

Ezekiel 9:1-11. Then I heard him call out in a loud voice, "Bring the guards of the city here, each with a weapon in his hand." 2 And I saw six men coming from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with a deadly weapon in his hand. With them was a man clothed in linen who had a writing kit at his side. They came in and stood beside the bronze altar.3 Now the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple. Then the LORD called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side 4 and said to him, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it."5 As I listened, he said to the others, "Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. 6 Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple.7 Then he said to them, "Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go!" So they went out and began killing throughout the city. 8 While they were killing and I was left alone, I fell facedown, crying out, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! Are you going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel in this outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?"9 He answered me, "The sin of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice. They say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land; the LORD does not see.' 10 So I will not look on them with pity or spare them, but I will bring down on their own heads what they have done."11 Then the man in linen with the writing kit at his side brought back word, saying, "I have done as you commanded"

Judgment is coming!

- 1. The LORD has put a mark of deliverance on you.***
- 2. The LORD sees the wickedness of this world.***
- 3. Pray that God may spare others from the coming wrath.***

Judgment Day; the very words can send a certain chill down our spine. The idea of being held accountable to God for every one of our thoughts, our words, and our actions is a truly a chilling thought. Certain sections of Scripture add to our awareness of just how serious God is about sin. Certain sections of Scripture flash intense visions before our eyes of the coming judgment for those who reject Jesus and his word. This is certainly one of section of Scripture that carries such imagery. We cringe, and rightfully so, when we read these words from the book of Ezekiel. This is a vision of God's righteous wrath going out with justice against those who reject him.

Ezekiel chapter 8 details the sins of God's people. We are told in this chapter that God reached out and grabbed Ezekiel by the hair and took him somewhere between earth and heaven to show him the rampant disobedience of God's people. By means of powerful visions he was able to see both the blatant and the secret sins of those who were meant to

serve God. So many had rejected the true God; even those that were appointed to serve as the spiritual leaders of the people. For example, King Manessah was so bold to have erected an Asherah pole and placed it in the temple of God. (2 Kings 21:7). The priests seemed to stand idly by as Manessah had also constructed an altar to the starry hosts. (2 Chronicles 33:4-7) Others were not so blatant in their practices, but still committed idolatry. Many went through the motions of worship in the temple of God but yet gave their hearts to other idols. Therefore, God shouted into the ear of his servant that he could not stand it any longer. The hot breath of his wrath would be sent out against his people. Ezekiel chapter 8 ends this way: ***Therefore I will deal with them in anger; I will not look on them with pity or spare them. Although they shout in my ears, I will not listen to them.*** [Ezekiel 8:18]

And so our words for our lesson today, the entirety of Ezekiel chapter 9, these are words that describe a vision of the coming judgment. This is a vision of the servants of God, his mighty angels, with weapons of destruction in their hands ready to bring judgment at God's direction.

But did you catch it? Did you catch the glimmer of hope, the display of God's grace, even in the midst of the carnage described in Ezekiel's vision? The first order that the God of Israel, the great Jehovah, would give was not one of destruction but of pure grace. When Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord rise up from the cherubim, from the Ark of the Covenant, and when it made its way out toward the threshold of the temple, the LORD spoke. It was then that the great Jehovah, the LORD God, called out his marching orders; and the first order he gave, was not to those weapons of destruction in hand, but he spoke first to the man in linen, the man with the writing kit and his instructions were to go out and save. Do you recall these words? ***Then the LORD called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side⁴ and said to him, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it."*** God would provide deliverance for his people even in the midst of such terrible destruction.

In his grace God sent out his messengers like Ezekiel to share the word of the Messiah. Through this word God spared a remnant of his people Israel. They believed in the coming Savior. They held onto this promise despite the idolatry of their kings and priests. They held onto the promise of the Savior despite the destruction of their nation, exile into a foreign land, and the demolition of the temple in Jerusalem.

In his grace God preserved his people and preserved his promise. He sent out his one and only Son to speak and fulfill this word of truth as well. In his mercy he has preserved that Word until now and has planted faith in the hearts of many. He brought faith to our hearts. He has brought us to believe in Jesus as our Savior. Through Jesus Christ we have been delivered from God's coming wrath.

Just like he did for those that he spared in Israel, God has put his mark on you. Ever since the day that God came into your life, whether it was through faith in the Word, or through the power of baptism, you have been spared from the coming judgment. When you were baptized, the sign of the cross was made over your head and your chest and you were marked as a redeemed child of Christ. Christ Jesus has delivered you. He has put his mark on you. You belong to Christ and with this mark he has set us apart from this wicked

world. And so because you belong to Christ, and because Christ is in your heart, the things that you and I see in this world are often detestable for we are foreigners and strangers in this world of sin, we belong to Christ.

