

IT IS FINISHED • John 19:28-30 • Del Shimandle • Good Friday, April 10, 2020

Good evening First Free Church, and welcome to our “virtual” Good Friday service. It’s been four Sundays of sermons online, since the shelter-in-place order went into effect, but even so, let us be encouraged by the fact that we can gather together at the same moment in time, even if we can’t be at the same location. I know you all wish, as I do, that we could be celebrating face-to-face so I’m preaching this sermon from my living room to make it a little more intimate.

It’s always worth repeating, at First Free Church our mission is to help people to be disciples of Jesus Christ and our vision is to celebrate lives that are transformed by Him! Even in the present crisis, we can fulfill that mission. So I encourage you to honor the authorities and practice “safe distancing,” but also to choose faith not fear, and to help not hide.

Let us begin with prayer: Our Father, we humble ourselves before you now. Speak to us this evening from Your Word in the Book of John. Teach us what it means that you suffered and died, and that the work you came to accomplish is FINISHED! And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O God. In the name of Jesus Christ I pray, Amen!

Well, if you are like me, you are DONE with this whole “shelter in place” thing. I think my family has had it pretty easy, mostly. We homeschooled our two boys up through 8th grade, so it hasn’t been very difficult to adjust to being in the house together. But CHOOSING to be a homebody is definitely not the same as being REQUIRED to stay home and avoid people as much as possible. I get it, and respect the need for safe distancing, but man, I MISS getting out and about, interacting with people, and feeling at ease, instead of feeling always tense and nervous about the spread of a virus. I am longing for shelter-in-place to be FINISHED!

I was born in 1965, and when I was growing up, a defining event of my parent’s generation was expressed by the question: “Where were you when President Kennedy got shot?”

Similarly, a defining event for my generation was the terror attacks of 9/11. My sons were born in 2000 and 2003, and they’ve heard me discuss the question: “Where were you when the Twin Towers came down in 9/11?”

And now a defining event for them will be: “Where were you during the Covid19 pandemic?” Of course, in an ironic twist, almost everyone will be able to answer the same thing: “At home!”

Crises like these leave us with more questions that we can process.

How are we going to finish the school year?
What about the baseball season?
How are we going to pay the mortgage and utility bills?
Will I still have a job tomorrow?
How are we going to keep the business afloat?
How does the virus really spread? What are the symptoms?
Is the pandemic peaking? Is it slowing down?
How are we going to survive?

WHOA! Nobody told me there'd be days like these! Strange days indeed.¹

Well, as if the pandemic itself isn't hard enough to wrap our minds around, I've heard some say that they've got it pegged. There are those who say coronavirus is God's judgment on the world. He's mad and He is out to punish humanity like Sodom and Gomorrah. Others emphasize that God is love, not a cruel judge! He just wants to be kind to people, and wants us to be kind to each other.

So which is it? We want answers! We DEMAND answers!

The Christian theologian NT Wright recently wrote an article about our desire for an explanation with the provocative title: “Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus!”

He wrote: “Rationalists (including Christian rationalists) want explanations; Romantics (including Christian romantics) want to be given a sigh of relief. But perhaps what we need more than either is to recover the biblical tradition of lament. Lament is what happens when people ask, “Why?” and don't get an answer.²

Friends, there is no simple answer! In fact, NT Wright is saying that sometimes there is no answer at all, and that even so, there is something to be gained, something to be learned! I would add that, sometimes, there are answers that we don't like. Answers we might resist, or be unwilling to face.

¹ Listen to John Lennon's song here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuuhsqA95iA>

² Read Wright's article here: time.com/5808495/coronavirus-christianity

Make no mistake, God's judgment is real. And so is God's love and mercy. But we need to stop over-simplifying, stop looking for trite answers that explain away truths that are difficult to understand. We need to sit still, and reflect quietly. We need to let our hearts be softened by soaking in the difficulty.

We need to lament!

And there is no better day than Good Friday to consider BOTH God's judgment AND His love. Because tonight we remember Jesus' death on the cross. It is at the cross that God's just judgment and his infinite love intersect.

Please open your bibles to John chapter 19. Read with me verses 28-30.

John 19:28-30 (NIV)

28 Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Attempting to consider or contemplate God's judgment is complicated because our minds might be quickly drawn to mental images that, though having some relation to descriptions in the Bible, are mostly influenced by popular culture, story-books and block-buster movies.

Ironically, dystopian and apocalyptic stories have become popular viewing, but result in a sort of mind-numbing belief that "that stuff is all just fiction, after all." And for many, that means a sort of rationalizing away of the idea of God's judgment.

