

The Book of Victory



*Messages by various speakers mostly on the book of
Luke at the Streetlight Mission Church
in the 6:30 p.m. services of April 2007
(includes the Good Friday service)*

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April 1, 2007
Pastor Paul Aasman

Luke 23:43 “Jesus answered him (the criminal), ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’”

A Small Light Deepens the Darkness

Reading: Luke 23:26-43
 Text: Luke 23:43

Dear friends of Streetlight Mission Church, brothers and sisters, and guests,

It is good for us to think about the suffering of Jesus today. The passage of scripture that we read teaches many things, but verse 43 teaches us in a very beautiful way about God's grace. It shows us how we need only the grace of God in order to be saved, and nothing else.

In the Bible we have many examples of people who were saved by faith alone, apart from any works. In the Old Testament there is a very famous example of a person who was saved simply by believing in God. It was Abraham. God promised him that he would have children and his descendants would be more numerous than the stars of the sky. He would have more children than the grains of sand on the beach. If you should visit a beach, you will know how much sand you would see there! God promised Abraham he would have that many children! When Abraham was 100 years old and he still didn't have any children, God said again

to Abraham that he would give him that many children. We read in Genesis 15:6 that Abraham believed God and that the LORD “credited it to him as righteousness”. He was righteous, not because of anything he did, but he was righteous because he believed in God. Abraham is a beautiful example, and we can hold on to that example in order to teach us and remind us that we are saved by believing and not by anything we do.

Also in the New Testament there are many examples of people who were saved by faith. The thief on the cross is the most beautiful and eloquent example of a person who is saved by faith alone, apart from any works of the law. It is one of the most comforting examples of the saving grace of God that you will find anywhere in the Bible – an example of salvation by faith. Faith is all that he had, in order to teach us that faith is all that you need.

Let’s look at the story as Luke tells it in chapter 23. Beginning at verse 32, we read, “Two other men, both criminals, were also let out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him.” This is a hill on a high spot outside the city gates of Jerusalem, which at a certain time of the day looks like a skull with sunken eyes and a bit of a cranium. That’s why it’s called the Skull. “There they crucified him.” The Bible doesn’t give us gory details. It simply tells us the terrible fact: they crucified him. And Luke adds, “Along with the other criminals – one on his right, the other on his left.” And then

Jesus speaks those fantastic words, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” He prays for forgiveness for the people who are crucifying him. It’s just an amazing example of the compassion and the dignity of Jesus the saviour. Even as he is suffering unimaginable pain, even as he has experienced the most terrible rejection by the very people who should have loved him the most, even at that very moment he wants to express mercy and peace for these people around him. He shows this wonderful dignity, even in his horrific suffering.

But for some reason – it has to do with the wickedness of the human heart – when we taste blood, we want more, and when we see the degradation and humiliation of another person, we want it to be worse. When the people see the dignity and compassion of the Lord Jesus, they want to take it away and so they hurl their violence and brutality against him, intensely focused on Jesus. In verse 34 we read, “And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.” So they stripped him naked. He hangs there with no clothing on. Recently in a morning worship service we observed that when Jesus Christ was crucified, he was naked, and not hanging on a cross with a loincloth around him as he is so often pictured in Roman Catholic carvings. We read specifically in the gospel of John that Jesus had an extensive undergarment on and they cast lots for it because it was one piece, woven all the way around. So they stripped him and they divided up his clothes, and

there you have the beginning of the focus on the violence against Jesus. They stripped him naked and they stole his clothes.

Verse 35 says, “The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.’” They are trying to take away his dignity. They are trying to discredit Jesus for the things that he taught during his ministry, when he had said, “I am the Christ.” They are trying to say that he is not the Christ. We read in verse 36, “Then the soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, ‘If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.’” So again, the people are abusing him. Then in verse 38 they have a written notice hanging above him on the cross. The words are “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS”. And then finally, the very people that are crucified with him also begin to insult Jesus. Verse 39: “One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: ‘Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!’” In the gospel of Mark it tells us that both of the criminals were making fun of Jesus. So when Jesus Christ in his dignity and mercy speaks the words, “Father, forgive them,” that becomes the reason for everybody to become more violent, to focus their hatred on him more than ever. Even the thieves that are hung on crosses beside him on his left and on his right join the people who insult him.

But between verse 39 and verse 40 one criminal on one side of the Lord experiences something. We call it being born again, regenerated. Something happens in his heart. Something about what Jesus has said is working in his heart and he changes his mind about Jesus. Instead of hating Jesus and insulting him the way we read that he was doing in the gospel of Mark, he decides instead to believe in Jesus in the most unlikely of moments imaginable. He believes in Jesus as he hangs upon a cross. He gives his testimony of faith in verse 40. He leans over to the other criminal hanging on the other side of Jesus and asks 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.” There is his testimony, a testimony that begins with acknowledging his own sinfulness: “We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve.” And then his testimony moves to praise for Jesus. “But this man has done nothing wrong.” He appeals to Jesus in verse 42: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” His appeal to Jesus is not a bargain. He’s not offering something in exchange. He simply asks Jesus as a king, “Please, O Lord, give me this most precious of gifts. Remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

And then we have that beautiful answer, verse 43. Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” The king’s mercy continues to reach out. Jesus, when

he was hung and when he was crucified, expressed mercy: “Father, forgive them.” Now a man asks him for mercy. The man has nothing to offer, he does not bargain. He simply asks, “Remember me.” And Jesus, as a great king, even as he hangs on the cross, says, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” As Jesus Christ does that, he accepts another burden on his shoulders. He accepts the sins of also this criminal on his shoulders and he will suffer even this added burden to bring this child of God home into the Father’s kingdom.

