

“Significance” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Last Sunday of the Church Year November 20, 2022

- I. **Colossians 1:13-14** – “¹³He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”
- II. **Deep down, punishment for sins makes sense to us.**
 - a. I read an article in *Christianity Today* magazine by Mark Galli who argues that we recognize the need to punish wrongs because it kind of “balances the moral books,” as he puts it.... And also, “sins must be paid for, as a debt must be paid for.”
 - b. Galli offers a couple of examples:
 - c. We first understand the nature of just punishment as children.
 - i. Your sister keeps changing the channel you are watching on TV to whatever she wants... and she’s rude and stubborn about it until dad finally steps in
 - ii. Now, he might tell her to apologize – where she rolls her eyes and says... “soooooorry” – but you aren’t too satisfied with that.
 - iii. A much better thing for you is when dad says your sister can’t watch TV for a week.... Because you know that punishment is part of the solution to this problem, and if there is no punishment, you feel like justice has been cheated.
 - d. Or take the old storyline that Hollywood regularly uses in revenge movies.
 - i. They are appealing to something deep and basic in the human heart: When a great injustice has been done, retribution is due.
 - ii. The villain does awful things to people, and all through the movie, we want the bad guy caught... but also punished!
 1. The worse the punishment the better!
 2. We keep going to movies like this precisely because of the inner satisfaction we feel when the bad guy gets his just reward and not getting away without punishment. ¹
 - e. We often use the phrase “justice needs to be served” because we feel like apologies and words are not enough.
- III. **So, how do we apply this deep need for justice to ourselves?**
 - a. It’s one thing to demand the maximum punishment for the other guy, but how do we usually respond when it comes to us receiving the punishment?
 - i. Usually it starts with, “I’m not a bad person...” or, “what I did wasn’t that bad,” or maybe, “what about you, haven’t you ever done anything wrong before?”
 - ii. Our own sinful behavior is usually minimized, or we shift the blame, or we try to get the least amount of punishment possible by appealing to a person’s kind heart.

- b. Another way that people respond when they have done wrong is to punish themselves... or to make sure they pay for the wrongs they have done.
 - i. Not everything is a punishable offense by the law... and yet, we all know that we do terrible things to other people – whether it is adultery or fornication, being a bad parent, abandoning loved ones, abortion, racist attitudes toward groups or certain people, or causing trouble with gossip and breaking down the reputation of others.
 - ii. Now, some people go back over their offenses, and they cannot... they will not... believe that repenting and seeking God's forgiveness is enough.
 - 1. Sometimes people get depressed and refuse to experience joy
 - 2. Some will retreat into themselves – they stop going out, eating properly, or spending time with others
 - 3. Still others pick various forms of punishment for themselves like avoiding any successes in life through education or jobs...
 - iii. The people who do this sort of thing usually live with major guilt, and they won't let go of the wreckage in their past – instead, they try to pay for it.

IV. **St Paul gives us some really good news in our reading today.**

- a. He writes this letter to the Church in Colossae to oppose false teachers.
 - i. We aren't sure whether these false teachers were like Judaizers who wanted people to go back to the Old Testament Law... but some evidence suggests that they were teaching that the body and material world were bad, while only the spiritual should be focused on.
 - ii. So, get rid of worldly desires... essentially punish the body into submission and then leave it behind when you die... and you can ultimately be saved by some secret knowledge...
- b. Paul begins this letter with thanksgiving, and then charges right into the truth... There is no secret knowledge that saves, only a real flesh and blood human being that revealed Himself...
- c. The truth is that Jesus Christ is God of heaven AND earth... things invisible AND visible... over the spiritual matters AND the earthly powers.
 - i. Jesus, the Savior long promised through the ages, the one who was involved in the creation of the universe, came in the flesh... in whom "the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." (vs 19)
 - ii. Our Savior broke through the spiritual and invisible realm right into the physical and visible world... and He is King and Lord of both.
- d. The best news of all is that God the Father's rescue mission included delivering those dwelling in darkness and bound for hell into the kingdom of Jesus... the Lord of our redemption... the Lord of our forgiveness of sins

V. **The punishment for our sins is placed on Jesus rather than us.**

- a. We don't always own up to our sinful, broken lives – and maybe we even try to minimize how bad things are...
 - i. I don't remember the Sabbath day always, but most weeks...
 - ii. I love my neighbor most of the time...
 - iii. At least I don't murder or steal...even if I do a few other things
 - iv. And yet we all must admit that our sins are worthy of punishment, and a just God has every right to punish us for them!
 - v. We all fall short of God's glory and the wages of sin is death.
 - vi. However, in the upside down world of grace and mercy, God placed that death sentence on His own Son – and through faith, we receive forgiveness instead.
- b. For some of us, we don't ever let go of our sins... and we seek to make it a point to punish ourselves.
 - i. For those who struggle with the wreckage of the past... the sins that we cannot seem to get over... or the need to pay for our misdeeds...
 - ii. Again, as you repent of these sins and seek His forgiveness, Jesus says, "I took your punishment, you are free."
 - iii. None of this is to say that you might not face worldly consequences for certain decisions in your life – but when it comes to grace through faith, Jesus received the punishment you deserve on a spiritual and eternal level.
- c. The Good News of our salvation in Jesus Christ is clearly stated in our lesson today – along with a couple of verses just after our lesson ended:
 - i. ²⁰ and through [Jesus] God reconciled everything to Himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. ²¹ This includes you who were once far away from God. You were His enemies, separated from Him by your evil thoughts and actions. ²² Yet now He has reconciled you to Himself through the death of Christ in His physical body. As a result, He has brought you into His own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before Him without a single fault. (NLT)
- d. Yes, my friends, God has done the work to make you holy – to bless you – and to give you significance... in Christ.

- VI. **We don't base our value or significance** on our sins or our good deeds.
- a. We have significance because God chose us in Christ from the foundations of the world to be holy and blameless (Ephesians 1:4)
 - b. We have significance not because we deserve it, like we are so good, but because God adopted us as His children through Baptism, by grace through faith... and all of that because He loves us.
 - c. We have significance not because we choose to pay for our sins and have a miserable life of guilt... but because Jesus paid for those sins by His very blood – and who are we to say that's not enough?

- d. I know we want justice and have a deep need to see people held accountable, maybe even ourselves... but God placed that on Christ.
- e. God's love has broken through the darkness and meets you right where you are at... He sees you as right and holy by His work... Thank Him every day that He sees you as significant. Amen.

¹ Mark Galli, *"It Doesn't Get Any More Personal," Christianity Today (January 2018)*