

True And Just Are His Judgements

How do you feel about the judgement of God. It's a tricky topic isn't it?

You might have heard me say this before, but often we think about God's judgement as the embarrassing uncle of Christian doctrine.

You know, you're introducing someone to the family: here is God's love, here is His mercy and grace. Who's that over there? oh don't worry about that, that's just God's wrath, it's not important, don't pay any attention to *that*.

We read through a book like 2 Kings and we get to chapter 9 and we just long to hear more of the healing of the sick, the raising of the dead, the care of the widows and the orphans, the feeding of the hungry. Just like the mention of "Hell", the violent judgement of God exacted in this passage upon Joram, Ahaziah, and Jezebel causes us to shift uncomfortably in our seats.

And, of course, there is something right about that. There are not going to be a lot of jokes in this sermon, just so you know, and that's completely appropriate. As we were reminded last week, God's judgement comes with tears. It is not something to be accepted glibly or gleefully. God's judgement *is* serious, and it *is* confronting. It is to be considered soberly and seriously.

And yet, the Bible does not share our *embarrassment* about God's judgement. It speaks openly about the reality of God's wrath, the existence of hell, and the punishment of wickedness and sin. 2 Kings 9 pulls no punches. Nor does Jesus himself, who speaks of judgement far more than just about anyone else in Scripture.

In fact, at times, the Bible *celebrates* God's judgement. It is not a trivial thing, but it is a *good* thing. So the saints cry out in Revelation 19 as God passes his final judgement on sin and the devil:

"Hallelujah!

*Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
for true and just are his judgments.*

*He has condemned the great prostitute
who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.*

He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

According to the Scriptures, God's judgement is good news. The judgement of God is not an embarrassing doctrine, it is in fact a liberating and life-giving doctrine that brings hope and health to our souls.

Perhaps you may need some convincing of that. Well let's consider 2 Kings chapter 9 and the judgement of God.

1. The Confronting Reality of God's Judgement

Now the first thing that must be said is that the reality of God's judgement is truly confronting. There is very little about this chapter that is comfortable. God's judgement on Ahab's household is comprehensive, swift, and gruesome.

First, one of the prophets is sent by Elisha to perform a drive-by anointing of Jehu. He arrives, appoints Jehu as King over Israel, and the judge of Ahab's family, and he gets out of there as fast as he can. And no wonder, given what is about to happen. Listen to the prophet's own words from verse 6:

"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anoint you king over the LORD'S people Israel. 7 You are to destroy the house of Ahab your master, and I will avenge the blood of my servants the prophets and the blood of all the LORD'S servants shed by Jezebel. 8 The whole house of Ahab will perish. I will cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel—slave or free. 9 I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah. 10 As for Jezebel, dogs will devour her on the plot of ground at Jezreel, and no one will bury her.' "

It is grotesque in its description, and grotesque in its execution. The rest of the chapter sees Joram and Ahaziah gunned down in cold-blood. Jezebel is unceremoniously thrown from her window and her body is devoured just as the prophet had said.

This doesn't make for comfortable reading.

And at one level, we might say that the events of this chapter simply *describe* the violent acts of one man Jehu, rather than *prescribe* the nature of God's judgement. And there is a certain truth to that: Jehu is certainly not a model believer. He does not carry out the judgement of God through tears like Elisha the prophet. He seems rather callous, watching Jezebel fall to her death and then coming in for a bite to eat. In the next chapter we will see even more clearly Jehu's shortcomings.

But Jehu's personal faults aside, the details of this passage do not allow us to dismiss this chapter as just an account of human violence. For from the moment the prophet is sent to anoint Jehu, everything in this passage unfolds according to God's own decree.

In fact, the details of the passage don't give us a route of escape from the confronting reality of God's judgement, instead they open up a path to go *deeper* into the reality of judgement. They open up a door to see that there is good news even in the terrible judgement of God. ***In particular, we need to attend to the details of place and prophecy that are littered through the chapter.***

Consider, first of all the way that the writer is constantly drawing our attention to the *place* that all of this unfolds. In verse 21 we are told that Joram and Ahaziah ride out to meet Jehu *at the plot of ground that had belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite*. When Joram is killed, Jehu orders that his body be thrown *on the field that belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite*. Curiously, even Jezebel's body is devoured on a *plot of ground at Jezreel* in verse 36. We are clearly not meant to miss the importance of this place that once belonged to a man called Naboth.