That, my friends, is one of the most beautiful examples of the freedom of the grace of God and it is freely offered to every one of us. The king, Jesus Christ, who has now risen and is seated in glory, can give to you that same gift. He can receive any one of you into his grace and his kingdom, no matter how evil you have been. Jesus has suffered and paid the price for you and no matter how little good you have accomplished in your life, Jesus Christ has done enough to give it all to you. He has done it for you. All you need to do is believe in him, because that’s all you need.

April 6, 2007 (Good Friday)
Pastor Paul Aasman

Luke 23:45a “. . . for the sun stopped shining.”

The Sun Fails as God’s Son Suffers

Reading: Luke 23:44-49
Text: Luke 23:45a

Brothers and sisters and friends of Streetlight,

It had happened before that God had sent a judgment of darkness upon a whole land, but it was not upon the land of Israel. That was the punishment or judgment of God of darkness upon the whole land of Egypt. We read in Exodus 13, which describes that plague, that it was a darkness that was so thick that it could be *felt*. So it was a terrible, terrible darkness. Perhaps you remember how that happened when God felt sorry for his Hebrew people, the Israelite people, because they had become slaves to the Egyptians. They were being treated very badly and were forced into very hard labour under impossible conditions. Because God still blessed his people in that they had families and children, the Egyptians wanted to stop the growth of the Hebrew people and they started feeding the Hebrew babies to the crocodiles in the Nile River. The suffering of the Israelite people was terrible. But God in his pity and compassion for his people sent Moses to deliver his people out of Egypt. Through Moses God laid all kinds of plagues upon the

Egyptians. One of the last of the plagues was the plague of darkness. Darkness came upon the whole land of Egypt and filled the Egyptian people with terrible fear and dread because it was a deep darkness, a darkness that could be felt.

Now we read in Luke 23:44, “It was now about the sixth hour and darkness came over the whole land.” So something really terrible has happened. This judgment which had formerly come upon Pharaoh, the one who enslaved God’s people and became an image for the devil, this punishment which became an image for hell, now becomes the wrath of God which falls upon the whole land. Is this the land of Egypt in our text? No, this darkness falls not upon Egypt but this darkness falls upon *Israel*. And it is upon the *whole land* – God’s people. You might say it is against God’s own church. Because whatever Pharaoh and the Egyptian people had done to God’s own people, Israel was now doing to God’s own son – his only son, Jesus Christ. And darkness falls upon the people of God, upon the Israel of God, and it falls upon the whole land. The darkness which falls upon the land, is something which, if we think about the message of the Bible, represents the last stage of the anger of God before he lets go completely and he throws all his anger out and doesn’t restrain himself any more. His righteous anger is about to happen. For our text says, “The sun stopped shining.” It’s not that the sun stopped shining on the other countries of the world. The sun was still shining in Moab, and

upon Greece and Egypt and Babylon. The sun kept shining on all the nations around Israel, but it stopped shining on Israel. The light was taken away. The sun stayed up there in the sky but it no longer gave its light on this one country.

In Genesis 1 we find a description of how God created the world and we read about the stages of creation. Did God create the sun or did he create light on the first day? God created light. It wasn’t until the fourth day that God created the sun itself. So now God takes away the light of the sun. The sun stays somewhere up there in the galaxy, but the light of God, which was the first thing that God created, is now the last thing that God takes away from Jesus Christ and the people of God. It is the last thing that God takes away before he releases his horrible wrath. The light represents all the good of God’s creation.

When he withdraws the light, it means that God has taken away from Jesus everything good that he has created. One of Jesus’ closest companions has turned out to be a betrayer. Judas betrayed him with a kiss. God has taken away the goodness. God has taken away not only the trust that Jesus enjoyed with his disciples, but God took away all his companions. All twelve of the disciples abandoned Jesus and fled for their lives, and Jesus’ most trusted companion, Peter, one of the leading disciples, even denies that he knew Jesus. So the fellowship is being broken. When the disciples abandon Jesus then he is all alone. It was a terrible blow.

