

"I have said all these things to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."

John 16:1-11

Sin, Righteousness, and Judgment

Pastor Stephen Ridge

In our passage this morning, we rejoin Jesus and his men on the night of the Last Supper as they wend their way across Mt. Olive, toward the Garden of Gethsemane. And as midnight turns into the deep, dark, early morning hours Jesus talks less about allegories and figures of speech and more about the tough reality the disciples will find themselves facing as Jesus goes to the Cross, and they find themselves off the bench and in the game, having to move and act and think and speak for themselves.

They won't be Christian "orphans" in this world, Jesus has already promised them. He will remember them through the cross, and through the grave, and through the clouds into heaven, and, once Jesus is back in the company of his Father, he will send a Helper, God the Holy Spirit, to live in their hearts and move in their midst, and make them the sort of people Jesus had only begun to teach them to be. This Spirit, this wild card God will throw their way will bear them through the challenges they all will have to face, as the deep dark turns to dawn on Good Friday. But in the hours that are left there still is much to say.

"They will put you out of the synagogues," Jesus goes on to tell them, "Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me." We talked some last week about things in God's Law, things in Christ's gospel that provoke hatred in the hearts of people whose own thoughts and feelings are at odds with the way of life that lives in the Father's heart in heaven. In every age and every era, it's different.

In old Israel, the bearing and teaching and gospel of Jesus most offended religious souls, people whose lives were orthodox and in control, who couldn't understand the warmth and affection Jesus extended to the riff raff, couldn't bear it when he allowed broken, outcast women to sob where he sat and to rinse his feet with their tears and to scrub the dust with their hair. Though devout and respectful at worship, and generous in their charity, Jesus and his people could be blase about ritual and custom to an extent that infuriated the rabbi's who believed that only kosher propriety held the people in check.

But all this zeal and precision and certitude hadn't brought old Israel's leaders any closer to God, "...they have not known the Father, nor me." Jesus said about them. "But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you." Leon Morris notes that up till now, Jesus had been talking about his hour, his hour, his hour. And his hour, Jesus' hour, was not happy hour! Jesus talked about being planted in the ground and dying, talked about being troubled, talked about being betrayed and rejected. To the disciples it wouldn't look like Jesus' hour at all.

They would see Caiaphas, the old, corrupt high priest get his way, they would see Pilate, the godless, clueless, pagan governor condemn Jesus to death, not because he thought Jesus was guilty, but because couldn't find another way to get the city through the holiday. It was "their hour," the bad guys win all the way around. And as the good guys hunkered down on Friday night in a locked, candlelit upper room, all they had to hold onto was that Jesus had told them this time would come. He would volunteer to be arrested in the garden, this Wonderworker who had calmed the waves and fed the multitudes and raised the dead would allow the bad guys to nail him to the cross, and taunt him and take everything he owned and break his mother's heart.

"I didn't say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you." Jesus told them. In other words, this is a different kind of talk than Jesus had ever had with his men before. Early on, with Jesus taking the point, there'd been no need for the men to understand just how hard things were going to get. "But now," Jesus goes on, "I'm going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go away, for if I don't go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I'll send him to you." Of course, the Holy Spirit had been roaming to and fro for centuries. David sang about the Holy Spirit in the psalms a thousand years before Christ.

The second verse of the whole Bible in Genesis shows us the Holy Spirit *"hovering"* over the deep, dark world before God filled it with wind and sea, soil and plants, and all the countless creatures that have made life what it is and us the rulers of it all. So the point here is not that God the Holy Spirit has been indoors and in hiding the whole time God had been moving history toward the day when Christ would save us. The point is that once Christ had lived and died and rose from the grave and soared through the clouds, once Christ had been there and done that, now the Holy Spirit could move faster and closer and more powerfully in our lives than he had in the days when old Israel was showing us still pictures of what heaven would be like.

"And he, when he comes," Jesus said, *"will convict the world concerning sin, and concerning righteousness, and concerning judgment."* Because before that night, before Christ took to the cross, and conquered the grave and rose through the clouds, faith in the one true God was mostly a local phenomena, one ethnic group given over to the one true God, one fairly small patch of land to which most people would have to travel to learn anything about the God who made them. But now God's own Son had bought the forgiveness that all humanity desperately needed, now God's Spirit would do things in our hearts that centuries of hand washing, and kosher eating, and fancy beards and clothes could only begin to picture.

Come Pentecost, only seven weeks from the night Jesus said all this, in seven weeks the Holy Spirit would descend on the men around Jesus and from that moment worship of the one true God would go on the move everywhere. Devout, fearless men and women would carry the Spirit, who used to live in old Israel's temple, in their hearts out to wherever God sent them. And everywhere disciples went, everywhere a church got planted, God's Spirit would use God's people to *"convict the world concerning sin...righteousness and... judgment."* *"Concerning sin,"* Jesus said, *"because they do not believe in me."*

Quite simply sin keeps us from believing in Christ, because sin drives us to want center stage in our own lives, and the gospel only ever puts Jesus center stage, so we hear the gospel and it sounds foreign to everything our heart wants. The Spirit convicts us *"...concerning righteousness, because I have gone to the Father and you behold me no longer."* The resurrection three days after Jesus died, and his ascension forty days after that is the Father's definitive statement that Jesus is right, righteous, and anyone who doubts him is wrong.

Finally, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will convict the world *"...concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged."* Remember that Jesus warned his men that his hour would be a time where the bad guys would appear to win. Christ's hour to suffer would look like *"their hour,"* the bad guy's hour, to win, but come Sunday morning all of life would turn in a direction none of the bad guys saw coming. From that moment on, Christ would be on the move, and the bad guys would be on the run. So the resurrection wasn't just a miracle, it was a verdict, it was God the Father showing thumbs up for Christ and us, and thumbs down for Satan and everyone who sings devil's song and dances to his tune.