

Do Not Weep for Me

Luke 23:27-43

The Last Sunday of the Church Year, November 20, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

I noticed something about this passage that I have never noticed before. Ever had that experience? Jesus says to the criminal on the cross with Him, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise."

Now I had always thought that when Jesus said, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise," that He was talking about heaven. I have always thought that our Lord was telling the criminal that he would be with Jesus in heaven. And I knew that the problem with saying that is that Jesus does not say it. In other words if Jesus is talking about heaven when He says to the criminal, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise," why doesn't He just say that? Why not say, "Today, you will be with Me in heaven?" Why talk about paradise at all? Doesn't that just confuse the issue?

Well, I discovered that in the original Jesus says, "Today, you will be with Me in *the* Paradise." That means that Jesus is talking about a specific paradise. And when the Lord says it to the criminal hanging next to him on the cross, He is talking about a paradise that the criminal already knows about. What paradise is there that the criminal already knows about? It is the one that the criminal just mentioned when he spoke to Jesus. He said to Jesus, "Remember Me, when You come into Your Kingdom." The paradise that the criminal already knows about although He may not realize that it is paradise is the Jesus' Kingdom. Jesus knows that His Kingdom is paradise and the criminal is asking Jesus to remember him when Jesus comes into His Kingdom. Jesus tells Him, "Today you will be with Me in the paradise," which is the Kingdom of Jesus.

The Kingdom of Jesus is paradise.

The Kingdom of Jesus is an everlasting Kingdom.

When Gabriel announced to Mary that she would be the mother of our Lord, he told her that her Son would sit on the throne of His father David. That means that Jesus would be a king. Furthermore Gabriel told her that He would reign over the house of Jacob forever. You heard the angel right: forever. And just in case you did not the angel goes on to say that of His Kingdom there would be no end.

In order for the Kingdom of Jesus to have no end the citizens of His kingdom need to have no end. In order for the citizens of His Kingdom to have no end the citizens of His kingdom need to not die. In order for the citizens of His Kingdom to avoid death, they need to avoid sin since the wages of sin is death. Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God if Jesus is going to have an everlasting Kingdom He is going to have to forgive sinners. In order for Jesus to forgive sinners He is going to have to die. Whether you look at it as Jesus paying the wages for your sin in your place or Jesus atoning for your sins to forgive them, Jesus must die.

That means that Jesus is establishing the everlasting Kingdom before the criminal's very eyes. Jesus is right there in front of the criminal suffering to atone for the sin of the whole world so that out of it He may establish a Kingdom of people who conquer death. Jesus is establishing the paradise that He promises the criminal before the criminal's very eyes.

Why then does Jesus say that the criminal will be with Jesus in paradise instead of saying to the criminal, "Welcome to paradise"? It is because Jesus is not dead yet while He is talking to the criminal. When Jesus does die sins are atoned, people are forgiven, death is overthrown and the members of the Kingdom of Jesus last forever. They rise from the dead.

Since the criminal is still hanging there alive on the cross next to Jesus when Jesus dies, the criminal is with Jesus and since Jesus just established His everlasting Kingdom by dying, the thief is with Jesus in paradise. And if hanging on a cross next to a dead Jesus does not look like paradise then you have no faith. Repent.

As soon as Jesus dies the criminal's sins are all forgiven. He will rise from the dead. The promise of living forever in an everlasting Kingdom is his. He is in paradise.

This is why Jesus tells the women not to weep for Him, but to weep for themselves.

Jesus is not the one in trouble with God. Sinners are in trouble with God. And if Jesus is not in trouble with God because He is not a sinner, He is the green tree. They killed the green tree even though He was innocent. If they do this with a green tree, how much more will they do it with a dry tree? In other words, if people will kill an innocent man who had done nothing wrong, how much more will sinners face terrible things in the judgment. In fact whatever it is that sinners will face in the judgment will be so terrible that they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us," and to the hills, "Cover us." The judgment will be so terrible that barren women will be considered blessed because they will not have to suffer the loss of their own children because of their sins or suffer watching their children suffer because of their sins.

Jesus is innocent. He will rise. Do not weep for Him. Weep for yourselves. The criminal on the cross did not weep for Jesus. He said that Jesus had done nothing wrong. The criminal on the cross wept for himself. He recognized that he was getting what his deeds deserved. And since he wept for himself instead of for Jesus, he escaped the judgment and was welcomed by Jesus Himself into the everlasting kingdom, into paradise.

So when Good Friday comes do not weep for Jesus.

I was reading a devotional book for children to Nathan the other day and it talked about Good Friday and it said, "We are sad that Jesus died." I went ahead and read that to Nathan because it is true, we are sad that Jesus died. We are also glad that He did it! If He had not done it, we would still be in our sins and subject to the power of eternal death. We would not be members of His eternal kingdom because without His death there would be no eternal kingdom of which to be a member!

So when Good Friday comes do not weep for Jesus. Do not come to Good Friday Tenebrae services and weep for Jesus as if you are sad for Jesus. If you are going to be sad on Good Friday the only thing you should be sad about is that you made it necessary. Your sins made it necessary for Jesus to die in order to forgive you and bring you into His everlasting Kingdom. Do not feel sad for Jesus on Good Friday. Feel sad for yourselves. Do not weep for Him. Weep for yourselves. And when you do, He will welcome you into the paradise of God.

Isn't paradise what people called the Garden of Eden? Why yes it is. The Garden of Eden was paradise. Adam and Eve lived in Paradise. They lived in the Kingdom of Jesus. It was everlasting. It was everlasting until they sinned.

Once they sinned they died. They became subject to death. There was no kingdom that was everlasting when everyone on earth was subject to death. No kingdom could be everlasting because the citizens of all kingdoms died.

Since paradise was everlasting and people were no longer everlasting paradise was no longer the appropriate place for people so the Lord drove them out of paradise and put a flaming sword in the way so that we could not get back.

What Jesus is doing when He dies is He is reopening paradise and bringing us in. When Jesus establishes a kingdom that is everlasting it is a kingdom that is like it was in the beginning. That is why life everlasting takes place after the resurrection.

It is only after the resurrection that we receive our resurrection bodies. It is only after the resurrection that there is a new heaven and a new earth. The creation is liberated from its bondage to decay and not only do we live forever so does it. With bodies that are new and perfect we will be able to engage in all sorts of vocations before God that are beyond our understanding. They are beyond our understanding because in the creation beset by death all of our vocations have something to do with preserving us from death. But in the paradise of God there is no death and so the vocations that we have there will not be to put off death. But we will have vocations there. We will have something interesting to do. We will have something to do in the new creation. It will be wonderful and it will be incarnate.

Thus when Jesus dies the resurrection of the dead is secured. The criminal on the cross was in the paradise of God when Jesus died, but he was not in its consummation. That was yet to come. The kingdom was here because Jesus died. People now do live forever, but we do not see them live forever until the resurrection.

This is the pledge of baptism. It is a pledge that the person being baptized will not be taught to weep for Jesus, but rather to weep for himself or herself. Weep before the judgments of God acknowledging that when you die you are getting what your sins deserve. And on that day you will be with Jesus in paradise.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.