God took away his companions and Jesus was all alone, standing on trial. Then he was falsely accused. Everybody knew the accusations were false, but they did not care. They still maintained the accusations against Jesus. They brought him to Pontius Pilate, who said many times, “This man is innocent of the charges against him,” and nevertheless Pilate said, “He will be crucified.” He sat on the judgment seat and condemned Jesus to that terrible death. So not only did God take away from Jesus his companions, now God also takes away from Jesus his protection, his community. He is no longer protected by anybody. The very people who are called by God to protect him and to administer justice for him are now saying that he is innocent but he is going executed. He is stripped naked, and the people are spitting at him, striking him and insulting him. Jesus loses his companions, his country, and then he loses his dignity. Whatever dignity or honour or respect he might have had is all taken away. And his life is ebbing out – he is losing his life. Jesus is being stripped, layer by layer, until he has nothing left. That’s the story of his existence now. He was eternal God and stripped of his glory when he came to earth as a man. And when he was a man he was stripped of everything as he hung naked on the cross, the object of scorn by everyone, the object of contempt and horrible injustice.

And now at last, at the sixth hour, God also takes away the light. The first creation is the last one to go. Because everything

that God every created for our enjoyment, to be the context of life, God is taking it away from Jesus Christ. In the darkness are the things that you fear, the things you cannot see. And in the darkness Jesus Christ experiences the horrible wrath of God from the sixth hour until the ninth hour. Then came the wrath of God. And when the ninth hour at last came, then Jesus Christ cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Why did you abandon me? Why did you throw all your wrath and hurl all of your anger against mankind, why did you do that to me? Jesus Christ in that period experienced horror beyond our imagination or knowledge.

It is very important for us to understand that Jesus Christ was completely stripped. He didn’t have any help whatsoever in his suffering because he suffered for us all alone. He had no outside help. He didn’t experience any favour. He had no friends. He didn’t have the law to support him. He didn’t even have the God above, his father in heaven, supporting him, strengthening him, or encouraging him. He had no support whatsoever, because when he suffered for our sins, he suffered only because he loved us. It was not because he had to, not because others were helping him endure, and not because he had any props or help or support. He suffered supported only by the power of his love. He stayed on the cross because he wanted to give the sacrifice that would be enough for our sins.

Because the darkness fell and the wrath of God fell and Jesus endured it all alone, his suffering is enough to cover the sins of adulterers like David, who took another man's wife and to prevent her husband from finding out he murdered him. Murder. Adultery. God's love in Jesus Christ is enough to save even a man like that. God's love in Jesus Christ is enough to save a man like Paul, who put all of his energy into persecuting the church, into eradicating the name of Jesus from the earth. He went from house to house, arresting the Christians and dragging them off to jail, and stood by when they were condemned to death. He delighted in the destruction of the church and the suppression of the name of Jesus. And yet God's grace is enough to cover such sin as well. God's grace is enough to cover the sin of a slave trader like John Newton, the man who created that famous song, "Amazing Grace". He was a man who devoted his life to capturing Negro people and bringing them in ships to America and he was changed by the grace of God and even his sins were forgiven. Jesus Christ's suffering was so much that it was enough to cover the sins also of each one of us, sinners like me and sinners like you.

Tomorrow morning, when the sun rises, then it would be good for you to remember that the sun stopped shining on Jesus Christ on Good Friday. The sun rises on us because the sun stopped shining on Jesus. Jesus Christ suffered all of God's wrath so that there is no wrath left for us. We may live because Christ

died for us and suffered for us. It is by grace that we live. It is by grace that the sun rises. It is by grace that the land is warmed and the soil produces crops and we have food and drink again. It is by grace in Jesus Christ that we may live such lives as we do. Let us then show our love for God and our thankfulness to God by using every new day to serve him and to show our love for a God who has been so rich in his love for us.

April 8, 2007
Pastor Paul Aasman

Luke 24:5b "The men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead?'"

Heralds of Christ's Victory: Belief and Unbelief

Reading: Luke 24:1-12
Text: Luke 24:5b

Brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ, friends of the Streetlight Church,

To believe in Jesus Christ is not easy. It's not even natural for us. As a matter of fact, one thing that the true story of the resurrection of Jesus teaches us is that we are not inclined to believe in the resurrection. That is something that is clearly taught in the events of the first day after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 9 we read the names of the women who were the first ones to come to the tomb on the Sunday morning. It was after that terrible Friday we now call Good Friday because we know that Christ died for our salvation. The whole of Saturday had passed and now it was Sunday morning and these women have come to the tomb. They are listed in verse 10: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them. There were at least five women, and maybe several more. Earlier on in the gospel of Luke we read that Mary Magdalene and Joanna were women who were healed by Jesus' power. Jesus commanded evil spirits to depart, he commanded diseases to be healed, and these women had already experienced the power of God's love and grace in their own bodies. We also read in Luke 8 that Mary Magdalene and Joanna were women who, along with several others, went with Jesus during his ministry as he traveled through the land, and they served Jesus and the disciples. These women wouldn't have had to worry about where they would live or who would get food for dinner or other things like that. They were wealthy women who were happy to provide from their wealth and to help Jesus and the disciples in their ministry, so that they could give all of their attention to teaching the people and proclaiming the gospel. So these were women who had already experienced the grace of God, and were committed to Jesus.

