



Hidden in the Savior's Promises

✠ Breaking the heart of God

✠ Ensuring all promises fulfilled

In the name of Jesus, our glorious Savior, dearly redeemed disciples, heirs of God's promises:

Why does the telephone always ring at the worst time? It didn't work a few weeks ago when I tried to make the phone ring right here in the pulpit during a sermon. My headset ringer was turned off; all we heard was ringing in the office. I didn't have the technology to make every cell phone in the sanctuary ring at once. But they would if we didn't remember to turn them off. Like the telemarketer who called just as I was writing this sermon. Afterwards I wondered why I didn't say more than, "Have a great Good Friday." We who cannot control our communications, landline or cellular, we who fail to communicate the most vital message every telemarketer also needs to hear, we tonight ***Behold the Hidden Glory of the Cross!*** It's **Hidden in the Savior's Promises**. But how could there be **Glory** when it's...?

✠ Breaking the heart of God

You who think of sin but lightly Nor suppose the evil great, Here you see its nature rightly, Here its guilt may estimate. Mark the sacrifice appointed; See who bears the awful load – 'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed, Son of Man and Son of God. (CW 127:3)

Some of the most religious people are hard core cruel. One man after church in a neighboring congregation would not let the rest of the people go. First to the door, he kept demanding why my sermon had "exonerated the Jews." He was thinking about passages like this: "***Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.***" The first Good Friday was the day to prepare for the most sacred Sabbath Day, the one after the Passover. Old Testament Jewish law said no body could hang on a tree overnight. The Roman conquerors actually allowed a rare exception for the Jews because of this law. Otherwise, the soldiers could be guarding crucified criminals for days on end, ensuring no relatives got them down. Nothing would be allowed to touch them except scorching sun, bitter cold, shivering rain and flesh eating birds.

But legs broken? Do you understand? A crucified man needed his legs to push up and breath. Without them the weight of his body quickly collapsed his lungs and ended the agony by suffocation. And the Greek word here for breaking (καταγνυμι) was accurately portrayed in Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* when the soldiers *smashed* the legs of the two criminals with a sledge hammer.

Imagine the phone is ringing deep in the night, jarring you awake with a voice telling you of a tragic accident. But what if you had to watch it? What if you were God the Father seeing this done to your one and only Son? Who could stomach it? What mind would conceive of it. Where is the ***Glory of the Cross*** in this? And how can it be that God willed it? 700 years earlier the ancient prophet Isaiah was

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inspired in our Old Testament reading for Good Friday to inform us: **“Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer...”** ? There must have been something we deserved of much greater grief for God than allowing His own Son to suffer, to volunteer for such an execution in our place. The immoral things we think and watch and do, our excuses for selfishness, the way we’re always too busy to help but never too busy to argue, the time we waste in worry, the burdens we carry for ourselves instead of others – all the love God commands for Him and our neighbor that gets crowded out of hearts too hard to care – this is our guilt. And here we **Behold the Hidden Glory of the Cross** because **“the Lord makes his [Son, our Lord Christ] a guilt offering”** for all our sins and shortcomings. But it would not end here on the cross. For the same prophet Isaiah was inspired to foretell: **“He will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.”** (Isaiah 53:10 NIV) The cross is...

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God did not require a wake-up call to remind Him what to do. No network was needed to explain the procedure. And God was not about to pay the price and then not take the product. None of us would lay down the cash for an expensive cell phone, then purposely walk away without it. Neither would God. Pagan Roman soldiers would carry out His will without knowing it. But by this death Jews and Gentiles alike would be exonerated – freed from the guilt of every sin, **Ensuring all God’s promises fulfilled.**

Smashing the legs of crucified criminals was quick and easy for battle hardened soldiers. But why not Jesus too? Just before our text, **“when he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”** (John 19:30 NIV) Months earlier Jesus had promised His fellow Jews, **“No one takes [my live] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”** (John 10:18 NIV) God the Father promised Adam and Eve a Savior in the Garden. God the Son promised throughout His lifetime. God the Holy Spirit promised through the prophets that Jesus would not be killed against His will. For the sake of God’s saving will, He gave up His life. The soldiers were fulfilling the proof.

1500 years earlier through Moses, in order to foreshadow the suffering Christ, the LORD had commanded concerning the Passover lamb, **“Do not break any of the bones.”** (Exodus 12:46 NIV) Yet Christ had to die because **“the wages of sin is death”** (Romans 6:23), and God did not want us paying those wages by eternal death in hell. So the Roman soldier, a professional executioner, without even realizing how he was fulfilling God’s holy Word, took a spear and plunged it into the side of the Man in the middle. This was not a clean piecing, but a twisting action to insure absolutely this One was dead. The blood and water that poured out of the *pericardium* sac around the heart proved it conclusively.

God’s Word was absolutely fulfilled. **“He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.”** (Psalm 34:20 NIV) No broken bones, but absolutely dead, the LORD through another prophet: **“They will look on me, the one they have pierced.”** (Zechariah 12:10)

We’ve all made promises but none like these. No one forced God or even imagined such a way to save fallen mankind. Entirely on His own He not only promised, but carried out those promises when no one could have held Him to such a standard. For us when the going gets rough, promises are easily forgotten. But never by God. From birth and beyond the grave He keeps them all. Through His apostles He promised that Baptism would wash our sins away and adopt us into God’s family. Since He kept His Word on the cross, you can be sure your sins are forgiven and that God is your Father for Jesus’ sake. A mother may forget her suckling child, God says, **“But I will never forget you. I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”** (Isaiah 49:16) Surely we deserve to be forsaken and forgotten, but God like the father of the prodigal son waits eagerly to welcome us back into His good graces and even calls this the **“ministry of reconciliation that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.”** (2 Corinthians 5:18f NIV) He is **“not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”** (2 Peter 3:9 KJV)

Just one more promise remains to make this Friday really Good. *“Because I live, you will live also.”* That too is a Baptism promise that binds us to Christ in His death and in the new life of His resurrection. For as the Lord’s Apostle Paul writes to the Romans, *“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”* (Romans 6:4 NIV)

Golgotha was veiled in black, like our church is this evening, and like our hearts filled with sorrow for our sins and what they cost God’s Son our Savior. But we also go home in the joy of forgiveness and in the quiet confidence to wait for the cry that is sure to come three days hence. For we have followed Christ to the cross this Lenten season. And again this evening we **Behold the Hidden Glory of the Cross – Breaking the heart of God** by His own set purpose and degree, but also **Ensuring all promises fulfilled**. And if you need a wake-up call Easter morning to see how God got it done, let me know. For once again we will celebrate: HE IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! For all this happened that the Scriptures would be fulfilled. Glory be to Jesus! Amen.