

June 20 & 21, 2024

The Jesus Way | Judgement

2 Thessalonians 1:5-7

Pastor Dan Nordin

Pastor Paul asked if I could preach on July 20 and 21. I was delighted. Then he sent me the scheduled topics for the summer theme “The Jesus Way”. The topic assigned to me, “JUDGEMENT!” My honest first response was, “Thanks Paul, my first opportunity to preach at Prince of Peace as the part-time Pastor of Spiritual Care and you gave me one of the least favorite topics for the Christian community of “JUDGEMENT”.

Isn't that your initial response to the topic of Judgment? Judgment: Dante's Infernal, written in the early fourteen century comes to mind and the Firey journey into hell. Then, the eighteenth-century Revivalist Preacher Johnathan Edward's use of the image of life suspended over the fire of Judgment. His famous writings had a huge impact on the church and its concept of Judgment. Edward's infamous sermon entitled, *Sinners in the Hands of an angry God* was an attempt to use fear to drive people into the life of faith.

My hunch is that many of us were subjected to the “Hell, Fire and Brimstone” preaching someplace in our earlier spiritual journey. In a sense, many preachers of the eighteenth century, and maybe some of us, were subjected to the “Hell and fire” damnation preaching of years ago that attempted to use fear to literally scare the “Hell” out of the people.

If you have been nurtured somewhere in your spiritual journey with a Dante or Johnathon Edward's theology of Judgment, fear has been most likely the core of your understanding of the judgment day. Well, hold on, fasten your seatbelts folks, Jesus has something that will “rock your fear based faith” with a radical promise.

Judgement and The Jesus Way

Just after Gospel of John wrote the well-known verse John (3:16), then John's Gospel says this –

For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned. (John 3: 17)

For followers of Jesus, Judgment Day and its outcome is not something to fear. Jesus completely eliminates the fear-based thinking about judgement. In the Jesus way of Grace.... In the death and resurrection of Christ and through the mark of his cross upon us.... Our ticket has been punched. We are saved. It is God's gift! No questions. Nothing to fear, just pure grace.

The Apostle Paul summarizes this Jesus way of meeting our judgment through the lens of grace, saying –

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)

Did you hear that, “There is NO condemnation for those who in Christ Jesus”. The Day of Judgement has been disarmed for all of us marked with the Cross.

Judgement of the Neighbor

“The Jesus Way”, “grace model” not only changes how we anticipate Judgment Day, but it changes how we live together in community. And it becomes very tricky! Jesus said,

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven (Luke 6:37)

Jesus was consistent. He said Judgement is God's work not ours. But we sure like to pick up the hammer of judgement and give it to those who are different from us. The “judgmental spirit” dies so slowly.

It was a bitterly cold February early afternoon. I made an appointment to bring Communion to one of my favorite shut-ins in Litchfield. Alice couldn't hear the doorbell because the TV was blaring. Alice finally heard my impassioned plea to let me in. Inside, the temperature had to be close to 80-85 degrees. Alice said, Hang your coat over there. Then she said, “Have a sit... my soap opera will be over in about 10 minutes.” As I thawed out, I began to notice a dreadful odor. I didn't know Alice had a dog. But a dog had surely been there and left something behind. “How could Alice live in this totally awful environment?” Should I report her to Meeker County? I had made a quick judgement upon Alice and it wasn't good.

Thankfully her soap opera was over, and she suggested we go into the kitchen for Holy Communion. It was worse. The odor was beyond horrendous. I cannot remember saying the words of the institution as fast as I did that day. Communion was served by what I called “Fast Food” style.

That day I was passing judgement on my dear friend. But we know how to pass on judgement upon each other don't we?

- Neighbor whose dog loves to take a dump on our yard instead of their yard.
- The person who lives a lifestyle that is so different than what we know.
- The person at work who wears a turban.
- The relative who knows how to push our buttons.
- The person on the other side of the political aisle that just is wrong.

We are quick to place judgement upon each other, aren't we? In II Thessalonians, we hear the Apostle Paul tell us about the call to be non-judgmental as the "Jesus Way."

All this trouble is a clear sign that God has decided to make you fit for the kingdom. You're suffering now, but justice is on the way. When the Master Jesus appears out of heaven in a blaze of fire with his strong angels, he'll even up the score by settling accounts with those who gave you such a bad time. (2 Thessalonians 1: 5-7)

Paul is saying that Judgement is God's work...not ours. So why do we so quickly judge others by their behavior, their background, their lifestyle, questionable faith or their political persuasion? The "Jesus Way" in which we are to treat and respond to those who are different than ourselves is in loving grace.... not judgement. "Judge not, and you will not be judged." Judging other people reveals an attitude or self-righteousness that goes beyond our words. We can think that we are so right, and you are wrong.

During the coming months of this election cycle, we all know that we will have plenty of opportunity to hold our judgmental thinking at bay. Hateful, harsh, judgmental words no matter how clear we may be of our political righteousness. We can be clear about our political position, but Judgement of the other is not the Jesus Way!

Two Faith questions about political discourse/dialogue:

1. Do I have to be right?
2. Do I have to win?

Judging others, Jesus said, "Don't try to separate the Weeds from the Wheat." Refusing to judge the other doesn't mean we give up our opinions or our position on a given subject. But it means that we respect the "other" as a higher mission than winning the argument or debate.

In "The Jesus Way" ... we are called to talk about politics in a different light. Love is greater than being right or winning.

The Jesus Way and Refusing to Judge Ourselves

Do you know how to kick yourself for mistakes made? If you don't know how to be hard on yourself, make an appointment with me.

I left Alice's house and jumped into my cold car with the heater fan put on high. By the time I returned to Zion Lutheran, the car had finally warmed up and, to my horror, the smell became intense once again. The same smell as in Alice's house. Well, the truth is the source of the smell wasn't anything in Alice's house at all... it was on my

shoes. I had judged Alice and her poor house care, and the poop was on me the entire time. Judge yourself?

Lorraine came to every Bible Study when she was in town. Quiet but so kind and loving. Then she came in to talk. Lorraine was under a load of shame. Not for what she had done. A Pastor in her youth preached with a pointed finger declaring everyone a terrible sinner. Sinners in an Angry God and Lorraine was hounded with the voice of that shame. Forgiveness, yes, but not in her private life.

I wonder if some of us have been wounded by well-meaning and shame based, fear based, pastors and adults in our lives? Those of us under self-judgement need to hear The Jesus Way, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

In The Jesus Way we are set free. Our chains are gone! Did you hear the Good News, "There is NO condemnation for all who are marked with the cross of Christ."

I wouldn't be surprised if some of you honestly come up to me and say, Pastor Dan, your first sermon at Prince of Peace really stunk. There may have been something about the sermon, but I unfortunately believe that what you may have smelled is the way I have not respected others in my everyday life and have in some way small or great judge them. Maybe it was the truth that I am still letting the Gospel (The Good News of Forgiveness) free me from self-judgement that refuses to set me free hound me. When I refuse to stop judging others and myself... it just sticks!

How about you? Anything on the shoes of your soul? The Gospel changes everything!

May the Precious word of the Gospel... The Jesus Way, continue to set us free

- to love and respect the other, whoever they may be.
- and then learn to silence the voices that once condemned ourselves.

Amen.