



ON THE CROSS

The whole human race was represented on the three crosses of Calvary. The whole world was represented on the middle cross. There Jesus suffered and died for all, the only Substitute and Sacrifice for sinners. In another way, we were also represented on one or the other of the two outside crosses. The men on both crosses were criminals, and both reviled our Lord (Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:32). All people are sinners and, by nature, have no love for God. Like many people, the man on the one cross did not repent. Like some people, the man on the other cross was brought to repentance and faith (Luke 23:39-43).

The repentant criminal admitted that he deserved to be crucified. We should acknowledge that we have also deserved that condemnation. Is that too strongly put? Have you and I actually sinned so seriously that we have deserved that horrible death? Why was Jesus on the cross? Not for anything He had done! But for everything we have done! He suffered our punishment there. We deserved that death. We deserved hell. He suffered it in our place.

The guilt of each criminal was the same. They were robbers and, probably, murderers. They were guilty of violent crimes. Both of them initially insulted Jesus. The one who repented was not a better man. We are Christians, but not because we are in any way in and of ourselves any better than anyone else. We deserve to be damned like everyone else.

One criminal was brought to repentance. Capital punishment confronted him with his evil life. God's Law, which he had heard before and which faced him now, brought him to repent and to acknowledge his sin. He cannot take credit for that. Neither can we take credit for the fact that God has brought us to know and admit our sin. Why did the other man not repent? Why do others not repent? That is their own fault.

Through the Gospel, the repentant criminal was brought to faith in Christ. Why had he heard the Gospel? He may have heard it before. But it seems that he at least heard Jesus say, "*Father, forgive them*" (Luke 23:34). That told him that Jesus was the sinless Son of God: sinless because He did not deserve crucifixion; the Son of God because He addressed God so intimately (the centurion also understood - Matthew 27:54; Luke 22:44). These words told him that Jesus was concerned to have people forgiven, not condemned. What more did he need to hear? What the repentant criminal saw and heard, told him that Jesus was dying for him then and there, next to him but also in his place. The criminal died himself to pay his debt to man. Jesus died for him to pay his debt to God. Jesus' death paid our debt to God.

The repentant criminal confessed that Jesus was true God. He said that he and the other criminal were suffering the same sentence of death as - God! Jesus was dying the human death of God the Son. The repentant criminal called Jesus Lord and said that He had a kingdom. He knew that Jesus was and is the

King of the kingdom of God.

The repentant criminal prayed to be included in Jesus' kingdom as a free citizen in good standing, with all his sins forgiven for Jesus' sake. Through all the pain attacking his mind, he saw that crucifixion was not the end for Jesus or for him. He still looked to the future, when the disciples had lost hope. He did not have time for a full adult confirmation course. But he understood some things more clearly than the men who had been listening to Jesus for three years.

The criminal who did not repent went from earthly torture to hellish torture. He has been suffering incredibly from that day to this. Death was no relief for him! We should not dwell on that unpleasant fact. But we should be grateful that Jesus has saved us from the same damnation. We should be moved to spread God's Word to save others, too.

The one who asked, received. Jesus promised: "*Truly, I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise.*" The repentant criminal went from earthly torture to heavenly joy. Since he was hanging on that cross next to the Lord, he has never been parted from the Lord. The repentant criminal did not claim credit for his conversion.

That was God's doing. Faith is being convinced by God, not deciding for ourselves, that Jesus suffered sufficiently to pay for our sins and earn our salvation. This man was convinced by God through seeing and hearing what we only hear about from the Bible. We are convinced and converted through the Word.

Salvation is entirely apart from good works on our part. The repentant criminal had done much evil. Now he could do no good. His hands were literally tied or nailed to the cross. He could not begin to make up for his crimes and sins. Neither can we! We owe God perfect love and obedience anyway. There is nothing we can do to make up for any failure to love and obey. By nature we cannot love God at all or obey Him from the heart (Romans 8:7-8).

The repentant criminal spoke up for the Lord. That may have been a good work, proceeding from faith and love. But it was not what saved him. What saved him, and what saves us, is nothing that we do but everything that Jesus did and suffered for us. We are saved from our bad works apart from any good works on our part (Ephesians 2:8-9). The difference between us and that man is that most of us have more time and more opportunities on earth to thank God by doing His will (Ephesians 2:10). We have forever to thank and praise Him in heaven.

But the repentant criminal still hung on the cross. Jesus did not save him from earthly suffering and death. Like us, his conversion did not mean an immediate end to earthly trouble. Why did Jesus not do something to make it easier on the poor fellow? Both criminals lived and lingered longer on the cross than Jesus. The repentant criminal was a believer, a Christian. Why did Jesus not save him sooner, in some way, from earthly pain? If nothing else, why did Jesus not hasten the man's death?