Nevertheless, when it came to the day of Jesus' resurrection, they were not ready to hear the good news. They came to the tomb, not expecting to meet a raised Jesus, but a dead one. That is very sad, because Jesus had told them beforehand many times that he was going to suffer, die, and rise again. But they didn't believe because they and we are not inclined to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even after everything God has done for our salvation, sending his son to die on the cross and then giving him the victory and raising him from the dead, God still shows *more* love and grace to us. He also has to open up our hearts, in order that we may receive the message and believe in Jesus. May God perform such miracles and such wonders in the hearts of us all, that he may open our hearts to really believe that Jesus is risen from the dead. May we be blessed with such faith.

Let us follow the account as Luke describes it in our reading in chapter 24. In verse 1 we read, "On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and they went to the tomb." They had prepared spices. It seems that this was something they had already done on Friday night after Jesus was dead. They had watched as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (and perhaps some others but we think it was just those two) had taken the body of the Lord Jesus off the cross and carried it to the tomb and wrapped it in cloths. But they had run out of time. The sun had set and the Sabbath had come.

The Jewish Sabbath is the Saturday, so on Friday night they would have had to stop working. They could not prepare the body.

The women have prepared spices because this was common practice in those days. When a person was dead, then you wrapped the body and with spices you tried to preserve the body or reduce the odour of decaying flesh. It was an act of devotion, a pitiful deed that the women would do for a defeated saviour. They had decided long ago already that they would prefer to deal with a defeated saviour that they could hold, and wrap in cloths, and re-wrap in cloths, and put the embalming spices on, and not a victorious saviour, glorious in his might even over death. On the Sunday morning, they prepared spices instead of banners; they went to the tomb to embalm his body, rather than greet the victorious Lord with banners reading, “Welcome, victorious Lord!” They were expecting somebody they could pity, rather than somebody to bow before. Well, we read in verse 2 and 3 that these women “found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.” When they saw that the stone had been rolled away, then of course all kinds of things must have gone through their minds. Maybe some animal had gone in there and violated the body of their saviour. Or perhaps even worse than a wild animal is a wicked human being who would have done terrible things, and that is especially what they feared. In the gospel of John we read that

Mary Magdalene met someone she thought was a gardener, but actually it was Jesus. She said, “They have taken my Lord away, and I don’t know where they have put him. Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” (John 19:14, 15) They were afraid that these evil people who had done the terrible things to Jesus on the Friday before had now taken the dead body and violated it further. It is terrible, terrible indeed. They must have wondered, “Is nothing sacred?”

As they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. They had clothes that gleamed like lightning. You know that today is a special commemoration of Vimy Ridge, a very important moment in Canadian history. I read this week that a soldier described Vimy Ridge this way. Imagine the crashing of thunder, and multiply that sound times two. Then consider that crash of thunder twice as loud as when you stand very near to a thunderclap, sounding continuously. That is what it was like in the artillery barrage before the assault upon Vimy Ridge when the Canadian soldiers went up the slopes to take the ridge. Here in the resurrection story we read about two men whose clothes were gleaming with the brightness of lightning that continued to shine brilliantly and never diminished at all. This surely was the glory of heaven shining upon the earth. Without a doubt, these were angels. Luke describes them as men, but other gospel narratives call them

angels. So these are angels speaking to the women with the glory of heaven. Whenever you have heaven shining its glory upon the earth people are filled with fear and terror, and these women were as well. The angels are pure and holy and we are sinful beings. In all kinds of ways we deny our sins until we are confronted by the purity of heaven. Then we are filled with fear because of our sinfulness. That happened here in verse 5: “In their fright, the women bowed down with their faces to the ground.” But then the angels spoke those well-known words, the special focus of this morning, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

You know, the older you get, the more you discover that we always do that. We look for the best of things in the worst of places. “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” As a father, I have to listen to music that sometimes I find in my home. If I look at the lyrics and try to analyze popular songs, I wonder how it is possible that people are listening to this music which keeps on focusing on death. It is just fixated on suicide, on the letting of blood, on asphyxiation and all kinds of death images. Why do people seek pleasure in death, or meaning in murder? We look for the best of things in the worst of places.

So many people are looking for companionship today. Where do they go to look for companionship? Many people are looking in the bars. Many people are looking for a relationship and for intimacy, and they look for it in sexual gratification, in a

one night stand. So many people are looking for happiness and they look for it in a bottle of alcohol. So many people are looking for the solutions to the things that frustrate them and they seek the solution in anger. We look for the best of things in the worst of places.

The women look for the living among the dead. “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” We know the truth. We know where happiness lies. We know where the solution to our frustration lies. We know where companionship can be found. We know where life and happiness and meaningfulness can be found. But we don’t want to listen to God. Jesus Christ has told them clearly not to look for him among the dead, because after he dies he will rise again. They are to look for him among the living. The angels tell the women that in verse 6: “He is not here, he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: The son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.” And then Luke says, “Then they remembered his words.” They were forced to, because Jesus had indeed spoken such words. Look at Luke 9:22. These are the words of Jesus to his disciples: “The son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” This was in the beginning or mid-point of his pastoral ministry, just before Jesus asked Peter, “Who do

you say that I am?" Already then, he had told his disciples very clearly that he would be crucified, he would suffer and die, but he would rise again. Then towards the end of his pastoral ministry (so in very recent memory compared to the time of the resurrection) he had said it again. Luke 18:31-33: "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again." So Jesus Christ has spoken about this at least twice. We read in the gospel of Matthew that it was three times that he had told them that he would die and rise again. Three times! They should have come to the tomb with banners greeting the living, and not with spices to greet the dead.

