

THE LORD SEES, MARKS, AND JUDGES

¹Then he called out with a loud voice in my hearing, “Bring the supervisors of the city here, each one of them with his weapon of destruction in his hand.” ²Then I noticed six men coming from the direction of the upper gate that faces north, each with his weapon, a war club, in his hand. There was also one man in the middle, dressed in linen, with a scribe’s kit at his waist. They entered and stood beside the bronze altar.

³Now the Glory of the God of Israel ascended from above the cherub, over whom it had been standing, and moved to the threshold of the temple building. He called out to the man who was dressed in linen, who had the scribe’s kit at his waist. ⁴The LORD said to him, “Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a cross mark on the foreheads of those who moan and lament over the abominations being committed in her.” ⁵To the others he said in my hearing, “Follow him through the city and strike the people down. Do not let your eye show pity, and do not have compassion. ⁶Old men and young men, virgins, little children, and women—you are to keep killing until you wipe them out completely. But do not go near anyone who has been marked with the cross. You are to begin at my sanctuary.”

So they began with the old men 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 and struck them down throughout the city.

⁸While they were striking them down, I was left alone and I fell facedown and cried out, “Oh, LORD God! Are you going to destroy everyone who is left in Israel, as you pour out your wrath upon Jerusalem?” ⁹He said to me, “The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is very, very great. The land is filled with bloodshed, and the city is full of injustice, because they say, ‘The LORD has forsaken the land’ and ‘The LORD does not see.’ ¹⁰But I am determined that my eye will show no pity, and I will have no compassion. I will bring down their conduct on their own heads.” ¹¹Just then, I saw the man dressed in linen, who had the scribe’s kit at his waist. He was reporting, “I have done just as you commanded me.”

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.



No one wants to feel judged. It’s uncomfortable and it may expose some of our secrets. If someone followed us around and wrote down all the mean, nasty things we said and did for a month, we might want the power to edit it and give it more positive spin. It would be pretty embarrassing. And if that person had the power to judge us, we would feel very uncomfortable ... especially if the judge was deciding whether we deserve to live or die.

Brothers and sisters, real judgment is much less complicated than that. Our Lord simply knows. He knows all our faults, our lies, our words, and all our crimes. But our Lord also knows the times when we have grieved and lost and suffered and believed.

Make no mistake, if we refuse to be judged now, we will be judged later. However, if we expose our hearts to God and offer our sins to the Judge now, we will find that the Judge is also a Savior and a loving Redeemer.

In our lesson, the prophet Ezekiel relayed information that he received in a vision from God. He learned in this particular vision that God was going to render judgment on the inhabitants of

Jerusalem and Judah. They were guilty of the first commandment, having other gods than the Lord. Rather than worshiping the Lord and trusting in Him for salvation, many Jews were looking for security from ancient deities, the sin of jealousy, and the sun in the sky. In response, God was preparing for judgment. This preparation for judgment included a roll call of armed guards, or executioners, each with a lethal weapon in hand.

The tone and feeling is the same as we believe and confess that, from the right hand of God, Jesus Christ "will come to judge the living and the dead." On the Last Day, the Lord will forever separate Himself from people who rejected Him. What a tragedy! Yet such a separation does not need to take place. Jesus the Judge is also Jesus the Redeemer and Savior. Jesus was punished for the sins of the whole world. That punishment is captured by these words, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me" (Matt. 27:46)? Jesus endured the punishment on the cross that His heavenly Father abandoned Him. This happened so that you and everyone else in the world would never know what that is like.

A single dead body or even a dog would be a huge defecating of the temple, but the Lord is ready to put the significance of the temple to rest. He has the executioners begin at His own temple. As Ezekiel's prophecy continues, the Lord was preparing to remove His glory from the temple and depart.

God does not lose track of His children when He is about to unleash His condemning judgment. In Ezekiel 9, He sent a man in linen with a palette and ink horn. The Lord told this seventh man to go throughout the city and mark all who grieve and lament over its destruction. It is as if there was an invisible mark of identification on God's children. He knows who they are.

What is this man supposed to inscribe? The Hebrew indicates that the mark given is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the *taw*, which has a T-sound, but in ancient Hebrew inscriptions this letter is shaped like an X. The least useful interpretation is that this mark was the scarlet cord of Rahab, who hid the Israelite spies in Jericho. The most reasonable commentator I read explained that the *taw* indicates ownership in the ancient world; God owned those whom He marked. These are citizens of the true kingdom of God. An ancient church father, St. Cyprian, thought it was the mark of the Passover, where the blood of the lamb of the Passover marked God's people whom He would spare and deliver out of the land of slavery. Some commentators believe this x-shaped letter could be tilted to mean a cross. So our translator has rendered the word, "a cross mark." I read one commentator who suggests this is baptism as the mark of a Christian. Perhaps all of these are true, because they all connect us to the Messiah who would come nearly 600 years later. In fact, while current Jewish tradition believes this man in linen to be Gabriel; ancient Jewish commentators believed that the man in linen was the ultimate prophet, priest, and king, the coming Messiah Himself.

So in the same way, Jesus Christ's death and blood marks believers "safe" from the coming onslaught. On the Last Day, Jesus will come and separate those who believe from those who do not believe. God's judgment is His will; He sends out the executioners. But it is equally true from the Bible that God does not delight in condemning people to eternity in hell. God's good and gracious will is that no one perish but that everyone come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). God's consequential will, however, is that people will get their way if they want nothing to do with Him.

So why is it those who weep and mourn who are marked? The people who really digested that Jerusalem was being destroyed would know their sins. It is the same when you weep and mourn and grieve because you have hurt your family or abused your body or sinned in some terrible way.

The only reason you are crushed and contrite is because you have a conscience. That conscience has grown since you first had faith. You understood you did not want to do wrong.

Luca begins a baptized life now, to face sins that will press his weeping head in the pillow. But He will also have a Savior who knows when he weeps and repents of his sin. AnneMarie could probably share many frustrations that brought her to tears in the matter of 90 years, but also many chances to bring that sorrow to Jesus. Whether you are 9 or 90, you also know that when you weep and mourn and grieve, that you have a person who is listening to you, loving you, forgiving you, and recognizing the mark on you, that you are His own. That person is Jesus Christ, who loved you and gave Himself on the cross for you.

We pray for those who do not weep over sin. We ask God to beckon them to His kingdom of grace. We ask God for answers to our most mournful problems. He sees His sons and daughters. He reminds us that His promise is sure. His judgment on the cross made His only-begotten Son guilty, so that you can be set free. He will come again to judge the quick and the dead, and that will be something for faith to look forward to. Amen.