures of great wealth and power. They have been honored and even dishonored by their military and political accomplishments as well as failures. They lived in castles and palaces; wore extravagant clothing, with crowns decked with jewels; they hosted extravagant dinners and entertained the rich and famous of this world. Kings and queens had little to do with the subjects of their kingdoms. They moved about among the elite while the commoners suffered hunger and disease.

Paul’s letter to the Colossians, goes to great lengths to emphasize that Jesus is God’s Son, he is everything that God is and that through him “*all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers” were created* *(Colossians 1:16)*. If he is the creator of all these things, then he is also lord and king of everything in heaven and on earth. Paul goes on to say that Jesus is not only king of every part of creation, he is also head of the church; “*He is the head of the body*” *(Colossians 1:18)*.

After describing Jesus as Lord of lords and King of kings, Paul goes on to describe something very peculiar about this king. This king died on a cross. Just grasp the magnitude of this. The King of kings and Lord of lords, God’s Son, died on a horrible human instrument of torture and death. Not only that, he died for all those who are enemies of God because of the evil things they did and thought *(Col 1:21)*.

Luke also gives us details about this very different kind of king. We’ve heard in fairy tales how a king dresses as a peasant and mingles with the commoners. Jesus doesn’t just dress up to be like us, he is one of us. He takes on human nature and lives among ordinary people especially sinners and outcasts, lepers and the demon possessed. What happens to Christ could hardly be regarded as noble, or kingly.

Luke tells us how Jesus is nailed to a wooden cross between two criminals. Weak from all the beatings; his clothes are stripped from him and soldiers gamble for his robe; he suffers mockery from those near the cross. Can you hear them, “*If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself*” *(v. 36)*. Sarcastically, Pontius Pilate has a sign placed above Jesus’ head which reads, “*THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS*.” (v. 38). On that hill outside Jerusalem, amongst the spectators, soldiers and condemned; there is only one person who saw something in Jesus that no one else saw. In spite of the gashes in his flesh from the whip, the nails piercing his limbs, the wounds, the blood, the nakedness, the shame and humiliation, only one, one of the criminals crucified with Jesus recognized him for the king he is. In his pain and anguish, for he was suffering the same punishment, He said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” (v. 42).

Let’s stop there for a minute. Who among us when facing death in a most humiliating way would look to a fellow prisoner being executed beside us for the relief we desire. Who among us would have recognized our fellow prisoner as the messiah? I am afraid I would have missed it. If we look to the prisoner on the other side we find him hurling insults at Jesus just as those who are crucifying him are doing. Nevertheless, Jesus hears this man’s plea and responds with a promise, “*Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise*.” *(v. 43)*.

Luke is describing a strange king indeed; he is suffering, weak, humiliated, despised, rejected and dying. But through his death, this unlikely king gave us the ability to be friends with God. God wanted to tear down the barriers that separated us from Him. He was going to stop at nothing to make this happen. He was even prepared to let his one and only son, the King of king and Lord of lords die a most painful and excruciating death, in order to make everything between him and us right again.

Paul says, in his usual clear and precise way, “*he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him…*” *Colossians 1:22*. That’s worth repeating to make it sink in. “*he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him…*” *Colossians 1:22*.Through Jesus death and resurrection, we are able to be washed clean of our sin, making us forgiven and redeemed.

This is the really good news, in the light of God’s judgment on the last day. There’s no denying it, “we are sinners”. There’s no getting around the fact that right up to the last day of our life we will continue to be tempted by sin in thought, word and deed. Many times we will stumble and fall; and we will be sinners till the moment when our spirit leaves this body. But if we strive to live according to Jesus teachings, if we ask forgiveness of our sins and believe that Jesus, the king of kings and lord of lords, has forgiven us, we will be sinners saved by grace. Scripture makes it abundantly clear; our sin condemns us and we would have no chance of surviving the judgment of God on the last day.

But Paul makes it clear that there is nothing to be afraid of. Christ has died for us. His death has made us friends with God again and continues to make us holy, pure and faultless. Our sin has been wiped away. Our sin has been forgiven. Our sin has been forgotten. On that day, if we walk with Jesus according to his teachings, we will be welcomed into heaven.

That is what happened to the man dying next to Jesus. Yes he was a thief; yes he was condemned to die a brutal death; but in his moment of deepest agony, Jesus tells the thief that his sin will no longer be held against him. “Today you will be with me in Paradise”. At a moment when all would seem hopeless, when all would seem to be without a future, Jesus promises him salvation, redemption, forgiveness, and a love that is greater than one deserves. Jesus is truly a king. He pardons and assures the man that he will be with him in Paradise. The word ‘paradise’ indicates a garden or a park, the kind a king would have. No earthly king would invite a thief to walk in his garden, but Jesus, the king, died for all of mankind and made it possible for each of us to be “holy and without blemish and blameless” and welcome.

When that last day comes, all who have believed and asked for the forgiveness of their sin, will be welcomed into Paradise because Jesus has made us “holy, without blemish and blameless”.

If the thought of the last day of our life or the last day of everything fills you with fear, be comforted by the fact that we have a living King. Yes, he did die on the cross, but while there, he spoke of the future. I challenged each of you to inspect your hearts and minds last week; to evaluate your walk with the Lord. Did you evaluate your walk? DO you stand in the light of the Lord or are you standing in the shadows? Are you striving each day to do the will of God, to live a life without sin, and working to lead others to Christ as well? If your heart is not right with the Lord, you must surrender your will for His? If you find yourself living in the shadow areas, if your actions are questionable, draw closer to Jesus, allow him to correct your actions and lead you into His light.

Without a doubt, there is a future after death and after the end of this world. Jesus promised the man next to him, a home in paradise, and He promises us a future after death. On the last day all the dead will be raised, and if we are alive at his coming, those who have been faithful to follow Jesus will be ushered into heaven. Once there we will wonder why on earth, we had been so hesitant Why we were sad at the thought of leaving this world. Heaven will be so much better, in fact, words cannot describe how much better it will be.

The events of Good Friday have made it possible for us to feel safe and happy about Christ’s return and this world’s final day. We have a servant-king who died for us and rose from the dead, who has done everything possible to ensure that we need not fear what will happen. At the end of everything, at the end of it all, we are safe because we are at the beginning of eternity with our King.