In verse 8 it says, "Then they remembered his words." They came to faith in Jesus Christ. They believed in his resurrection immediately at this moment. And then they went to tell the good news. Verse 9 tells us, "When they came back from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the others." They became heralds of the good news to others, lest others also begin to look for the living among the dead, the best of things in the worst of places.

"But they did not believe the women," Luke 24:11 says. That would seem to mean that none of the eleven disciples or all the others who were with them would believe what the women

said, because "their words seemed to them like nonsense." They thought that the women were telling crazy stories. And so, just as God has worked powerfully in the hearts of the women to open them up to receive the news of Christ's victory, so also God had to work powerfully in the hearts of the disciples to open up their hearts, so that they too could accept and believe the message of Christ's victory and resurrection. On the Friday, just three days earlier, God had accomplished a great victory. Through his son, God had accomplished the forgiveness of all our sins, because Jesus died, suffering the punishment we deserved. God must continue to work with his grace. God's love must continue to reach out to us because he has to also win a victory over our sinful hearts, because we don't want to believe in Jesus.

Our passage of scripture teaches in a very forceful and a very memorable way that faith in God is a gift that God gives to us. The last important victory is the victory over our own resistance and our own unbelief. The apostle Paul speaks of faith as God's gift. In his letter to the Ephesians, 2:8, Paul says, "It is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."

I ask you, brothers, sisters, and friends of the church: do you believe in the resurrection? Do you believe that Jesus is not just a pitiful saviour that we may be sorry about? He is the great and powerful saviour, who is in glory and who reigns in heaven! If

you believe that, then you are blessed. God is giving to you the miracle which he has done 2000 years ago. Give praise to God for your faith and do what the women did: share this good news with others. Some will not believe, but some will. By the glory of God he will work through you to grant faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ to many others. May God be glorified, because all glory belongs to him.

April 15, 2007
Pastor Paul Aasman

Luke 24:27 “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

The Risen Lord Reveals the Truth in the Old Testament

Reading: Luke 24:13-35
Text: Luke 24:27

Good evening,

There was an Englishman named Francis Bacon, who said that hope is a good breakfast, but a bad supper. What do you think that might mean? We rise in the morning and we are filled with hope. We have ambition, we want to do certain things in the day, and throughout the day we see the things that we hoped for unfold. God blesses us with the energy that we give to the day. But hope

is not for the evening. The evening is a time when we may look back and see the blessings God has given us. Hope is a good breakfast but a bad supper.

I apply that to the life of Jesus Christ. Many people have come to know the great things that God is promising through the preaching of Jesus Christ. Jesus has taught people about the love of God and the triumph that God will give to everybody who suffers and who is afraid, if they believe in Jesus. Many people have had their hearts filled with hope and they are looking forward to the fulfillment of their hope.

In our passage, these people are traveling on their way to Emmaus, and they say that they are completely disappointed in the hope that Jesus gave them. They believed that none of the things that Jesus promised them could come true, because Jesus was crucified, he died and was put in the grave. All of their hopes have come to nothing. That's what I mean – hope is a bad supper. You can't go to bed with hope; you rise in the morning to hope. But if in the end you still don't have what you're hoping for, and all you have left is hope, then you are empty. That's the way these people felt. They felt completely empty. They had hoped for so much, and they had gotten nothing.

But why do they have nothing? Why don't they get any of the things that they have been hoping for? Lack of faith is a big problem here. The reason why they don't have any of the things

that they're hoping for is because, even though God is giving it to them and offering it to them, they don't reach out a hand to accept it from God. I hope that you are able to understand that this evening, and that you too may be a person who says, "I have no reason to complain. God gives me so much, and all I need to do is to see the grace that God has given me and rejoice and give thanks to him." None of us has hope for supper. We have what God offers – the forgiveness of sins and much else.

It's amazing how, on the resurrection Sunday, the news of Christ's resurrection was met with unbelief. The very people who should have believed in the resurrection did not believe. Peter and John and the apostles "did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense." And now these travelers on the way to Emmaus, who were also people who had hope in Jesus, who knew about him personally and were familiar with his ministry, are wondering about the stories the women have told, and they are determined to hold on to their unbelief. We need to pay careful attention to that because if there is something that we are inclined to do, it is this: We want to hold on to unbelief. We are not inclined to believe in the victory of God's love for us.

