

Easter Certainties

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[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 23, Jerry Seagull and Joe Shoster met in high school.! They began creating a science fiction character and drawing him into comic strips and hoping to get them in papers.

! And then in 1938, after five years of working on the idea, with little success in publishing it, they sold all the rights to their work for \$130.

Now that's almost \$2,900 in today's dollars. Their character was Superman. A forerunner of DC Comics bought it and the rest is history.

The Superman franchise has made \$27 billion worldwide. And the first comic book that was sold last year, the first Superman comic book was sold last year for \$6 million.

After being sold three years earlier for \$2.5 million. If you are a Seagull or a Shoster in this place, I am sorry to tell you about the fortune that you missed out on.

[1 : 1 1] The men missed an underestimated their potential and missed a golden opportunity. And I don't want you to miss your chance.

I want to show you this morning about one man who just had a few minutes more to take advantage of the greatest opportunity that he possibly could.

And he didn't miss it. And it made an eternal difference. Luke chapter 23 tells us that Pilate delivered Jesus over to the will of the people.

The mob mentality led to kill him. And they led him away to be crucified. And then Luke chapter 23 verse 32 says this. Two others who were criminals were led away to be put to death with him.

And when they came to the place that is called the skull, there they crucified him. And the criminals on his right and on his left. And Jesus said, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

[2 : 1 6] And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by watching. But the rulers scoffed at him saying, he saved others, let him save himself. If he is the Christ of God, his chosen one.

The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself. There was also an inscription over him, this is the king of the Jews.

One of the criminals who were hanging rail at him and saying, are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us. But the other one rebuked him saying, 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. For this man has done nothing wrong.

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

[3 : 2 0] In the very next verses, it speaks of Jesus' death. The Gospel of John tells us that the other men died shortly thereafter. They wanted to make sure that all three men were dead before the sun went down because that would start the Sabbath.

And no one was to be hanging there when the Sabbath started. And so the soldiers would break legs to get them dead by dark before the Sabbath started.

When they got to Jesus, he was already dead. And then they thrust a spear through his chest cavity and into his heart to make sure he was dead. And just like that, they were dead.

Jesus did not deserve to go to the cross. In one way, it was not his cross to die on. It was intended for Barabbas, a notorious criminal who had stirred up an insurrection, who had robbed folks, possibly even killed folks.

It is often thought that he was a gang leader, a gang leader with two sidekicks. The two sidekicks would be on the crosses beside Jesus, with the intent being that Barabbas' cross would be the center cross.

[4 : 35] Christ literally died on the cross intended for Barabbas after Pilate traded off Barabbas for Jesus. However, in an even greater way, it was the cross of Christ.

Before the time existed, the cross of Christ was coming. It would have to, due to the sin of humans and the redeeming grace of God.

He died so that we don't have to. He died in our place. He is the only one that could. He was virgin born of the Spirit of God, not born of the same sin state that we are in.

He stayed sinless throughout his life. He is the only one that could perfectly fulfill the law. The only way that a sinful humanity had hoped to coming back to God was through a sacrificial atonement. Somebody had to bridge the gap, and only Christ could do it, and thank God that he did. While he died, most jeered. Some sneered.

[5 : 45] But at least one's life was changed. There's evidence that possibly more than that. But it was the dying thief hanging on the cross next to Christ that was changed. When one spoke harshly to him, another asked him for help.

And when he did, help came. Jesus said, he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And God answered his prayer.

Jesus answered it immediately. The thief on the cross died that day with the promise of two certainties. And I want you to know something this morning.

Those two certainties are open to all of us as well. There are two realities that can be absolute certainties for us.

The first one is the certainty of salvation. There's no need for you today to be uncertain about salvation in Christ. I want you to be clear.

[6 : 45] Our lives can be changed. How does that happen? Well, it's a three-step process. One, it's by our confession, the confession of our need. This repentant thief knew his sin was leading to death.

He told the other criminal while he was on the cross, we deserve what we're getting, but not him. In a day when people want to excuse away their sin, when people want to ignore their sin, when people want to justify their sin, we need to understand that your sin, that my sin, that our wrongdoing will forever condemn us and separate us from God.

We don't have to stay that way. If we refuse to admit that we have a problem, when God has shown us that we are separated from him and what has separated us from him, we will never receive help for our eternal problem.

