

Do to Jesus the Good in Your Eyes

Jeremiah 26:8-15

The Second Sunday in Lent, February 28, 2010

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

I understand that the Scripture says that Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father. I understand that. I also understand that the Scripture says that He is above every authority, principality and power. I understand that Jesus is above every king. In our day and age that means that Jesus is above every president. He is above every tyrant. He is above every congress and every government. That is to say that Jesus has power over them all. They serve at His pleasure. He dismisses them at His pleasure. I understand that the Scriptures confess these things. I understand that Jesus has full authority over nature. I understand that the earthquake in Haiti occurred under His authority. I understand all of that. I have read Revelation. I have read Colossians. I understand how much power Jesus has sitting at God's right hand.

But just between you and me and I hope I don't get struck by lightning for saying this and if I do that means that I have this wrong, but it seems to me that Jesus sure isn't a very powerful God. In fact it seems to me that when it comes to the things that are the most dearest and precious to the heart of Jesus that is precisely when He is the weakest. He is the weakest God that I have ever seen.

Think about this with me for a moment. The most important thing to Jesus is the salvation of the world. He has died to accomplish it. He rose again from the dead to accomplish it. He wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. But then He makes salvation contingent upon whether or not people believe in Him. That is a matter of the heart.

Jesus does not make salvation contingent upon the joining of a particular group. Jesus does not make salvation contingent upon the performance of a certain action. Jesus does not make salvation a matter that He forces upon you.

Jesus makes salvation a gift. He does not even force you to unwrap it. Faith comes from hearing the message. It is the message about Him and what He has done for you. The most important thing to the heart of Jesus, Jesus entrusts to words. In the end it is a message. It is a message, just like any other message. The only thing that is different about it is that it comes from God. Other than that the words that God uses are just like the words that anybody else would use save for their content.

In other words there is nothing evident to human reason why these words are different than any other words. I do not glow when I preach the Gospel. The Bible does not float off of your nightstand into your hands in order to give you the clue that this book is special.

Jesus does not come down out of heaven in a blaze of glory to refute those people who would oppose His word. In other words there are a bunch of people out there who say that the Bible is stupid. They have historical arguments regarding why the Bible cannot be true. They have logical arguments on why the Bible cannot be true. They have geographical and biological and geological reasons for why the Bible cannot be true. Then the line of reasoning goes: if the Bible is not true then the One about whom the Bible is about is not true. And Jesus is up there in heaven on His glorious throne doing nothing about this. Oh sure, He has His Church oppose such nonsense, but He does not do all of the mighty things at His disposal to defend His word.

Jesus places Himself entirely into the naysayer's hands. They may do anything they wish to Him. They do to Him the good in their eyes.

There are people out there who say the Bible did not come from God. They say that it evolved over time. Therefore the Bible is nothing more than an assembly of religious ideas that have come to us over time. Religious ideas will continue to evolve. Therefore our own religious notions are just as good as what the Scriptures say. Jesus does nothing forceful to resist such nonsense. He does not strike them dead. He does not take away their degrees in theology. He allows them to be on the television spouting this nonsense. He permits millions of people to listen to such talk and be lead astray into damnation. Jesus does nothing at all.

It is the same with the Sacrament of the Altar. Jesus offers no proof that His body and His blood are there. He offers no coercion to get you to eat His body and drink His blood. If you take the consecrated bread and wine and put it under a microscope you are not going to find muscle cells. You are not going to find hemoglobin. You are going to find only bread and wine. Jesus offers only His own words as proof that it is His body and His blood that you are eating and drinking. There is no objective evidence that we should do it. And to say it is for the forgiveness of sins is nothing more than to believe what Jesus has said. There is no objective evidence that says that this forgives sins. That is why the catechism has to fool around with the question, "How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?"

Baptism is not different. It is just water. Jesus offers no proof that this restores us to God. He offers no evidence that it is nothing other than water and that the only thing that happens in Baptism is that it makes you wet. Again the catechism has to answer the question, "How can water do such great things?" The only answer that it gives is because the Word of God says so, but then why should we believe the Word?

I find this frustrating as a preacher. I really wish that as soon as I share the Gospel with someone that they would instantly repent of their sins and believe in Jesus. I really do wish it were that simple. I wish that I did glow like the angels in that TV show, *Touched by an Angel*, so that people would know that I was the messenger sent to them from God to tell them the truth. I wish that I could do miracles like Moses, Elijah or the blessed Apostles so that people would see my miracles and believe what it was that I was telling them. I wish that people were so enamored with my oratory or my reasoned arguments that they handed over their lives to Jesus at a moments hearing of my words. I wish that Jesus would provide these things so that I could get more people to believe in Him. Isn't that what He wants? Doesn't He want all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth? Does not His own word say that? Well then Jesus let's have some show of your almighty power down here so that people will believe in your word and be saved. That is why so many times I wish that I could share the Gospel with a gun pointed at them and say, "Believe the Gospel or else."

