

2nd Sunday in End Times – Final Judgment – Year C – November 7, 2010

Based on Ezekiel 9:1-10 – written by Pastor Paul Horn

“You are Sheltered from the Day of Destruction”

¹ Then I heard him call out in a loud voice, “Bring near those who are appointed to execute judgment on the city, 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 ⁴and 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 the old men, the young men and women, the mothers and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary.” So they began with the old men 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, “Alas, 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 people 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.”

An opinion poll from *The NewsEnterprise* this past week asked its readers: Did you take shelter when the tornado warnings rang out last Tuesday? 60% of the people who responded indicated that they did nothing, only 40% took shelter. That same day an article ran reporting that the staff at Central Hardin High School didn’t do anything to protect their students either. Why not heed warnings especially when a tornado severely damaged that same school a couple of years ago. We’ve seen the destruction tornadoes can create, especially loss of human life, and that can paint a scary picture.

Our lesson this morning is from Ezekiel, and the story, quite honestly, is very disturbing. To help us understand the vision that Ezekiel is seeing we need to read the previous chapter, which I will summarize now. But it is perhaps even more disturbing.

Ezekiel was one of the LORD’s prophets one of the thousands who had been taken captive by the Babylonian army when they invaded Jerusalem the first time. 10 years later King Nebuchadnezzar would destroy the city and burn the temple to the ground. This was about 600 years before Christ was born. One day while sitting in his home, in exile, in Babylon, Ezekiel had a vision. In his dream a divine messenger, an angel, took him by the hair of his head and transported him from Babylon to Jerusalem, and dropped him in the temple. There the angel showed Ezekiel the reason for the judgments of God upon his people.

Ezekiel saw idols erected in the temple courts. He saw images of animals, crawling things and other detestable things drawn on the walls of the temple courts. What was worse Ezekiel saw 70 elders standing before the images on the walls, offering incense. Incense symbolized prayers going up to heaven, in this case, prayers to false gods. The spiritual leaders of the people were leading their people astray, in God’s own temple. Ezekiel saw women mourning for a false god called Tammuz. The women thought he was dying,

because the plants were withering, and he was a fertility god. Ezekiel saw men turning their backs on the temple to bow down the rising sun in the east.

All of these abominations took place in Jerusalem at one time or another in the history of Israel. Especially during the reign of King Manasseh. King Manasseh built altars in the temple so that he could worship the stars and moon and sun. He sacrificed his own son in the fire. He practiced sorcery and divination and consulted mediums and spiritists. He led his people astray so that they did more evil than the nations that were before them. He shed so much innocent blood that Jerusalem was filled with dead from one end to another (2Kings 21).

Do you understand why God was so angry? Do you understand why Ezekiel saw the glory of the LORD leaving the temple? (9:3) Remember that the LORD used a pillar of cloud as a visual symbol of his presence. Here Ezekiel sees it leaving the temple, leaving his people. And what is God supposed to do, when he has done all he can for his people, people who are so rebellious and unwilling to repent and turn away from the false gods who are no gods at all?

In his vision Ezekiel hears the LORD, “[He] called in a loud voice.” I’m sure that those of you who went through basic training still remember the shrill, clear voice of your drill sergeant in your ear. How much more so the thunderous voice of God! When he speaks, people move! Ezekiel sees 6 guards march into the city, six angels, wielding a deadly weapon, ready for battle.

The LORD commanded them, “Go out and kill, without showing pity or compassion, slaughter, spare none, beginning with the elders of the people in the temple,” the spiritual leaders who should have known better! God brings judgment on his own people, how much more serious for those who do not believe!

Ezekiel’s dream was not only a picture of the impending destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 10 years, but the prophet has a front row seat of the final judgment, the Last Day. Our Second Lesson from 1Thessalonians 1:3ff, the apostle Paul wrote, “The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels, he will punish those who do not know God and do not believe the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.” They will be put to death, eternal death, a suffering in hell with Satan and his evil angels.

