

Untitled (43)

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[0:00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Now, I have to admit, my brothers and sisters, that there are things that cause preachers to step into the pulpit with a sort of fear and trembling.

Now, near the top of that list, I'd place things like difficult parables, difficult prophecies, preaching about God's judgment. And today in our gospel reading, we kind of get all three of those for the price of one.

Difficult passages of scripture present something of a challenge for us. A challenge we've all felt if we've delved very deeply into scripture. I remember once, when I was a seminarian sitting in a New Testament class on a Monday morning, my classmates and I were talking about the challenging gospel verses, along with the confusing sermons that each of us had heard in our parishes the previous day.

Now, my New Testament professor had also had that experience. He was a layperson, but had a doctorate in New Testament. He said the sermon that he heard, and probably the sermon that most of us heard, was like a punt on third down, as he put it.

I thought he put it pretty well. I think also of a different situation, when a former parishioner of mine explained to me once that she'd had difficulty understanding a certain parable.

[1:38] She asked a friend about it, and the friend explained that because she didn't understand the parable, she must not have the Holy Spirit. I'm hoping and praying this morning, brothers and sisters, that we can avoid either of those approaches.

Personally, I hope to avoid being desperate enough to punt on third down. Now, I should say right now, and Raymond, you can back me up on this, the Green Bay Packers this season are almost that desperate, but let's hope that we're not.

I see Raymond didn't laugh. Now, on the other hand, and seriously, let's pray that the Holy Spirit would open up the truth of the Scriptures to us this morning.

We may believe and act according to what's written there. Even those things that are hard for us to understand. Now, shifting our attention to Advent for a second, I want to point out that we see two ideas running side by side in tension with one another in our prayers and our readings for Advent. We see redemption running side by side with judgment. And they run side by side pretty much inseparably. We see them side by side in our Gospel passage for this morning.

[3:09] We see them side by side, I would submit, brothers and sisters, because the reality that Jesus is Lord has consequences.

Where the Lordship of Jesus is received, redemption is found. But where the Lordship of Jesus is rejected, judgment follows.

Now, I should say here that I'm reminded, as I am every time I preach about God's wrath and God's judgment, that in some ways there's this temptation to tell the easy lie rather than the hard truth. It's easier to try to tell the good news without telling the bad news first, and when we do that, we don't get the good news right. We distort it.

So let's take seriously what our Lord Jesus in our Gospel passage for this morning tells us about His coming again. Now, in our passage, Jesus is talking about the judgment that is coming on the world that rejects Him.

[4:24] To get it in context, our verses come after, He talks about the judgment that will come upon Jerusalem for rejecting Him. Although it had yet to happen when He talked about it here, this is a prophecy, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

Jerusalem, Jesus tells us, would be razed to the ground, and the temple destroyed by a hostile and pagan occupying power because Jerusalem had rejected Jesus.

In those verses, we see the same basic pattern that I already mentioned. that judgment follows where Jesus is rejected. Now, in the destruction of Jerusalem, we see an example of what will

eventually fall upon the whole of the unbelieving world when Jesus comes again.

And our verses for this morning pick up on that topic. Now, if you can, look with me at Luke 21, beginning with verses 25 and 26. There will be signs in sun and moon and stars and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves.

People fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Jesus tells us that there will be signs of his coming.

[6:04] Signs in the heavens. Signs in the natural world. He doesn't get too terribly specific about what these signs will be, but he does tell us what we need to know.

There will be signs in the sky. Signs in the sky. Signs in the sea and the waves. The natural world will be shaken.

Signs in the sky. Signs in the sky. As the human history of this present age comes to an end, sin will increase to such a point that the burden of sin in the world becomes increasingly obvious.

And God's wrath and judgment upon human sin will be displayed in power. Displayed in terrifying power.

Displayed in undeniable power. And the nations will be afraid. The nations will be perplexed. The nations will be petrified.

[7:07] The powers of even the heavens will be shaken. People will faint with fear and anxiety. The dread of what is coming will become so apparent that it can't be ignored.

Outside of confidence in what God has done and is doing in Jesus, there will be no cause for hope. No cause for confidence. Every other cause for hope and every other confidence will be shaken and raised to the ground.

And what happens next? Look at verse 27. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

The nations of the world, everyone, will see Jesus coming. They will see Jesus coming in victory. Jesus coming in might. Jesus coming in triumph.

They will see Jesus coming as King. Now we get a solid description of what this coming will look like in our psalm for this morning.

[8:16] In Psalm 50, which is a prophetic psalm about the coming of the Lord, which is why the lectionary prescribed it for us this morning. Now verse 3 tells us this.

Our God comes. He does not keep silence. Before Him is a devouring fire. Around Him a mighty tempest. Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God will come.

