

LUKE

Part 80: “Judge of the Living and the Dead”

Luke 22:63-71

By David A. Ritchie

Sunday, March 29, 2020 (The Fifth Sunday of Lent)

Scripture Reading

“Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, ‘Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?’ And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him. When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, ‘If you are the Christ, tell us.’ But he said to them, ‘If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.’ So they all said, ‘Are you the Son of God, then?’ And he said to them, ‘You say that I am.’ Then they said, ‘What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips” (Luke 22:63–71, ESV).

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your holy word. In a time in which we are hindered in our capacity to gather, thank you that your word is able to go forth without hindrance. As we look into your Scriptures, may your Holy Spirit give us eyes to behold the face of Christ your Son. Give us ears to hear his voice. And give us grace that we may respond with believing faith, loving worship, and faithful obedience. We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus. AMEN.

Introduction

In my high school American Literature class, I remember reading a sermon by the puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards. That sermon was called, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” [In this section show images 1 “Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)” and 2 “Title page of ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God’”].

The exercise in the class was to examine the power of word-choice and visual metaphor, of which Edwards was a master. Edwards didn’t have a production department, special effects, or epic music to make his sermons come alive. He only possessed words. But those words were high-definition in their power and effect.

I wasn’t even a Christian believer when I first read the sermon, but I found Edwards’ depiction of divine judgment a terrifying notion.

Here is a short sample of Edwards sermon, *“The corruption of the heart of the man is immoderate and boundless in its fury; and while wicked men live here, it is like fire pent up by the course of nature; and as the heart is now a sink of sin, so, if sin was not restrained, it would immediately turn the soul into a fiery oven, or furnace of fire and brimstone.”*¹

If you notice, the last words of that quote are “fire and brimstone.” You could say that Edwards’ sermon is the quintessential example of “hell, fire, and brimstone” preaching. There was a time when such sermons were popular in the mainstream of American Christianity. However, they are not very popular today.

And there are some sound reasons that some sermons in the “hell, fire, and brimstone” category are deserving of critique. After all, God is not an angry tyrant in the sky, just itching to smite someone with his anger. He is not capricious, arbitrary, or petty. A powerful but petty god sounds a lot more like Zeus of ancient Greek religion, not the God that is revealed on the pages of Scripture.

Moreover, the longer that I have been a Christian pastor, I have come to believe that the most devoted Christians I know are not Christians because they are merely afraid of hellfire. The most committed and sincere Christians I know are Christians because they are amazed by, in awe of, and in love with Jesus.

But with all of that said, the doctrine of divine judgment is most certainly something the Bible teaches. And not only does the Bible teach that there will be a divine judgment, but that it is, in fact, Jesus himself who is the Divine Judge. As all of the earliest creeds of the Christian church affirm, Jesus Christ is the “judge of the living and the dead.”

Now, at first glance, our passage today does not seem to be about the theme of divine judgment. Instead of sinners in the hands of an angry God, we might call this a passage wherein God is in the hands of angry sinners.

But I want to argue this morning that this *is* a passage about judgment. It is a passage that shows us how Christ is the judge of the living and the dead. And even more, this is a passage that shows us how the truth of Christ being the judge of the living and the dead is the truest foundation of hope we could ever have.

That Christ is our judge is, in fact, very good news, especially in a world with a lot of bad news.

Exposition

1. Man Judges Jesus

¹ Jonathan Edwards. “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” Enfield, Massachusetts (now Connecticut). 8 July 1741.

As a church family, we have been walking through the gospel according to Luke, line by line, verse by verse. We are now in Luke 22, nearing the very end of Jesus's life and ministry.

Jesus has recently arrived in Jerusalem, where he has been very popular among the crowds, but constant odds with leaders of the religious establishment.

But now, Jesus is captured. Without having to worry about Jesus's popularity among the people, the religious leaders are finally able to unleash their hatred upon this upstart teacher from Galilee.

