

Reward and Judgement

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[0 : 00] So the Old Testament reading for tonight comes from Isaiah 65, verses 17-19, and also chapter 66, verses 22-22-24.

From verse 17.

And then verse 22. The New Testament reading comes from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 9, verses 38-50.

The New Testament reading comes from Isaiah 65, verses 38-50.

Cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maim than with two hands to go into hell where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off.

[2 : 22] It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where the worms that eat do not die and a fire is not quenched.

Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?

Have salt among yourselves and be at peace with each other. This is the word of the Lord. All right. Please keep your Bibles open to Mark, chapter 9, as we continue in our Gospel of Mark.

Okay. We know that when it comes to accomplishing something important, having the right attitude precedes and may even be more important than the actions themselves, right?

Particularly when you're doing an essential but unappealing task. Like, you know, those chores that you have to do every week, laborious as it is?

[3 : 37] How do you get through them? Except making sure you have the right mindset. Or, I know this is a bit raw for some of you, getting through year 12. Having the right attitude means that you get the job done and done well.

Now, actions in turn have consequences. So, again, I know for those of you who did physics, Newton's third law of motion says that every action has an equal and opposite reaction.

Yes. All consequence. And in life, we hear the saying, don't we? Don't do the crime if you can't do the time. That's right. Now, if your parents left a pot unattended on the stove, there are consequences, aren't there?

If you stay up all night on the internet, there are consequences, aren't there? The next morning. All, no? Yeah. All actions have consequences.

Now, today we continue with Jesus' teaching. And if you recall, the Father appeared to Jesus and the three disciples at the transfiguration. And what did the Father say to the disciples?

[4 : 55] Listen to him. This is my son whom I'm pleased. Listen to him. And so, we continue that today as we keep looking at Jesus' teaching. The passage is clearly divided into two sections, as you will see in the outline.

And so, we'll consider each of them in turn. And as I said in my introduction, with each case, Jesus is first interested in fostering the right attitude or correcting the wrong one.

Then actions follow, leading to consequences. Eternal ones, to be sure. And actually, in particularly with the second section, if we don't focus on the attitude and simply just look at the actions, we will actually end up applying it in the wrong way, in a disastrous way, personally.

So, let's get to it. The first section, which if you look at the outline, I've tried to summarize by saying that the right attitude here is that, to have, is that no disciple or church must think that they have a monopoly on Jesus.

And in this instance, for disciples, that they have a monopoly on Jesus' power as well. So, let's read from verse 38, and I'll see if you agree with my summary. Teacher, said John, we saw someone

driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop because he was not one of us.

[6 : 15] Do not stop him, Jesus said, for no one who does a miracle in my name can, in the next moment, say anything bad about me. For whoever is not against us is for us. Truly, I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

So, first, let's just recall what's been happening. Remember that the disciples had had trouble at the bottom of the mountain trying to cast out an evil spirit, and Jesus had ended up rebuking all of them for their lack of faith.

Now, John actually here sees someone else doing exactly the same thing. And what? This guy, or girl, probably a guy, was succeeding.

Now, John's motivation is not recorded here, but remember they've just also been arguing about who's the greatest, right, in chapter 10, and when we get to chapter 10, it actually becomes clear that John is one of the main culprits.

So, I would suggest maybe that John was envious, I'm guessing, but, you know, he may be concerned for Jesus' reputation and name too, but I think, I have to say, probably his secondary concern.

[7 : 30] So, Jesus tells John not to stop this person, giving the reason that if this person does a miracle, a mighty work in my name, he would then turn around straight away to speak evil of Jesus.

And so, regardless of who this person is, he's actually drawing people to Jesus rather than turning them away. Now, it appears this person didn't have any prior contact with Jesus or his disciples. John uses the phrase that he's not following us rather than following Jesus. And I think that implies that it's possible, actually, to follow Jesus without physically being part of the band of disciples that were with Jesus.

Jesus, therefore, doesn't want the disciples to think that they have a monopoly on him and his path. Now, we're not sure how this person learned how to do this, to cast out demons in Jesus' name without being with Jesus.

