

God's Judgment and Mercy in Jesus

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Date: 21 October 2018

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[0:00] Amen. So, Psalm 91 always stirs up memories for me.

So, it was probably a couple of years ago. Mia was probably around four. She's running around barefoot in the yard playing. All of a sudden, she comes up to me, obviously injured with tears in her eyes.

I say, Mia, what's wrong? What happened? And she says, I dashed my foot against a stone. So, that will be forever associated with Psalm 91 in my mind.

So, dreams can be weird things, right? Some are fairly common, even between people. For example, if I'm feeling even the least bit stressed, I'm likely to have dreams about my teeth falling out.

That just happened recently. Anyone else ever have that one? Yeah, yeah. It's not uncommon. Here is another dream that is fairly common.

[1:36] Finding yourself in front of a crowd of people with a bit of a problem. You've forgotten to put on clothes. I'm not going to ask how many people have had that one.

I don't care for a show of hands. But I'd guess that there are people here who have. Why is that common? Why is that common? I think it probably taps into this basic primal fear that people have of being naked and exposed, of having nowhere to hide.

Now, I'm a priest, not a psychologist, so don't quote me on that. But I do think that I can safely say that the thought of being judged by God who sees everything that we have ever done, every thought that we have ever had, everything that we have ever said, everything that we have failed to do or say that we should have done or said, and we're being honest with ourselves, the thought of that is scary, isn't it?

Now, it's easy to say off the cuff that only God can judge you. But the truth is that He's going to, and if you really think about what that means, it's suddenly not such a small deal.

Our passage this morning from Hebrews reminds us that we will all have to give an account to God who sees everything. What does that mean?

[3:05] How do we respond to that? So if you will, please look with me in Hebrews chapter 4. In verses 12 and 13, we read this.

That's not at the top of the list of Bible passages.

People look to you for encouragement. It's not like you're likely to put this one on your refrigerator or send it to a friend who is having a rough time.

But the Bible is honest. Sometimes painfully honest. And just because something is hard to hear, just because it doesn't feel good, doesn't mean that it's not true.

Now, the Bible, the Word of God does encourage and comfort. But that is not all that it does. It's also filled with God's commandments.

[4:39] It tells us what God's standards are. It tells us that His standards are perfect.

And tells Him that the consequences of violating His standards are severe. I mean, if we read God's commandments, it's a serious reality check.

Let's think about the Ten Commandments. I preached a sermon series about that this past year.

Let's think about what we hear from Jesus in the summary of the law.

I mean, we started the liturgy with this. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment, and the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Now, take a moment to take an honest inventory of your life, the entirety of it, including the things that you're ashamed of.

[5:44] And then can you say that you have kept all of God's commandments perfectly your whole life? Have you always loved God completely?

Have you always loved everyone as much as you love yourself? No? Well, welcome to the club. Does it sting a little bit?

Yeah, it does. That's because we have just been struck by the Word of God, that two-edged sword that pierces our soul and reveals the state of our hearts.

And we're being honest, it is not a pretty picture. The only way we can find ourselves in a relatively positive light is if we make the assumption that God is grading on a curve.

I think that that is the assumption that the average person you would run into on the street today would make.

[6:46] You know, I'm a pretty decent person and I think God will accept me. I'm not as bad as those people or these people. Sure, if we're compared to other people, we might think, then we're okay.

I'm not an axe murderer, so I must be fine. The trouble is that God does not grade on a curve. As we read recently in James, whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

So, have you ever dishonored your parents? Having children, I know that probably all of you have. You're guilty. Have you ever taken the Lord's name in vain?

You're guilty. Have you ever lusted or been angry at someone without just cause? You're guilty.

Have you ever been dishonest? You're guilty.

Have you ever gossiped about someone? You're guilty. Of the whole law. Of failing to keep the whole law.

[7:55] In case you're starting to think, man, this preacher is starting to sound like a judgmental jerk. Let me be clear. I, too, have disobeyed the commandments of God, so I'm guilty, too.

Man, that is bad news. We thought that reading the Bible was supposed to make us feel good, and all of a sudden we're not feeling so great, are we? We've broken God's law in even one part.

We are guilty of all of it. And then our text reminds us. In case we've forgotten. No creature is hidden from his sight.

But all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. So we're guilty.

We will all stand before the judgment seat of the one who sees absolutely everything.

Everything that we have ever done in our whole lives. That's troubling.

[9:03] If I'm looking at this objectively, I'm a rotten sinner. God's going to judge me and nothing will be hidden from him. Saying that only God can judge me suddenly doesn't sound like a comforting thought, does it?

But then our text takes a very sudden turn. At first glance, we might even wonder how one idea is connected to the other.

We read. Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God. Let us hold fast our confession.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

So one second. We're in a state of fear and trembling because we realize that we have messed up and there's no place to hide. And then Jesus shows up.

[10:07] Does that surprise anyone? No. Sounds like gospel truth to me. Doesn't it sound that way to you? Jesus, our text tells us, is our high priest.

