

Midweek Lent 6

March 16, 2016

Sermon Text: Luke 23:42

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⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Their hard-fought effort was slipping away. For six years they mustered all their strength to expand the borders of their empire. The Imperial army swelled in numbers. The Imperial Navy boasted a strength rivaling that of America's navy. The Imperial Air Force unleashed warplanes which twisted and corkscrewed and dived faster than any other plane. During World War II all Japan could think about was conquest.

Already by 1942, Japanese leaders began questioning the reality of world domination. The Battle at Midway severely crippled their Navy. Mighty carriers were sunk. Destroyers and cruisers were heavily damaged. Thousands of men lost their lives. Over the next three years, all the land Japan frantically clawed for was slipping out of their hands. Finally, on May 8, 1945, Allied Forces proclaimed victory in Europe (VE-Day). Just three short months later, Allied Forces forced Japan's unconditional surrender.

That is really the one thing Japan did not want, right? Unconditional surrender. That is why they continued fighting until fire from the sky devoured their land. They feared government losing its independence. Restrictions would drag on the economy. Freedom would be taken away; other people would control their lives. Surrender usually means that life changes for the worse.

"Surrender" is really a word you do not want to hear, is it? Most likely you do not want to surrender your driver's license. You probably do not want to surrender your house for an apartment. You do not want to surrender your favorite food for a diet. You do not want to surrender your current work-schedule to someone else. Surrendering usually paves the way for a less-than-pleasant life.

That almost appears to be a rock-solid truth. That surrender always means a worse life. At least, that is the first glance on Mount Calvary. Three men on crosses; freedoms surrendered. Yet, look again. **THE SURRENDER TO THE CROSS** sets you free from captivity, and makes you heaven's citizen.

You already know that those who die on crosses are suffering capital punishment. Hanging, gasping, suffocating until eyes close in death. The horrific sounds, graphic sights, serious atmosphere warned everyone living under Roman rule not to break the law.

Guilt brings us here to Mount Calvary. A thief, who surrendered. He allowed the law to catch him and then listened as his life became less-than-pleasant. Yet, the Bible never settles any curiosity by mentioning what great crime this criminal committed. All you know is that (1) a jury found him guilty of some crime and (2) a judge sentenced him to death.

Now he loses his freedom, while everyone else freely comes and goes. Those innocent bystanders will eat dinner with their families, sleep in their own beds in their own homes, go to their jobs tomorrow; walk their daughters down the wedding aisle, grow old with their spouses, pass away in their sleep, and be buried with a service in a cemetery. They had freedom to do what they wanted— but for this one dying thief, all he feels is death’s hands slowly wrap around him.

Yes, you and I are still free to go to our homes, to our jobs, to our families. No police officer or foreign nation is currently demanding your surrender. Yet, there is the one surrender we all must face— the day our life surrenders to death. Then what? Do you wonder if life will become better? Or if you will suffer for the crimes committed against a holy God? What do you expect to hear for all the times you lost self-control? Or the many times your selfish choice not only affected you, but made your family victims? Or the times when you clearly understood the evil God told you not to do, but you did it anyway? Or when you acted out for the simple reason that you thought no one else was watching?

Where can you run and hide so that your guilt does not find you? Surrender before a holy God seems utterly ludicrous! Sometimes it feels better to cover up our pile of disobedience and pretend it is not there instead of confessing our sins to God. It just feels that we can cancel out guilt on our own.

You know, we are not at Mount Calvary tonight because of that thief’s sin. Our guilt is the reason we are here in the first place. If we were sinless, we would never have a reason to walk to the cross. Even the dying thief knew that. Not only does he suffer for his earthly crime, but he faces eternal punishment for his many crimes against God.

It just so happens that the guilt of this thief brings him to Mount Calvary. Hanging next to him is Jesus, nailed to a cross, hanging, gasping, suffocating beside him. This dying believer sees Jesus as someone more than just someone on a cross. He sees someone like him, suffering in his place; someone pierced for transgression. Someone who willingly surrenders his freedom and was led like a lamb to the slaughter. Someone who dies at the hands of men, but would soon have all things placed under his feet. Yes, through faith this thief sees Jesus as the very Son of God.

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” That is exactly what Jesus does. The name ‘Jesus’ means ‘he saves’—and Jesus saves you and me from the consequences our sin earned us. Sin’s debt is draped across his back. Our wrongs nail him to the cross. Our disobedience makes him the target of God’s anger. Jesus surrenders his own life to death so that you and I may never be forced to endure that eternal shame. See **THE SURRENDER TO THE CROSS**—the only surrender that truly matters: Jesus surrenders his life to *set you free from captivity*.

THE SURRENDER TO THE CROSS *makes you heaven’s citizen*. At first, that sounds ironic, like a contradiction. Since when does surrender make life better?

Surrender usually means that life changes for the worse. That is why Japan continued fighting until fire from the sky devoured their land. When they did surrender,

their fears became reality. They were not made American citizens, nor were their war crimes automatically forgiven. The war they fought brought many deserved consequences to their nation.

So, does repentance mean that God will finally punish you? That when you turn to God in faith with shame in hand and lay it at the cross, he will damn you to hell? That you surrender, meaning that God will make the rest of your life one living hell? No!

The dying thief surrenders to the cross. Yes, he surrenders to his own physical cross as he dies, but that is not the cross we are discussing. Remember, Jesus dies on the cross to make you his believing child. By faith you believe Jesus is dying for a reason; he dies to establish his eternal kingdom. No, this is not an earthly kingdom. Jesus does not live to set up boundaries and a real, tangible kingdom. Instead, he dies and rises so that he can rule your heart by his Word. So that you can be comforted in knowing that Jesus your King has made God at peace with you. So that you can be assured that no enemy—world, death, devil—can overthrow Jesus. So that you can be quieted in knowing that Jesus our King.

By faith, you believe that your King grants you royal pardon, forgiveness for a debt of sins. He has *made you heaven's citizens*. Through faith heaven is guaranteed to you. There is no doubt about it. This is sealed up by the unbreakable promise of God.

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Surrendering to the work of Jesus is not something which makes life worse. Resting your confidence for heaven in his work brings about an entirely new way of life. You are set free from sin’s captivity; you are set free for eternal life in heaven. This all comes, not because you or I surrendered and gave ourselves up to Jesus. This is all yours because of Jesus and **THE SURRENDER TO THE CROSS** *sets you free from captivity, and makes you heaven's citizen.*