But while many shy away from, or even criticize, the biblical concept of divine judgment, don't we have to admit that we all practice judgment ourselves? Don't we innately understand the call for judgment when our own sense of justice has been awakened?

Who hasn't been tempted to shout at the driver who cut us off on the highway? (...even though they couldn't hear us! Kinda ridiculous, in more ways than one...)

Who hasn't given a piece of their mind to a roommate or spouse who left the dishes in the sink or squeezed the toothpaste from the middle of the tube instead of the end of the tube. What parent

hasn't scolded a child who left their LEGOS on the floor for the umpteenth time for us to pick up after them?

Or more seriously, who wouldn't feel the injustice at being unfairly passed over for a promotion at work because of their gender? Who wouldn't be outraged at being denied a home mortgage or a rent contract because of the color of their skin?

From the silly to the serious, we have to admit that we demand judgment all the time! It's not so much that we don't believe in judgment, or that we believe judgment to be wrong or cruel. The problem is that our sense of justice is arbitrary and not completely trustworthy. Our sense of justice generally comes from our selves.

Frederick Douglas was a man born into slavery in 1818, and after escaping slavery and went on to become an abolitionist, social reformer, and great public speaker and author. His grandmother had served a lifetime of slavery, and when she was finally too old to serve her masters, they sent her off to tide alone and apart from her family. Douglas, in his autobiography asked: "Will not a righteous God visit for these things?"³

Some say that they don't want an angry God of judgment, but our arguments against divine justice, "on whatever ground we rest them, seem to turn round and walk away."⁴

But isn't the neglect of lament and the denial of a divine justice that supersedes our own, isn't it THAT which feeds our anxiety and disquiet? Jeremiah lamented in chapter 12 of his book: "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?"

An article from the Gospel Coalition titled "You Want a God of Judgment" (as in "Seriously! You DON'T want a God who WON'T pronounce justice!") put it this way: "At these moments our hearts need a God who names, judges, and punishes sin. We need a God to whom we can call, "Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted" (Ps. 10:12)—in confidence that he will answer. We need a God who will eventually visit for these things."⁵

³ Read Douglas' complete biography here for free: gutenberg.org/files/23/23-h/23-h.htm

⁴ Read Plato's "Socrates' Dialog with Euthyphro": gutenberg.org/files/1642/1642-h/1642-h.htm

⁵ Read this article here: thegospelcoalition.org/article/you-want-god-judgment/

We have been in a sermon series on the book of Jonah for the past several weeks, and we have seen this contrast of human desire for justice wrapped up with a self-centered view of justice. Jonah could see all too clearly the sins of Nineveh. And he hated them for it with a passion! Yet he neglected or ignored his own sin of hatred! He saw the sliver in their eye, but ignored the plank in his own eye! He complained to God himself for being gracious! Jonah preferred his own death to seeing Ninevites live in God's grace.

Yes, divine judgment is real, none of us can deny it. And when it is convenient or advantageous we even invoke it. But where our own judgment is arbitrary and not trustworthy, God's judgment is trustworthy and good!

Why can we say that? Because God is holy! Listen to Habakkuk 1:12-13 (NIV)

12 Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, you will never die. You, Lord, have appointed them to execute judgment; you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish. 13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

Because God is righteous! Psalms 119:137 says:

You are righteous, Lord, and your laws are right. The statutes you have laid down are righteous; they are fully trustworthy. (NIV)

Because God is good! Psalms 34:8 says:

8 Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. (NIV)

From beginning to end, the Bible affirms God's attributes. And reflections on the greatness and goodness of God's justice and judgment could take many sermons and have indeed filled many books of theology.

But in the Gospel of John, it is summed up in our passage today by a single word in a loud voice from the Messiah: FINISHED!

It is encapsulated in a single symbol: His death on the CROSS!

Read with me again Jesus' last words while he was dying on the cross.

John 19:28-30 (NIV)

28 Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus SAID...

Interestingly, Matthew⁶ and Mark⁷ both describe it as a “loud cry!” not just “Jesus said...” That is because this is a declaration of VICTORY⁸, not a resignation to defeat! John himself, in an earlier chapter, 16:33, recorded Jesus saying to his disciples: “Take heart! I have overcome the world!”

Back to verse 30...

30 When he had received the drink, Jesus SAID: “It is FINISHED!”
With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Notice that no one took Jesus’ life! He himself had the authority to lay His life down, and he did so! HE bowed his own head! He gave up his own spirit! He did it for us!⁹

What then did He finish? What was His mission? John tells us plainly in his Gospel, and you likely know the verses! Turn to John chapter 3!