When the passage opens in verse 13, it begins describing these people traveling down the road to Emmaus on the same day that Jesus rose from the dead. Emmaus was about 11 kilometres from Jerusalem. While they are talking about the things that have

been happening – the arrest of Jesus, his trial before the Sanhedrin, his conviction by Pontius Pilate and his crucifixion, death and burial – Jesus joins them, a third traveler. And we read in verse 16, "they were kept from recognizing him." What do you think kept them from recognizing that this man was Jesus? I think it was unbelief. There are some people that say that his appearance was changed. That may be somewhat true as well. He had been raised in glory, immortal, and yet he still had the wounds on his hands and his side and his feet. But his appearance was not so different that they could not recognize that this man was Jesus. So it was unbelief that prevented them from recognizing Jesus. They were determined to hold on to the idea that Jesus is dead. They did not want to believe in the resurrection. That's a familiar tale to us, isn't it? People don't want to believe in the resurrection.

Jesus joins them and he asks them, in verse 17, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" And Cleopas answers, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" Jesus asks, "What things?" And then they explain it to him, starting with the hope that they had. Jesus had given them hope. He had spoken of great things. He had unfolded for them things about God they had never dared to imagine: God's love, God's mercy, God's closeness, God's triumph. They said, "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people." Jesus had revealed to

them things about God they would otherwise never have known. He was a powerful prophet, not only in the things that he said, but in the things that he did. He healed people, he cleansed people, he raised the dead.

In verse 21 they say, “But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.” There you have that word “hope”. We had hoped he was going to be the Messiah. We *had* hoped. But now he’s dead, and we know that that was a false hope. That is what they believed, what they were holding on to.

“And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.” (Luke 24:21) Here they were referring to the prediction of Jesus, when he said, “On the third day I will rise again.” They wondered why the third day had come and he had not risen. Then we read in verses 22-24, “In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” And so, even though an angel from heaven has told the people that Jesus is risen, they are holding on to their unbelief. Unbelief is a powerful thing, and it wants to lay its terrible grip on your heart as well, and not let you go.

Then Jesus said to them, verse 25, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have

spoken!” He calls them fools and unbelievers. In the Bible, a fool is a person who does not fear God. Psalm 14 says, “The fool says in his heart there is no God.” They are being foolish because they do not fear God, they fear man. An unbeliever is someone who does not accept what God reveals in the Bible. And they do not accept what God revealed through his son. They do not accept what Jesus taught and they do not fear God. They are fools and unbelievers. And God does not want us to remain fools and unbelievers. He wants us to have wisdom and faith in Jesus Christ. And therefore Jesus changed them from what they were to what he wanted them to be. He opened the scriptures. “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” This is the most beautiful thing. The thing that they are bemoaning, that they are grieving that Jesus died, is the best of all things, it’s the fulfillment of scriptures! He had to suffer these things, but he also had to rise from the dead and enter his glory, and he did that.

Then Jesus opens up the scriptures and, “Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27) He changed them from fools and unbelievers by opening the Bible to them, because the Bible is what makes us wise. It is the reading of God’s word that makes us fear God – to fear God with the kind of fear

that a child has for a father. It is reverent, loving fear that God wants to create in us so that we may be wise. He makes them wise and he creates faith in them by showing that the Bible is all about Jesus, with the central event being the resurrection from the dead. Jesus showed them that the Bible is the story of how God rescues us from our sins. It's all about how God loves us and how he did whatever needed to be done in order to save us.

Understand now that when Jesus opened the scriptures he made them wise and made them into believers. The power of God overcame their unbelief so that they believed. But what is it that made them believe? They believed, not because they saw Jesus. They believed because they discovered Jesus in the Bible. They saw Jesus in the same way that you can see Jesus: by reading the Bible, by having somebody explain the Bible. It is only later, when Jesus Christ celebrated the Lord's Supper with them, that "their eyes were opened and they recognized him." (Luke 24:31) Now they know for a fact that they have seen with their eyes that Jesus has risen from the dead, but they have already believed it because Jesus preached it to them.

We need to put all our energy into fighting against unbelief, but we are not able to do it on our own. By nature we are fools and unbelievers. We need to be near God's word. We need to read the Bible and discover God's grace in Jesus Christ. You need to have somebody explain God's word to you, just as Jesus explained it to

these people traveling to Emmaus. Because when we open scripture and when people explain it to us, we discover the thing which no human being could ever imagine on their own: the love of God who gave his own son in order that we may have salvation.

Stay near to God's word. Stay near to God's church. Stay near to the place where you hear God's word proclaimed and taught. And Jesus will stay near to you, and he will keep you on the path of wisdom, the path of faith and life. He will make sure that you never go to bed hungry. Your hope in Jesus will never disappoint you. He gives us everything that we could ever want, through his word.

April 22, 2007
Mr. Jim Witteveen

1 Samuel 8:7 "And the LORD told him (Samuel): 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.'"

Israel Rejects God as Their King

Reading: 1 Samuel 8:1-9
Text: 1 Samuel 8:7

Last Sunday evening, Pastor Paul preached from the gospel of Luke, the passage where Jesus is speaking to two men on the Road to Emmaus. The verse that he spoke about was Luke 24:27 -

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Tonight we're starting a new series of Sunday evening messages, and last week's Sunday evening message was a great way to bring us back to the Old Testament, where we find ourselves tonight. Because Moses and all the prophets, in other words, the whole Old Testament, tell us about Christ. Even tonight's passage, where we don't see any prophecy of Christ, or mention of him at all, points us to Christ. And that's what I'd like to speak about tonight.