Take a look at verses 63-65 again: *“Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him. They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, ‘Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?’ And they said many other things against him, blaspheming him”* (Luke 22:63–65, ESV).

Jesus was revered and recognized by many people across the nation as a prophet who was sent by God and who spoke the very words of God. But now men blindfold Jesus, and they take turns striking him. They mockingly command him to prophesy as to which of men had hit him. [\[Show image 3 “The Mocking of Christ \(1440-41\)” by Fra Angelico\]](#).

This whole moment is filled with a sense of dramatic irony. Most likely, the men who abuse him are members of the temple guard. Their purpose is to defend the temple from all that would defile the holiness of God. Yet, here, they lay unclean hands-on God himself. They will accuse Jesus of blasphemy against God. Yet in this moment, they blaspheme the One who is God. They ask Jesus to prophesy. Yet Jesus had already prophesied about this very moment.

This is from just a few chapters ago in Luke, as Jesus and his disciples journeyed toward Jerusalem: *“And taking the twelve, he said to them, ‘See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon’”* (Luke 18:31–32, ESV),

The very breath these men breathe is granted to them by the providence of the One they mock with their words. The One who they command to prophesy is the One who knew them all before they were knit together in their mother's womb. The One they strike is the One in whom they live and move and have their being (cf. Acts 17:28).

Then Jesus is brought before an assembly of Jewish leaders known as the Sanhedrin (συνέδριον). The Sanhedrin was composed of the chief priests (ἀρχιερείς), teachers of the law (γραμματεῖς), and a group of lay elders of the Jewish nation (τὸ πρεσβυτέριον τοῦ λαοῦ). As New Testament scholar Dr. Robert H. Stein says about this group, *“The*

Sanhedrin was the highest Jewish ruling body in Israel and was granted control by Rome over virtually all internal Jewish matters.”²

However, although the Sanhedrin possessed real authority, they were not able to execute capital punishment (see Jn 18:3). The best they could do was fabricate enough charges and evidence against Jesus that would result in the death penalty.

Thus, from the outset, Jesus does not get a fair hearing. We know from other gospel accounts that the Sanhedrin went out of its way to find witnesses to testify against Jesus, which resulted in often contradictory testimonies (see Mk 14:55-59).

A modern-day term that we have for such a situation is called a “kangaroo court.” A “kangaroo court” is a court of law that ignores the standards of law and justice. It is a court that willfully denies ethical obligations of a fair trial, legal representation, and due process that are typically granted the accused. It is a court wherein the judge or tribunal is biased from the onset.

One of history’s most infamous “kangaroo courts” was the “Peoples’ Court” of Nazi Germany [show image 4 “The Peoples’ Court” (July 20, 1944)]. This was the court in which critics and opponents of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime were tried and sentenced. The court was a mere charade of justice. Many cases lasted less than one hour without evidence or argumentation ever being presented. Then, most often, a guilty verdict was rendered, and a death sentence was carried out.

Jesus is being tried in such a “kangaroo court.” He is a victim of gross injustice.

Most of you have never stood before a “kangaroo court.” But I wonder, are there other ways in which you have personally felt the pain of injustice in your life? Have you ever felt willingly wronged, defrauded, or oppressed? Have you ever felt slandered or falsely accused? Have you ever been placed under the power of a person or group of people who hated you?

If so, this passage of Scripture reminds you that you are not alone. In the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God allowed himself to personally feel the sting of injustice.

In our world and nation, we are in a time of chaos and turmoil. We are fighting an invisible enemy that has spread a veil of fear over our lives. But more than that, it is possible that some of you have are currently experiencing trials that seems truly unfair.

Sickness seems unjust because it strikes at random. The same with economic downturn. Some of you have lost your jobs through no fault of your own. Some of you have had to let go employees that you care for deeply because you can no longer afford to pay them. Some of you have found yourself in a place of unjust suffering.

² Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 570.

