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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
MARCH 11, 2007
KARL SCHAPHORST

1 MR. SCHAPHORST: We have been interviewing and
2 listening to some witnesses who either had some experience
3 with the crucifixion or had some experience in knowing the
4 joy of Christ.

5 We've talked to the crown of thorns. We've talked
6 to the robe; to the nails. This Wednesday we will talk with
7 the spear.

8 We're also talking to real witnesses, people like
9 you and me, and I'm so honored and glad that my good friend
10 Mike who works with me is here today to share his testimony
11 on his journey towards the cross.

12 Our reading today comes from the Gospel of Luke,
13 Chapter 23, verses 32 to 43, if you would like to follow
14 along.

15 "Two other men, both criminals, were also led out
16 with him to be executed.

17 "When they came to the place called The Skull, there
18 they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his
19 right and the other on his left.

20 "Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know
21 not what they do."

22 "And they divided up the clothes by casting lots.
23 The people stood watching and the rulers even sneered at him.

24 "They said, "He saved others, let him save himself,
25 if he is the Christ of God, the chosen one."

1 "The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They
2 offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the King of
3 the Jews, save yourself."

4 "There was a written notice above him which read,
5 "This is the King of the Jews."

6 "One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults
7 at him. "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us."

8 "But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you
9 fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence.
10 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds
11 deserve, but this man has done nothing wrong."

12 "And then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come
13 into your kingdom."

14 "Jesus answered, I tell you the truth, today you
15 will be with me in paradise."

16 This ends our reading.

17 This is a tough story. It paints a very clear
18 picture of Calvary, doesn't it? We know what is going on
19 there.

20 There is a scripture verse that I think of in
21 Galatians, second chapter, it goes, "I was crucified with
22 Christ, and yet I do not live, but Christ lives in me. The
23 life I lead in the body is in faith to the Son of God, who
24 loved me and gave himself for me."

25 It is a cruel and tough scene that is described in

1 Luke, but really it's just a great love story.

2 I would like to dive into this and take a closer
3 look at what treasures we might be able to pull from this.

4 There's not a lot of words, there's not a lot of
5 sentences that Jesus speaks when he's on the cross, so when
6 he does we really ought to pay attention and try to extract
7 as much nourishment from it, don't you think?

8 We know that the scene was described. We have Jesus
9 and then we have two crosses, one on the right and one on the
10 left, and then we have this cross in the middle

11 And then Jesus says, "Father, forgive them, for they
12 know not what they're doing."

13 I teach fourth and fifth graders, and I'll preach,
14 and I can say a lot of righteous things, and I try to do a
15 lot of righteous things.

16 But I'm here to tell you that my words and my feet
17 are not always in sync.

18 I will confess that I am a hypocrite, very much so,
19 but Jesus is not.

20 The words that he says he lives and there is no
21 flaw.

22 If you look at this, "Father, forgive them, for they
23 know not what they are doing."

24 Do you remember the Sermon on the Mount? Do you
25 remember what he taught in the 5th Chapter, Verse 44?

1 Do you remember those words? Pray for your enemies.
2 Pray for those who persecute you. Love your enemies.

3 How difficult is that? Jesus is up on the cross
4 being murdered, being executed, and his executioners are
5 there mocking him, and yet he does not forget the words that
6 he preaches; he lives them.

7 Only Jesus. Really. Only Jesus. But what a great
8 role model we have.

9 We can strive for that. Yes, we can. We can want
10 and desire to be like him, and it's good. That's very good.

11 I'm going to go out a little further into the story,
12 because I think the scene that is set is very telling.

13 It talks about these criminals. We have one at the
14 left and one at the right.

15 And I don't know which one was the one that was
16 mocking Jesus and which one was the one that was rebuking the
17 other criminal.

18 I don't know if that was right or left, so I'm going
19 to make an assumption here.

20 I'm going to say that the one on the left was the
21 criminal, was the cross that was mocking Jesus, and what did
22 he say?

23 "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us."

