

Good Friday
Luke 23:32-49
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About 10 years ago I did one of those online quizzes on Facebook. The title was: “When will you die?” I answered some questions: about my health, family, exercise, diet, smoking, drinking. I thought I would do pretty well. Here is the answer I got: **29th February, 2016.**

So today, I’m feeling pretty good. So good in fact that I went back and thought I’d take the quiz again. By the way, I think these quizzes are stupid, but they make excellent sermon stories 😊

So I answered all the questions and apparently I will now live to the age of 97. So there you go. 30 years to go.

It’s not unusual for people to think about when they’ll die. Sometimes we might even wonder HOW we’ll die. But we don’t often think about WHO we will die WITH. We might think about who will be **with us** when we die. But not who will actually die WITH us. At the same time.

Yet, this is one focus of the passage today – WHO Jesus dies with. And in every gospel account of the crucifixion, this is made very clear. Jesus died between two criminals. And he died the same way as those two criminals. Nailed to a cross. They were executed as criminals.

III – Last meal: This is DANNY ROLLING (photo). He died on October 25th, 2006 at the age of 52. His last meal was lobster tail, butterfly shrimp, a baked potato, strawberry cheesecake and sweet tea. Why do we know that? Because it was his last meal on death row Danny was a serial killer. He was executed with the death penalty in Florida because he violently murdered 4 university students, as well as committing rape, mutilation and even decapitation. His last meal doesn’t tell us anything about HIM. Except that he liked seafood. It doesn’t tell you anything about his life. But here was a guy who wouldn’t look out of place next to Jesus on that cross as a criminal.

If I die before lunch, my last meal ever will have been porridge. Not very significant. And it doesn’t tell you much about me! Except that I’m often a fairly boring person. Especially since I wrote this sermon on Monday and KNEW that I was going to have porridge on Friday morning. But, maybe I live to 97 years old because of the porridge...

Jesus’ last meal was with his friends. The Passover meal – the meal remembering how God freed his people from slavery in Egypt hundreds and hundreds of years earlier. And Jesus says to his disciples, as he shares that last meal with them: this

meal is now about MY blood and MY body. This is about a NEW covenant. Jesus redefined the Passover meal to be about HIM. HE was now the sacrificial lamb.

And here he is now, on the cross, being sacrificed. You see, that's the difference between Jesus on the cross and the criminals beside him. They are being executed. He is being sacrificed. They are being executed for what THEY have done. Jesus is being sacrificed for what WE have done. That's what his last meal tells us.

And while he is hanging there, a lot of people are saying a lot of things.

Verse 35 – the people watching: *“He saved others, let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One.”*

Verse 36 – the soldiers: *“If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”*

In verse 39, even one of the criminals harasses him!

“Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

Then the other criminal rebukes him:

“Don't you fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

III – How long will you live survey:

Don't think badly of me, but while I was doing my sermon research, I did another quiz. These are the only ones I've done all year. I think. Again, it was titled “When will you die?”

But this is what it spat out for me at the end:

Sins: 73

Good deeds: 406,406

Final decision: heaven

Weird! It just spits out this strange set of data that I've only committed 73 sins and done 406,000 good deeds? And I'm going to heaven based on those statistics! That I the weirdest quiz I've ever seen!

But it IS the way a lot of people think about heaven and hell. It's about sins and good deeds. That there's some simple tally of both, and on balance, that's the decider of what we deserve – heaven or hell. And if I do more GOOD than EVIL I deserve heaven.

So I want to ask:

How many sins are too many for heaven?

How many good deeds do I need?

How much is ENOUGH to deserve, or NOT deserve, heaven?

You see, we are the criminals either side of Jesus. Are we any worse than Danny Rolling? God says we deserve the same sentence. Even the second criminal understood that he deserved punishment. The same punishment. The same verdict.

WE deserve the punishment of God. Because one sin, just ONE sin, is enough to keep us out of heaven.