It begins with a confession. You got to confess that you've got a need. It continues by our change in our heart and life.

One must turn from his or her sin to be saved. And whereas one criminal ridiculed Christ, the other repentant one said to Christ, please.

[8 : 07] And salvation came when he acknowledged Christ for who he is. The third process of that is by calling upon him for salvation. And he saw the innocence of Christ.

He saw the lordship of Christ. Christ, I want you to hear me this morning. If that old boy would have known in his heart but never acknowledged with his life, he would have spent eternity in hell.

Knowing's not enough. But thank God he didn't do that. He acknowledged the state of his circumstances and he called upon the Lord. If you have a familiarity with Christ today, but you've never truly submitted your life to Christ, Christ, I want you to know that familiarity is not enough.

An old preacher was talking to a lady one time that knew little about salvation. And he asked her, do you know that God has set a definite date for your salvation?

And she looked surprised at him and said, no, I didn't know that. Well, he has. And he asked her, he said, if I show you that he has, will you keep that engagement with him?

[9 : 18] She looked at him seriously and said, yes, I would. He said, all right, then here it is. Behold, now is the favorable time.

Behold, now is the day of salvation. My friend, the promise of salvation is that when you turn to him, you will be with him both here and forever.

And the difference in the saved and the unsaved and the difference in the forgiven and the unforgiven is that the unbeliever and the believer and the unbeliever is that the believer has received the forgiveness and the grace and the mercy of God by their personal surrender.

And my friend, that's the only hope that we have. Once we have that through Christ, we ought to be different. We ought to be changed. And there's times when we don't look that much different.

The apostle Paul said, the things I want to do is the things sometimes I don't do. And the things that I wish I didn't do are the very things that I do. Sometimes there's a struggle in that.

[10:28] But the reality is the power of the Holy Spirit of God within us teaches us to lean upon God daily as he leads us. And we get better at that with time.

We ought to if it's real. Each day that we live, we ought to get better at it. So come to Christ. Drop what you're doing and come. Confess your sin. Turn to him.

Call upon him. That is exactly how the thief in his final moments was saved. And that's how any of us are saved. That is our hope.

It is the certainty of salvation. But there's another certainty here and that's the certainty of heaven. Jesus said, today you will be with me in paradise.

In other words, life continues. My friend, this is not all there is. 1 Corinthians 15, 9 says, if in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all pity, of all people, most to be pitied.

[11:32] This is not all there is. Leave this life without Christ and you'll have hell to pay. You leave it knowing Christ and you'll be changed forever.

All of that, we don't quite understand. It's a little bit beyond us. However, we can know the assurance of the change. 1 Corinthians 15 puts it this way in verse 50.

He said, I tell you brothers, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable and this mortal body must put on immortality.

When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality, then death is swallowed up in victory. In other words, in Christ, death has lost its sting.

Life in Christ is real. Life after death is as real as the empty tomb in Jerusalem where they laid the body of Jesus but it lays no longer.

[12:37] Thank God, it's empty. I've been there. He's gone and he lives. And that's why we celebrate today. We celebrate because he lives and because he lives, we too may live.

The certainty of salvation means that life continues. It also means that we can be with him forever. Scripture promises us the unchallenged presence of God.

The greatest news of this passage is today you shall be with me in paradise. People have wondered, theologians have struggled over what paradise means there.

Where's paradise? Well, the word comes from a Greek transliteration of a Persian word that speaks of the king's garden. And the king's garden in that atmosphere is somewhere where nobody could go unless they were invited into this gated garden.

That reminds me of the Garden of Eden before there was sin and they walked with God in the cool of the day. So where is this paradise and what is it?

[13:47] Well, let me tell you what really matters. Scripture says, today you will be with me in paradise. You see, I believe paradise is heaven under construction.

And what I mean by that is not that they're up there building golden mansions. I'm not talking about building construction. No, heaven will not be complete until all God's family is there.

Once you've lost loved ones here, there'll never be a time on this earth when all your family will be back together again unless they know Jesus and then you can be with them in glory if you are in Christ.

Then we'll be together in the presence of God with no enemy chasing us down and no temptation whispering in our ear and no human frailty hampering our fellowship.

We'll be there together in the unchallenged presence of God. What's heaven like? Scripture tells us a bunch about it but how do you explain an eternal place in temporal words?