24 If I could put a label on this cross, the cross on
25 the left, I might call it the world.

1 It looks like the world, the world which is Satan's
2 kingdom.

3 We, who are children of God, do not belong here. We
4 belong in heaven.

5 This is not our home. This is Satan's home. This
6 is Satan's kingdom.

7 So as someone who lived and subscribed to that
8 kingdom, you would almost expect them to sound like Satan.

9 I'm here to tell you these words are very eerily
10 similar to the very words that Satan spoke to Jesus when he
11 was being tempted.

12 Do you remember, forty days fasting in the desert
13 and Satan leads him up to the highest place on the temple and
14 what does he say to Jesus? Do you remember?

15 Well, if you are the son of God, cast yourself down.
16 Go ahead, cast yourself down, because if you are the Son of
17 God you can save yourself, right?

18 But Jesus responded with the word of God saying you
19 cannot test, we should not test the Lord our God, right?

20 Jesus didn't respond to the criminal, but I find it
21 amazing how similar his words reflect those of Satan.

22 It's the world. Scripture describes this. It
23 really does, and I searched the scriptures, I wanted to find
24 something that might describe what this cross represents

25 And if you ask me, both crosses, they can categorize

1 every single living being that is alive.

2 We either belong or subscribe to the cross on the
3 left, or we belong or subscribe to the cross on the right.

4 What does that cross on the left really look like?
5 I found some passages in Romans.

6 I am going to go to Romans, the first chapter of the
7 Book of Romans, starting in verse 21. This is what Paul
8 writes.

9 "For although they knew God," you cannot deny that
10 this criminal knew who Jesus claimed to be.

11 He knew him. He knew him, because he obviously
12 said, well, if you are the Christ, save us. So he knew him.

13 You know what is interesting here? Satan knows
14 Jesus.

15 So do all his demons. They know him. In fact they
16 believe in him, so just knowing him certainly may not be
17 salvation.

18 "For although they knew God, they neither glorified
19 him as God, nor gave thanks to him. Therefore, God gave them
20 over. In the simple desires of their hearts, they exchanged
21 the truth of God for a lie," which happens all the time.

22 99 percent truth, 1 percent lie, equals a lie. Take
23 what they are comfortable with, just change it a little bit,
24 and then you've got a lie, and that's what they were doing.

25 They were taking the truths of God and then

1 distorting it and making it a lie. It happens all the time.

2 "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and
3 worshipped and served created things."

4 This is what the world does. This is what the world
5 does.

6 We can worship the things that we see, things that
7 we feel, things that make us feel good, or things that cause
8 us pain, these are the things that are in the world.

9 We see that stuff and that's what happens. We serve
10 and worship the things that are in the world, rather than the
11 one that created the world, who is forever praised.

12 This is the cross on the left. What about the one
13 on the right?

14 I'll use the very word that Jesus used, which is
15 paradise.

16 So if the one on the left is the world, let's call
17 the one on the right paradise.

18 Now, scripture talks a lot about that, and I'm not
19 going to give you a lot of information or details on what
20 scripture says on what paradise looks like or what it is.

21 What I find interesting is that this criminal
22 hanging on the cross went from being condemned to death to
23 being a saved son of God in a matter of moments, and I was
24 curious, how did this happen?

25 There is a message of salvation contained in just a

1 few verses here.

2 The message of salvation maybe isn't so complicated;
3 maybe it's really very basic and simple.

4 Can we study this? Let's go to the scripture and
5 let's look at this carefully and see what we can learn from
6 this criminal on the right who is able to get Jesus to say
7 those magical words, "I tell you the truth, today you will be
8 with me in paradise."

9 I start in verse 40. "But the other criminal," this
10 would be the criminal on the right, "rebuked him. Don't you
11 fear God?"

12 Let's stop right there. Fearing God. Maybe this
13 already is one step towards salvation.

14 Let's go to the scriptures and find out. Let's
15 support this with scripture and I go Psalm 85, Verse 9. Here
16 is what it says.

17 "Surely his salvation is near to those who fear
18 him."