Let me explain: If you make a big omelette with 12 eggs, and only 1 egg is rotten, is that OK? Is one bad egg OK in an omelette? Would you eat that omelette? What about 2 bad eggs? Is that OK? 1 bad egg ruins it right?

If we want to be in heaven with the Holy God of the entire universe, how much sin is enough to keep us out of his presence?

One.

Just one.

One sin makes us a sinner. And there's no place for sinners in heaven.

There's no place for sin in the presence of a holy God.

The 2nd criminal was right. They were getting what they deserved. They were getting what we ALL deserve.

But then he says the best ever final words... verse 42:

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

This criminal, all his life, had rejected God. Ignored God. Gone his own way. Done his own thing. And now, on death row, he recognises what he deserves. He is getting what he deserves. But he turns to Jesus, recognises him as the King, and says *"Remember me, King Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom."*

And Jesus says to him: *"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."*

Jesus says to him: When it comes to humans, yes, you're getting what you deserve. You're being crucified for your crimes. But when it comes to standing before God today, I will take what you deserve from Him, so you can have what you **don't** deserve – heaven. Paradise. I will take your punishment from God, so you can receive his gift of eternal life.

And this is the dilemma we face. We don't want to admit that we deserve hell. Punishment. God's wrath. But we do. We don't want to believe that we own the label *"sinner"*. But we do. We don't want to believe that one sin is enough to knock us out of the presence of God. But it **is**.

However, once we recognise this, once we admit, like that second criminal, that we need Jesus, he sets us free from that sin. He says: "I will take what you deserve so you can have the eternity you don't deserve."

"Remember me", the criminal says:

That's what we need. We need the King to remember us.

When Jesus shares the new Passover with his disciples he says to them "remember me" as you eat and drink this.

Then the thief on Cross turns to Jesus as he dies and says “remember me when you come into your kingdom”.

And they’re the two responses we need at Easter. First, we need to **remember Jesus** and his body and blood given for us. To remember what he’s done for us. That on the cross, that execution was actually a sacrifice, for us.

But second, we need to turn to Jesus and say “Jesus, remember me. Remember me as one of yours.”

I think we often try so hard to be remembered by the world. We want to live a life that won’t be forgotten. So much of what we do is an effort to be remembered by the world isn’t it? If we’re honest with ourselves. We want to be remembered by our family, friends, work colleagues. It’s so important or us to have an impact on peoples lives. Who wants to be forgotten?

But we don’t **need** the **world** to remember us. We need **Jesus** to remember us. And Jesus will NOT remember us for what we’ve done, but for **who we’ve trusted** with our life. At the heart of forgiveness is God saying: Trust Jesus and I will remember your sins NO MORE. I will take them away as far as the east is from the west. You can’t imagine that, can you? As humans we can’t imagine “forgetting” sin. But that is what God does when we trust Jesus. He piles our sins onto Jesus, on the cross, and says: “Done! Not what YOU have done, but what JESUS has done. HE DIED for your sins. They are no longer yours. He took them. He nailed them to the cross through his own hands and feet. He took the punishment. And it is finished. It is done. By Jesus. Not by you. By Jesus.

When we turn to Jesus and recognise our need for forgiveness, when we acknowledge him as King and say: “Jesus, remember me”, he not only forgives us, and remembers us, but he forgets our sin. And we are no longer called “sinners”. We are called “saints”. We are children of God. We still sin. But we are forgiven. And we are his.

Today is about trusting the work of Jesus on the cross. Don’t worry about the world remembering you. Ask Jesus, now, to remember you. Be forgiven, now. And you can live with the peace of God, now.

Let’s pray.

Sacrifice.

When will you die?

What will be your last meal?

Who will you die with?

“Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” (39)

“Don’t you fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” (40)

Getting what we deserve

How much sin is too much?

How many good works are enough?

Last words

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." (42)

"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."(43)

Remembering and forgetting