Nor are we to miss that the deaths of Joram, Ahaziah, and Jezebel are recorded as the fulfilment of *prophecy*. Not only does a prophet of God set everything in motion but in verse 25 Jehu recalls a prophecy that the Lord spoke against Ahab way back in 1 Kings chapter 21 . Joram's death unfolds *in accordance with the Word of the Lord* in verse 26. In the same way, Jezebel's gruesome death fulfils *the word of the LORD that he spoke through his servant Elijah the Tishbite* we are told in verse 37.

Here's the big idea: the events of this chapter are not random acts of unrestrained violence. This is God's *justice*. And God's justice is good news.

2. The Good News of God's Perfect Justice

One person who came to understand this is Miroslav Volf. He is a theologian from Croatia. Here is how he describes his own experience.

I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God. Isn't God love? Shouldn't divine love be beyond wrath? God is love, and God loves every person and every creature. That's exactly why God is wrathful against some of them. My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come. According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed and over 3,000,000 were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalised beyond imagination, and I could not imagine God not being angry. Or think of Rwanda in the last decade of the past century, where 800,000 people were hacked to death in one hundred days! How did God react to the carnage? By doting on the perpetrators in a grandparently fashion? By refusing to condemn the bloodbath but instead affirming the perpetrators' basic goodness? Wasn't God fiercely angry with them? Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love. - Miroslav Volf

Do you see? The judgement of God is what happens when His perfect love encounters genuine evil in the world.

In 1 Kings 21, Naboth was falsely accused, and brutally killed, all because Ahab and Jezebel wanted the field that belonged to him. The verdict at the end of that whole affair was that *"There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols..."* (verses 25-26)

And now in this chapter we are told that God saw all the wickedness committed against Naboth. And now he is bringing it to account. The writer of Kings wants us to be completely clear: these are not random acts of violence, nor is God flying off the handle in a fit of irrational rage.

The wrath of the Triune God is exactly the opposite of a character blip or a nasty side in him. It is the proof of the sincerity of his love, that he truly cares. His love is not mild-mannered and limp; it is livid, potent and committed.¹

The judgement of God is, when all is said and done, his loving justice. And that is good news. Because it means that God is not indifferent to evil in the world. And, can I make this clear, God is not indifferent to the evil that *you* face in the world.

Naboth was not a man of great honour and prestige. He was a humble farmer. Yet God has recorded his name for us to know that God is on the side of the weak and the oppressed.

¹ From *Delighting in the Trinity* by Michael Reeves

If you have been the victim of abuse or injustice, be assured, God has seen it and he will bring about his perfect justice.

If you have been exploited, if what was yours was robbed from you, be assured, God has seen it and he will bring about his perfect loving justice.

If you have been the victim of evil committed by someone who was meant to be a leader of God's people, be especially assured, God is not indifferent to your suffering, he has seen it and he will bring about his perfect loving justice.

If you have suffered as a result of hypocrisy, or oppression, if your friends at school have abandoned you, if the weight of the world seems to be bearing down upon you and you think that nobody cares.

Whatever else we might say about suffering and evil, we simply cannot say *God shrugs*.

Brothers and sisters, hear the good news of the justice of God:
God cares. God loves.

3. The Confronting Reality of Our Own Sin

And yet, I suspect that most of us, though we can understand the justice of God intellectually, are still emotionally disquieted by the topic of God's judgement. It's one thing to get it in our heads, but in our hearts the discomfort remains.

And I want to suggest that the reason for this is that, deep down, we recognise that we, too, deserve God's judgement. For who could possibly stand before the perfect justice of God? Who could enter into his presence confident in their own righteousness? My contention is that we all know intuitively what the Bible states explicitly again and again.

The apostle Paul picks up the words of several Psalms in Romans 3:

*"There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.
All have turned away,
they have together become worthless,
there is no one who does good,
not even one."*

For sure, our sin seems of a totally different order to the Jezebel's and Ahab's of the world.

And yet haven't we all taken from others something which belonged to them. Haven't we all silenced and sidelined those who would speak the truth to us.

Haven't we all stubbornly ignored the Word of God and resolutely pursued our own way, no matter the collateral damage it leaves in our wake.

