

GOD'S JUDGMENT REVEALS TWO THINGS

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ November 8, 2015



¹Then I heard him call out in a loud voice, "Bring the guards of the city here, each with a weapon in his hand." ²And I saw six men coming from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with a deadly weapon in his hand. With them was a man clothed in linen who had a writing kit at his side. They came in and stood beside the bronze altar. ³Now the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple. Then the LORD called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side ⁴and said to him, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it." ⁵As I listened, he said to the others, "Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. ⁶Slaughter old

men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple. ⁷Then he said to them, "Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go!" So they went out and began killing throughout the city. ⁸While they were killing and I was left alone, I fell facedown, crying out, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! Are you going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel in this outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?" ⁹He answered me, "The sin of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice. They say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land; the LORD does not see.' ¹⁰So I will not look on them with pity or spare them, but I will bring down on their own heads what they have done." ¹¹Then the man in linen with the writing kit at his side brought back word, saying, "I have done as you commanded."

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword,

It never ceases to amaze me how diligently the devil works on the hearts and minds of believers. He twists God's word here, he inserts a bit of logic there, he makes it more about emotion than about the plain and clear words of Scripture. One of the places he does this is when it comes to heaven and hell. It is amazing the number of Christians who think that almost everyone will end up in heaven, simply put because God is a God of love, and he doesn't want anyone to go hell. In these people's minds, the only ones who miss out on heaven are the Adolph Hitler's and the child molesters. These people poo-poo the idea of judgment and sin.

But when we think like that, we make God out to be like us, in our own image, instead of letting God be God. Instead of seeing sin for what it is, instead of seeing judgment for what it is, we can tend to minimize both. There are any number of sections in Bible which talk about the judgment of God – and not just a temporal judgment when we say a bad word, but a lasting judgment. The words of God that we consider for this morning come from God's prophet Ezekiel in the Old Testament. And we see very clearly that GOD'S JUDGMENT REVEALS TWO THINGS:

1. Wickedness will be punished and
2. The pen is mightier than the sword

Now maybe, when you heard the words from Ezekiel when they were read a few minutes ago, you scratched your head metaphorically, wondering what in the world would have caused God to get so mad that he would send six angels to execute judgment over the city of Jerusalem. And perhaps you began to think, why would I want to follow a God who gets that angry? That's certainly what many people who would read this words think. But before we rush to a condemning decision of God, let's take a look at what did cause God to get so angry.

When we turn the beginning of Ezekiel, we find out what kind of time this was. **"In the thirtieth year...while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God...the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians."** If you know your Jewish history, you might remember that God punished the Israelites by sending them into captivity. Ezekiel was part of the number that was taken to the land of Babylon. It was in the land of Babylon that God used Ezekiel to preach to his people. Sometimes it was a message they didn't want to hear. The message from Ezekiel chapter 9 is one of those messages.

For while Ezekiel was in Babylon, there were still Jews left in the city of Jerusalem, but they were not acting like Jews, they were not acting like God's people. Instead they had turned away from God – saying that **"The Lord has forsaken this land"** and **"the Lord does not see."** So they turned to other gods, and other idols. They did not realize it was because they turned from the Lord that the Lord in turn turned his back on them. The previous chapter of Ezekiel, chapter 8 describes in great detail the atrocious acts they were committing and they were doing. What made it even worse was that they were doing this in the Lord's house.

As a comparison point, let's use marriage. Many of you know what it's like to be married, I would hope that many in marriages are happy. Now just imagine you came home early one day, came in the front door and shouted, "Honey, I'm home!" only to find your spouse cheating on you with their lover in your own bed. How many people would it take to restrain you from your anger? This is a comparison to the way God must have felt.

The only difference between God dispensing justice and us dispensing justice, is that God, the creator of the universe, has every right to. Which is why we hear that God called for six men to come and execute judgment on the city. Which is why we hear the specific instructions to go through the city and kill without showing pity or compassion. Which is why God said, **"defile the temple and fill the courts with blood."**

Anyone with any semblance of a conscience can look at this and see what a horrific action this is. It would be like taking a look at any battle picture with the field littered with fallen soldiers. And yet, God's action is only a consequence of detestable actions of the Israelites. God specifically says, **"The sin of the people of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice."** God's punishment was no worse than the crime which was committed. GOD'S JUDGMENT REVEALS TWO THINGS, the first being that wickedness will be punished.

