

## That Day, and Today

Ash Wednesday – 03/05/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 23:26-43 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 29 [Jesus says,] **“For behold, the days are coming...”**

v. 43 [Jesus responds and says,] **“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”**

### **Introduction**

✘ Tonight, in the beautiful rhythm of the church year, we begin the season of Lent; a time to reflect and repent; to pray and to praise; to recall and rejoice in our Lord Jesus as He humbly moves toward the cross and His powerful victory from the grave.

→ During our Midweek services this year we are going to follow our Savior’s journey as it is recorded in the Gospel according to St. Luke.

✘ And the theme for this series of sermons is a statement against all those who tortured, ridiculed, beat and crucified Jesus; a statement of judgment against all of us as sin-filled human beings declaring this: *“You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.”*

### **I. Evil is louder than good**

✘ I’d like you all to consider this truth as we begin tonight: “evil often is louder than good.” In news outlets they have a saying, for instance, that says, “If it bleeds, it leads.” That is, you take a story that is sensational or even bloody, and you make that the main story because it catches people’s attention. “Evil often is louder than good.”

→ Another example: criticism, negative comments - those tend to be more powerful, “louder” to us than compliments or positive remarks. We remember the complaint or the criticism or the insult against us far longer – often replaying them over and over again, long after the kindness or the affirmation someone gave to us has faded. This is why so many people look and act like they are carrying around a whole truckload of negativity in life, because evil often is louder than good.

✘ This is true in our reading tonight from Luke 23. In verse 35 we find “the rulers” of the Sanhedrin “scoffing” at Jesus. Literally the Greek might most accurately be translated to say, “they kept on continually scoffing” – because when evil speaks, it is loud and long in its sin. The irony is that without realizing it, these Jews even declare things that are true about Jesus as He hangs on the cross. They say it with a taunting tone, but it is true, Jesus is God’s Messiah; His Christ; “His chosen one” (v.35). But they completely miss the object of His saving work. He is not there to save Himself, but to die for all people. The rulers can’t see this, in their unbelief. All they can do is scoff and ridicule, so loudly.

→ And then there are the soldiers; the troops under Roman control. They are the executioners that actually kill Jesus and the two criminals. And they know the charge that Pilate has settled on; the charge against this perfectly innocent man – the only truly innocent man ever. His charge is written on a piece of wood and posted over Jesus’ head, “King of the Jews.” But that’s not enough. In their blindness of sin, they can’t just let the sign speak for itself. They are compelled to mock the truth that it declares: “If you are the king of the Jews save yourself” like any true king should be able to do. Laughter, mockery, insults. Loud, evil words.

✘ And there’s more. Even one of the suffering and dying criminals actually finds the strength to rail at Jesus; to blaspheme Him, continually saying, “Aren’t you the Christ?” “Well, aren’t you? Do something!” I wonder how the rulers and the soldiers reacted when one of the men who was dying beside Jesus joined in on all the noise and mockery against Him. They had already taken

His clothes. Jesus had no earthly dignity left. And now this criminal's voice adds to the clamor. It's loud, and it's long, and it's evil; the way that evil often is.

## II. The voice of faith

- ✘ But then ... there is one more voice in the midst of it all. He speaks to his fellow criminal, and then he speaks to Jesus. This solitary voice speaks not out of blindness, or ignorance, or hatred, or mockery. This is a *believing* voice that speaks honesty and truth and hope. Honesty, truth, and hope. We need to listen carefully to this voice; to the believing criminal; to understand what he said in a faith that stands out among all of the noise around him.
  - ➔ And then, Jesus answers him! Up to now Jesus hasn't replied to any of the other noise. But He does speak to this man! And we must listen carefully to Jesus' voice, even though it's been more than 2000 years, because He promises here a gift.
- ✘ This believer – yes, that's what we have to call him – this believer speaks first to his fellow criminal. We have no idea what these two have done, whether they were partners in crime, or just ended up in this place at the same time to die. It doesn't matter.
  - ➔ But his voice of faith is, first of all, astonishingly honest; about himself and his fellow criminal. "Do you not fear God?" (v.40) All of the other unbelievers around him are ignorant; they have no idea that something big is going on here; something mysterious; God's justice at work; and even more. The criminal goes on. "Look – you and I are dying here because we deserve what we are getting. But this Man in between us has done nothing wrong!" Technically those words don't prove that this guy is a *believer* – but how does he know that Jesus is innocent? He's right, of course – he's very right. And he's been hearing the evil voices around him, saying things that are actually true. "If you are the Christ...if you are the king" – and indeed Jesus is the Christ.
  - ➔ Jesus is not only king of the Jews; He's king over everyone! And the fact that this perfectly innocent King is now dying on a cross – talk about injustice.
- ✘ It's the believing criminal's next words that really show the depth of his faith. And don't forget, this isn't the first time that Luke tells us about God working a powerful faith in someone that we might think is an "unlikely believer." There was the centurion back in chapter 7 with the servant that was sick unto death. Even Jesus was amazed, saying of this Gentile, that He'd never seen faith like this...even in any of the sons of Abraham.
  - ➔ There's also the sinful woman who is so moved by Jesus' mercy that she loves Him to the point of anointing His feet and wiping them with her hair. Of course there is the woman with a chronic bleeding issue as well. And who can forget the short, rich tax collector that everyone hated, yet Jesus called to him in the tree and said, "...come down, for I must stay at your house today" (Lk. 19:5). When Jesus said it, "Today" was an unexpected day. No one saw it coming; none of us would have seen it. But for Zacchaeus, "today" was "the day" of salvation for him.
  - ➔ Now, back to the cross: Does this criminal really know who Jesus is? Does he believe that Jesus, dying on the cross, can still be the king? Yes, he does. He speaks the truth, in the full hope of faith. "Jesus! Remember me *when You come into Your kingdom*." You see, this man knows that Jesus is the King; surrounded by evil; with that evil destroying both his and Jesus' flesh.
  - ➔ Yet he clearly knows that because Jesus is the *King* of kings, this will not be the end of Jesus!
- ✘ Because He is God's true King, no evil anywhere can stop God's plan through Him as God's Chosen One. In fact, this criminal even knows that the day will come when this King will undo all evil; will overthrow all injustice; will put the world right and then come into the glory of His eternal kingdom. Even while he is dying, this believing criminal looks for that day. "Remember

