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Good Friday – John 19:28-37 – God on Trial: Evidence

3/29/24 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

To the devilish delight of God’s enemies, the trial was over. They got their way, and the sentence they sought was being carried out. Their hatred for Jesus manifested itself in the accusations they brought against him earlier in the day, and now that those accusations achieved their purpose, they decided to rub a little salt in his wounds. **“Where’s the evidence?** You who claim to be the Son of God and the Messiah, prove it!”

You remember the story. As Jesus hung up there on the cross, the Jewish religious leaders mocked him, *“He saved others... but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him... Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”* The Roman soldiers who were there taunted him, *“If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!”* People going by on the roads hollered at him, *“Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!”* And even the criminals who were crucified next to him added their insults, *“Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”*

In their own ways, each of them was really saying the same thing: “Where is the evidence that you really are who you say you are?” And as cruel as they were being right then, so many people even to this day still put God on trial with that same basic question: “Where is the evidence?” Where is the evidence that God is even *real*? Where is the evidence for creation vs. evolution? Where is the evidence that God actually cares about us, with so many bad things going on all around us? Where is the evidence that prayers make a difference, when so many go unanswered? Where is the evidence that God actually has any power at all, when so many people are still hurting and suffering and dying on his watch? Those questions may come from hatred, from mockery, from skepticism, from desperation, or from honest ignorance. Maybe those are questions that you yourself wrestle with. Yet in every instance, the demand is still made: prove it. Show me the evidence!

So what did Jesus do? That day as he hung up on the cross, he gave us all the evidence we need that he really is the Son of God and the Savior of the world, just like he claimed. And Exhibit A is the evidence of the Scriptures. Just here in John 19, it mentions four Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus here at his crucifixion. Well add to those anywhere from 300-500 other prophecies about his birth, life, work, suffering, and death that are found across the Old Testament Scriptures written hundreds of years before Jesus was even born, and you get a clear testimony that Jesus was exactly who he claimed to be and

exactly who the Scriptures said he would be – the Messiah promised for ages past, and there was no mistaking it!

But then notice this little piece of cross-examination. The Jewish religious leaders said, *“He saved others... but he can’t save himself!”* Little did they know they were actually making Jesus’ case for him. That was Exhibit B for Jesus, the evidence of the miracles he did for others. All those people Jesus helped and healed and saved, the multitudes he fed, the demons he drove out, the nature he controlled, the dead that he raised – the stories of Jesus’ miracles couldn’t be denied because so many people had personally seen them and witnessed them, and the only legitimate explanation for them was that Jesus really must be the Son of God, because no one else had the power and authority to be able to do anything like that!

And in fact, that first-hand testimony is what the Gospel writer John here points to as Exhibit C: the evidence of the witnesses. Even today, there is no more powerful testimony in a court of law than eye-witness testimony, and John himself testifies that everything he saw and heard from Jesus is true. Just that day as Jesus gave up his spirit, the temple curtain was torn in two, the earth shook, the rocks split, the tombs broke open, and the dead came back to life. John saw it, the women saw it, the soldiers saw it, everyone who was there saw it! Who could be responsible for something like that but the true Son of God? But it wasn’t even just John – it was all the rest of the disciples and hundreds more witnesses beyond that too, all of whom were even willing to give their lives rather than turn on Jesus or fold under pressure to deny him. A fake or a fraud doesn’t have that kind of open-eyed, unwavering devotion!

So on the basis of that evidence – and actually, one more piece of evidence that was the biggest clincher of all, but we’re going to have to wait on that one till Sunday – Jesus concluded his defense. Only, he didn’t do it by saying, “I rest my case” like the defense attorneys on TV. Jesus rested his case with words of confidence and victory: *“It is finished.”* See, the cold, hard facts of courtroom evidence might seem a little academic on a day like today when it comes to proving who Jesus really is, but only when we’re certain about that can we also be certain about what Jesus has done for us. Yes, Jesus really is the Son of God, so that means God is real and he does have power to work for good in our lives and eternities. Yes, Jesus really is the Messiah long foretold, so that means we can trust God’s Word, rely on all his promises, and be sure that he will never let us down. And yes, Jesus really is the Savior of the world, so that means he really does love us, he really does forgive us, and one day he’s going to save us *from* this sinful world and bring us to be with him in heaven. A flawless substitute who lived a faultless life in our place and to our credit; a loving Lord who gave his life willingly for us and for our salvation; a perfect, infinitely valuable sacrifice to pay for all our sins and reconcile us to God – that’s who Jesus is, and his cross is the evidence that proves it now and forever. Amen.