

Authority to Judge

Ezekiel 19:29-30

Sunday, October 1, 2023, at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Unpopular

One of the most unpopular theological topics is that of judgement; the idea that we must stand before God as God judges our lives. The Book of Revelation depicts an awesome and grim scene in which the people of the ages stand before God and books are opened and those whose name is found in the book are admitted into heaven and those whose names are not in the book are sent to hell. It is frightening, and it should be. People recoil from the notion, and in fact the whole idea of being judged is sour to us. We do not like judgmental people. To be called “judgmental” is a criticism or an insult. It is human nature, I believe, to simply want to be the rulers of our own lives, or to simply be in charge in general. Our attitudes is sometimes like that of the cat in this little joke. It goes like this:

God looks at the Doberman and asks, "Doberman, what did you believe?" the Doberman replies. "I believed in being faithful and loyal to my master until the day I died." God answers "Very well. You come sit at my left side. Shepherd, what did you believe?" The Shepherd says, "I believed in serving my country to the best of my ability until I was shot in action." God says "Very well. You may come sit to my left side. Cat, what did you believe?" The cat, without even thinking replies "I believe you are in my seat."*

- The Bible episodes for today; Ezekiel & Matthew

- Matthew

Let's look at our Bible passages for today. In Matthew 21, the Lord Jesus has yet another hostile encounter with the religious leaders of the day. They question His authority, but He deftly turns the tables and asks them about the authority of John the Baptism, whom they did not believe. They dared not answer because they knew the masses recognized John as a great prophet, so they told Jesus that they did not know. He then told them a parable about two sons, asked by their father to work in the family vineyard. The first one said “no,” but later through better of his decision and went to work. The second said “yes” but did not follow through. The point was that intentions and verbiage don't compare to actions when it comes to judgment, and the leaders confronting Jesus realized that Jesus was telling them that they would not fare well in their current state.

- Ezekiel

The Lord Jesus may have had our passage from Ezekiel in mind when He spoke, for that great prophet reported that God said much the same thing when He decreed that people demonstrate by their actions the character of their souls. As a side note, actions do not earn salvation, they demonstrate salvation gained by grace through faith. Also, the juxtaposition of the two passages shows the Lord Jesus claimed authority to judge, but what does it man for Him to authority to judge us?

- What does it mean that Jesus is Judge?

We tend to think of being judged by the Lord in terms of that final judgment before the Great White Throne in Revelation 20:11 or the judgment mentioned in 2 Corinthians 5:10 in which Christ assesses the live of His followers (and James 3:1 indicates that pastors and teachers will receive a

more detailed assessment), but there is more to the actions of a judge than that. The word for “judge” used in Ezekiel 19:30 refers to someone who can make decisions and give punishments, it is true, but also someone to whom you can appeal for justice for yourself or for others. A judge is someone to whom you can go if you have problems, if you are in a situation that you cannot solve. It is as judge that Christ gives us wisdom. As Christians, we should reverently turn to Christ as judge often for guidance, correction, and forgiveness.

- Application
- Be comfortable with accountability.

Here’s the application; be comfortable with accountability. In your job and in your personal life there should be people who have the right to ask you, graciously, to give an account of your actions just as there are people who are accountable to you. In a culture in which some refuse to be accountable to anyone be a person who recognizes the righteousness of accountability for as Christian we are accountable to our Savior. In fact, the whole world is accountable to Him. It is ironic and counterintuitive but, according to Scripture, the greatest freedom is found in people who are slaves to Christ.

- Conclusion

The cat, in our little joke, wanted to be God, or at least “God” of his own life and it is a fairly common attitude in the world today. The Scriptures for today, both in Matthew and in Ezekiel, reminded us that we are judged by actions, not just intentions, and that as Christians we should be used to accountability, for we are accountable in prayer, in life and ultimately when we meet our Savior face to face.

*<https://upjoke.com/judgement-jokes>