

"The Stark Reality of Divine Justice"

Good Friday 2010

Hebrews 10:26-31

*Ye who think of sin but lightly
Nor suppose the evil great
Here may view its nature rightly,
Here its guilt may estimate.
Mark the Sacrifice appointed,
See who bears the awful load;
'Tis the WORD, the LORD'S ANOINTED,
Son of Man and Son of God. (TLH 153)*

Grace, mercy and peace be yours from our Father in Heaven, and from his Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Our theme for our special Lenten meditations this year has been "We preach Christ crucified." This evening that theme seems especially appropriate, for this evening we are naturally focused on that great and terrible event. God, abandoned by God, dies. What mortal is capable of grasping such lofty truths?

The text that will guide our Good Friday mediation this evening is found in the Book of Hebrews, the Tenth Chapter:

Hebrews 10:26-31 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Here ends the Word God himself has given us. Hold these words in reverence and learn from them - recognizing the Author, for it is written, "**Blessed are those who hear God's words and treasure them.**" So also we pray, "**Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

In the great, epic struggle between Jesus and Satan, in one sense Jesus didn't have a chance. In the other, Satan didn't have a chance.

First Jesus. Did you ever stop to contemplate or analyze the base or root cause for the Jewish rejection of Jesus? According to their own words, they rejected and condemned Jesus to death because he was guilty of blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God. Stop for a moment and think about just how ridiculous that accusation really was. Their reason for condemning Jesus absolutely guaranteed that they would reject, condemn, and then execute God's Promise Messiah. How so?

The Promised Messiah was not *capable* of blasphemy, since he himself *was God*, and by definition God cannot commit blasphemy. Charging everyone who claimed to be the Messiah with blasphemy *guaranteed* that the Jews *would* one day kill their Messiah – who *of course* would rightly reveal to them that he was the Son of God and (in their minds at least) thereby commit blasphemy. In other words, they took the most basic attribute that they should have expected in the Messiah and

condemned Jesus simply because he claimed to possess that basic attribute. It made no sense – but then unbelief rarely does.

If the Jewish rulers were going to condemn Jesus for speaking the truth, Jesus' only "hope" in connection with the scribes and Pharisees was to lie to them about who and what he was, or to pretend to be someone or something that he was not. This, obviously, Jesus could and would never do. In that sense, Jesus didn't have a chance – not as far as the Jews who rejected him were concerned.

Here's something of a parallel. Suppose you are told to go to the airport to pick up a man you've neither met nor seen. To find him, you hold up a sign with his name on it and show it to every passenger that walks off a plane. What the Jews did to Jesus would be akin to you punching in the nose and kicking into bloody submission anyone and everyone who claimed to be the man you were supposed to pick up. Again, with such Jesus didn't have a chance.

But then we look at Good Friday from the opposite perspective and it becomes immediately apparent that Jesus' enemies – Satan in particular – were those who really had no chance. If their quest was to prevent the Son of God from carrying out the work his Father sent him to accomplish, they would certainly fail.

That's not to say, of course, that the temptations of Satan weren't real. They certainly were. Nor does it mean that it was impossible for Jesus to fail. Had he even once sinned, he most certainly would have failed. What it means is that Satan and his allies were simply no match for our great Savior and Champion. They were nowhere near powerful or clever enough to prevent him from doing what he set out to do.

We know, of course, that Satan's goal was to destroy the only chance that mankind had to be saved by destroying Jesus. His only hope was to tempt Jesus to sin – for even Satan knew that a *sinless* offering or sacrifice was demanded as the payment for mankind's transgressions.

Knowing what they did, have you ever asked yourself why Satan manipulated or incited mankind into killing Jesus? The devil undoubtedly knew that if a *sinless* Jesus was put to death he would thereby fulfill his mission and open the doors for all Christians to be saved. Why then put him to death, and thereby seal their own doom?

