



“Your Enemy You’ve Made Your Friend”

Luke 19:32-46

April 19th, 2019

Maybe you have noticed a certain theme running through this evening’s music and readings and now the title of this evening’s message. That theme is the friendship of Christ.

I want to start my time of sharing with you by being very clear that first and foremost we want to honor the Lord Jesus Christ as just that—as the Lord, as the Holy One, as the Sovereign, as the One who is the Creator and Sustainer of all life. He is King Jesus! He is so far above any of us. He is exalted. He is King Jesus way up on high with a Name that is above all names.

With that, how amazing is it that in the pages of Scripture Jesus refers to those such as us His disciples as friends. Jesus did it at least twice. Once was in Luke Chapter 12 where He had been in the home of a Pharisee with His disciples. There He referred to His disciples as His friends as he taught them to fear God, not man.

Then on the very eve of His crucifixion, just hours before He would go the cross, He spoke to His disciples and said in John Chapter 15 and Verses 13 through 15:

**¹³Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.
¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.**

The Lord of glory referring to His disciples as friends is amazing. The hymn writer John Wilbur Chapman was right, even after bearing the loss of one wife and then another wife and then an infant child, declaring:

**Jesus! What a friend for sinners!
Jesus! Lover of my soul;
Friends may fail me, foes assail me,
He, my Savior, makes me whole.**

And the great preacher C.H. Spurgeon in his autobiography as we heard earlier this evening, when he was illuminated at his conversion, he spoke of his knowledge of the death of Christ as the very murder of his best friend. It is just amazing that the Lord would think of us like this, and that we can think of Him in that way as we are those who are under His saving grace.

This evening as we look to the cross, we will see the mercy of Christ at work. As we dig into the Gospel of Luke, we are going to see Christ turn one of His enemies into a friend by the working of His grace. While Jesus was providing atonement for all His people in general through the ages, what we see recorded for us in the book of Luke is that at the same time, Jesus saved one person in particular. It was not a death-bed conversion. It was a death-penalty conversion.

Jesus made an enemy His friend and as we look at that story, I pray that we will have eyes to see our own stories as those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ. Let's look on as Luke takes us to the scene of the crucifixion just outside the city gates of Jerusalem.

In Luke Chapter 23 and Verse 32, we read:

³²Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

So taking us to the crucifixion, the first thing that Luke wants to tell us is that Christ was not the only one being crucified that day. Two criminals were there being put to death with Him, Christ being positioned in the middle.

Crucifixion was the form of capital punishment reserved for the worst of the worst. Christ was in the middle. To His right was public enemy number one. To His left was public enemy number two.

That being the case and looking closer, we also learn here that the place of the Lord's death was in fact a threatening and imposing sight. In Aramaic, it was called *Golgotha*. In Latin, it was called *Calvary*. Both of those words translate into the English word *Skull*.

It is believed by some that the rocky geography just outside the gates of the city of Jerusalem had a feature resembling a human skull. That's where they would put people to death. Others believe that a human skull was fastened permanently to a post, indicating it as a place of capital punishment.

One way or the other, what we understand is that this was no comfortable place to die. When Jesus was put to death for our sins it was not in the comfort of somebody's home. It was not in a familiar bed with a morphine drip, with hospice care close by. There was no anesthesia applied to Him when the nails were driven into His wrists and through His feet and into the wood of the cross.

To say the least, it was with great pain and discomfort when Jesus was hoisted up high at this place of *The Skull*, where He would die a slow and sorrowful and suffocating death on that cross.

Once Jesus was lifted up by crucifixion, He spoke forth words of grace in the hearing of all who were there—the soldiers, the Pharisees, the onlookers and the criminals. Now lifted up on the cross, the text goes on to say:

³⁴And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.

There is something about the chronology of what we just read that blows my mind, because Jesus the Messiah had just spoken words of unparalleled kindness. As they crucified Him, He

spoke words of mercy upon them, providing for us all an example in what He preached when He said to love your enemies. Jesus called on God for the forgiveness of those killing Him and they just proceeded to roll the dice to see who would get to keep His apparel. In His heart, Christ was so willing to forgive but their hearts remained so callous. This is human sin and we are all cut from the same fabric.

