

Theme: “Names of Wondrous Love” – THE WAY

Text: Luke 23:39-43 (NKJV)

³⁹ Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." ⁴⁰ But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? ⁴¹ "And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." ⁴³ And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

Have you ever been lost? I see the men of our congregation shaking their heads “no,” since as you know, no man has ever admitted to being lost! ☺ Well, if you’ve ever been lost, how did that feel? Not knowing where you are. Not knowing how to get where you are trying to go. Did you feel scared? Confused? Helpless? Hopeless? Being lost—especially if you’re really, really lost and cannot find your way—is not a good feeling at all.

You’d think that in our day of GPS (Global Positioning System) and apps with turn-by-turn directions right on our phone that it would be nearly impossible for people to get lost. But we do. We’re human. It’s what we do! In fact, being lost is in a sense, what we are—at least by nature.

When we are born into this world our “spiritual GPS” is broken. We are by nature lost. We don’t know how to get where we are trying to go when this life is over. If it feels scary, confusing, helpless and hopeless to be lost physically, just think what it’s like spiritually. And so we see people seeking all kinds of different philosophies, rituals, and religions to try and find their way.

This is why Jesus came. He came for a world full of lost human beings searching for life’s meaning, searching for peace, searching for eternal life. During His ministry Jesus Himself said, **“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10)**. The night before His crucifixion and the events of our text took place Jesus said to His disciples—and to all people who would read His words in **John 14:6, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”** Today, in our series of sermons on Jesus’ “Names of Wondrous Love,” we look at a text that reminds us of one of the most important names for Jesus: THE WAY.

I. For the Lost

The two men being crucified on the crosses next to Jesus would certainly qualify as men who had lost their way. Luke tells us that they were **“criminals” (v. 39)**, and they must not have just been the run-of-the-mill kind because the Romans only crucified the worst of the worst. They deserved to be where they were. Their actions in life lead to this kind of horrific death. The second criminal even admits it, **“We are punished justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for what we have done” (Luke 23:41 EHV)**.

But Jesus, the One being crucified on the center cross certainly did not deserve this! The second criminal recognized this as well and rebuked the blasphemy of the first criminal, saying, **“This man has done nothing wrong.”** Looking at Jesus’ silent suffering, listening to Jesus’ remarkable prayer seeking forgiveness for those who had mocked, beaten, and crucified Him, this criminal had reached a conclusion: This Jesus was not a sinner who had lost his way. He was innocent.

Yet, shocking as it may sound, Jesus belonged on that cross, didn’t He? **“We all, like sheep, have gone astray,”** the prophet Isaiah reminds us, **“each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity (“guilt”) of us all” (Isaiah 53:6)**. The holy Son of God was guilty

because the sins of the whole world were being heaped upon Him and He was experiencing the full punishment those sins deserved. Because of that guilt, His Father turned His back on Him. We again heard Him in our Passion History reading cry out those chilling words, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)**. The One who had never lost His way was paying for every wayward thought, word, and action of every lost sinner.

When we look at this scene again today, are we amazed again by the wondrous love of our innocent suffering Savior? Do we realize that when we look at this scene we very much have a lot in common with the criminals who were crucified next to Jesus? Because of our sins we too were headed for a horrific punishment—yet one that we must admit with the second criminal, one that **“we deserve for what we have done” (Luke 23:41 EHV)**. You see, God does not grade our sins on a curve. He doesn’t wink at our “white lies” and sweep our gossip under the rug, but burn in anger over murder, theft, and adultery. No, in the eyes of our holy God sin is sin! Every sin carries with it an eternal death sentence. Every time we shoved God down our priority list; every time we had a greedy, hateful, or lustful thought; every time we said hurtful things to someone else or acted in an unloving, unkind way we earned that criminals’ cross and the eternal punishment that awaited us. The more we realize how lost in sin we were, the more we appreciate the wondrous love that held the innocent Jesus to His cross.

II. The Only Way

That criminal not only saw that Jesus was innocent. With eyes of faith, he also saw that Jesus was his only way to heaven. With eyes of faith opened by the Holy Spirit this condemned criminal now saw Jesus as His Savior and prayed, **“Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (v. 42)**. This repentant, yet clearly undeserving criminal asked Jesus, the holy, almighty Son of God for heaven. What was Jesus’ response? **Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (v. 43)**. In a few hours that criminal would draw his last breath, and because of the One who was crucified with Him and for Him, that very day He would be with Jesus—not nailed to a cross next to Him—but wearing a crown of glory with Him in the **“Paradise”** of heaven!

Do you again see yourself in the criminal here? Undeserving though we are, with repentant hearts of faith we too have this same promise of heaven from Jesus. By His grace we know that He is THE WAY to heaven. We have heard and believe His words through the work of His Holy Spirit in our hearts. Listen again to His words and understand what He means: **Jesus said... “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6)**.

- † He is not “part of the way” to heaven, as if there is something else we have to do to be able to complete the journey. He did it all! That’s what He meant when He said, **“It is finished!” (John 19:30)**.
- † He did not say, “I am one of the ways,” to heaven. No, He Himself said **“I am THE WAY... No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6)**. All other supposed “ways” to heaven that we or anyone else can come up with or try will only lead to a dead end, literally!
- † Jesus is not just some road sign pointing us to the right “way” either. He’s more than just our perfect map and guide on the way to heaven. He is THE WAY to get there! Through His death and resurrection He is the perfectly paved highway to heaven AND He is the perfectly reliable and absolutely free transportation who will get us there. His own promise of **“Paradise”** guarantees it!

THE WAY. What a name of wondrous love for Jesus! May the God of all grace keep our faith focused on Him as we journey to the heaven He has won and prepared for us. Amen.