

Title Slide – “Praises and Pain” – Rev. Peter Paige

It is difficult to know if you have made the right call – the correct judgment, the perfect discernment. Let alone to have other people agree with you. Some will praise what was decided and others will cry out in pain. Today is one of those days I’m especially glad Jesus spoke our language – that God came down as one of us to teach in ways we could better (maybe not perfectly), but better understand.

None of us can get through a single day without making a judgment call. Most mean almost nothing – like what color shirt or shoes to wear. Other decisions are critical to our relationships, our livelihoods, and even our faith. Will we choose to let something go or address it head on – and if we think it’s best to speak with someone – how will we choose our half of the interaction to go? Will we try to explain and seek empathy, re-direct their actions with threats, or seek mutually beneficial scenarios using encouraging words? All have a place.

Slide – “Judgment”

Judgment that is both necessary and difficult.

Our passage from Matthew reminds us judgment is necessary because we cannot allow sin – the harm of others – to continue unchecked. We must address it and bring healing if we can. Either by correcting the problem or by expulsion from the body. We must choose directions – judging which will get us closer to the target – loving God and neighbor. If we do not choose a direction, we won’t grow closer to God. Finally, judgment is necessary in order to learn. If nothing else teaches us – it’s trial and error. Make a choice – see how it goes – make another choice – hopefully a better one. We praise God for health – both personal and of our family and community. We praise God for a direction to work toward and feel accomplished and blessed in the journey. We praise God for learning and growing closer to him.

Judgment is difficult.

With every decision there is difficulty because of the pain involved. The opportunity cost of not doing the other thing. The pain of sacrificing what it takes from us to implement the choice. The pain of losing a relationship or what was sacrificed.

Slide – “God’s Judgment” (a bar weight balancing scale)

Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” The Bible further teaches that God’s judgment is true and right, perfect and inevitable. It is not vindictive or arbitrary, but best of all is tempered by mercy!

Slide – “Difficult Passages”

We need to look to our two scriptures for today - and a third to seek what is necessary to balance the difficulties of judgment.

- The Exodus – Plague of the 1st Borns
- Whatever you loose or bind... in Matthew 18
- Anything you ask in my name... in John 14

Slide: “1st Born Plague”

It seems selfish to relish the pain of oppressors. God’s judgment upon them, however, came with nine other warnings – Moses confronted the Pharaoh before any of the plagues and then before the tenth – the final plague – all the while asking “Will you let my people go?” Pharaoh hardened his heart – he denied who the God of Israel is – and provoked the judgment of pain that would tell the world of God’s power and desire to save God’s people. A judgment call only God could make. The people of Israel were not asked in this moment to enact judgment, but to decide to do what God asked of them – to be ready – to make sure everyone was protected through the night. That’s what they were called to remember and to re-enact...not the pain, but the praise of God’s salvation. Similarly, Christians are not to praise the pain, but to be merciful in warning with options and then remember somberly why judgment is necessary.

Slide: “It will be done”

Let’s look again at Matthew 18:18-20

18 “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Is that right? If I ask God to help me win the lottery will I get what I want? What about if I ask God to make my aging pet live forever or what if I ask her to stop the cancer growing in my sister in Christ. Or what if I ask God to get me a better job? Do we received these things just because two or three of us agree they are good? When we are immature, we think “If I just had enough faith I could ask God and I will be granted my every need,” but very often we see that prayer - even opening and reading the Bible - doesn’t work. So what’s wrong? Is our judgment off? Binding and loosing are what will be done for us – this passage is about forgiveness and judgment - about mercy and communication. With each other, the other who needs to know God, and all of us with God. The goal is to approach others and let them know God – if they don’t show humility – the relationships are broken – we are no longer bound in community with them – that is the meaning of “treat them like a tax collector.”

Slide: "Ask in my name..."

Finally let's go to one last scripture: John 14:12-14

13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

But first Jesus says:

12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

What was this Jesus greatest work? Was it not suffering death - enduring the pain of the cross proving that God would not leave us to eternal damnation, but just as Jesus was raised to glory – we too will receive eternal life. We are invited to greater things. What could these be? - To live through broken relationships to live through cancer or other debilitating diseases, to live through the sometime poor choices of ourselves and others! We ask God to respond to our needs - God does answer prayer by bringing us through the suffering - not necessarily ending the suffering. Beyond the pain – is resurrection to new life, just as Jesus was resurrected to life beyond death.

Final SLIDE

Other sermons will need to help tease out the greater context of prayer in Jesus' name and the power given us by the Holy Spirit, but the study today on the praise of God's judgment necessary for health, and direction, and learning – these are the things we ask for and receive when we ask. We more fully understand the pain of God's perfect judgment and add more mercy to our own judgments. We keep council with other maturing Christians and don't allow the world to become our measuring stick or scale.