

## Guided to Hope

Lenten Midweek – 03/13/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 23:39-43 Pastor Keith Besel

**<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup> And He (Jesus) said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."**

✘ As we continue on our Midweek Lenten journey – being *Guided to the Cross* by God's Holy Word, our series tonight directs us to take a look at how we are *Guided to Hope* every day and especially now in this holy season.

➔ So, how would you instinctively answer this question: What is it that you hope for today, this year, this decade, in this life? For many of us, the harder we think about that question the harder it is to answer it. There are so many possibilities: Are we hoping for something to make us feel better? Are we searching for things that will make us happy? Are we clinging to the chance of financial stability? Are we craving companionship? Are we wishing for peace and prosperity?

➔ These are all nice and worthy things to hope for on some level. But the hope we grab onto most tightly here in Lent is the hope of the cross of Christ, because the hope we have in Jesus and His cross is not like any other type of wishful thinking we might conjure up in this world.

✘ You know the old saying, "There are only two things that are certain: death and taxes." But this hope in Christ and His cross even stands out from those two certainties because it alone is both solid and lasting. The hope of the cross is not just a passing fancy or a one-time occurrence. It is a constant principle by which we Christians live every single day.

✘ And yet, the irony is that, on the surface, the cross does not look like an element of hope. In fact, originally the cross was not something a person would think of as a goal to strive for in life. It was a torture device, and one of the cruelest at that. Yet God, in His infinite wisdom, chose to use the cross to actually win salvation for us through the death of His sinless Son, Jesus.

➔ So in that way, the cross provides us with hope where before there was no hope at all. The Bible is clear, we were dead in our sins and not able to save ourselves before the cross came along and Jesus was lifted up on it. In our sin, we were lost with no understanding of what was in store for the future; not able in our unbelief to see the big picture of God's plan for those He created.

➔ But now, the cross and Christ's death upon it, gives us a path to follow; the assurance that heaven awaits us; that faith brings us into a closer understanding of God's will to embrace us in His love; to gather us together into His presence. These, my friends, are the reasons we have hope. These are the basis for our confidence in Christ and His cross; a certainty that cannot fade.

✘ So, how does this hope that we have in Jesus come out; how do others see it in us? The Bible teaches us that people can actually see the hope we have in Jesus by the way we live our lives. Jesus told His followers in John 13:35, "By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

- So, we love and we care for others as Christ loved and cared for us on the cross – undeservedly, selflessly, sacrificially. We approach hardship and suffering with a calm and peaceful demeanor. We don't allow the tragedies and disasters of this world to overwhelm and distress us because we know...we know there is a world to come in which we will be safe and blessed forever.
- ⊗ These are the ideals; what we seek to do because we are filled with gratitude for all that Jesus has done for us. But...I know, that's not always what we show to those around us, is it?
- No, our hope in Jesus is not always as strong as it should be; as we want it to be. We doubt. We question. We are afraid. And those are the times when we need to be reminded of those who followed Jesus on the way to His cross.
- Even though Jesus told them again and again, His disciples did not want to believe that Jesus would suffer and die for their sins. They resisted and doubted that news. They questioned it. And then, when it was happening, they ran away and hid. They sank into a funk of hopelessness and despair.
- ⊗ And it didn't help matters that one of the criminals on the cross next to Jesus ridiculed Him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (v.39). That guy didn't believe Jesus was who He claimed to be, so he tried to publicly lead everyone else away from Jesus. He wants them, all of the others at the cross, and even you and me to believe that there is no hope in Jesus saving him or us. So he tried to turn it into something to laugh at.
- The soldiers acted the same way by mocking Jesus in the hours before He went to the cross. They put a purple robe on Him; they made Him hold a staff as a scepter and pounded a crown of thorns into His head and then mocked Jesus as a want-a-be king, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Jn. 19:3). They had no hope that this guy, Jesus was any kind of savior.
- But even more, the people at the Pavement – Pilate's public courtroom, stood before the beaten and bloodied Jesus when Pilate brought Him in front of them and displayed their absolute lack of hope in Jesus. They cried out in loud and angry voices over and again, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" (Lk. 23:21).
- Then as Jesus hung on the cross, those walking by Mt. Calvary either on their way into or on their out of Jerusalem, believed that all hope was lost. Matthew 27:39 says, "Those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads" as if to say, "What a shame. This did not turn out the way we thought it would." Their hopes were dashed.
- ⊗ It was only...only the criminal on the cross, on the right side of Jesus that displayed any hope. He believed that all of this drama of which he was in the middle of had a purpose much greater than just three nobodies being punished as they deserved. He said to the criminal on the left of Jesus, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong" (vv. 40-41). It sure looks and sounds like this criminal knew more of what was going on than Jesus' supposed followers.
- Number one, he knew that Jesus was innocent of any crime, while he acknowledged the depth of his own guilt. He knew that he deserved death but that Jesus did not. He also knew he could do nothing to save himself. But here's what mattered the most. He was absolutely certain that only Jesus could save him. So, filled with hope, he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (v. 42). That repentant criminal was confident that there was a life beyond his certain death – and that that life depended entirely and only on Jesus!