We squirm at the mention of Hell, because we know that it is not only the Jezebels and Hitlers of this world who stand condemned. We shrink back from the justice of God because we know that what each of us really needs is mercy.

2 Kings 9 brings all of this into sharp relief. Like Jehu's Chariot coming ever-faster into view, the judgement of God looms large on the horizon, inescapable.

Consider Joram and Ahaziah: they make a run for it. They try to get as far as they can from God's anointed judge. But the getaway is doomed from the start.

Consider Jezebel: She puts on her makeup and attempts to flatter her way out of trouble, trying to play on Jehu's desire.

She tries to outwit Jehu, too. She calls him Zimri – the name of a previous Israelite commander who killed his King, only to die a week later. "Be careful Jehu", she says "killing me will put you in a precarious position. You might need to keep me around.

But it doesn't matter how pretty you are, or how powerful you are. You cannot flatter your way out of God's judgement. You cannot flee the justice of God.

4. The Good News of the Gospel

So how on earth could we possibly say that the doctrine of God's judgement is liberating? When confronted with the reality of God's justice and our own sinfulness, what hope can there possibly be?

Did you notice in this chapter that there is one place of safety? There is one place of escape from the coming judgement of God. And it is not to flee *from* the judgement to come, instead it is to run *to the judge* and to take refuge with *him*.

Look again at verse 18:

Joram and Ahazia see Jehu coming furiously toward them and they send a horseman out to meet him. The horseman asks if he comes in peace. And Jehu replies, *What do you have to do with peace? Fall in Behind me.*

Then the same thing happens again, a horseman rides out, "Do you come in peace?" But then they fall in behind Jehu. Then again, the eunuchs in Jezebel's palace flip sides and end up eating a meal with the new King. If you want to be safe from God's judgement, get on the same side as the judge.

The judgement of God, and passages like 2 Kings 9, are so necessary for us, because they completely disabuse us of the notion that we could ever stand by God on our own merits. They liberate us from trusting in ourselves, turning us out to look to someone else. They lead us to life by prompting us to cry out in need, to recognise our own helplessness that we would run to Jesus the coming judge of the world. We fall in behind *him*, and it's there that we find peace and eternal gratitude in *His* salvation.

This is the source of hope and health for our souls that we all desperately need. It is when we are *with the judge* that we are spared the judgement. As we read in Romans 8:1,

*Therefore, there is now **no condemnation** for those who are **in Christ Jesus our Lord**.*

This is the good news of the gospel. The good news that God loves the world so much that he judges evil for what it is. AND that God loved the world so much that he took that judgement upon himself on the cross. *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whœver believes in him, would not perish but have eternal life.*

And so can I ask you this morning, are you with the judge? Have you fallen in behind the One True King? Are you *in Christ Jesus*? Do you believe in the one and only Son of the Father?

In another place, Miroslav Volf says this about the judgement of God:

“God will judge, not merely because God gives people what they deserve, but because some people refuse to receive what no one deserves. If evildoers experience God’s terror, it will not only be because they have done evil, but because they have resisted to the end the powerful lure of the open arms of the crucified messiah.”

Do you know I think this is the great sadness of this chapter. As we read about the end of Joram and Ahaziah, and the fall of Jezebel, this is not the first time they have encountered God. Time and time again, God has sent his prophet to these wicked rulers, calling them to repent and come back to him. He has demonstrated his power, he has displayed his compassion, and time and time again they have turned away.

It reminds me of this verse from the prophet Isaiah where God says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.” (Isaiah 65:2; c.f. Romans 10:21)

This is what God did for Joram, and Ahaziah, and Jezebel, and they rejected him. This is what God does for you. On the cross, Jesus stretches his arms out to the world. He opens wide his arms for you, bleeding and dying, pleading with you to come Home. To turn away from your sin, and trust in him.

If you feel like you have never said Yes to that offer, please don’t leave here without accepting the gift of God’s grace. All you need to do is ask God quietly in prayer for his mercy. To admit that your sin is real, and to thank Jesus for taking the punishment you deserve.

And brothers and sisters, for all of us who know our own sin, and have thrown ourselves at the feet of Jesus and received his mercy. Let us overflow with thanks to God for his perfect justice, and his perfect love, and the grace and peace that we have all received in our Lord Jesus.

For with him, we have nothing to fear. In him, there is no condemnation. Through him, we will not perish but have eternal life:

(For) he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. - Hebrews 9:26-28