The repentant criminal continued to suffer. Crucifixion was no picnic. A crueller death has not been devised by man.

Through dry and swollen lids, he watched a soldier approach with a heavy rod or hammer. Through dry and swollen lips, he screamed with what breath and strength he had left when his legs were broken. Guilty before man because of his crimes, he was righteous before God because of his Saviour. Whether or not he used Jesus' exact words (Luke 23:46), he commended his spirit to the Father, who was now his Father through faith in Christ (Galatians 3:26).

"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). God knows what He is doing and what He is permitting. It is enough for us that God knows why. We know that God is pleased with us in Christ, having forgiven us all our sin (2 Corinthians 12:9; Colossians 2:13). For us, God turns every curse into a blessing. If we do not now see how that is so, we shall see when we look back later. When that repentant criminal stands whole and healthy, raised and glorified on the last day, he will have no complaints about the violence his body suffered on earth! It was better for him to meet Jesus, though it meant looking across from cross to cross, than to have gotten away with his crimes on earth and to be paying for them yet in hell. The same for us!

What strengthened the repentant criminal to bear the pain? What gave him faith to believe and trust Jesus' promise of Paradise when there was no relief on earth? Christ gave him that faith through His Word: *"Truly, I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise."* The Gospel strengthened and sustained him spiritually to endure the pain of the cross. The Gospel strengthens and sustains us spiritually to bear all the pains that we will suffer yet in this life, come what may.

It is wondrous that the repentant criminal did not lose his faith under all that he had to bear. God kept him in the one true faith. Jesus, even while His hands were nailed to the cross, did not let this man slip from His divine grasp (John 10:28-30). Jesus holds on to us, too. Otherwise, we would be lost under far less torment than that repentant criminal bore.

What great joy, though in the midst of great pain, to have Jesus' precious promise, *"Truly, I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise"*! What Jesus said to him, Jesus says to each of us: *"you will be with Me in paradise."* He says that in the Gospel every time we hear or read or remember it. He says that in Absolution, Baptism, and Communion. He says it to us for the same reason He said it to that man. It is true because Jesus suffered and died in our place and completely paid for all our sins. It is said to comfort, strengthen, guide, and lead us gently, mightily home.

"You will be with Me in paradise" is the same as *"your sins have been forgiven you"* (Luke 5:20). Our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. We shall be with Jesus in Paradise. The only difference is that Jesus told the repentant criminal when, "Today." But that man already knew that he was dying soon. Unless the Lord returns first, we are facing death just as surely, though perhaps not as soon. Our comfort is that Jesus says to each of us, His redeemed and ransomed sheep and lambs, *"You will be with Me in paradise."* He knows when. One day He will say, "Today," also to you and me.

"God has raised up a prophet in Greta Thunberg in a way that no one could predict." That claim was not made by a naïve political activist or a foolish theological ignoramus. It came from the mouth of Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury and erstwhile professor of theology at the University of Cambridge, after he had presented a Bible study on Jeremiah at an ecumenical conference in Norway in July 2021. When he was asked to provide a present day example of a similar prophetic voice, he declared that Thunberg was a prophet like Jeremiah who dared to speak the truth to power to wake up a sleeping nation.

This incident sums up the spiritual confusion that is rife in the church today. We could rightly overlook this endorsement if it were given by a secular person rather than such an eminent teacher in the church. Even though she may give voice to the spirit of the age by her oracular predictions of an imminent ecocatastrophe, she is not a Christian, neither does she claim to speak in the name of Jesus. But Dr. Williams is a teacher of the church. He should know better than to misrepresent her and foist this unfairly on her.

Nevertheless, we do not want to assess the status and authority of this lionised young activist here, or intend to examine why Dr. Williams makes this claim on her behalf or even whether he is a false teacher. We want to consider what Christian prophets do and how we are to assess their utterances, so that we are not misled by them in these confusing times.

Christian prophets do not predict the future by rational analysis of current events, or statistical projections from past and present trends, or foreknowledge through occult means such as divination. They are people who have been called by the living God and inspired by His Holy Spirit to speak His life-giving, effectual word to people. They are His mouth-piece. They hand on the words that they themselves have received from God by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21). They do not predict what will happen, because even the devil and unclean spirits can do that in some cases (Acts 16:16). But they tell what God is doing now and what He will do with and for His people. They pronounce God's judgment on sin and announce His salvation of sinners. Most of all, Christian prophets speak in the name of Jesus about Jesus as the fulfillment of all prophecy. The best description of what they are called to do is given by Jesus in John 16:12-15: *"I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot endure them now. ¹³ However, when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will lead you into the whole truth. For He will not speak on His own authority but will speak whatever He hears and will tell you what is coming. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and will tell it to you. ¹⁵ All things that the Father has are Mine. That is why I have said, 'He takes from what is Mine and will tell it to you.'" In short, the Spirit reveals the glory of the risen Lord Jesus by declaring what He is saying and doing in the church.*