He may have been falling from afar and learnt it, or possibly he could have been a John the Baptist disciple and then switching now to Jesus when he arrived. But I think given that he succeeded in driving out the demons in Jesus' name, this person was clearly an agent of God.

[8 : 51] That is, he was being used by God and so clearly on Jesus' side. And so, Jesus now makes the more general statement that whoever is not against Jesus and his disciples, that is, whoever is not against us, is for us.

Now, at the end of the day, though, I think we're not really meant to focus on this stranger or person that we don't know about. Rather, Jesus is actually wanting us to focus on John and his attitude. Because what Jesus is trying to inculcate is the attitude that much as he loves them, the disciples don't have a monopoly on him. As Lord over all humanity, Jesus can command loyalty in whatever way he wants.

Yes, while he's on earth, he could only be in one place at one time, but that does not restrict him from working or his power from being effective, even if he's not there.

For example, we read in other parts of the Gospel that Jesus could heal from afar. So, with the centurion servant, with the official son in John 4, Jesus said the word and the person far away was healed.

[10 : 08] His authority, his power extends to places where he may not physically be at. And so, if the disciples got this attitude right, then the right actions will follow.

And I say that in my outline, that they will show grace and humility when it comes to the service of others. Because they would realize that they didn't have a monopoly on Jesus' power.

No one does. They would see that God can use whoever he chooses. So, there's no room for boasting of being proud. And then in verse 41, Jesus actually turns the tables and says that if the disciples are then served by a stranger, that is, someone who doesn't really know them, but gives them a cup of water just because they belong to him, they know they belong to him and therefore want to serve them, then this simple act of hospitality will receive a reward from God.

And so, really, Jesus was saying, you know, John, instead of stopping this person, you need to welcome him. And should this person show kindness to you, John, and the disciples, then you should receive it with thanks as though it is from God, because it is from God.

Now, I think we all know this intellectually. We know that Jesus doesn't owe us exclusive loyalty. Like, he's not just, you know, the Jesus that is loyal to this group of people here at HDD, isn't it? [11:43] We know that. In fact, we're the ones that owe our loyalty to Jesus. But often, I have to say, we don't behave like this, do we? Instead, we can become envious or we're quick to judge when others are serving God differently and sometimes disagreeably to us as well.

And even worse, if they have more success than us, oh, that doesn't go well with us, does it? Now, recently, I was on the internet, not all night, but on the internet, and I saw or read something which explained how the Persians, the Iranians, are currently doing evangelism in Iran. In fact, I'm pretty sure they don't call it evangelism. Now, not surprisingly, it doesn't appear that they run Christianity Explored. And they probably don't advertise it so that you can come and meet at a certain place.

But also, they don't speak of, it doesn't seem, the idea of asking people to accept Jesus into their hearts. That's not the way they think about it.

Rather, if I represent them accurately, what they do from the very outset is to actually call people to follow Jesus. That is, to begin to leave out what Jesus teaches in the Gospel from day dot.

[13:13] Obey Jesus, like what he teaches on the Sermon on the Mount. Begin to forgive, to pray to the Father, not to worry, not to judge, to turn the other cheek, to seek his kingdom first.

In other words, converts are asked from the very start to submit to the Lordship of Jesus. And then as part of that, they learn that Jesus is also their Savior.

Now, if you think about it, we're a bit different, aren't we? We tend to ask people to believe in Jesus first, to be saved first. And then afterwards, we might challenge them to Lordship of Jesus.

So their methods appear to be different to us, and perhaps they have something to teach us as well. But, you know, God is undoubtedly working among them. We hear reports of people coming to faith in Iran.

And so rather than being suspicious, even though we don't quite understand or agree with what they're doing, we should praise God for it, right? Now, Iran is a long way away. So, you know, we're not threatened by the success of the Persians, are we?

[14:24] But it's a bit harder when things are closer to home, isn't it? Another church in Doncaster or, you know, around here, Box Hill or whatever. Yeah, we theoretically accept what they are doing.