The Christian tradition has a lot to say about such trials of suffering. After all, our faith was birthed on a cross, and the blood of the first martyrs became the seed for the early church. We cannot control our circumstances to absolve us from suffering. But we can be a people who respond with Christian hope, knowing that our God is with us.

We can refuse to respond to suffering with sin. We can refuse to drink the poison of resentment and bitterness. We can refuse to participate in adding fuel to the endless cycle of pain in the world. For when we experience injustice, we can entrust ourselves to the perfect justice of God.

As the Apostle Peter says elsewhere in the New Testament, *“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly”* (1 Peter 2:21–23, ESV).

2. Jesus Judges Man

There is a certain amount of built-in drama that surrounds any type of court case wherein a person’s life is on the line. That’s why we have the whole genre of entertainment dedicated to film and television shows that deal with courtroom drama.

And there is certainly a lot of spectacle that surrounds the moment of Jesus’s trial before the Sanhedrin. Only a chapter ago, the religious leaders were pulling out all their tricks in order to tempt Jesus towards stumbling into heresy or treason. But in those moments, Jesus shone with brilliance and wisdom in his responses. Any bystander would be expecting fireworks to happen in this moment.

But now, as his accusers stand before him, Jesus is silent. He does not explain or defend himself. He does not plead for mercy or attempt to prove his innocence.

In frustration, they ask Jesus to tell them plainly whether or not he is the “Christ.” Now, contrary to popular opinion, the word “Christ” is not Jesus’s last name. The word “Christ” is a title. It comes from the word “Christos” (χριστός), which the Greek word for the Jewish concept of “Messiah.”

They are asking Jesus, “Do you really claim to be the Messiah? Do you think that you, a back-water rabbi from Galilee, could ever become God’s liberator-king? Do you think you have what it takes to lead a revolution and restore the kingdom of Israel?”

Clearly, the Jewish religious leaders, as well as almost everyone else at this time, considered the “messiah” or “Christ” to refer to a human figure that God would send.

Now, Jesus was and is completely human. But he is also completely divine.

So, because of the misconceptions that surround the title “messiah” and “Christ,” he never refers to himself this way. No, when Jesus refers to himself, he uses the title “Son

of Man.” Look at verses 66 through 69: *“When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, ‘If you are the Christ, tell us.’ But he said to them, ‘If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God’”* (Luke 22:66–69, ESV).

In the gospels, Jesus uses this term “Son of Man” in reference to himself eighty-two times. It is a term from Daniel 7 that refers to one who is both human and divine.³

This is from Daniel 7: *“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed”* (Daniel 7:13–14, ESV).

Now, when you hear the title “Son of Man,” your first thought might not be, “Oh yeah, Daniel 7.” But the religious leaders standing before Jesus know exactly what he is saying. [\[Show image 5 “Christ Before Caiaphas \(c. 1305\)” by Giotto\]](#). That is why in both the gospels of Matthew and Mark, after hearing Jesus say these words, the high priest tears his garments, and the council condemns Jesus as one who deserves death (Mt 26:65; Mk 14:63)!

By referring to himself in this moment as the “Son of Man,” Jesus is saying, “Now, I stand before you. But a day is coming that you all will stand before me. [\[Show image 6, “The Last Judgement \(1536-41\)” by Michelangelo\]](#). Right now, I am under your power. Soon all things will be under my power. Right now, I am being judged by the world. One day, I will be judge of the world!”

First, Jesus will endure humiliation. But then, he will be exalted. First, he will be obedient to the point of death. But then, every knee will bow to him, and he will be given the name above all names (cf. Phil 2:5-11).

Conclusion

When I was in high school, I had a very close friend who had a life-long dream of becoming a medical doctor. He left for college, and I went to college here. So naturally our friendship drifted. By the time he was in his senior year in college, I was already in ministry working for a church. He came back to Amarillo over a break, a suddenly he became very ill. In fact, he was hospitalized and found himself on the threshold of death.

