**First Things First . . . ABC’s of the Christian Life**

Jesus, Judgment, and Those Difficult People

Advent, Week One: What does it mean to HOPE in God? Isaiah 64:1-9

**The Problem:** We rightly long for a day when God deals with oppression. “Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down . . .to make your name known to your adversaries.”

 Let’s face it, life often is discouraging. We see the guilty go free, the innocent killed, and leaders lying to us with no one to hold them accountable. In our own families there are betrayals, broken promises, and abuses from people who are supposed to protect us. Is God not watching? Why doesn’t He do something? When will someone deal with the difficult people in our lives? You aren’t the only one asking! See David’s complaints in Psalms 3; 4; 7; 10; etc. How does real hope work? And how does hope for tomorrow help my soul when I face difficult people today?

**The Answer:** Don’t be confused. God is just, but also merciful. Choose: Outrageous Grace or Aborted Vindictiveness Matthew 18:21-35

 As Jesus tells His disciples how they should correct sin in their midst, and forgive it, Peter sought to know the outward limits of grace. How far does it reach? How many times must I do this? After Jesus tells him 70 x 7, he illustrates with the parable of the two debtors. In a chilling conclusion, the unforgiving servant is cast into outer darkness, and Jesus warns Peter and the others, “So also will my heavenly Father do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” The lesson is clear enough. Receive and give grace, or face the fury of God’s wrath forever by trying to extract your “pound of flesh” from those who have wronged you.

**The Dynamic:** The Holy School of Divine Accounting. “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on Him.”

 We humans “keep score,” but only God judges according to righteous judgment. And He has decreed that all who believe in Him shall be saved, while those who reject His offer of grace He will leave to themselves to perish in their own gracelessness. It was first said of Abraham that he believed God, and therefore, God “accounted it to him for righteousness.” Genesis 15:6. It still works this way, and always has, as Paul points out in Romans 3-5.

 Our duty is to receive this grace that God offers us through His Son, and then extend and proclaim that grace to the nations. 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. The way it works is that ALL sins, each and every sin ever committed will be paid for in full. For those who receive God’s offer of grace, those sins are paid for on the Cross of Christ. For those who refuse God’s offer of grace, they will bear their own sins and the punishment for those sins forever. Ecclesiastes 8:10-13; 2 Peter 2:4-9; 3:7

**And for now?** Four hope-cultivating reminders in dealing with difficult people:

1. Pray for them. Even our enemies can be saved. Matthew 5:43-48; Acts 7:60

2. Refuse to be entangled with them. We complicate our lives unnecessarily when we argue with fools or try to reform them. Proverbs 9:7, 8; 19:19; 23:9

3. Take off your judge’s robe. Leave the judgment to God in His time and His way.

 Luke 9:51-56; Romans 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15; 4:3-5

4. Pursue peace and holiness as you, yourself, await judgment. Romans 12:17-21; 1 Peter 3:14-17; 4:12-19; 2 Corinthians 5:10

*Hope in a righteous, merciful God allows us to leave judgment to Him and show grace to others as He has shown grace to us, pursuing peace and holiness and keeping our own lives free of anger and revenge.*