me,” Jesus, on that day, is the man’s cry. “I deserve everything I am getting, but You can save me, Jesus.” That’s the truth. That’s the hope of every true believer.

### III. Jesus puts substance to the faith

✘ Friends, you and I have the privilege of reading Luke’s Gospel, so that we see how Jesus puts real substance and promise to this criminal’s words of faith. Only the night before, in the upper room, Jesus promised the apostles who would soon betray Him and run away that He would restore them after He was raised from the dead. Jesus promised that He would remember them, saying, “that you may eat and drink at My table *in My kingdom* and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Lk. 22:30). This promise from Jesus to His apostles, it points them to “that day”; to “the same day” of *final* victory over evil and death to which the criminal on the cross is now pointing us.

➔ But, how could this believing criminal know this except that God has revealed it to him here at the end of his life? And all he has to do to show his faith is say, “Jesus, remember me...”. And Jesus will.

✘ On “that day”; the day of Jesus’ remembering, this convicted, yet believing criminal will have a place at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; with all of the apostles as well. So what do we see there, next to Jesus? Honesty – he knew what he deserved. Truth – he believed who Jesus is. And hope – he looks forward to “the day.”

### IV. Jesus’ answers to faith

✘ But there’s more, just like with Zacchaeus, Jesus answers that man’s faith with the gift of one power-packed word, “today”! Just like at Christmas, in Bethlehem, before the shepherds expected it, “Today there has been born for you in the city of David a Savior” (Lk. 2:11). So, for this criminal who trusted that the true King beside him would remember him on that great day, Jesus gifts him with the greatest gift of all, “...today you will be with Me in Paradise” (v.43).

➔ Paradise is the place of rest and safety; spending eternity in the presence of the living God. That very day, at the moment of death, this believing criminal’s body and soul is torn apart for a time; that’s what death does to us. It’s what happened to Jesus, as well, in the great mystery of the death of the Son of God. But during that time, Paradise; perfect rest, safety and peace is what that believer; what all believers experience as he/they continues to wait for “THE great day.”

✘ My dear friends, listen to that same voice of faith, not unbelief, even and especially as evil is all around you; yes, even when your own evil wants to rise up and close your ears to it. The world is filled with mockers and scoffers right now today. Their voices can seem so loud. It can feel like the noise will crush us.

➔ But we have seen the strange and unexpected salvation of our God here in Holy Scripture. Here in His passion, we see the evil come against Jesus, and it physically crushed Him. But in His victory, death and evil have been undone.

✘ And so, in faith we wait both with the church on earth and with the church at rest. We wait for Jesus to come into His kingdom with all of His glory. The world; the devil fills our ears with the sounds of impatience, doubt, mockery and more. Don’t listen to that evil. Let that quiet voice of faith one cross over from Jesus long ago, instead, shape and guide you today in how you think and speak – with honesty, and truth, and hope.

➔ Speak honestly in the difficulty and death that you face every day. “We are getting what we deserve” if we were left to our own goodness and strength. This is what our sin truly deserves. We must be honest about it.

→ But then speak truth to yourself and out loud to others; the truth about Jesus, the true King. Speak of how, although He is the King of kings, He emptied Himself and became obedient to God's salvation plan to the point of death. Yet even in death His Kingship did not end, so that the great "today" of Easter has claimed the "today" of your salvation as well!

→ And let your voice speak of the unshakeable hope that you have; the hope that is built and based upon this glorious King. He is the King that cannot and will not forget you as His beloved on "that great day" of His return.

### **Conclusion**

✘ So we wait in faith; confident that the clamor of evil will not have its way with us because the truth of Jesus and His promises of both "today" and "that day" cannot and will not ever change. We live here and we live now in the certain hope of our "today in Paradise" and "the day" when Jesus brings us into His eternal Kingdom forevermore.

→ In the Name of the Father and of ✠ the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.