Do you watch the news at night and often get frustrated by the immorality that surrounds us? Do you read the news and feel sick to your stomach when you read that more and more states are legalizing gay marriage? Are you troubled and irritated by the laws that are being made to uphold the right to kill the unborn? Are you troubled and grieved, when you see fellow Christians, religious leaders, and entire church bodies compromise their beliefs and their teaching to correspond with the corrupted morals of our day? Does your heart drop, does your heart ache, when you see so many twisting and manipulating the word of God to create for themselves a god and a religion that suits their wants and desires? The Lord tells us we should feel such frustration. He tells us that we should be so repulsed by the ways of this world. The Lord warns us that such immorality, such detestable things will be around his people as long as this sinful world exists. Therefore, as a child of God, as those who bear his name and his mark, we should be bothered by things that go against our God's will until God brings about his judgment and justice.

But the pressure is always there to give in and get used to these detestable things. There is always this pressure to see these things as just the way the world is headed and accept them as the new normal. Many in this world try to convince us that we should just 'get with the program' and 'lighten up'. After all, if there is a God, he doesn't care how you live your life or how anyone else lives theirs. With twisted yet persuasive logic the godless pollute the earth with their sin and then blame God that there is trouble and pain and grief in the land. They say God is not watching. They say he doesn't care and you should just be true to yourself. They fashion for themselves their own personal gods and invite you to do the same. *"Live how you want to live. Do what you want to do. Believe what you want to believe. After all, you are accountable to no one except yourself."* It is the same sad tale. People still today use the same phrases that God laid before Ezekiel as evidence of Israel's rebellion and Judah's waywardness, ***They say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land; the LORD does not see.'***

Let us remember that the LORD is watching. He does want us to fear, love, and trust in him above all things. He does care how we live our lives. The LORD God will not let the wicked go unpunished, but he will see that justice is done. He will not let the godless trample on his name.

As believers, we pray often as our Lord Jesus taught us, "deliver us from evil", and he will. Our Lord keeps us from evil in our daily lives and there will come a day when he will bring an end to the evil of this world. Those who reject him in their hearts and in their actions, they will have to give an account to God. They will have to stand before God and try to explain themselves and their actions but will have no excuse before a holy God. And because the LORD has found their hearts and their lives lacking he will strike them down. He will destroy them. He will condemn them to everlasting destruction without exception.

This is another point that is brought out so severely in this section of Scripture. The Lord calls out to his angels, those appointed punishers, those guards of the city, and he tells them to ***6 Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, without***

showing pity or compassion... Begin at my sanctuary. It didn't matter for those in Jerusalem who they were or where they were, destruction came for young and old, man and woman, peasant or high ranking church official. It doesn't matter who you are or where you are today, those who reject God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they will be struck down on the Last Day. That is the stern warning that we have before us in God's Word. Judgment is coming! Don't give in to the ways of wickedness that surround you, remember that the LORD is watching, find refuge and deliverance in the Lord Jesus, and pray.

As Ezekiel watched in anguish he fell facedown and prayed. He cried out to the LORD and prayed for his people. **"Ah, Sovereign LORD! Are you going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel in this outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?"** May we also pray for the people of our world, our nation, our community, and even our congregation! As we approach the LORD we are not only to pray deliver us from evil, but we are to pray for the people of this wicked world. We will pray that those who are lost will be found before it is too late. We will pray that many will hear the word, believe in Jesus, and be baptized so that they may be spared from the coming wrath, for this is a truly horrible fate. But as we pray we are also comforted by this wonderful assurance that God gives us in his word: God knows who are his. God has put his mark on his people. He brings judgment, but he also offers deliverance. Remember how the ninth chapter of the book of Ezekiel ends. **¹¹ Then the man in linen with the writing kit at his side brought back word, saying, "I have done as you commanded."** God had placed his mark on his people. God had brought about deliverance for those who had faith in the LORD and were grieved over the sins that surrounded them. God has put his mark on us. God has delivered us from the judgment that is coming upon this wicked world. What grace is revealed even in this troubling reading! What wonderful assurance and confidence we have as we consider the fact that we will one day stand before the throne of God and his judgment seat and we will be seen as worthy through Christ Jesus!

For weeks upon weeks during the church year, we speak of God's mercy, we focus on his compassion and we ponder his great love, and even in a reading like this one that graphic describes the wrath of God we also see the graciousness of our God. That he would spare some, that he would put a mark on his people to deliver them, that he would put his mark on us, and that he would give us this blessed assurance as we consider judgment; there are all truly signs of his grace. But we need this reminder too: Our God is powerful, and our God is a just God. As it says in the book of Nahum, **³ The LORD is slow to anger and great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet...⁵ The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. ⁶ Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him. (Nahum 1:3,5-6)**

May the Lord lead us all to fear his wrath, find refuge in Christ, find assurance in our baptism, resist the evil of this world, cling to his promises, and pray for those who do not yet know the Lord Jesus, because Jesus is coming again. He is coming in glory with his mighty angels to judge the living and the dead. Consider his great power. Marvel in his glory. Give thanks for his grace. Amen.