- And look at Jesus' amazing response. In the midst of unspeakable agony, Jesus comforted and assured that criminal in his great display of faith, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise" (v. 43).
- ✘ At that moment, on that day outside of Jerusalem, full and free salvation in Jesus was proven to be the deepest and greatest reality, not only for that man who came to faith only moments before his death, but for every person ever who would place their hope and faith in Jesus' sacrifice and victory at the cross.
    - Friends, the only certain hope of eternal salvation is hope in the everlasting kingdom of Christ, and that hope can never, and will never fade.
  - ✘ Need a little reminder of this fact? Fast-forward to the evening of Easter after Jesus had risen. Two of His followers were headed from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus. All they knew was that Jesus had died three days earlier.
    - As they were walking, a stranger began walking beside them. They did not discern, in their grief, that the stranger was Jesus. So when Jesus asked them what had happened recently, the disciples talked about Jesus; about how He had been killed.
    - You can just hear their sadness: "We had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel" (Lk. 24:21). At that moment, their hope was dashed. But Jesus, as only Jesus can do, according to Luke 24:27, "interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." He restored hope in their hearts. They realized, and told the other disciples later, how their hearts burned within them; how they were filled with hope when Jesus was talking to them and when they recognized Jesus as He broke bread in front of them in their home.
  - ✘ Do you remember how that resurrected hope came to life within them; how it was displayed? Luke 24:33 tells us that immediately they ran all the way back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples all about Jesus! That's what hope does for you and me today. It takes hold of us; it compels us to tell others about Jesus. We can't help but be excited about the certainty of our salvation in and through Him. It's such Good News that it pours out from us. We are overflowing with joy!
    - 1 Peter 3:15 speaks of this drive when Peter says, "In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."
  - ✘ It's important for each one of us to figure this out, "What is it that drives you to share with others the hope that you have in Christ and His cross?
    - Maybe it's a profound spiritual moment you had in church, or perhaps it was a recovery from any illness or injury. Or was it an aha moment you had while praying or reading the Bible.
    - While similar, each one of us has our own unique interaction and relationship with Christ the Crucified that produces amazing experiences through the Holy Spirit. And those events empower us now today to live faithful and active lives for Jesus, because of Jesus! It fills us with the daily, living hope that Jesus is with us every step of the way on the road to our promised heavenly bliss forever.
  - ✘ So, dear Christian, be guided to the cross this Lent. Be guided to the hope you find only there. Be blessed as you move forward in faith with the confidence and assurance that the Crucified Christ is always at your side; teaching you along this life's path and making your hearts burn within you with the only sure hope in Jesus! Amen.