

## No One Is Hopeless

Luke 23:39-43 (New American Standard Bible)

<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” <sup>40</sup> But the other responded, and rebuking him, said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our crimes; but this man has done nothing wrong.” <sup>42</sup> And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!” <sup>43</sup> And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

### Introduction

Hope---it is one of the most beautiful words in English vocabulary, isn't it? Do you remember the short story of O. Henry? *The Last Leaf*. Johnsy was dying with pneumonia. Somehow, she attached her life to the hanging leaves outside. *The last ones fall*, she said, *I must go*. One night, there was a storm. Despite the beating rain and the wild wind, the last leaf was still hanging against the wall. The following morning, looking at it, Johnsy felt hopeful (if the last leaf made it, then so shall I) and she started getting better. The truth? On that stormy night, the last leaf actually fell, however, in its place her friend Behrman painted one. The power of hope.

We all love hope, don't we? We hope to be in God's presence one day. We hope to see our loved ones in resurrection. We hope for a better job, better life, better health, and better days. On the other hand, 'hopeless' is such a depressing word. Obviously, it means without hope. Beyond redemption. *Hopelessness*. That's the topic of my sermon this morning. No one is hopeless in the Lord.

### Content

Before I dig deeper, let me define the word 'hopeless.' Here's the standard definition of 'hopeless' in the dictionaries.

**Definition of hopeless:** 1. Feeling or causing despair about something. 2. (*mainly British*) Inadequate; incompetent. 3. Incapable of redemption or improvement

For the sake of my sermon, I will stick to the third definition of hopeless as 'incapable of redemption or improvement.'

### **God of Hope:**

Whenever we talk about hope, we ought to consider God who is the source and giver of hope. In the Scriptures, hope appears 137 times (64 times in the Old Testament / 73 times in the New Testament). One book stands out--the Book of Job in which the word 'hope' appears 15 times. It makes sense, because in the throes of agony and despair, Job was desperately searching for hope. His hope in God enabled him to persevere through his afflictions. Remember: God is our hope. To such God of hope, Paul prayed for the believers as follows: *Now may the **God of hope** fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in **hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).* Do you need hope? Go to the Source, and set your hope in God, and you will not *be disappointed* (Romans 5:5). God is our hope.

### **Everyone is redeemable and reformable:**

The God of hope calls no one hopeless. That is, in God's eyes, anyone is redeemable and reformable. No matter how much we are broken, God can make us whole again. I noticed in God's Word that God never calls anyone *hopeless*. Neither should we. Never tell anyone, "You're hopeless." Let me repeat: in God's eyes, no individual is beyond redemption. Isn't it wonderful to know that such great love and mercy of our Father is available to all people? E.g. John Newton--Amazing grace--former slave trader-- "wretch like me." No one is hopeless in the Lord.

Once I was talking with a friend about the redeeming power of God. He didn't believe in God's forgiveness of the worst criminals. He questioned me if Hitler would be forgiven his horrendous crime against humanity. My initial answer was NO. Not *Hitler*. "What's the reason behind your question?" I asked him. "Is it because you don't believe in God's ability to forgive his sin or is it because you don't want God to forgive him?" "If the latter is the case," I continued, "I understand how you feel. We want God's justice on Hitler's crime. However, if the former is the case, that is, God is incapable of forgiving Hitler's sin, you are mistaken, because God's grace is far greater than any human sin." *Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt* (Julia H. Johnston).

God's grace embraces any human being and can forgive any human sin, except the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31). You line up all the worst criminals in history, and you compile all the sins of the world, still God's love and grace can forgive

them all in Christ. Every single one of them, no matter how grave it may be. That doesn't mean, however, that those sinners will be automatically forgiven.

Listen carefully. Through Christ's blood, our sins are forgiven. Such redemption is freely offered to all sinners, yet, the redeemability depends on the sinner's repentance and acceptance of Christ as their Savior and Lord. God wants everyone to be saved from their sins, however, the result is not up to God, but up to individuals. The reason why I don't believe Hitler was forgiven his sins, is because he never repented. I don't believe Stalin was forgiven by God either, because he refused to repent of his sins. Let me say it again. God's forgiveness, grace and mercy are available to all, but only those who accept His offer through their repentance will be forgiven. E.g. Ted Bundy. Another controversial subject of forgiveness. He was forgiven his sins because he sincerely repented of his horrendous crime and accepted Christ into his heart. What about the gun man (Charles Roberts) who killed 5 children one day in Nickel Mines, PA, in October 2006? Although the Amish community has forgiven him, whether he will be forgiven by God, it all depends on his repentance before he killed himself.

### **People are to be pitied and prayed for:**

Let me add one more thing here. There are certain people in the world for whom we must pray. They are the ones who need the Lord and His redemption. For instance, consider Judas Ischariot the one who has betrayed and sold Jesus for money. Although Jesus never called him hopeless, Judas was close to it. Jesus said that it would've been better had he not been born.

We need to pray for people in the world who are lost without God. Pray for those who refuse to believe in God, who reject the gospel message, and who choose to be their own god. Pray for those who are conceited or set their hope on the uncertainty of riches (1 Timothy 6:17). Pray for those who are separate from Christ, reject the power of Christ's blood for redemption and have no hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). Pray for those who hope only in this life, not in resurrection nor eternal life. *They are of all people most to be pitied* (1 Corinthians 15:19). Pray for them all.

### **Conclusion**

Let me take you back to today's lesson. On the day when Jesus was crucified, two other criminals were also crucified. Jesus was in the middle. One on His right, and the other on His left. One of them hurled insults at Jesus demanding to save him from the cross. The other one was ashamed of what he had done in life. In his true repentance, he asked Jesus

to remember him in God's Kingdom. To him, Jesus said, you will be in Paradise with Me today. That day, the criminal entered God's presence not because of what he had done, that is, many bad things, but because of His confession in Jesus as his Savior and Lord.

You may say, it is a cheap salvation, but it is not. It is a greatest victory of God over the devil. The devil messed up this man's life big time for years and was about to seal his eternal fate in Hell with crucifixion. But in the last hour, God turned the table around and declared, *I won!* God never gave up on this felon up until the last moment and when the criminal took the offer of salvation from Jesus, God gladly accepted him into Paradise. The lesson? Let us not call anyone hopeless. Everyone is reformable. God loves them all. His grace embraces them all. Everyone is redeemable. No one is hopeless in God. Amen.