First of all, understand that their own personal doom was already sealed. Causing Jesus to fail would have done nothing to help the certain plight of the devil and his minions. They were cast out of heaven and reserved for the fires of hell whether Jesus failed or not. In fact this gives us a bit of insight into the true nature of the devil. Here we are given an unobstructed view of pure evil as it really exists. Knowing that they were already condemned to hell, the sole purpose of the devil and his angels is to destroy that which God loves. Their one and only goal was to cause others to join them in everlasting agony. Such evil is difficult for us to even imagine, but it tells us what we are up against, what we face day by day until our Lord calls us home.

Yet, again, why put Jesus to death when their only hope was to tempt him into sin? The answer probably is that they are evil, not insane. Albert Einstein defined insanity as doing exactly the same thing over and over again with the expectation of a different result. They weren't insane. They had tried to tempt Jesus for 33 years, in all manner of different ways, and they had a 100% failure rate. They apparently decided therefore to try something different. Their plan was to roll the dice in one last great effort to accomplish what had always been their goal. Perhaps when faced with isolation and death Jesus would finally break.

The story of Job gives us an insight into the character and thought process of the devil. You will recall how Satan first assumed that he could persuade Job to curse God if God would allow him to suffer the loss of his possessions. God allowed it, but Job remained faithful. Satan then approached God with this accusation: "**Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.**"⁵ "**But**

stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" God then allowed the devil to afflict Job himself, and still Job remained faithful.

Again, the point or lesson here is that we are here given understanding as to just how Satan thinks, and from this we can gain insight into why he finally decided to incite his allies to kill Jesus. He undoubtedly had come to the conclusion, after 33 years of failure, that he could not successfully tempt Jesus to sin. His one last desperate hope was to gamble that Jesus would finally fold when faced with his own demise.

He didn't have a chance. Jesus, our Champion, remained absolutely faithful and sinless to the bitter end. That end was announced by Jesus himself on this night: ***"It is finished!"*** The result is that the devil not only lost everything, you and I won – everything.

Yet our text for this evening sounds a very appropriate warning, doesn't it. For you and me the struggle is not over until the struggle is over. The words of our text therefore are those that we are to use to pummel into whimpering submission that old Adam that lives within each of us. Upon the cross we witness the wages of sin – the awful price that had to be paid if we were to be saved. In our text we are reminded that all will be for naught for every single soul that rejects Jesus Christ – every soul that, in the words of our text, ***"goes on sinning willfully"*** and who ***"tramples the Son of God underfoot, counting the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insults the Spirit of grace."*** We live in a society that condemns condemnation. God and his truth are not affected by such nonsense and falsehood. The truth of God is not nullified or cancelled by the foolishness of mankind.

Today mankind might well scream defiance at their Creator and laugh to scorn those who cling desperately to the truths that God has revealed to his children. For those who die in such rebellion ***"there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour (God's) adversaries."***

Truly, as our text warns, ***"it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*** Yet it is only fearful for those who reject him and spurn his Son. Their time is now. It will soon come to a tragic and terrible close. Therefore on this evening do not pity Jesus. He now reigns in everlasting glory. Pity rather those who reject him – even as Jesus once turned to those women who followed him to the cross with the traditional Jewish wailing and said, ***"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."*** Luke 23:28

Know for certain on this Good Friday evening that soon enough a new kind of day will dawn. On that great Day there will be no more hidden glory or masked divinity. On that Day the King of kings and Lord of lords will appear in his unveiled glory and every knee will bow and every tongue confess the glory and praise that belong to our God alone. There can be no unbelief on that Day, for then the godless will be forced to kneel and acknowledge the very one they rejected. On that day all men will see the truth. For those who died rejecting that truth (which they will be forced to confess) – hell will be their sentence. Yet for those who died trusting only in Jesus for their forgiveness – unspeakable, unimaginable joy in the presence of God for all eternity.

With great joy we now recognize that by what our Lord did on this night he has removed from our lives that which alone could have condemned us – our sins. You and I stand, even now, holy and righteous in his sight. Thanks be to Jesus who on this very night won this great victory as our Substitute. Amen.