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 358.

I remember visiting him in the hospital and praying that the Lord would spare him, and by the grace of God, he slowly recovered. We reconnected as friends, and he even became the first person who I ever had the privilege to baptize.

Today, he is a physician. He happens to not only be a brilliant doctor, but a doctor who is filled with kindness and compassion.

And as terrible as his near-death experience was, I can't help but think that he is now a wiser doctor, a more empathetic doctor, and a better doctor because of what he suffered.

After all, who could be a better doctor than one who has felt the pain of life-threatening disease?

Likewise, who could be a better judge than one who has personally known the pain of injustice and true human suffering?

We have such a judge in Jesus Christ. As the author of Hebrews says, ***"Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted"*** (Hebrews 2:17–18, ESV).

The notion of absolute power is terrifying. After all, as Lord Acton once famously said, "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely." And he is right in that no human that is prone toward selfish desires and corruption should never hold unchecked authority.

However, there is one problem with this way of thinking. Absolute power is only a problem if the one who holds it is not also absolutely good.

In Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, we have one who is both absolutely powerful and absolutely good. And if this is the One who stands at the end of history to judge the living and the dead, then this is the best news possible.

When we look to Jesus, we look to one who has experienced the worst of injustice, but who has promised to restore complete justice.

And through his own suffering, he has made a way to end all evil without ending us.

If we believe this to be true, we can be a people of hope. If we believe this to be true, our souls can find rest. If we believe this to be true, we can forgive our enemies and show courageous love for our neighbors.

Our world is broken. Today, we feel the fractured nature of creation acutely.

The way things are not the way things should be. Deep in our bones, we know this to be true. We long to gather again. We long engage in the dignity of our studies and our

vocations without fear of catching or spreading a plague. We long to hug our loved ones and feast with our friends.

People of God, I believe that day is coming. But I want to direct your hope to an even greater day that is coming – a day when creation will be renewed and all sad things will become untrue.

For the one who was once humiliated will be exalted before all men. The one who was judged now sits on the throne of heaven. His perfect justice is coming.

Redeemer Christian Church, may we be those who join with the Spirit and the Bride and cry out, “Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly.”

AMEN.

Prayer

Almighty God, in whom we live and move and have our being.
You are our Creator, and you are our Redeemer.
To you, all authority in heaven and earth has been given.

We continue to ask for your mercy in this season.
The virus that has cast a veil over the nations is now in our community and has now claimed life.

We ask for your Holy Spirit to give us protection, give us provision, give us peace.

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy on us!

We plead that you would heal the sick, and shield the vulnerable.
We pray for the individuals and businesses who have suffered loss, grant them provision.
We pray for those who are struggling with fear, soothe them with your peace.
We pray for our leaders in our city, state, and nation; give them wisdom.

Give grace to the human life that is at risk and give grace to our economy.

May there soon come a day when we are healthier, wiser, and happier for having passed through the crucible of this trial.

Grant us repentance from sin and selfishness.
Lead us in the path of courageous love and humble righteousness.

Help us to trust in the resurrection of your Son. And may we embody that resurrection hope to a watching world.

In the name of Jesus, our Judge and our Defender, we pray. AMEN.

Gospel Community Discussion Starters

Bibliography

- A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*. Ed. Michael J. Kruger. Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2016
- Bailey, Kenneth E. *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*. Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 2008.
- Beale, G.K. *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*. Edited by D. A. Carson. Vol. 19. New Studies in Biblical Theology. England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*. 2nd. Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 2007.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Luke*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996.
- Craddock, Fred B. *Luke*. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990.
- Hughes, R. Kent. *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978.
- Plummer, Alfred. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke*. International Critical Commentary. London: T&T Clark International, 1896.
- Stein, Robert H. *Luke*. Vol. 24. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992.
- Wright, Tom. *Luke for Everyone*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004.