19 So this makes all the sense. If we want to get on
20 that road to redemption, if we want to get on that road to
21 salvation, it starts with believing that there is a God and
22 having fear in him, believing that he has power over us.

23 It's difficult to get there without it, and notice
24 how this criminal starts with that.

25 Don't you fear God? Interesting.

1 Psalm 111 says this, "The fear of the Lord is the
2 beginning of wisdom."

3 And in another place in scripture it says that
4 wisdom, you should seek it with everything you have. I
5 believe that's in Proverbs.

6 Real true wisdom. You should give everything away
7 to grasp real true wisdom, and it starts with the fear of the
8 Lord. Interesting. I like it.

9 So, he says that. He fears God. Then he goes on
10 and says, "We," meaning him, the cross on the left and the
11 cross on the right, "are being punished justly, for we are
12 getting what our deeds deserve."

13 What just happened there? I almost hear a
14 confession. He's admitting that he's done something wrong.

15 Scripture talks about confessions in a lot of
16 places.

17 It says in First John, Verse 9, "If we confess our
18 sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins
19 and purify us from all unrighteousness."

20 Interesting. There is a confession there.

21 You know what else I see in those two sentences that
22 the cross on the right said?

23 I hear this sense of repentance, of remorse, of
24 putting on the sack cloth and mourning about the decision he
25 made.

1 There is repentance. Repentance and confession, and
2 scripture also supports this.

3 Scripture also says in the Book of Jeremiah, it
4 talks about the Nation of Israel, how if you just cleanse
5 your hearts of all the evil desires, then you will be saved,
6 and that word is used, salvation, saved, cleanse your hearts
7 of evil doing, turn away from the wickedness, turn away from
8 that which is unclean, that that is of the world, and focus
9 on the things that are righteous.

10 Repent. Turn. There's repentance. There's
11 confession and then there is repentance. Let's read on.

12 He turns to Jesus now and he speaks to Jesus
13 directly, and the first word he says is Jesus.

14 I think that's significant. I think that's very
15 significant.

16 In the Book of Acts it says, "For by no other name
17 under heaven given to man can we be saved."

18 It has to start with Jesus. It has to start with
19 him.

20 "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." And
21 there I see the cross on the right giving an acknowledgment
22 to a truth, that Jesus is who he says he is, Jesus is Lord,
23 and he said it with his mouth. He said it with his mouth.

24 Romans, Chapter 10, Verse 9, "If you confess with
25 your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God

1 raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

2 It goes on to say in Verse 13, "Everyone who calls
3 on the name of the lord will be saved."

4 There is a message of salvation in that. I find it
5 amazing, the cross on the right, there was no baptism, there
6 was no communion, there was no ritual, there was no
7 sacrifice.

8 All there was was a simple rendering of the heart.
9 It's a heart matter. We honor God with that, but salvation
10 is an issue of the heart, as proved out in this very last
11 moment of this criminal's life. He gained that precious gift
12 of salvation. That's a lesson.

13 I was preparing this, and it's interesting, I have
14 some other people in my industry that are very faithful
15 people and we gather together every once in a while in
16 fellowship.

17 And there's this one gentleman who is very
18 knowledgeable about the scriptures and he always challenges
19 me.

20 And he said, well, let's talk about salvation and
21 see if we can't put that into a little one page sound bite.

22 And I very much tried to do that and came up with
23 something.

24 And it was interesting how that really prepared me
25 for this.

1 But it also helped me come to maybe the real message
2 that is on display when we think of Calvary.

3 Calvary. In the scripture they call it The Place of
4 the Skull.

5 The Latin translation of the skull is calvaria;
6 hence the name Calvary.

7 And we have this image on one side. As we talked
8 about, you have the world.

9 The cross on the left might represent the worldly
10 view apart from Christ.

11 Then you have the cross on the right, which
12 represents paradise.

13 In the Old Testament translations, or Greek
14 translations, that word paradise means garden, a blissful
15 place.

16 And that takes me all the way back to the second
17 chapter of Genesis. What a great description for that.

18 We haven't talked much about the cross in the
19 middle, have we?

20 And maybe it's almost blasphemous to suggest that
21 that cross in the middle represents sin, but it's scriptural.

22 Second Corinthians says that the one who is without
23 sin, our Savior, Jesus, became sin for us.

24 In those final moments of Jesus's life he became the
25 very abomination that has separated us from our Father in

1 heaven. He became sin.