But if people start going to their churches instead of ours or whatever, we get a bit envious, don't we? We're quick to judge if they do things differently. Or if their theology is disagreeable to us.

Now, please hear me. I'm not saying that we don't care about false teaching or false shepherds. Okay, there are other parts of the Bible that teach us to pay attention to sound doctrine and right living.

And so it's not just the case that if any church calls themselves a church or, you know, followers of Jesus or use Jesus' name, that everything is fine. But what I'm saying is that we do need to take care, don't we, of being judgmental.

And however we want to do it, we need to remain humble and gracious, don't we? And above all, to actually check our motives. Guard against hypocrisy.

[15:31] Not do what John was doing. Because if you think about it, if God can use us and we readily have to admit that our own theology and our own lives are not perfect, yes, then why can't God use other imperfect churches too?

Of course he can. Now, I'll say a bit more of this after we finish the second section, but let's move on to the second section where the attitude that Jesus then wishes to inculcate now relates to our own lives and the people we have influence over.

That is, now Jesus turns and says, instead of worrying so much about other people and what they do in Jesus' name, well, let's focus on what is happening in our midst and what we're doing in Jesus' name.

And here, the wrong attitude that Jesus seeks to correct is that of making light of sin. So, verse 42, if anyone causes one of these little ones, now, remember, the little ones are the ones that Jesus actually brought to his side about two weeks ago, but more generally, they represent those who believe in me.

Well, if we then cause any of them to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off.

[16:51] It is better for you to enter live maim than to, with two hands, go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter live cripple than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.

And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where the worms that eat them do not die and the fire is quenched.

Now, let me first say that Jesus is using exaggerated language here. And that's why I said the right action here is not to gouge out your eye or cut off your limbs, okay?

Jesus is not asking us to do this literally. We need to get the attitude right. Instead, what Jesus is doing is to convey just how serious sin is.

And the attitude, the wrong attitude, is to make light of it. And so instead of drastic physical surgery on your eye or limbs, the action that Jesus is commanding is actually, firstly, spiritual diagnosis, so that we can have spiritual surgery of our hearts to transform it.

[18:09] And if you think about it, you know, the eye itself doesn't see by what it's, you know, sin by what it sees, right? Sometimes we can't help seeing what we see. But rather, it is what is aroused in the heart and the mind by it, by what we see, like lust and jealousy and anger.

That is the thing that's sin, isn't it? And here Jesus says that sin is so serious that it's even worth sacrificing your own body parts to stop it.

Because the resulting consequence, actions follow, consequences following action, the resulting consequence, if you don't, is to find yourself in hell.

Now, talk of hell nowadays can be confronting. We don't like to, you know, delve into it, even when it comes up in the Bible. So let me just digress for a few minutes to address this.

And I know for us, we can easily just try and dismiss it by bringing up caricatures of hell, right? The devil with his pitchfork. Or, I know some of you watch the movie Hellboy, images from that.

[19:18] Or even the Melbourne Footy Club. Now, let me just say, if you are following your, you know, a fan of the demons, it's okay. That's fine.

But the Bible here is actually not concerned, is it? I don't think, with the physical details or characteristics of hell, but much more concerned with the spiritual implications of it.

And what we find here, and what we cannot escape, the fact is, is that Jesus speaks plainly about hell's reality. You cannot get past what Jesus is saying here.

In fact, if you read the rest of the Bible, you can't get past the fact that the Bible presents it as a reality as well. Even in the Old Testament, which was quoted by Jesus right here, and which Ruth read earlier, the phrase there right at the end, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched, is actually a quote direct from Isaiah, where you heard, didn't you?

And interestingly, these words are found at the very end. These are the very last words of Isaiah, which actually is very unexpected, because the rest of Isaiah is a picture of a hope, right?

[20:33] Of Israel being restored, of the new creation being ushered in. But instead of ending on a high, Isaiah ends with a warning, that not everyone will enter into the new creation.