There are then two basic kinds of prophecy. On the one hand there are the special prophecies that have to do with

impending acts of divine judgment and salvation, such as we have in the book of Revelation. Another clear example of that was the warning by a prophet of Jerusalem's imminent destruction in 66 AD with the instruction that the congregation there should leave the city and settle in the mountains (Matt 24:15-17). On the other hand, there are general prophecies that take what God has said by His prophets in the Old Testament or by Jesus in His earthly ministry and proclaim them as His word of warning or encouragement to new people at a new time and a new set of circumstances, such as we have in the letter to the Hebrews. We have two examples of this with Paul to the Jews in Rome in Acts 28:25-28 and to the congregation in Corinth (1 Cor. 10:1-13).

Jesus Himself warns us to beware of false prophets in the Sermon on the Mount because they are not easily recognised but often seem to be from God (Matt 7:15). So when Paul also tells us not to despise prophecies, he also urges us to test them all in order to receive the good gifts that true prophecies deliver and avoid the great spiritual damage that is done by false prophecies (1 Thess. 5:20-21). But how can we test them? What criteria can pastors and other leaders use to assess them when they claim to speak in the name of Jesus?

The New Testament teaches that we are to use five criteria for this. Is their behaviour consistent with the faith they profess (Matt 7:15-20)? Do they, in their prophecies, do God's will by teaching and enacting the written words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt 7:21-27)? Do they confess that Jesus is the incarnate Christ who has come in the flesh from God (1 John 4:1-4)? Do they submit to the authority of the apostles and the apostolic testimony to Jesus as well as the discipline of the church (1 John 4:5-6; Rev 19:10b)? Is what they prophesy in agreement with the Christian faith that is confessed in the Apostles or Nicene Creed as the rule of faith (Rom 12:6)? Taken together they supply us with all that we need to test all prophecy.

We can quite readily dismiss the claim that God has raised up Greta Thunberg as a prophet because she does not claim to speak in the name of Jesus, let alone in God's name. What's more, Dr. Williams gives us no good reason to regard her as a true prophet. Yet cases like this are useful for us because they help to sharpen our sense of spiritual discernment which will, in the time to come, be increasingly necessary as many more professed Christians reject the authority of God's Word and the teaching of the church and more false prophets and false teachers arise to fill the spiritual void in the church and in the world.

NEW LIFE IDENTITY

God, the giver of life in creation, also gives new life in the new creation in Christ. Man did not stop being man when he fell into sin. But he was cursed; his life became death, he was separated from God, and his reality was eternal judgment. In order to save man, God, who is not man, became man. In the place of all mankind, Jesus is man reduced to one cursed God-forsaken man.

Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God atones for the

sins of the world. God washes man into this atonement through Baptism. God feeds this atonement into man in the giving of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. God also breathes and speaks this atonement into man in the preaching of the Word. Through these Means of Grace, God breathes His image back into man, breathing His holiness and righteousness into man.

God, through the preacher, identifies man as salt, light, living branches, bride, sons, heir, sanctified, holy, new creation, alive, and the like. In his preaching, the pastor proclaims to God's people that in Christ Jesus this is now who and what they are - in the present tense!

In sacramental preaching, the pastor doesn't just tell his people about living water; he preaches living water into the hearer, whereby the Holy Spirit works saving faith. The pastor doesn't just tell his people about Jesus crushing Satan's head; he preaches the victorious Christ, who defeated the accuser into the ears of the hearer, whereby Satan's power over the hearer is crushed and the Holy Spirit works saving faith. What is taking place in preaching is the imputation of the justifying Christ into the ear, soul, faith, and life of the hearer in the here and now. This reality makes for a uniqueness to sermon writing and preaching where God enters the hearer, creating and sustaining a most wonderful, incomprehensible union with and saving faith in Christ Jesus.

WOULD YOU EAT A MAMMOTH SPAGHETTI AND MEATBALLS?

by Ken Ham

Most people have enjoyed the classic Italian dish of a steaming pile of spaghetti noodles topped with sauce and a couple of meatballs. But would you tuck into that plate if you knew the meatballs were made with... mammoth meat? Wait - mammoth meatballs? Yes!

Okay, what's all this about? Well, an Australian cultivated-meat company took a DNA sequence from a mammoth muscle protein and filled in the gaps with genetic material from a living creature within the same created kind - the elephant. The next step for these scientists was to place this DNA sequence in the "myoblast stem cells from a sheep." These cells then began to replicate, and the resulting muscle meat was then made into a meatball. All in all, apparently the whole process was "ridiculously easy and fast," completed in just a "couple of weeks."