He sympathizes with our weakness. He was tempted as we are. He gets it. He offered his life as a ransom for us, as our gospel text tells us.

And if he offered up his life for us, gave himself as a perfect sacrifice for us, then the debt from our sins is paid and we are free from sin and death. Because of what Jesus has done as our great high priest.

Isn't that contrast striking? In these verses, we go from being naked and exposed. To having a sympathetic high priest.

The son of God who sympathizes with us, who pleads for us, who bled and died for us. And that makes all the difference in the world. It's the difference, really, between despair and joy.

[11:17] It's the difference between the kind of righteousness that comes from the law and the kind of righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

It's the difference, ultimately, that will turn us from believing that God will accept us because we're good people, to believing that God will accept us because Jesus died for us.

Martin Luther once put it this way. Luther says, The law says, do this, and it is never done.

Grace says, believe in this, and everything is already done. In other words, the law says, do this, and we try our very best, and what happens? We still fall short.

But the gospel of grace says to trust in Christ, who kept the law perfectly on our behalf and died the death that we deserve.

[12 : 23] Grace says, believe in Christ, receive the free gift of salvation in his name through simple trust in him and in his death and resurrection.

Difference is striking, isn't it? If salvation is simply a matter of being good so that God will accept me, hoping that the curve that he grades on works out in my favor, then I can never be sure of where I stand with God, can I, if that's the way it works?

If salvation is a matter of my accomplishments, then I have to be prepared for the reality that at any moment I'm going to mess it up and blow it all. If salvation is by the law, then I would have to make sure that I'm good.

Or the God that I call my father might decide he doesn't want me or love me anymore. But the gospel tells us that we are adopted.

If Jesus is our Lord and our Savior, we are assured that God has adopted us and loves us as his own children. What does that mean?

[13 : 47] That means that he isn't going to quit on us. That means that he isn't going to give up on us. That means that he isn't going to get tired of us.

Because guess what? He knew what kind of people we were when he sent his son to bleed and die for us. He knew what kind of people we were when he called us to believe the gospel.

He knew what kind of people we were when he adopted us to be his sons and his daughters. And he loved us as his own, sent his son for us, chose us and called us to himself anyway.

And that means that we can be confident. Yes, God sees all. God sees our shortcomings. God sees our sins. God sees our sins.

And yet, in Jesus, we can come before God boldly with confidence. As our text here this morning tells us. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

[15 : 01] You know what that means? That means that we can come to God for mercy just as we are. Now, why all the soul searching before we got to this point?

Why all of that unpleasant stuff about falling short of God's law and God's standards? Well, we won't understand the gospel until we understand that we have fallen short.

And then we'll miss the good news in one of two ways or maybe some condemnation of both. Now, we think that God grades on a curve.

We might think we're doing all right. When the fact is that we have, like all other people, sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

We won't realize that we're sinners who need a Savior. And if we remain in that state, trusting in ourselves instead of Jesus, we will have refused the offer of salvation and will ultimately be condemned on the day of judgment.

[16 : 08] The pastor and writer Tim Keller put it this way. Christ will do everything for you or nothing. You cannot combine merit and grace. If justification is by the law in any way, Christ's death is meaningless in history and meaningless to you personally.

In other words, if your hope of being accepted by God is in anything that you have ever done, your hope is misplaced. If your hope is in your righteousness and your good deeds, be sure of this.

It will not withstand the gaze of God's judgment. It won't. Even our best efforts are filthy rags in the sight of God.

The good news is that Jesus is more full of grace than we are of sin. We have simply to ask Him for mercy to find that this is true.

To trust in Jesus. To know Him as Savior. To believe the gospel. And to know that all of your sins are forgiven. That you are a beloved adopted child of God. That you are saved and have eternal life.

[17 : 24] That means you'll need to repent not simply of your sins, but of what you think of as your righteousness. That isn't as great as you might think. Now on the other hand, maybe you're the

person who knows that you've made mistake after mistake.

That you've often failed to do the right thing. If you think that way, it's easy to miss the gospel as well. Maybe you feel that God could never love you.

Maybe that's what you're struggling with. But hear me clearly. The true and living God saves sinful people and heals the broken. That's what He does.

That's why we need a sympathetic high priest. So we can find grace and mercy. Perfect people don't need grace and mercy, do they? No matter how far we've fallen, we are not beyond the reach of the grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

We're told simply to confess our sins, to trust in Christ, to receive the grace and mercy that is found in Him and Him alone. In closing this morning, the reality is this, my brothers and my sisters.

[18:38] We are going to stand before the judgment seat of God. It's going to happen. Every one of us. And He sees everything.

There is nothing hidden from His sight. Here's the question for us. When we do, will we stand to answer for our sins and receive the consequences?

Or through faith in Christ, will we stand as those who have a great high priest who has taken away our guilt? The answer makes all the difference in the world.

And the outcome will last for eternity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.