But this is just the beginning. It got worse. Now the mockery ensued. It went from scoffing to mocking to outright railing upon Christ. As we read what came next, I wonder if you might see what's repeated over and over again as they mocked Him. Verse 35:

**³⁵And 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!"
³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself! ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."
³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"**

The taunt that kept ringing in His ears while He was on the cross was, *Aren't you the Christ? Is He the Christ? If He is the Christ, if He is the Holy One, let's see Him save Himself.* After the Pharisees and the religious rulers said these things, then the soldiers asked Him directly that if He were the King then save Himself. Then even one of the thieves being crucified with Him said, *Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself. Save yourself. Save yourself!*

That is the repeated taunt. I was thinking this week what if He had given into the taunts. They kept yelling at Him to save Himself from the situation He was in. What if He had done just that? I don't know about you, but I think taunting is hard to take. I get upset when people taunt my baseball team, let alone this kind of mockery and taunting.

What if Jesus had called for a legion of angels, standing on high alert to come down and remove Him from that cross and to declare the glory of His great Name and granted them freedom to unleash their weapons of mass destruction upon the wretches who were mocking Him in this way? What if He just let loose? That would satisfy something in me.

What if He did this at that moment? If He done that, had He saved Himself, we would be left in our sin and we would be eternally undone, as we pay for our own sin in the place of justice called Hell.

At that moment, if Christ saved others, He could not save Himself. He was drinking down the cup of divine judgment for us. Therefore, He did not save Himself. He was being pierced for our iniquities, so He did not save Himself. He was bearing our sin in His body on the tree, so He did not save Himself.

Brothers and sisters, I am so thankful that on that occasion, Jesus did not save Himself because in not saving Himself, He saved me. He paid the price for my sin. I pray that you would

recognize this great payment for sin that Jesus so gloriously made. What a friend we have in Jesus!

As we continue in this narrative of the crucifixion, this historical account, we come to something wonderful. It is a bright spot in a very dark place. Where as everyone else was railing upon Christ, now someone speaks up in His defense.

Again, Verse 39:

³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”

One of the criminals drew strength at both the physical and moral levels and he rebuked the other criminal and he honored Christ. Where in the world did this come from? This is very interesting because each of the four Gospel accounts tell us that there were two criminals that Christ was crucified with, being between the two of them.

Matthew and Mark are very, very clear to tell us that both these criminals were mocking and insulting Him, joining the chorus of scorn that was being heaped upon Jesus on that day, so what was happening here that we see one of the criminals mocking and the other honoring Christ? Do we have a contradiction in the pages of Sacred Scripture?

Brothers and sisters, I am glad to tell you that this is no contradiction. This was a conversion. This was the working of the grace of God there on the very cross of Christ. This was Jesus working His grace.

Do you want to know what happened there? Grace happened there! The familiar word of John Newton might explain this. We have sung these words many, many times.

**T’was Grace that taught my heart to fear
And Grace, my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed**

What is the first work of grace in the life of a Christian? *T’was Grace that taught my heart to fear.* What was it that this criminal said to the other? *Don’t you fear God?* Suddenly this man understood that he was in the very presence of holiness and love itself.

I wonder if this man really heard the words that Jesus had said earlier?

³⁴And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do

I wonder if this word of grace taught his heart to fear, helping him to understand that he was in the presence of one who was unlike any other? And understanding that he was in the presence of the very Messiah, his heart began to tremble with the fear of the Lord, and he called out to the other one, *Don't you fear God? We are here because we are sinners, but this man is innocent.* Grace taught his heart to fear.

I pray that each and every person here understands that their sin deserves hell. It is against the holiness of an all-loving and righteous God that we have sinned. Every sin that you have ever done, everything that you hope to God nobody in this world finds out about, He knows it. He sees it. Jesus shed His precious blood for it, because He is such a friend to sinners.

This is Jesus and this man understood the holiness and the grace of the One that he was in the presence of and his heart feared the Lord. His heart was driven to God in grace.

T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear

Then what does grace do next?

And Grace, my fears relieved

Now watch how King Jesus relieves the fear of this man. Verse 42:

⁴²And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

The word *paradise* is used three times in the New Testament to speak of the dwelling place of God. It is in II Corinthians 12, Revelation 2:7, and it is here in Luke 23:43.