This vision of judgment on the city of Jerusalem (which would come to pass in a few years), is just a small picture of the judgment that God describes will happen on the Last Day. The Last Day, or Judgment Day, will be the great equalizer. We heard that in our second lesson this morning from

Thessalonians, **"God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you...This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels."** Wickedness will be punished.

But not just the wickedness of those who do atrocious acts – murderers, thieves, rapists and thugs, but all wickedness. And wickedness is not determined by a majority vote, but by a holy God. And God shares how this wickedness is present in each and every one of us. Each and every one of us may not kill, rape or beat another person, but we have a heart that is blackened with sin. Our very thoughts of anger, greed, and lust condemn us before our God.

The same description of the land of Israel could apply to our country today – **"the sin of the people is exceedingly great, the land is full of bloodshed and the cities are full of injustice."** And maybe as Christians we have not always participated in the detestable things, but do we really think that just because of that, we are any better? We have been called by our God to be salt of the earth and lights in the world. When we don't speak out with our words and actions, we are not salt and we are not light. Based on our own actions, or lack of actions, our wickedness would be punished on God's judgment day. Our own actions condemn us.

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It's only when we understand that – that there's nothing in you that makes you special or worthy of God's love any more than anyone else – that you begin to understand God's grace. It's not anything in us that makes us special, it's the mark God puts on us. Which leads us to the second thing GOD'S JUDGMENT REVEALS – the pen is mightier than the sword.

In addition to the six angels of destruction the Lord called upon to slaughter the wrongdoers in Jerusalem there was an additional angel – one clothed in white linen, white the symbol of purity, who had a writing kit at his side. This angel was called upon by God to go throughout the city and make a mark, designating those who grieve and lament over the detestable things. This mark is not unlike the blood the Israelites smeared on their doorframes in Egypt so that the angel of death would pass over their houses. This mark that the scribe would put on their foreheads would spare them from the destruction that came upon Jerusalem. The mark of the pen is mightier than the sword.

The same can be said about the mark that God put upon us. It is this mark that not only spares us from the condemning wrath of a holy God, but it is this mark that creates a new person within us. The mark is the reason we grieve and lament of the detestable things done in the world. That mark is Jesus Christ. We receive that mark when God calls us as his very own through the saving water of Holy Baptism. We receive that mark when he causes us to recognize our sin and lean not on our own actions, but on the grace of God. The mark doesn't mean we were perfect or will become perfect, but it means we are treated as perfect by God, who placed the punishment of sins not on us but on his Son. The book of Revelation also reveals, **"they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads."** This is the same idea.

GOD'S JUDGMENT REVEALS that the pen is mightier than the sword, and the cross is mightier still. The declaration of God is mightier than our sinful actions. Praise be to God that he has revealed this to us in his Word. This is why we can honestly look at passages about judgment in the Bible and not be afraid of what might come next, we have nothing to fear. But that doesn't mean we can just

go about living our lives as if nothing is wrong. Because even though we have been marked by our God, there are still many who are not yet marked. It is to them that we owe our effort and attention.

Maybe it seems like it's something you hear from the pulpit every week – tell others about the message of Jesus Christ. If you're picking up on it, I'm glad. Because that is what we have been called to do by our Lord and Savior. Just like Ezekiel did for a people kept in exile in Babylon, so we can be watchmen for people today – messengers of warning. Remember that picture of blood stained bodies on the battlefield? That's a picture of what it will be like for those who do not believe, and as a consequence of not believing, God has no other option than punish them for their wickedness. Call it a scare tactic if you wish, but how else do you explain the words before us in Ezekiel?

Judgment is not a topic that a lot of people like to talk about nowadays – whether that's judging the actions of people here and now, or about a last judgment. And so to get around that topic people just ignore it or make up something that will make them happy. Neither of those two is the right option. When we take a clear look at God's Word, we see these two truths standing out – God is a God of love, and God is a God of justice. Some elevate one truth to the exclusion of the other. When you say God is love then all people will get to heaven. When you say God is just then nobody will get to heaven. But when we let both truths stand, we confess what Scripture teaches. We cannot have one without the other, nor would we want it that way. As we look forward to the Last Day, may we boldly confess these two truths about God's judgment, wickedness will be punished, and the pen is mightier than the sword because the cross is mightier still. Amen.