The first thing we need to do when we look at this passage is to think about what was going on in Israel at the time that Israel asked for a king. Samuel was one of the great prophets of the Old Testament, but he was also the last of the judges. The judges were rulers of the people who were appointed by God to lead the people after they arrived in Canaan, the promised land. We can read about them in the book of Judges, which comes right before the books of Samuel in the Old Testament.

In Israel's history at the time of the judges, there was a pattern, a way things happened. The people would fall into sin. They would forget about God, and they would start worshipping idols instead. Instead of serving the God who led them into the promised land, they served the false gods of the people around them. And what happened then? God would deliver them over to

their enemies. They would be defeated, and oppressed, and beaten up, and finally, when they were at their lowest, they would cry out to God. And God would send them someone. Gideon, Samson, many others, and finally, Samuel. And the same thing happened during the time of Samuel. The people fell into sin again, and God sent the Philistines to attack them. Samuel led them back to the true God, and God delivered them from the Philistines. No matter how stubborn and wicked and foolish the people were, God had mercy on them when they turned away from their sins and cried out to him. God continued to be merciful to his people!

The judges were weak, sinful people, just like us. But God had placed them into their position, and had given them special power in special ways so that they could do their work and lead his people. This was the important thing – not that they were such special people of themselves, but that God had chosen them to do a job. He had made them leaders.

But now, the people said, Samuel was getting old. His sons were not righteous like he was, and the people wanted a king. But the fact that they wanted a king was not, in itself, a bad thing. In the laws of Deuteronomy, God had given rules for a king, when Israel would receive one. Having a king was not the problem. The problem was the reason why the people wanted a king, their motivation. What made them want a king? Was it really because

Samuel was old and because his sons were no good? Or was there another reason behind it?

Well, if we look at Chapter 8 a little more closely, we can see what it was that was making the people want a king. In verse 5, the elders of Israel say to Samuel, “You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.” So they have their excuse – you are old, your sons do not walk in your ways... but then comes their real reason for wanting a king: “such as all the other nations have!” They want a king because they want to be like the nations around them!

Israel was a special people. They were called by God to be his special people. He chose them to be different, to be separate, from the people around them. And now they wanted to be like the other people! This was problem #1 – they wanted a king because they wanted to be like everyone else. They didn't want to be different.

But then there's problem #2, which comes up later on in this chapter. After Samuel tells the people about all the bad things a king will do to them, they still refuse to listen to him. Verse 19: “But the people refused to listen to Samuel. No! They said. We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”

So again – we want to be like the other nations. But it gets even worse – we not only want to be like the other nations, but we want this king to fight our battles for us! Now remember where Israel had come from. They had come out of Egypt, and God had led them. They didn't need a great king and a great army to defeat the Egyptians, because God was their great king. He had led them, he had defeated their enemies on the way out of Egypt, and he had defeated their enemies when they entered the promised land. Remember the city of Jericho – all the people had to do was march around the city and blow their trumpets, and God destroyed it for them, without them having to fight at all. But now it seemed like the people were forgetting about all of that. They didn't have enough faith that God would lead them and fight their battles for them, so they wanted a human king.

And this is why God said to Samuel, “It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.” It was God they were rejecting, not Samuel. It wasn't because Samuel was old, or because his sons were wicked – it's because they were not faithful.

But the Lord gives the people what they want. He tells Samuel, Listen to what the people are saying. Give them a king. But warn them. Make sure they don't go into this king thing with any false ideas or hopes about what a king will be. So Samuel tells them. What will a king do for them? Well, he'll draft your sons into

the army. He'll take your other sons away from you and make them work in his fields. He'll take others from you to make weapons. He'll take your daughters away to work for him. He'll take your best land, your best fields and vineyards and olive trees. He'll tax you. And at the end of this long list, Samuel says, "When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you." Because you made the choice. You were warned, but you made the choice.

And again the people say, we don't care about all that. We want a king. And God says, Listen to them. Give them a king.

Remember at the beginning of the message I said that even this verse in the Old Testament points us to Christ. He is our king! Jesus is Lord – Jesus is king! He has claim over all of us, over all of our lives, over all of his world. He is the great king, and we are all called to serve him, and to have him as our king, as our Lord. Every Sunday here at Streetlight we are called again to serve Jesus as our King – to believe in him, to worship him, to trust in him, to serve him. Sunday after Sunday we hear the message. Jesus is Lord – worship him.

This is a call from God himself. When someone hears the gospel message, the good news that Jesus is king, and rejects that message, he is not rejecting the messenger. He is rejecting God as king. When I started to put together this evening's message, I was reminded of a passage in the gospel of John, which speaks about

our great king. In John chapter 19, Pontius Pilate, the Roman leader, has spoken to Jesus after his arrest, and he has found no guilt in him. This man is innocent, and Pilate knows it. So in 19:12, we read, "Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified."