Now, let me just say a bit about Isaiah. The prophet itself begins with the problem, that God is lamenting over the sin of Israel. So chapter 1, verse 4 on the slide, he says, Woe to the sinful nation, that's Israel, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption. They have forsaken the Lord. They have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on Him. His anger is aroused against their sin, isn't it? They are turning their backs on God, of rebelling against His laws.

And then for the rest of Isaiah, what God tells them is how He will fix this problem, culminating, as we saw last week, in Isaiah 52-53, where the suffering servant, which Jesus, the Son of Man, comes to fulfill, gives His life to pay for the transgressions of many.

And so Jesus has been telling them that His death is coming for that reason. But once He has died and risen, it will pave the way for the coming of the new heavens and the new earth, which is the picture we get in Isaiah 65, right?

[21:57] Which Ruth read at the start, See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. Then verse 19, I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people.

The sound of weeping and of crying will be heard no more. I'm going to keep reading, actually, which I didn't put the slides on. But still in 65, verse 20, Never again will there be in it an infant who

lives by a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years.

The one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child. The one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered a curse. They will build houses and dwell in them.

They will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. Now, bear in mind, this has not happened with the people of Israel because of their sin. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat.

For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people. My chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune, for they will be a people blessed by the Lord.

[23 : 05] They and their descendants with them. Before they call, I will answer. How beautiful is that? While they are still speaking, I will hear.

The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and the dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.

That's a beautiful picture of the new creation that we can hope for, that we can long for to enter.

And so at the end of Isaiah 66, Isaiah returns to that, isn't it, in verse 22, as the new heavens and the new earth that I will make will endure before me, so will your name and descendants endure.

But then, the warning in verse 24, And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebel against me. The worms that eat them will not die.

The fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind. Now, if the Israelites didn't know what that was talking about, Jesus has just told them, that is a picture of hell, because he's just quoted from it to describe hell.

[24 : 17] Now, Nicole talked about FOMO, and let me tell you, if there's one FOMO that's really good, this is it. You do not want to have the fear of missing out on heaven, and the new creation is the best FOMO of all, let me tell you.

But friends, Jesus makes it clear, doesn't he, that hell is real. And as the Son of Man, he should know, because he's come from eternity.

He has seen it. He knows whether hell exists or not. And if Jesus knew hell was imaginary, or simply figuratively, that it was just figurative, you know, it would be the height of cruelty for him to now then warn people to cut off their limbs and cut out their eyes if hell was not real, right?

So either you think Jesus is lying, or he's telling the truth. And he saw hell for himself, and he knows what, how everyone needs to avoid it.

Now, of course, we can debate about whether hell is really about suffering internally, or, you know, is it dead bodies, as is described here in Isaiah 66, so that people are just dead, but not conscious.

[25 : 35] But again, I say, if we concentrate just on those details, we are being distracted from the big picture. The big picture is, there are very serious consequences for making light of sin.

And so horrible is this fate, that Jesus urges his disciples to do whatever it takes to stop sinning.

And he's saying, don't just sin because of its impact on you, stop sinning because it will also impact the little ones, the people that look up to you, that you teach.

And so, we need to follow the argument of Mark, or Jesus, along chapter 9, isn't it? Because last week, in verses 36 and 7, Jesus brought a child into their midst, even as they were arguing about who was the greatest, and said, no, welcome and serve the little ones.

And then today, John attempts to stop someone who's not one of them from driving out demons, presuming that they're doing the wrong thing. But Jesus is saying, look, guys, come back to this, come back to where your responsibility lies, to these little ones, the ones that are under your care, the ones who will watch your actions day in, day out, the ones who will pick out any inconsistency and hypocrisy in your lives, where it's hard for you to hide your pride and jealousy.

And so serious is this responsibility that Jesus says, you'd be better off throwing them into the sea with a huge weight around their neck, than to stumble them.

[27 : 19] Just think about that comparison, right? Even your worst enemy, I don't think you wanted to throw with a weight at the bottom of the sea, will you?

But this is how bad hell is, isn't it? That Jesus says, if you're going to stumble them, you might as well throw these little children into the ocean.

