

“THE SCALES ARE TIPPED”

Pastor Mike Corwin

MAUNDY THURSDAY

TEXT: LUKE 23:32-43

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 22:14-20

I – THE JUSTICE STATUE:

You will find her in just about every courthouse that is in existence, whether it’s a small claims court, or the United States Supreme Court. She adorns the walls of public buildings where cases are tried. You can find her hanging out in the law offices of prominent and not so prominent attorneys. And she isn’t only known to our country, but to all countries that have a system of justice in place. We have named her simply...LADY JUSTICE.

Most commonly she appears as a lady in flowing robes, holding a set of scales in one hand and a sword in the other. Most often she is wearing a blindfold. The statue has been around since the time of Jesus. It could very well have set in the room where Jesus was tried before Pontius Pilate. The lady in the flowing robes is the ancient Roman goddess “THEMIS” who was the goddess of justice and law. She holds the scales to represent the impartiality that justice is supposed to be served with. She holds the sword to signify the power held by those making the decision.

We sometimes call her “BLIND JUSTICE” because of the blindfold she wears in today’s statues. The blindfold she wears did not come into existence until the 16th century and is to signify that justice is not subject to influence. In recent history we may well challenge that justice is not subject to influence. Those of us who have watched the celebrity trials of people like O.J. Simpson and Robert Blake may well question if those with money can influence justice. Based on the case of those who have been cleared recently by DNA testing we have to ask if justice has always been blind or if the scales have been tipped one way or the other in certain cases.

II – SCALES TIPPED AGAINST JESUS:

As I read again the story of Holy Week, I had no trouble coming to the conclusion that

when it came to the ordeal of Jesus, Lady Justice was not blind. Lady Justice had been influenced in many ways. The scales had been tipped against the Savior.

The agents of the established church had been plotting for months to arrest Jesus and cause his death. Their plot grew to reality as he entered the city on a donkey and they realized the time had come to deal with this upstart preacher who claimed to be the Son of God. They found an informant who betrayed him and led the temple guard and Roman soldiers to him for a mere 30 pieces of silver. They had no legal search or arrest warrants, but they arrested him anyhow, shackled him, and led him before the religious leaders to stand trial on false charges. He was not afforded an attorney, he was not judged by a jury of his peers. The outcome arrived before he ever appeared before the judges. He was manhandled, questioned, convicted and sent to the Roman authority. Once there the same thing happened. The Roman judge Pilate knew the man was innocent, but the people yelled for his crucifixion and Pilate gave it to them. He pronounced the death penalty.

In less than 24 hours Jesus had been betrayed, arrested, tortured, tried, convicted, and nailed to a cross. There was no appeal, there was no review by a higher court, justice was tipped against Jesus and justice was swift.

III – SCALES TIPPED BY JESUS:

With Jesus hanging on the cross we find that Justice can be tripped in another direction. We find that there is an appeal, there is a higher court for us to take our case before, and Jesus controls the court. Jesus tips the scales for us.

Luke 23:32 – 43 (NLT)

³²Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. ³³Finally, they came to a place called The Skull. All three were crucified there—Jesus on the center cross, and the two criminals on either side. ³⁴Jesus said, “Father, forgive these people, because they don’t know what they are doing.” And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. ³⁵The crowd watched, and the leaders laughed and scoffed. “He saved others,” they said, “let him save himself if he is really God’s Chosen One, the Messiah.” ³⁶The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine. ³⁷They called out to him, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” ³⁸A signboard was nailed to the cross above him with these words: “This is the King of the Jews.” ³⁹One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you’re at it!” ⁴⁰But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you

fear God even when you are dying? ⁴¹We deserve to die for our evil deeds, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." ⁴²Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." ⁴³And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

The time of execution has come. Jesus and two criminals are led out to be crucified. Carrying their crosses, they're marched to the top of the hill called the skull, which is also known as Golgotha, or Calvary. And there they're nailed to the crosses they carried and lifted into place to die the slow agonizing death of crucifixion. There will be no justice now; there will be no last-minute reprieves from the governor's office. Their fate is sealed. And yet in this story I see two examples of the scales of justice being tipped in the favor of those who don't deserve it.

As he hangs there beaten and bruised, suffering from loss of blood, and being suffocated by the act of crucifixion as his body weight pulls down against his lungs, we find his humiliation is not complete. First, he's stripped naked and the soldiers gamble for his clothing. The religious leaders stand at the bottom of the cross and laugh and scoff at him, telling him that surely the Son of God as he claims to be, should be able to save himself. The soldiers join in the mocking calling him a king and nailing a sign above his head that he is the King of the Jews, earlier they had crowned him with thorns. If justice were to be true this night, if the sword in the hand of lady justice would be used this night, it would have struck dead all those who had done this to Jesus, all those who had the opportunity to embrace him as their Savior and didn't would have been consumed by the heavenly fire of God, or killed by the angel of death as the Egyptians had been so many years before on the first Passover. But instead, the victim himself, the one God sent to Save the world looks out over them and utters the words "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM." Jesus tipped the scales in their favor. They have another chance to repent and come to their senses before their life ends. They can yet find their Salvation because Jesus did not demand the justice, they deserved from his heavenly Father this night.

As I read the rest of the passage, I see the scales of Justice in action. There's Jesus in the center, as the balancing beam, between two criminals. Two men who were probably there legitimately, who were probably receiving true justice for their actions. The two were probably evenly matched in their criminal behavior and the scale Jesus was holding was probably balanced. But the one hears this man utter words of forgiveness instead of condemnation. Something inside this criminal realizes Jesus is who he says he is and he takes the other criminal to task for his mockery of the Savior. It's at that point the scale moves, the balance is thrown off as Jesus tips the scale in the favor of this

criminal and tells him that "TODAY, YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE."

IV – THE SCALES ARE TIPPED FOR US:

The Good News of the gospel is that the scales were not just tipped for this one criminal, this one moment in history. The scales were tipped that night for all of us who have ever been born. What Jesus did for all of humankind was to tip the scales in our favor forever!

If we were left to our own abilities justice would not be kind to us. As our sins were placed on the scales it would soon start to sag on one side. As our sins of greed, lust, hatred, unforgiveness and all the others were placed on the scale it would move downward. As we were held accountable for loving God with all our heart, mind, and soul, as we were judged for loving each other as Jesus commanded, as we are judged for our energy spent spreading the Gospel as Jesus commanded, the platform holding all of our sin would crash to the bottom of the scale. As God would look upon our lives the sword of justice would be swift and cruel.

But Jesus puts the blindfold on justice; Jesus tips the scale for all those who call upon His name to save them. The blood of Jesus, shed on a Roman cross drips onto that scale, it far outweighs our sins, and it tips the scale in our favor so that God cannot see our sin, it's been washed away, it's been removed from his sight, truly then justice is blind and favorable.

V – WHICH SIDE OF THE SCALE?:

The question you need to ask yourself tonight is: WHICH SIDE OF THE SCALE AM I ON? As you look at the story of the crucifixion are you the criminal who scoffs at Jesus or the one who accepts him as the Son of God? Does the way you live show love and acceptance of this Jesus as the Savior or does it show disdain and unbelief? If God were to weigh you this very night would the scales tip under the weight of your sins...or under the weight of the Savior's atoning blood? Are you the criminal that said No to Jesus, or the one who said Yes?

I pray you've said yes. I pray you've had the scales tipped in your favor and God no longer sees your sins as they've been washed in the blood of the lamb. I also pray that those who haven't yet done so will step forward and do so tonight.

AMEN