

O Lord Jesus Christ, before whose judgment-seat we must all appear and give account of the things done in the body: Grant, we beseech You, that when the books are opened in that day, the faces of Your servants may not be ashamed; through Your merits, O blessed Savior, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colqhoun, p. 27)

Then [Jesus] began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you." At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

In Christ Jesus, through whom the love of the Father in heaven has been revealed to you, dear fellow redeemed:

As you approach the great and final day of judgment, do you feel like the accused criminal waiting outside the courtroom, hands cuffed and legs shackled - waiting to be brought in to hear the verdict especially as the accused knowing you are guilty? Once the jury has reached its verdict, you will be at least temporarily unshackled and escorted in, awaiting the arrival of the judge. What shall be the verdict you will hear on that great and final day? Actually God wants you to know already, you need not guess. You will hear on that day that you are **Blessed by the Father, His Son Bore Your Condemnation.**

I

Contrary to how most want to characterize Jesus today, He did on occasion speak harsh judgment and threatened to speak such a way on the last day. Our text is an example of this. He denounced three cities where He had performed many miracles, all on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee, Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. Jesus had spent much of His

time and efforts in this area during His three years of public ministry. But despite these many opportunities to witness who He was, the Son of God come in the flesh and to hear the blessed truth of God's love and salvation for them, these cities' inhabitants by and large remained impenitent.

So Jesus contrasted them to places which were known for their great impenitence and were condemned – the home country of the despicable Queen Jezebel, Tyre and Sidon; and the wicked city of Sodom which was destroyed with fire and brimstone. Jesus points out that in the judgment to come it will be more bearable for those ancient cities than the cities of His day, which rejected Him.

Now the judgment for those ancient cities would still be one of eternal condemnation, so how will it be more bearable for them? They certainly will still be made accountable for their sin and unbelief, but the greater shame and regret will be felt by those who had Jesus, the Savior, personally visible and audible in their midst. Imagine the *"kicking of themselves"* that will take place as they stand before the very One they had seen and heard, but rejected in this life.

Why would they have rejected Jesus, when it was so plain as He went about performing many miracles? They considered themselves to be too wise. No doubt many were willing to have a Christ to follow who helped them improve their lives to make themselves ready to present themselves acceptable before God. The Gospel that God has done all to save us through His Christ does not fit with the inflated view of oneself. The Gospel of which Jesus spoke always seems foolish to the world of unbelief, which by nature is proud and self-righteous.

Jesus words denouncing these cities should be quite sobering for us today. We are blessed with His gracious presence too in the appointed means of Word and Sacrament. We are set free from the curse of the Law to serve our neighbors in this life, the least of the brothers of Jesus in this life. But do we not often fail? Do we not resort to thinking like the wise in this world that God will accept us based on our goodness? Being so self-focused do we not often end up neglecting the needs of our neighbors to feed, clothe and visit them when in need? These least of the brothers of Jesus, do not have to be total strangers, but those closest to us. We have to confess that it is more often those closest whom we neglect and abuse with unkind words and uncharitable deeds as we seek to fulfill our selfish desires.

You live in the rich presence of Jesus who liberally forgives all your sins and clothes you with His pure righteousness as you receive His grace in Word and Sacrament. How pitiful it is that you still sin against Him and the least of His brothers. Will it be more bearable for Tyre, Sidon and Sodom in the judgment than for you too? Or worse yet more tolerable for Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum?

II

In the repentance that God has graciously worked in you, even without the sackcloth and ashes, you must answer that you truly deserve to be more miserable in the judgment than all others. But in that repentance which God has worked in you, you also cling to the One whom He has sent for you and all sinners. This was His gracious plan for us from the creation of the world. We, the wicked sinners that we are, have been declared right before our Creator God through the person and work of His Son in our behalf.

We rejoice in this truth clearly revealed by God to us His children: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.” Far from the condemning frown, our Lord smiles upon us on account of all that Jesus has done for us through His perfect life, holy sacrifice and glorious resurrection.

When God tells us that in Christ He remembers our sins no more, He means it. Look at how our Gospel lesson describes our judgment. We, who believe in Jesus, will be gathered to His right and although He will judge all our deeds and words, He will not bring up one sin committed by us. He will only speak of the righteous things we have done for Him. This will be a surprise, because in our daily repentance now, we do not forget our sins. We are ashamed of them, some which we would never speak about to anyone else because our shame is so great. But Jesus bore them all on that cross, they died with Him and shall be remembered no more. He knew those sins intimately and personally. He was charged with every last one of them and made to suffer God’s eternal wrath for them all.

Recall these words of our Lord in John, chapter three: “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the

world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

We are truly blessed by the Father, His Son bore our sins and therefore also our condemnation, our eternal condemnation. We need not fear the judgment, the verdict has already been declared. It is well beyond just being declared "*Not Guilty*", we are declared to be eternally righteous! Be sober, be vigilant, Jesus is here among us even today performing His great works among us through voice, water, bread and wine. Continue to repent of all your sins, which deserve eternal death, and trust that in Christ Jesus there is now no condemnation awaiting you, but rather the sweet invitation to receive the blessed inheritance provided for you, the righteous ones, by the Father through the work of His Son. Amen.