Will come obviously and will come unmistakably. Not silently and not secretly. Will come for all to see. He will come in power.

With the natural elements at His command. Devouring fire before Him. Mighty storms and winds around Him. It will be a terrifying display of authority.

Now as I think on these. As I think of the fires. I think of the tempestuous winds. I am reminded of what we were taught as children to do in the event of earthquakes or tornadoes.

[9:24] Natural disasters. Fires. You know in the case of a tornado you duck and cover, right? Preferably in the corner of some basement somewhere. In the case of fire.

You try to run away. And if the fire catches you, you stop, drop, and roll. Now that would be the natural reaction you would think of in this sort of situation with these tempestuous winds.

This fire, devouring fire going before. And that's why what Jesus tells us in Luke 21, 28. What He tells us to do when this mighty coming of the Son of Man takes place.

That's why it's surprising. Look at what He says. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads. Because your redemption is drawing near.

Jesus tells us when these things place, not to run and hide. Not to duck for cover. But to look up in hope and look up in expectation.

[10:28] Why? Because our redemption is drawing near. Now, after purchasing us with His precious blood, our mighty King will be coming.

Not only to execute judgment on an unbelieving and rebellious world. But most especially to claim us, to redeem us. We who have faith in His blood.

Not to take vengeance on those who believe. But to finally and fully save those who believe. Now, flipping back to Psalm 50 again.

We see this reality there too. In verses 4 and 5. It says, He calls to the heavens above and to the earth that He may judge His people. Gather to Me, My faithful ones, who made a covenant with Me

by sacrifice.

The Lord's people, the Lord's faithful ones, when the Lord comes again, will be gathered for judgment. But this will be judgment according to the covenant made with the Lord by sacrifice. [11:43] Now, remembering back to what we talked about in Hebrews a few weeks ago, right? We know that the sacrifice of bulls and goats can't be what is meant here. The sacrifice of bulls and goats can't fully and finally save anyone.

Only one sacrifice can do that. It is the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus. In these verses in Psalm 50, we see that when Jesus comes again in might, there will be a call to gather all who have faith in Christ crucified and have been washed in His blood.

A call to gather us for judgment. But because of the mighty power of the precious blood of Jesus, we won't be gathered to be judged according to our disobedience.

We will be gathered to be judged according to the perfect obedience of our sacrificial Lamb, Jesus Christ. And there we will find the wrath of God turned away from us.

Remember, that's what propitiation means. We will be totally and finally redeemed and gathered to our God, and we will dwell with Him. We will be His people, and He will be our God forever.

[13:07] Now, our final verses for this morning contain a parable that summarizes our need to be on the lookout.

In verses 29 to 31 in our gospel text. He told them a parable. Look at the fig tree and all the trees. As soon as they come out and leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near.

So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Jesus here reiterates that we should seek to recognize the kinds of things that signal His coming again. But we have to ask, why should we seek to recognize these signs of His coming? Well, given what verse 28 told us, that we should see the signs of His coming as signs of our redemption drawing near, it's not that we should seek to recognize the signs of His coming in order to be discouraged. Quite the opposite. We should seek to recognize the signs of His coming in order to take heart, to be encouraged, and to hope.

[14:29] We should remember, even as the intensity of suffering and sin increases in the world around us, that that is a sign that Jesus is coming soon.

To judge the world in righteousness and to claim us as His own. That said, we should use the remembrance of His coming to examine ourselves.

Are we living as those who believe that this present age will come to an end? Are we walking in the way of faith, hope, and love? Are we finding our ultimate joy, not in the things that we can't take with us, but instead in the things that are of eternal value?

Are we exemplifying the hope that's within us? And we have to ask, looking at the world around us, since we know that judgment is coming, do we have a desire to see lives changed and sins forgiven through the power of the gospel?

Are we living that desire out in our lives? Are we eager to tell others that the merciful arms of our Savior are wide open to receive all who come to Him in faith and repentance?

[15:49] Are we eager for that? Do we yearn to see others flee from the wrath to come, to one day see them gathered into that number of the faithful when Jesus comes again in power and in glory?

Is that us? Jesus is coming again. And He will be bringing God's righteous judgment on sin with Him.

That is a hard truth, but it's one that we have to remember, brothers and sisters. Because if we don't remember that, we lose sight of what it means when we proclaim that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

We lose sight of what Jesus has done for us and how that demonstrates God's love for us. We lose sight of the cost of our salvation.

And we lose sight of the character of God, that He is both merciful and just, and that His character finds its fullest expression in the cross of Christ.

[17:07] Jesus is coming again. Coming in power and coming in mercy. Let's be ready for when He comes. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.