But then that wouldn't be faith would it? If someone had a gun pointed to their head and were told to believe in Jesus or else and they said, "Oh, I believe in Jesus," is that really faith? They aren't saying it because they really believe in Jesus. They are saying it because they have a gun pointed to their head.

The five thousand men plus women and children followed Jesus after He fed them with five loaves and two fish. Jesus performed a miracle and they followed Him. Then He preached them a sermon and when Jesus got done preaching, He had twelve left. All five thousand plus people left Him. They were impressed by the miracle, but they did not really believe in Him.

If Jesus came down from heaven in a blaze of thunder and glory and demanded faith, people would say, "Oh Lord, we believe in you!" But that would not be faith either. They would say that only

because they felt threatened by His power and glory. It would not be real faith. It would simply be Jesus putting the screws to them and scaring them half to death in order to get them to say they believe in Him.

Jesus wants real faith. What Jesus is after is your heart. Jesus wants you to come to Him willingly. Jesus wants your loyalty. In order to obtain it, there are no threats. There is no coercion. The servants of Jesus have no coercive power over others. You have coercive powers in your home and community by virtue of the fact that you live in the state and you are fathers and mothers and citizens. But as Christians you have no coercive power, none whatsoever.

Jesus gives you the truth. He may perform a few miracles in order to attract your attention and attest to the truth of His word, but you cannot count on miracles. He won't always perform them. He gives you the truth. He asks you to testify to it. Then He leaves Himself in the power of those who listen to you. They may do to Him the good in their eyes. They may do to Him whatever they want.

Now among other things, that means that Jesus is in your hands. I have no coercive power over you as a pastor, none whatsoever. You do not have to put money in the offering plate. You do not have to come to worship. You do not have to maintain a congregation. You do not have to have a building or pay me. I have no coercive power. The only thing at my disposal is preaching and teaching the word of God and administering the sacraments. I preside at Communion and I baptize. That is really it.

I don't tote a gun. I don't threaten you with jail time if you don't repent. I can't fine you like the government can. Jesus has not given me that authority. In the end people Jesus is in your hands. Whether or not you heed what I say is up to you. Whether or not you read your Bible at home is up to you. Whether or not you get baptized is up to you. Whether or not you eat His body and drink His blood is up to you. Even if you should drop His body or spill His blood on the carpet Jesus is not going to strike you dead. He offers no coercion. All He offers are His promises: forgiveness of sins and life everlasting are here. No defense is offered. No explanation is offered, only the testimony of those who saw Him rise from the dead.

He is in your hands do to Him the good in your eyes. In other words you may do with Jesus anything that you want.

This is why Jesus did not call on those twelve legions of angels. Remember in the Garden of Gethsemane? Judas has betrayed Jesus. The soldiers are arresting Him. Peter pulls out a sword to defend his Lord. Jesus tells Peter to put his sword away. Those who live by the sword and take up the sword shall die by the sword. Then He tells people, "Do you not believe that I cannot call upon My Father in heaven and He will not at once send Me twelve legions of angels?" Well Jesus if the Father will send you twelve legions of angels, get on with it! Don't you know that you will be killed? Where is the power? Where is the glory? Where is that command of the wind and the waves? Where is the power that raised Lazarus from the dead and healed the sick? Where is the power that cast out the demons? Where is it now when it seems like it is most necessary? It is nowhere. Jesus is in their hands. They may do to Him the good in their eyes.

This is why Jesus offered no defense in His trial. The only time He did speak up was to offer evidence that got Him condemned. Jesus was no different in front of Pontius Pilate. He made no defense in court. Instead He discussed Pilate's salvation with Pilate. To have made a defense in court would have been to make use of governmental authority in saving Himself from crucifixion. It would have been coercion. It would have been force. Jesus will have none of this. He is in Pilate's hands. Pilate may do to Jesus the good in his eyes. In other words, Pilate may do to Jesus whatever He wants.

This is why Jesus does not resist the flogging. Jesus does not resist the crucifixion. He does not resist the nails. He does not resist the crown of thorns. He does not resist death. He makes no retaliation. No threats are on His lips.

And then it comes. My wish and my prayer are on the mouth of the Pharisees. "Come down from the cross and we will believe in You!" Do something amazing! Do something spectacular. Do something that will make it beyond a doubt that you are the Savior so that people will see and believe. But then that wouldn't be faith would it? The Word says it, "We live by faith and not by sight." Therefore to live by sight is not to live by faith. If Jesus had come down from the cross, the Pharisees would have said they believed in Him, but it would not have been faith. It would have been sight.

Jesus does not come down from the cross. He is in their hands. They are doing to Him the good in their eyes. By doing so they did bring innocent blood on themselves and on their city. The result is the salvation of the whole world. The result is the forgiveness of the whole world's sins. That is the result.

And so Jesus is in the word. He is in your Bible. Jesus is in the Sacrament of the Altar. Jesus is in Baptism. Jesus is in the preacher. He is in all of these things. Jesus is here at worship. He is in your hands. He has spoken to you all of the words that God the Father sent Him to say to you. Do to Him the good in your eyes. Do you to Him whatever you wish.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.