

Second Sunday of End Time; Last Judgment; November 6, 2022

Ezekiel 9:1-11

“You are Marked with the Cross”

Then 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.”** Then 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 in his hand. They entered and stood beside the bronze altar.

Now 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. The 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.”** To 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. Old 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. Then 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.

While 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?”** He 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.’ But 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.”** Jesu 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.”**

There was a day of judgment coming. When it came, it would look like the Babylonians were doing the hacking and butchering. But it would actually be the Lord. The Lord’s judgment was coming to Judah.

Judgment was coming to Judah because the people would not repent. Ezekiel sees it coming in a vision: **Then [the LORD] 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.”** Then 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. North is the direction that invading armies entered Judah. These six supervisors are coming with war clubs. They are coming with judgment. But not their own. The Lord’s. And his judgment is going to get ugly: **To [the warriors] 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. Old men and young men, virgins, little children, and women – you are to keep killing until you wipe them out completely.”** Anyone who refused to turn to the Lord in faith was going down – no exceptions. The Lord’s judgment was coming to all the unbelievers in Judah.

But it wouldn't start with the common folks. **So they began with the men who were in front of the temple. Then he said to them, "Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go!"** The Lord's judgment starts at the temple, with the priests and elders.

Of all the people in Judah, they should have known better. It was their responsibility to sound the spiritual alarms and plead with the people to stop worshiping false gods and return to the Lord. But they didn't. Instead, the religious leaders told people whatever they wanted to hear. The Lord told Ezekiel, **"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.'** Instead of calling people back to the Lord, the religious leaders were telling them that the Lord was gone. He did not see. He was not paying attention anymore. He's not here. He's not watching. So worship whoever you want, and live however you want.

The Lord's judgment was coming. It was coming to all who refused to repent. But it was coming first and hardest for the priests and elders who scratched itching ears, saying, "Believe whatever. Do whatever. Because God isn't here anymore and he doesn't care."

The judgment of God is coming again. It is coming, as it did in Judah, for all who refuse to repent, to turn to the Lord in faith. And when it comes, it is going to be ugly for them. And God will make no exceptions, as he made none in Judah.

Once again, his judgment will come for all unbelievers. And once again, it will start at the temple; it will start with all the leaders who led people astray. I was considering reading some examples of present-day leaders in the Christian church telling people that they can behave however they want, believe whatever they want, and make their own rules for morality. But even in the context of condemning it, I don't want it spoken from this pulpit. Suffice it to say: it's everywhere. People who wear robes and stoles and crosses around their necks doing nothing more than telling people what they want to hear. Scratching itching ears. Telling people, in essence: "God isn't here anymore. He's not watching. Believe what you want. Do what you want."

Why would those who should be preaching repentance and faith and Godly living tell people what they want to hear instead? Perhaps they want to be popular. Perhaps they are truly convinced that God is gone and no longer watching, if he ever existed at all. Whatever their motives, they will be judged first and most harshly. Jesus says: **"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."** Christian leaders are given the greatest trust of all: to proclaim God's Word correctly, both the law of God's commandments and the good news that calls us to faith in Christ. Those who choose to abuse that trust and tell people that it doesn't matter what they do and believe will go down first and hardest in the judgment.

So, it's a good thing for you you're not in that position! Fair enough. But you do have choose who to listen to. Don't listen to leaders who tell you what your sinful nature wants to hear: that God has left and isn't watching and that his judgment will never come. Listen to leaders who tell you faithfully God's Word: both his unchanging commandments and the good news of his love in Christ, to call you to repentant, saving faith. Because the judgment started at the temple, and it will again. But it also continued into the streets, for all who listened to the ear scratching leaders instead of repenting, and it will again.

When Ezekiel saw the sheer number of people being cut down in the judgment, he was horrified. **While he was 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?”** And the answer to that question was “no.”

Because even as the Lord called forth the six warriors to enter from the north and cut down all who did not believe in him, **There was also one man in the middle, dressed in linen, with a scribe’s kit at his waist.** This one man is ready to write. And before the warriors descend on the temple and then on the city, he goes through the city first to do some marking: **The 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.”**

The cross mark that the scribe on the foreheads of believers is the Hebrew letter “tav.” I know you’re not here for a Hebrew lesson, but this is important to understand what’s going on here. Like most languages, the writing of Hebrew letters evolved over time. Today, the Hebrew letter “tav” looks nothing like a t, or a cross. But in Paleo-Hebrew, which was the language of Ezekiel’s time, it looked a cross, or a t. Very interesting. And a bit too much of a coincidence to be a coincidence.

In my Bible, there is a footnote that says, “The significance of the similarity between the ‘tav’ and the cross was not apparent, however, at this point, five hundred years before Calvary.” Maybe not. But believers in the Lord have always been marked with the cross. Five hundred years before Calvary, of course they didn’t know all the details about the work of the coming Messiah, but they knew enough. By the time of Ezekiel, they could know a perfect prophet was coming. They could know also he would be the perfect Lamb of God who would suffer intensely and shed his blood in the place of the people, to take their sins away. They could also know that he would rise, because God would not abandon his Holy One to the grave. They knew all that already, and a lot more, too.

And there were those who believed. They believed that the Lord God of Israel was not only there. And he wasn’t just still seeing them. He was loving them. He was promising their salvation and working to bring it. And they also believed that finally the Lord would come to save them. And we know, looking back on it, why the scribe marked them with a cross. It’s because when the Savior came to shed his blood, he did it on a cross.

Everyone who trusts in that promise, whether they lived five hundred years before Calvary or two thousand years after, is marked with the cross. When you were baptized, the pastor or whoever baptized you made the sign of Jesus’ cross over your head and heart. Moments earlier, the Spirit baptized you into Christ and gave you faith in him. To this day the Spirit has worked in you to keep you in faith. Jesus’ cross is marked on you. You trust in him for the forgiveness of your sins.

This is the beautiful thing about Jesus’ cross. God draws it on you when you come to faith. And every time you turn back to your baptism, or listen to Jesus love for you, or receive his Supper, he draws it on you again. It reminds me of this kid I went to kindergarten with who was never satisfied with the boldness of his art. He’d draw something. And then draw over it again. And again. And again. To make it bolder and bolder and bolder. This is what the Spirit does with the cross on you. Every time you’re in Jesus’ love, he draws it again, stronger and bolder each time.

The judgment is coming. And in that judgment, you will stand and live. You will live forever. Because God has marked you with the cross of his Son.

Ezekiel was collapsing in despair when he saw everyone who was being cut down in the judgment. But this is the last word of his vision: **Just 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."**

At God's command, you've been marked by Jesus' cross. Your faith is in him. And in the judgment, you will live.

So, until then, listen to what God tells you. Close your ears to anyone who tells you that you can make your own beliefs and your own morality, because God is gone or he's stopped watching. It's pure evil, and deadly dangerous. Listen to God's commandments, to the message of the cross, and only those leaders who speak it truly. Do it to keep your heart with the Lord, and to keep the saving cross marked on your forehead. Amen.