Now again, that's hyperbolic language, but that's how serious it is, isn't it? And so, Jesus now, in the final verses, in Mark chapter 9, verse 49, warns, everyone will be salted with fire.

Now there are various explanations for this, but I take it to be a reference back to Isaiah and the fire that symbolizes God's holy judgment. This is God's righteous standard, that no one escapes.

And you know, against that standard, we all fail. Okay? I know, we like to think we can aspire to it, but no one can withstand God's holy judgment.

[28 : 23] And that's why, I come back again, that the first thing we need to do is to come to Jesus in faith, repentance, cling to the cross, be forgiven, because that's the only way to escape judgment and find eternal life.

And so in a sense, even as us who are leaders, our first action really is to continually be repentant and believing in Jesus, because in a sense, that's the best way not to stumble others.

If they see that we're repenting and continue to put our faith in Jesus, they would do the same. But then of course, that doesn't mean after we've been saved that we are free to keep sinning, because we can't make light of sin ever.

which then Jesus goes on to say in verse 50, to prompt them to live pure and holy lives. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?

Have salt among yourselves and be at peace with each other. The image of salt here is positive. I think it's sort of God's righteousness that when we live it out, we rub God's righteousness off onto one another, don't we?

[29 : 34] And then the whole community is filled with salt, filled with God's righteousness and living in righteousness. And so that phrase there, be at peace with each other, Jesus is saying, look, stop fighting about who's the greatest.

Instead, if you're concerned for greatness, demonstrate it by being salt, demonstrate it by living out God's righteousness so that you will serve and inspire and rub off God's righteousness onto others in how they live.

And so for us who are leaders, you know, and I'm talking as one who's a prime example here, this is our added responsibility because leadership brings with it influence and authority.

Others will look up to us, to our words and our deeds as examples. And often we seek authority in leadership like the disciples so that we can wield influence and power.

And we often think, oh, that means that now that I'm a leader, I can tell people what to do. Stop sinning, stop doing this, stop this, whatever. And then we can become envious when other people have more influence.

[30 : 41] But Jesus tells us that the way to exercise leadership is actually to firstly deal with our sin so that we don't stumble others. And so when we come back to this topic about other churches and Christians, I think that means that we cannot be too quick to judge them.

We need to get our own lives and hows in order first as the first priority. Of course, again, I'm going to say this, we need to be on the lookout because there are false teaching around, right?

There are cults on campuses and if you look on the internet, false teaching is pervasive. So as leaders, we need to take care to teach everyone to be on the watch out.

But our motives when we do that need to be right. We need to be humble and careful not to discredit the work of other Christians when actually what they're doing is serving God.

And maybe they haven't got it all right and maybe, you know, we might not do it exactly the way they do it, but we mustn't be doing it out of envy for their success. Instead, our chief goal is to safeguard the faith of those that are under our care.

[31 : 53] So if you look at it, actually, those two attitudes that Jesus has just spoken of today are related, aren't they? First, we need to realize that no one has a monopoly on Jesus. We need to serve humbly with whatever we've been given to do.

Be thankful for the work of others even if we ourselves may not do it the same way. But then, second, related to that is that the work we're given to do, let's do it so that we are careful not to stumble others.

And the easiest way to do this is to make light of our own sin, our own pride, our own envy, our own lust, anger, hatred, lack of forgiveness.

We need to deal with those ourselves first, individually, as a church, so that then we will ensure that all of us, we don't stumble anyone so that all of us will reap God's reward instead of judgment.

Let's pray. Father, humble us to know that we are merely your instruments and that Christ's work is done through his entire body, the church.

[33 : 11] Help us with the work that we're given, including the very important task of dealing with our own sinfulness. But thank you for Jesus. Thank you that because of his death on the cross, the gift of forgiveness is freely given to all who turn to him in faith and repentance.

May it spur us to lead godly and holy lives until the new creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, let's rise and let's reflect with the song Judge of the Secrets.

Let's sing.

Oh, holy judge, here is my heart. What can I say to you? Where could I run?

Where could I...