2 And I really believe at that moment our Father in
3 heaven could no longer look upon Jesus, because his perfect
4 eyes cannot be so beholden to such sin.

5 And Jesus truly was alone, and when he was on that
6 cross he was saying, "Father, why have you forsaken me," and
7 there was no answer.

8 But Jesus fulfilled his purpose. You see, remember
9 that scripture, I was crucified with Christ, and it's not I
10 that lives, but Christ in me.

11 What died on Calvary that day was not Jesus; it was
12 sin that died.

13 Sin is what was crucified. Sin is what was nailed
14 to the cross.

15 So when I say I was crucified with Christ, so that I
16 no longer live, it is my sinful nature that I pray would be
17 hung on that cross, to wither and die, so that the spirit of
18 God can shine brightly in me.

19 We are truly separated from God by sin, and Jesus
20 has become the bridge to get us from the world back to
21 paradise.

22 His resurrection demonstrated his power over sin,
23 and if we put our faith in him, just like that cross on the
24 right did, then we bridge the sin and enter into paradise.

25 I would like to introduce my friend Mike to come up

1 and share his testimony, because it's very relevant to this
2 discussion, and I'm so glad that he's here to do this and
3 appreciate the risk he's taking. Mike.

4 MIKE: Thank you, Karl. You'll have to forgive me.
5 I had to write my thoughts down.

6 I'm neither an orator, nor a minister, so if you
7 will bear with me I'll try not to exactly read from it, but I
8 wanted to make sure I captured everything that I felt.

9 Karl has asked me to give my testimony today, and
10 I'm more than happy to share with you my journey to the Lord,
11 my Savior.

12 I was raised in the Catholic church, educated in a
13 Catholic grade school, Catholic high school, married in the
14 Catholic church to a Catholic girl for 36 years.

15 But I must admit I had no relationship with God, nor
16 did I for that matter with my Catholic faith.

17 I worked with Karl for several years in the same
18 office, but we were never really close.

19 I left that company to pursue other opportunities
20 with a competitor for close to five years.

21 For some reason I had a desire to return to the
22 company that I had left earlier and the opportunity presented
23 itself and I returned.

24 After a couple of years back at the firm my wife
25 faced major surgery that did not go well and she suffered

1 this disabling damage that resulted from the surgery that
2 changed her life and mine.

3 And shortly after that I, too, faced a major health
4 crisis of my own, heart disease.

5 I underwent angioplasty a few times, which led to
6 multiple artery bypass surgery, a couple of minor strokes,
7 more angioplasties.

8 I was truly like the thief on the cross, caught up
9 in the things of the world, and salvation was not something I
10 was seeking or even cared about.

11 I was angry. I was angry at God. I was angry at
12 the medical profession.

13 I was bitter, I was depressed, and I only worried
14 about poor pitiful me and how my wife wasn't going to be able
15 to work at her job of thirty years, the things we couldn't
16 buy or do anymore, and how it affected my life; not hers, my
17 life. I was very selfish and I was very mad.

18 Karl was part of a Bible study in our office that
19 met weekly before work and for some unknown reason I started
20 to attend.

21 This led to a desire by me to learn more and Karl
22 and others in the group were always wanting to share with me
23 their love of the Lord and would ask if I was ready to accept
24 him.

25 I resisted, but for some reason I kept coming back.

1 I began to question my own faith and why God had led me to
2 this place at this time.

3 My burdens were many, but I found comfort in the
4 word.

5 I found answers in the word and I asked God if he
6 would become my Savior and come into my life.

7 My struggles did not go away, but with the help of
8 the Lord I was able to accept them and look at them in other
9 ways.