Now, here's the surprising twist - the scientists are reportedly afraid to eat the meatball. Why? Well, one of the scientists says, "We haven't seen this protein for thousands of years... So we have no idea how our immune system would react when we eat it. But if we did it again, we could certainly do it in a way that would make it more palatable to regulatory bodies."

Given the process by which this meatball was created, I'm not sure I'd want to eat it either! But think about this from a biblical worldview - mammoths didn't die out 10,000 years ago as most people believe. The elephant kind went onto the ark with Noah and his family, survived the flood, and came off the

ark into a new world. Now, like all the kinds God created, the elephant kind was created with a lot of genetic diversity, so after the flood, that kind adapted to a changing world, resulting in different species within a kind, including mammoths and African and Asian elephants (among other species within that kind). Sometime after the flood, likely toward the end of the ice age, mammoths went extinct, perhaps due to climate changes (caused by the flood and subsequent ice age) and/or human hunting.

So, are mammoth steaks coming to a BBQ near you? Perhaps. But, if they do, you won't be joining human ancestors from tens of thousands of years ago in grilling and eating them. Humans who may have feasted on mammoths lived just a few thousand years ago in the world after the flood, during the ice age.

QUEENSLAND NEWS

Queensland Attorney General fails to listen to the electorate:

Parents have a right to have their children educated by those who are of their faith. Over 17,000 petitioners have asked the Queensland Parliament to support this right.

However, the Queensland Attorney General, Shannon Fentiman, has failed to listen to the concerns of these 17,000+ Queenslanders who have called on the Queensland Parliament to protect the rights of Christian Schools.

Mr Rob Norman the Australian Christian Lobby Queensland Director said today, "The petition calls on the Queensland Parliament to reject Recommendation 39 of the Queensland Human Rights Commission's (QHRC's), 'Building Belonging Review of Queensland's Anti-Discrimination Act'. This recommendation removes the right of religious schools to hire staff who align with the school's statement of belief and code of conduct.

"This recommendation would effectively allow the QHRC to decide which staff roles Christian schools are allowed to exclusively employ Christians.

"The Attorney General should listen to the 17,039 petitioners who can clearly see the problems with this glaring intrusion into Christian schools. The QHRC has completely ignored the rights of parents who expect Christians schools to deliver education from a Christian worldview."

Tele-health abortion service:

The Queensland government is quietly rushing through a tele-health abortion service which, in addition to killing the unborn, will put our women at serious risk, especially in rural areas.

Tele-health abortion is not healthcare. It is do-it-yourself abortion. We used to talk about how dangerous at-home abortions were - and this is legalising them - using a controversial drug (RU486) with no in-person medical consultation.

This will make abortion more prevalent and more dangerous. It will allow women to take abortion drugs without any medical supervision, when we know that a significant number of them will have complications that need urgent medical care.

The Queensland government considered introducing tele-abortion services during COVID and the medical fraternal said, "No, this is really dangerous!" Now, they're rushing this through quickly and quietly, even though it will put our women at risk.

FROM THE PASTOR

By the time you read this newsletter, we have celebrated the death and resurrection of Jesus. We have worked our way through the six-week Lenten period and have reached the climax of the season. However, for the next 7 weeks, the Sundays are Sundays of Easter, before we reach the Day of Pentecost. In the midst of these weeks, we shall also celebrate the Ascension of Christ.

Many of you would have met Doug and Vicky Lueck, members of Pilgrim Lutheran Church, Decatur, Illinois. They spent a couple weeks here and attended church while present. It was lovely to catch up with them both. They have now returned to the USA. Pastor Brock Abbott from Pilgrim has indicated that he, his wife Beth, and their son Lucas (who is studying in the Walther Seminary) are very keen to come for a visit. I shall keep encouraging them, but they too are always asking when they will get a visit from AELC members. So, I am planning on visiting them around the middle of next year (their summer) and have the idea of perhaps a group of our members travelling together. Decatur is not far from the site of the Ark Encounter – the life-size Noah's Ark and creation museum site in Kentucky. My family and I visited this site last time we were there, and it is truly something to behold. We could organise a group tour to the Ark, and then spend some time in Decatur and surrounds. Maybe we would be looking at a trip length of 7-10 days, but I'll keep you informed and will try to work out some costs asap, so any of you who wish to come, can start saving!

Remember that Bible Studies, Newsletters, and Meeting Minutes are all available under the members section of the website. These are all added regularly. You will need a password to enter this section. Ask Pastor for the password if you don't know what it is.

God bless!

Pastor