John 3:10-21 (NIV)

10 “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? 11 Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

⁶ Matthew 27:45-50

⁷ Mark 15:37

⁸ Murray J. Harris. *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: John*. Kindle Location: 10056-10058.

⁹ Don Carson, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: Gospel of John*, p488.

Do you see it? It's all there in just a few verses! The judgment of God, the love of God, and the mission to bring them both to COMPLETION in the CROSS!

Look at verse 19:

“This is the verdict [or JUDGMENT]: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”

That is, judgment is required! God's judgment is real.

Now look at verse 16:

“God so LOVED the world that he gave his one and only Son, so whoever believes in him shall NOT perish but have eternal life.”

That is, MERCY is provided! God's LOVE is real!

Finally, look at verse 17:

“God did NOT send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”

That is, Jesus was sent BY God to seek and save the lost. That was his mission!

In fact, these truths are woven throughout John's Gospel!

In chapter 5:24 Jesus said:

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”

In chapter 8:15 he said:

“15 You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. 16 But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.”

In chapter 12 he said:

27 “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name!

...

31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

...

46 I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

47 “If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. 48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.

And in 17:4, Jesus said:

“4 I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.”

Judgment is what the world deserved, and God judged! But in his mercy, He provided the judgment through the sacrificial death of His own Son on our behalf.

Both God’s just judgment and his amazing grace intersected at the CROSS!

The Bible’s view of justice and mercy is no infinite circle of recycling or reincarnation. It is not a tedious repetition of yin and yang from which one can never escape.¹⁰

Rather, the Bible acknowledges REAL right and wrong, addresses ACTUAL evil, and God pronounces JUST judgment. And OH!, we owe infinite praise to Him because God ALSO pronounces REAL forgiveness!

In the cross he showed REAL judgment, and He also showed UNIMAGINABLE love.

Jesus our Lord sacrificed Himself, taking the judgment that we deserved, so that we might obtain the love of the Father that He deserved.

So, back to the question asked earlier: Do we need to fear that God SENT coronavirus as an angry judgment on sinful world. NO!

Rather we should remember that Jesus’ mission to take God’s judgment on our behalf is FINISHED!

God is not angrily looking for an opportune time to blast everyone! Actually the Bible tells us in 1 Timothy 2:3-6 that: “God is our Savior, and that He desires all people to be saved and to come

¹⁰ G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy, Ch. 1: The Maniac*, ccel.org/ccel/chesterton/orthodoxy/orthodoxy.v.html : “The Christian permits free will to remain a sacred mystery; but because of this his relations with the housemaid become of a sparkling and crystal clearness. He puts the seed of dogma in a central darkness; but it branches forth in all directions with abounding natural health. As we have taken the circle as the symbol of reason and madness, we may very well take the cross as the symbol at once of mystery and of health. Buddhism is centripetal, but Christianity is centrifugal: it breaks out. For the circle is perfect and infinite in its nature; but it is fixed for ever in its size; it can never be larger or smaller. But the cross, though it has at its heart a collision and a contradiction, can extend its four arms for ever without altering its shape. Because it has a paradox in its centre it can grow without changing. The circle returns upon itself and is bound. The cross opens its arms to the four winds; it is a signpost for free travellers.”

to the knowledge of the truth. There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all!”

On the other hand, should we see this crisis as a call to wake up to God’s saving grace? ABSOLUTELY! God isn’t anxious to punish, in fact He desires that all might listen to the Gospel.

The Apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3:9 wrote: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

Finally, crises can serve to remind us of how we SHOULD live in light of God’s grace! The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 12:1: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God--this is your true and proper worship.” (Romans 12:1)

Let us close in prayer: Jesus, what a wonder is the cross. A symbol of shame and violence subverted to be a symbol justice and mercy. Sometimes too familiar with Bible stories, we too easily miss the meaning that might transform our lives. Have mercy on us, and refresh our faith. Remind us that your work is FINISHED and has accomplished its purpose. Now we ask you, empower us and equip to walk in a manner worthy of this great Gospel. Ignite a spark in our hearts to love you, to love our neighbor, to show and speak the Gospel as You did. No greater love is there than this, that you have laid down Your life for us. Soften our hearts so that we forgive others in the way you have forgiven us!

I pray in your powerful name, Jesus, Amen!

As you go now, remember: It is FINISHED! Through faith in Christ, we no longer need to fear judgment, we can go forward living a new life through the Holy Spirit, and we can look forward to Christ’s return!

Join us again on Sunday morning at 10am, when we celebrate Jesus’ resurrection from the dead!