

Sermon #1,278: Luke 19:41-48 (Historic Gospel)
8-20-17 (Trinity 10), Bethany-Princeton MN

HE IS A JUST AND LOVING GOD

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus: You shed tears for the people of Jerusalem who turned against You and crucified You. We also turn against You when we sin in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Teach us to take refuge in Your tears, which prove Your great love for us and all people. Amen.

Sermon Text, Luke 19:41-48 (v. 41). ⁴¹ Now as He [Jesus] drew near, He saw the city and wept over it. Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Protect us from despising Your words to our eternal harm, which You do not want, but help us always to be very attentive to hear You. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ, who weeps over lost sinners but even more died for them out of great love: Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Many people think that God cannot be both just and loving. How can a loving God be angry with sinners, and still love sinners? How can a loving God tolerate war and injustice, how can He allow birth defects, abuse of animals, poverty, and racism? These questions (how a loving God could allow misery or could condemn people to hell) have so tormented some people that, to “solve” this equation, they accuse and reject God.

But justice and love are both attributes of God. They co-exist within His nature and essence. But this is not to be solved like a mathematical equation. It is a truth revealed by Jesus here in this scene, when Jesus weeps for His people who reject Him. He who is eternally in the bosom of the Father, who alone can declare Him, reveals that God is just and loving. Out of His mouth come words that express God’s righteous anger and foretell punishment, and words that express the greatest love and mercy.

I

First Jesus declares God’s justice. He says to Jerusalem: “**Now the things that make for your peace are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build and embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level**

you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another.” Jesus is foretelling what would happen to the Jews as a result of rejecting Him.

Jesus could see all the way to the year 70 A.D., and behold the massive walls broken down by the Roman army, the beautiful temple burned down, every stone crushed. He could also see the human loss and misery: 1 million, 100 thousand people lying dead, and 97,000 made prisoners. It was the result of a 4-month siege. That’s what it means to **“build an embankment around”** the city, **“surround and close [it] in on every side.”** It all happened exactly as Jesus said: **“They will not leave one stone upon another.”**

Jesus predicted this not only here, but also in Matthew 24 and Mark 13, where His words about The End are recorded. There He speaks both about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. What happened in Jerusalem was not *the* Judgment Day but it was *a* judgment day.

It involved physical suffering and death, not eternal death; however, they died as unbelievers, so as terrible as their deaths were humanly speaking, far worse was – and is – their eternal death, the eternal separation from God. Their time of death was the end of their opportunity to repent. God’s patience with them came to an end. What they did first to Jesus, and then to the martyrs, the apostles and other Christians such as Stephen, and James the brother of the Lord, was punished first in time and then in eternity, because they rejected Jesus and God’s Word.

So this is about God’s justice. He didn’t overlook what they did. He was not patient forever. He avenged His children. *“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord”* (Ro 12:19). But while we see it in the case of Jerusalem, this rarely happens. You see a lot of injustice, evil and chaos in the world, and the Lord appearing to do nothing. This is a common refrain in the Psalms: *“How long, O Lord? Why do You slumber?”*

So, for example, we wonder where His justice was when the Nazis were trying to exterminate Jews; where His justice was for the slaves in America prior to the Civil War; where His justice is when a group of kids is ganging up on a weaker one in school; where His justice is when dishonest employees receive promotions and the honest worker is mistreated.

You want all of God's justice and righteous anger to be poured out on the evildoers. But this desire often is tinged with self-righteousness. Look at what is going on in our nation's streets, with mob justice carrying the day, people pointing the finger at someone else's evil as an excuse for their actions. This shows why God counsels us not to let loose with our frustration and anger. We rarely have righteous anger. We see the sin in others much better than the sin in us. We want them to be treated as we think they deserve, but we wouldn't want God to treat us as we deserve.

In the destruction of Jerusalem, we see God treating them as they deserve, and it is horrible. It is a warning, a function of God's Law. God is just. He must punish every sin. If He would punish every sin, if He would treat us as we deserve, if He would judge us according to our own righteousness and obedience, then the divine finger would be pointed at you and at me. We would have no escape. It would not just be physical death, it would be eternal; eternal separation from God.