10 I feel God has given me these burdens only to make
11 me stronger and to help grow my faith.

12 I accept that God will only give me what I can
13 handle, and that with his help I can move forward.

14 He has taught me the things of the world are not as
15 important as my eternal salvation and life with him in his
16 kingdom.

17 I pray every day to my Lord to make me a better man,
18 a better husband, a better father, and a better coworker.

19 My journey has only just begun and I know I have
20 many miles to go before I'm anywhere close to being the
21 Christian I need to be.

22 I'm still a practicing Catholic, but more
23 importantly I'm a born again Christian that loves the Lord.

24 I read the Bible and I try to absorb the words I
25 read.

1 I'm nothing special, but for some reason God has
2 selected me to grant me his eternal mercy, and more
3 importantly the Holy Spirit has selected to grant me the
4 strength to face the crisis that I face in my life.

5 This past week we buried my father-in-law of 36
6 years.

7 He was the father of eleven children, married for
8 over fifty years, was a successful business owner, and
9 recently diagnosed with cancer.

10 When I asked him if he was ready to make this
11 journey, he said he had spent his whole life getting ready to
12 meet the Lord and his only concern was how his children would
13 take it, what he was facing, not any concern about himself,
14 just about his kids.

15 He loved the Lord and knew that God had given him so
16 much and that he owed a lot back.

17 He never hesitated to give back his time, or money,
18 or anything else that was needed of him.

19 You see, he knew what salvation was about and what
20 his place in the world was about, serving his community,
21 raising great kids, and serving his church in any way he
22 could.

23 The last several years he worked funeral lunches at
24 his local parish and washed dishes and he loved it.

25 He loved serving his fellow parishioners and he

1 loved serving the Lord. He will always serve as a role model
2 to me.

3 I know God led me to this place, for if I did not
4 return to where I work today I would not have found him and
5 would not have been saved.

6 Without the Lord I would not have been able to
7 accept the difficulties that life has presented me.

8 In the end I am just a simple man, but I am a man
9 that has been saved by the Lord and salvation is eternal.
10 Thank you.

11 (Applause)

12 MR. SCHAPHORST: Thank you, Mike, for blessing us
13 with that.

14 That takes a lot of courage and a lot of risk. I
15 hope you were pleased with his testimony.

16 I can certainly relate also to the cross on the
17 left, because I was there for a long time, a very long time.

18 But I have to go back to the word of God, because
19 here is what he says.

20 "I tell you the truth, today," the word he uses is
21 not yesterday, it's not tomorrow, it's not in a few weeks,
22 it's not a long time ago, it's today. The word he uses is
23 today. I will be with you in paradise. It's today.

24 I hope this encourages and strengthens your faith
25 and I hope if you are searching this might open up a door for

1 you to come to the cross and truly give your heart to Christ.

2 There's just an amazing love story in all that pain
3 and suffering. There truly is a love story. Let's pray.

4 Lord, heavenly Father, I'm so sorry for what you had
5 to go through on the cross.

6 I'm sorry for all the sin that is in my life that
7 has disgraced you. I pray for your mercy.

8 Lord, heavenly Father, I'm so grateful that your
9 blessings are fresh and new every day.

10 I'm so grateful that through your word you encourage
11 us, even when the world would see it as there is no
12 encouragement, there is nothing to be happy about, Lord, but
13 there is joy in the heart of the believer always.

14 What a gift. Thank you so much, Lord, and I pray
15 that your Holy Spirit would do a great work today.

16 That we would no longer look at the hill of Calvary
17 the same.

18 That we would understand the message of salvation
19 put on display for us, just as the city is on a hill, Lord,
20 we cannot miss it.

21 I pray, Lord, that your word would make us a new
22 creation.

23 I pray, Lord, that your word would draw us close to
24 you and make us more like you, and that we would do as we
25 say.

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I pray, Lord, that your Holy Spirit would give us
the strength to do many great things to give you glory.

I pray this in the name of Jesus.