The word *paradise* speaks of the very dwelling place of the Living God. When speaking about that experience he had of being caught up into the third heaven, Paul called it *paradise* in II Corinthians Chapter 12.

The historian William Barkley helps us to understand the nature of the concept of paradise. He said this in one of his writings:

One lovely thing that we may note for it will help a little. The word paradise comes from a Persian word which means walled garden. When a Persian king wished to confer a very special honor upon someone especially dear to him, he made him a companion of the garden and gave him the right to walk in the royal garden with him in intimate companionship.

When the Bible uses this language of heaven, it is not only speaking of the beauty of the dwelling place of God, but it is speaking to us of an intimacy that is restored between God and man, the very intimacy that the first human beings knew with the Lord in the Garden of Eden before they fell into sin and transgression.

Paradise is not only a place of beauty, but of close fellowship and intimacy. Jesus said to the criminal who hours before had been mocking Him:

⁴³...“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

What a friend to sinners! What a friend to sinners. Later that day, that man’s body was left behind, and his spirit went to the very abode of God by the working of God’s grace. An enemy became a friend.

Now Scripture takes us from these thoughts of paradise back to the place of *The Skull* and to the temple of the Living God in Jerusalem. Verse 44:

⁴⁴It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵while the sun’s light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last.

In one of the Gospels, the Roman reckoning of time was used to determine the time that Christ was on the cross. In the Gospel of Luke, the Jewish reckoning of time was used. The Jewish people started their counting of hours at 6:00am.

When you put it all together, what we understand is that Christ was on the cross from 9:00am until 3:00pm, six hours. It seems to me that in the first three hours He was suffering visibly at the hands of men as He took their mockery and their shame and the physical pain of crucifixion.

Then at 12:00 noon something happened. We read in the pages of Scripture that the noonday sun was darkened. The lights were turned down. This was not a solar eclipse. This was not a dust storm. This was a divine miracle. This was God the Father indicating that propitiation was taking place.

It was the indication that our sin was being imputed to Jesus, and the wrath of God was being experienced by the Christ on the cross so that wave after wave of judgment and justice was poured out on Jesus until finally it ended and He cried out, *It is finished*. Tetelestai—transaction complete. Paid in full. Satisfaction has been made for sinners.

At that moment, the teaching of Scripture is that the veil of the temple was ripped from top to bottom. Understand that the curtain that is spoken of here is not like the curtain that you might have in your living room. It is very, very different. In the temple of Jerusalem there is a place called *The Holy of Holies*. It was the place where God somehow specially manifested His presence. It was the most holy place, the inner sanctum.

There was this veil, a giant curtain, that set it apart from *The Holy of Holies* from the rest of the temple. This giant curtain was made of purple and blue fabric. It was about sixty-feet tall, thirty-feet wide, and four-inches thick. There was the embroidery of a cherubim on the front of it, indicating that was where the holiness of God resided. Men did not go in there except for the

one day of the year on Yom Kippur when the Jewish High Priest went in to make satisfaction for sin.

At the conclusion of the atoning work of Jesus Christ that massive curtain was torn like a piece of paper by the unseen hand of God, indicating that access had been granted into the very presence of the Living God. The temple in Jerusalem was long ago laid to waste. It is not there anymore, so there is not a most holy place, this inner sanctum, on earth now as there was then.

But, brothers and sisters, what I want to let you know is that Jesus has brought us into a place and to a place that is just as holy and that is just as sacred. He has taken us to His very table. His table!

Not only are we in the inner sanctum, we are in the inner circle of those He calls friends. We come to the table of the Living God, the Lord of heaven and earth, the Awesome God of all creation for sweet intimate fellowship with Him by the grace of Jesus Christ.

We are sinners brought near by the blood that has cleansed us and the gift of the garment of His righteous that clothes us. We come close to God, so very close to our Lord who loves us. Sinners have been brought near. Enemies have been made friends. I pray that all these things would be gathered in our hearts as we sense the presence of Jesus in this place and go to His table.

Let's pray. We will sing. Then we will continue to dwell in the gracious presence of our Lord.