II

But it is not God's justice that defines how He deals with us. Jesus is not here to declare God's judgment. That is the preaching of the Law, it is necessary, but it is Jesus' strange and foreign work. It is not His nature. His proper work is to proclaim the Gospel - God's love for sinners.

That is why this begins with Jesus' tears: "**Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it.**" Where was Jesus when He did this? On a donkey, a beast of burden. About to enter Jerusalem to die for it, to die for those who reject Him, to die for all people, including you.

Jesus' tears reveal God's love for sinners. But God's justice is involved in this. God must punish every sin. He punished His Son for every single sin. Jesus was the burden that the donkey carried, and the burden was all the sin of every person in the world. The burden was your sin. He carried it all to the cross. This is how God's justice is carried out.

These are "**the things that make for your peace,**" Jesus says, peace between you and God. If you have peace with God, then He has no anger for you at all. You have peace through the blood of Jesus' cross.

Jesus here declares God's love for sinners in His own body. He said this was "**the time of your visitation,**" when the fullness of time had come and God sent forth His Son, He sent His Son to visit the world of sinners, to redeem every person with His own blood on the cross. It is still His time of visitation. He comes to visit you like He came to visit Zacchaeus.

He does not care how bad of a sinner you are. That won't keep Him away. He does not say how you have failed Him. He only says He has come to visit and be with you. He comes close to you - see how close in the Lord's Supper, He even comes *into* you as you eat His body and drink His blood! Why does He come so close? To forgive you. To declare that you are at peace with God by His doing. You have no sin in God's sight. You have Jesus' righteousness.

God's justice for you means He declares you just, righteous, innocent for Jesus' sake. He does not treat you as your sins deserve. He treated Jesus as your sins deserve. He has redeemed you, you belong to Him, He is pleased with you and approves of you fully, through faith in Jesus.

He is a just and loving God. That's what Jesus reveals here.

III

It's in our trials and sufferings that we experience the tension between God's justice and His love.

It may be yours or a loved one's cancer, serious illness or other affliction. It may be the death of the one person you felt you couldn't live without. It may be a lack of friends, loneliness, depression, or that no one understands you (like Job's friends). It may be that you are bullied or excluded in school. It may be that people speak against you or betray you. It may be that a dear one moved away, as in the story behind our hymn today. It may be divorce or a broken relationship with a family member. You ask yourself: "*If God loves me, why is He putting me through this?*" It feels like God is against you.

But hear me, you are not suffering the anger or punishment of God. No Christian does. This is because Jesus suffered all the anger of God; it was all poured out on Him. God punished Jesus instead of you. All God has for you is love, the forgiving love that we call grace. He loves you.

The temptation Satan brings in our sufferings is that God must not love you if He allows His Christians to suffer such things. But actually it is the opposite. God uses sufferings (the Bible says) to “chasten” or train the Christian, to draw you closer to Him, so that you talk to Him, cry out to Him, pray to Him, and desire His visitation – His coming close to you in His Word and Sacraments. Suffering is not a sign that God is far away. Suffering is God drawing near to you, to comfort and be close to you.

The Christian’s answer – the Bible’s answer – to “*Why is God putting me through this?*” is: “*So that I might see Jesus.*” Because in Jesus we see how God’s love is shown to us even in our suffering. Jesus suffered, and He suffered for you, and He triumphed so that you might be led through suffering to the infinite joys that God has prepared for you.

God sends sufferings and trials, not because He is being unjust to you, and certainly not because He loves you less. What did we sing, about our sorrow and suffering? – “*My Lord Himself doth share it!*” That’s Jesus, the Suffering Savior. He does not weep for you; He weeps *with* you who weep. His place is beside you *throughout* the suffering and He is placing His joy before you.

So even when you see injustice in this world and in your life, because you are sure of His love and He is right beside you, you have His ear. So whether it is chaos in the nation, a government that can disappoint us, or unfair treatment in our own life, we pray to the Lord who loves us and also make use of the institutions through which He is working. For:

*From God shall naught divide me,
For He is true for aye,
And on my path will guide me,
Who else should often stray;
His ever bounteous hand
By night and day is heedful,
And gives me what is needful,
Where'er I go or stand. Amen!*