And that was it. The people of Israel were again rejecting God as their king. We have no king but Caesar, the leaders of the people say. The real king was standing right there in front of him, but they refused to see it. They wanted Caesar, the emperor of the Romans, to be their king instead. Again they did not want to have God as king. In their sin, and in their blindness, they rejected God in the flesh. And finally Pilate handed him over to be crucified.

And now, Christ has been crucified. He has risen from the dead. And he has ascended into heaven, where he sits at the right hand of God. He was the king. He is the king. And he always will

be the king. Because the people of Israel rejected him as their king and had him crucified, he died. But he did not die for nothing. He died for the sins of those who believe in him. He died so that his people could live. And now he lives so that his people can rule as kings alongside him.

This is our king. The only question is: Will you serve this king? Or do you want a king of your own choosing? Because if you want to choose your own king, God will give you the king you choose. But choosing any other king to rule your life besides Jesus is a dangerous path indeed. Because there is only one true King, and that King is Jesus Christ, our Lord.

April 29, 2007
Rev. Doug Vandeburgt

Job 23:10 “But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.”

I Will Come Forth as Gold

Reading: Job 23
Text: Job 23:10

There is a story behind the verse I have chosen to preach on tonight. Some years ago when I was a pastor in Denver, Colorado I regularly would visit some senior members in an apartment complex called *The Christian Living Centre*. From time to time I

would also lead worship services in this retirement home. Whenever I visited I would have to buzz up to the people in their apartment and if they had their hearing aids in they would answer the phone and open the front door. Once inside I would go to a little desk across from the elevators and there under the watchful eye of one of the residents I would sign in the visitor’s book. Well, one time as I was signing in there were two women at the desk paging through the Bible. When they recognized who I was they told me they were looking for a Bible verse. Now in case you did not know every minister has memorized every verse in the Bible. Just ask us and we’ll tell you where to find your verse. I am kidding! Anyways, these two women told me that somewhere in the book of Job were the words, “*I will come forth as gold.*” I had to tell them I had no clue where to begin looking in the book of Job. But then I had an idea. I turned to the back of my bible where there was a concordance. I looked up the word *gold* and sure enough there was the verse they were looking for – Job 23:10. Those ladies were happy with me but I must admit as I walked away I was happier with them. It was they who had led me to a most wonderful verse of Scripture. To this day I believe that if had not been for that five minutes of my life I would never have known about this remarkable verse of Scripture. And so it is fitting to tell you the story behind this verse to honour these godly women who I

found diligently searching the Scriptures. I would encourage you to be like them and search the Scriptures.

Now as we prepare to look at this verse let me ask you – do you know the story of Job? In this chapter Job is saying how he wishes he could go to heaven and find God so that God could declare that all the bad things that had happened to Job were not because of his sin. Job’s friends were telling him bad things had happened to him because he was guilty of great sin. But Job declared his innocence and in this chapter expresses his desire for God to declare him innocent in the heavenly court. In the middle of this speech he says in verse 10, *“But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.”*

Gold is precious and valuable. It is a metal found in the earth. But when gold is found in the earth it is mixed in with other things. It is not pure gold. So how do you separate the gold from the other things it is mixed in with so that it comes forth as pure gold? How do you remove the impurities? With really hot fire. A really hot fire will remove the impurities so that what comes forth is pure gold.

Does anyone know what we call that process which involves the impure gold being placed into a really hot fire? It is called *refining* or *testing*. That is why Job says in verse 23, *“when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.”* Job is saying that God is testing him. That means God is refining him like gold is refined

in a fire. This is why Job also says, *“But he knows the way that I take...”* Job is saying that God is directing his life. Job believes the Lord has brought trials and suffering into his life in order to test him and refine him. And most importantly Job believes that when the Lord is done refining him through his trials and suffering he will come forth as gold. He believes he is being purified by the Refiner’s fire.

If you are someone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ I want to ask you, have you ever looked at your troubles in life the way Job does here? Have you ever looked at your suffering and said the Lord knows what is happening? He does know the way that you are taking. He knows the way because he directs the path of your life. He also knows that you and I are not perfect. We are full of imperfections. We are all filled with impurities. And the Lord won’t leave us in that state of impurity. He loves us too much. We are too precious and valuable in his sight for that. So what does he do? He tests us. He refines us with the refiner’s fire. I once heard someone say it like this, *“God will take us where we don’t want to go in order to produce in us what we cannot on our own.”* Do you think Job wanted to lose his family, his wealth and his health? Do any of us want to walk down the path of suffering? But the Lord takes us down those paths doesn’t he? He takes us places we don’t want to go. Why? In order to remove our impurities. He does it to make us more valuable and precious in his

sight. He has us suffer grief in all kinds of trials in order to change us into the image of Jesus Christ who though perfect and without sin gave up his life in order that you might be purified.

Do you believe this? Do you believe Christ gave up his life so that you might be purified? And do you believe that your present struggles and sorrows are God's refining fire in your life so that you will be purified? Then in faith you can sing that song we call *Refiner's Fire* with the words, '*Purify my heart, let me be as gold, pure gold.*' If you believe then with Job you too can say, "*I will come forth as gold.*"