[15:09] How do you describe the divine to the human? How do you describe the infinite to the finite? I'm convinced it's all watered down words to try to satisfy some of our questions.

But in reality it's so beyond our concepts. I like what the old doctor said to his patient. It was in a day when doctors made house calls and he had made a house call and there was a man there who was very sick and he said Doc what's heaven going to be like?

And the doctor's dog had followed him to the man's house. The dog was out on the porch and he was scratching on the door whimpering and whining to get in and the doctor said do you hear that? He said yeah.

He said that's my dog. He's never been inside your house. He don't know what's inside your house. All he knows is that the master is there and if the master's there he wants to be there too.

It must be okay. Paradise is where the Lord is. What else really matters?

[16:23] Knowing heaven is real means real life continues. We are with him and also and I want you to get this heaven is immediate.

Jesus said today you shall be with me in paradise. When we've surrendered our lives to Christ and one day we close our eyes in death here we open them with Christ.

It's instantaneous. 1 Corinthians 15 verse 52 says in a moment in the twinkling of an eye we shall be changed. The apostle Paul tells us to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. No delay it's immediate. The thief died that day so did the Lord the thief was instantly in his presence just like he promised and that day is coming for all of us.

So I ask you this morning on Easter Sunday morning in your Easter best let me ask you are you ready? Are you ready?

[17:38] He died for us. He met us where we are. He makes us aware of our need for him. Listen if there's anything in you that pulls toward wanting to know more of God of wanting to be in relationship with God I want you to know you didn't come up with that on your own.

You didn't conjure that up on your own. I didn't convince you of that on my own. No my friend the Holy Spirit of God is drawing you to himself. All you have to do is obediently follow his lead and the reality is our hope is as real as the empty tomb that we celebrate today and thank God for you it's not too late if you're sitting here breathing this morning and if you're not let your neighbor know but if you're sitting here breathing this morning I want you to know it's not too late.

I think about what the old boy said that fell off the horse. He said betwixt the stirrup and the ground mercy I ask mercy I found.

My friend I don't know what you've fallen into today but I want you to know something you can come to Jesus. He'll meet you where you are.

He knows your circumstances better than you do. He knows the things you've done that nobody else knows about but you and maybe you even forgot.

[19:17] He knows it all and yet he loves you so much that he came and lived a sinless life and died a sinner's death for your sake and for mine.

Thank God three days later he rose again to remind us of the eternal life that we have because of what he did on the cross. if you're here this morning I want you to know it's by a divine appointment. If you've never acknowledged the Lord Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior I promise you today he'll meet you where you are. He'll take you to where he'd have you to be. All you have to do is surrender your life to him today.

Lord take me as I am. Forgive me of my sins. Come into my life and change me from this day forward to live for you. I'd love to guide you in that.

In a moment after I pray we're going to stand and we're going to sing but more important than singing I encourage you to be obedient to God. I'm available for you to come. Just tell me what God's laid upon your heart.

[20:19] Maybe you're here this morning and you have acknowledged the Lord Jesus Christ but you've never done that publicly. It's a private matter for you. Jesus by his example and by his commission tells us that we need to follow that with believers baptism.

We're going to do that in a couple of weeks and I'd love to guide you in that process and so if you've never done that I encourage you to come. Let's start that conversation. Or maybe you're here and God's guiding you to Pickens First Baptist Church.

Man I thank God for what God's doing in our midst. He's doing a wonderful work. He might be drawing you to be a part of that and if he is then I encourage you to come. I'd love to guide you in what that means.

Guide you in that process. Or maybe you're here and you got all that down. But there's just stuff. Stuff in your life that you don't like to acknowledge but today the Holy Spirit of God has spoke to you about your circumstances and you realize that today's the day of decision.

This Easter day is a day of new beginnings. things. It's time to renew. It's time to be fresh again with the Lord. And I'm thankful that you can do that in the pew where you'll stand in just a moment.

[21:39] You can do it at this altar or you can do it with a pastor praying for you. I just encourage you don't leave here until you've done everything that God would have you to do. Nothing more.

Nothing less. He'll take care of everything else. Just be obedient. Heavenly Father I love you and I thank you for your love for us. Lead us right now dear God to follow you with boldness, with

obedience dear God and with courage oh God I pray in Jesus precious name.
Amen. Amen. Amen.