

“What Is It We Need to Be Sure Of?”

Matthew 27:23; Isaiah 53; 2 Corinthians 5:21

Sermon for Good Friday 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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Hearing and singing about what happened to Jesus raises questions.

One of those questions is who’s in charge. Is it ultimately the governing authorities who are engaged in a grave injustice against Jesus? And what about Pontius Pilate. He recognized that Jesus was innocent. The crowd being stirred up into a mob and spurred on was shouting crucify Him! about Jesus. Pilate asked “Why, What evil has He done” (Matthew 27:23). But then he used cost-benefit analysis. It would cost less to have Jesus put to death than it would take to resist and quell the riot that was escalating. Are governing authorities who use cost-benefit analysis in stead of doing the right thing ultimately in charge?

And then what about Satan. Luke tells us that Satan entered Judas who betrayed Jesus. Judas, who was supposedly Jesus’ friend. He feigned loyalty to Jesus and purported to be a follower of Him who called Him master. And then Satan must have surely been stirring up the mob to get rid of Jesus. It surely wasn’t the Holy Spirit that was doing so.

But there are even more important questions. The most important questions have to do with what God was doing and why. And this will also answer the question of who’s in charge. What God was doing and why leads to what you, dear Christian, can be sure of when you contemplate the things that happened to Jesus. The prophet Isaiah and the Apostle Paul tell us about this. This is to say, the Holy Spirit tells us. The Holy Spirit gives us the inside track.

The Apostle Paul said, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them. . . . He made the one who did not know sin *to be* sin, in our place, so that we may become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:19, 21). In Isaiah’s words, “The LORD laid on Him our iniquity so that the LORD could regard many as righteous on account of Him” (Isaiah 53:6, 11).

These words from Isaiah and Paul tells us two things that we should be sure of with respect to what God was doing in Christ’s suffering and death. The first thing is not necessarily comfortable for us; it isn’t meant to be. But it is oh so important for our souls. It is the admission that you and I need to be reconciled to God. It is the admission that you and I have committed trespasses that require God to figure out a way to redeem us from the just punishment that our trespasses deserve according to His justice and holiness. This punishment is death. This involves the recognition that I deserve what happened to Jesus.

Our culture and corrupted human nature puts very powerful temptations in front of us in this regard. It tempts us to view ourselves as basically pretty good people and really entitled to good things, especially from God. We live in quite an ego-puffing culture. It could go like this. I am perfectly willing to admit that I have made some mistakes, here and there. But I am otherwise really a pretty good person. I should be validated. Using the word “iniquity” or evil about me such that I should deserve what happened to Jesus, well, that is just a little too strong; that’s going a little too far. I deserve better than that. In fact, I deserve good things.

When we see Jesus crucified from the standpoint of what God is doing, however, we must come to an entirely different conclusion about ourselves and human nature. Otherwise, God would be the one involved in a grave injustice in the death of Jesus, which is impossible. It is impossible that God could be involved in any injustice toward His Son. The grave injustice

would be allowing Jesus to be put to death with no apparent redeeming purpose. We must conclude, therefore, that we are guilty of real-live evil. This is not an abstraction. God's law requires that we love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and that we love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). When we have not loved our neighbor as ourselves, we have hurt our neighbor. Again, this is not an abstraction. Hurting our neighbor is evil.

We have not loved God as we ought when we have been indifferent to or set aside God's word and truth for the sake of some loyalty that is less than God, and have violated principles of truth and justice according to God's word and truth for the sake of such loyalties.

God is love and truth and God knows. He knows it all; God knows what evil is. He is doing us no injustice when He accuses us of iniquity.

Since God tells us that what was happening to Jesus was God laying our iniquity on Him and punishing it, He brings to us the opportunity for soul-cleansing honesty. Jesus' cross is actually the spiritual power for this, in a way that leads to salvation.

Jesus' suffering and death leads us to this: Yes, Lord, I am guilty. Of this, I am sure. I see what you were doing, because you tell me through your word, in what was happening to Jesus. Have your way with me.

But in this very thing, the LORD laying our iniquity on Him, we are led to the even deeper thing of which God assures us; an even deeper thing. It is that Jesus has paid the price for our iniquity. God the Father and God the Son know that the one who is indebted to them could not possibly pay the debt they owe. We cannot possibly pay the debt we owe. So God the Son pays the price in our place.

It is fully paid; fully paid.

I am thinking of a promissory note, and then a great big stamp coming down on it that says, "Paid in full." Our debt to God is paid in full.

Now there is relief. The burden is lifted. Now there is the deepest and most reverent giving of thanks. Now there is that paradoxical joy of Good Friday. Now there is the power of Christian love. Now there is the liberty that no created power can take away from you. If God has reconciled you to Himself in the death of His Son, which He has, then there is no lasting death and destruction that any created thing could impose on you. Whatever Satan or the human creature may do to you, whatever may befall your flesh in this life, you are free and God is with you and you are with God (Romans 8:31-39).

From God's standpoint, what happened to Jesus assures you that God is completely reconciled to you. He has taken away your iniquity. God sees you now as He sees Jesus in His own innocence and righteousness. The satisfaction for sin is complete. The punishment for iniquity has run its full course for you.

So it comes down to this in Jesus suffering and death: you know, in the honesty between you and God, about God's just judgment against your sin. And so you despise your own sinfulness and desire relief and deliverance from it. But you also look to the promise of Jesus to save you from it. In Jesus' suffering and death, you are assured by God that whatever punishment His justice and holiness could require against your sin is satisfied. He has accomplished your relief. He has obtained your deliverance. He has covered your sin. You are fully acquitted in the love and mercy of God found and exhibited in Christ Jesus our Lord. He turns to you His smile in Christ Jesus. Now He raises you up, once again, to live, as He raises up Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.