It should not surprise us on the last day that we hear screams and cries for mercy, but none will be given. The Last Day of Judgment will be no time for second chances, and gods they worshiped in their hearts will not be able to protect them from God’s wrath.

We know this day is coming soon. Jesus told his disciples about the signs of the end times, wars, famine, an insurgence of false prophets, and natural disasters.

Especially if you lived in one particular nation on earth, you would be constantly reminded of Jesus’ second and final coming, Indonesia. 50% of world’s active volcanoes are located in Indonesia, one of them erupting

several times in the past week, claiming over 100 lives, displacing 1million people from their homes. And scientists speculate that the worst is yet to come. And just last week another tsunami hit the islands, killing over 400.

We cannot imagine such a natural disaster hitting Louisville and all the people living in the city and the surrounding area are displaced from their homes because the exposure to such a natural disaster would make living downright dangerous. It is hard for us to imagine this scenario and how such a tragedy would affect our emotions and our faith.

I believe there are times in our life when we do face our own “disasters” that leave us feeling exposed and unprotected. A child begins school for the first time and the mother or father feels a detachment, knowing that they cannot be by their child’s side to protect from bullies and the negative influences of their peers and secular agnostic teaching. A Soldier deploys, and even though he/she trusts in their Kevlar and armor plated Hummvee, there is constant danger. The mission exposes the Soldier to attack, injury and death. The spouse of the Soldier sits at home, apprehensive about the safety of his/her marriage partner, exposed to loneliness and depression. The family who watches their loved one slowly decay from sickness and disease, fearful of separation, exposed to thoughts of anger toward God, loneliness and depression.

It often happens in these moments that we feel unprotected by God himself. We feel that he has left us all alone. That’s a scary picture, that we could imagine that God would leave us unprotected from the world and its physical dangers, but how much more so, the thought that God would abandon us in times of spiritual danger! If God indeed dropped his defenses around us, then we have every reason to despair and be afraid, for then the destruction described in Ezekiel’s dream is true of us. Where would we turn to escape our own fears and God’s wrath? We may feel this way at times, but our feelings are often far from the truth of God’s comforting promises and abiding presence in our lives!

In the days of the westward expansion in North America, when men saw a prairie fire sweeping over the landscape, what would they do? There was no way for them to outrun it. The pioneers took a match, burned the grass in a designated area around them, and then they would take their stand in the burned area. As the roar of the flames approached, they would not be afraid. Even as the ocean of fire surged around them there was no fear, because fire had already passed over the place where they stood.

Jesus once said, "I have come to bring fire upon the earth." There is no escaping the judgment that Jesus will bring. All must stand before him on the Last Day. There is only one safe place to stand and that is where the match of God's judgment has been struck: The foot of the cross. For our sins of fear, anxiety, of abandoning God, the wildfire of God’s wrath has already passed. There on the cross God’s judgment and the fires of hell were already endured by Jesus Christ. Here at the cross, is the only place you and I can stand fearless on the Last Day and be completely safe from the Judgment fire that will roar around us.

The angels will be there on that Judgment Day. The angels will sound a loud trumpet call. The dead will be raised. All will be gathered. Things that have never before been seen or heard will take place. But you, my friends, will not be fearful. You will be confident, for you are sheltered from the Day of Destruction. **“Then**

the LORD called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side ⁴and 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.” The mark is the Hebrew letter tau, the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet which originally looked like an “x.” 700 years later the apostle John sees a similar event in his revelation of Jesus Christ, “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” (Revelation 7:3) As I look around the congregation this morning, I do not see any marks on anyone’s forehead...

The Apostle Paul in 2Corinthians 1.22 explains, “[**God**] **set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.**” The Holy Spirit, working through the waters and Word of baptism, put his mark or seal on you, telling you and Satan and all his demons that you belong to Christ Jesus. For in Holy Baptism, the Holy Spirit marked you with Christ’s blood. Just as the mark of lamb’s blood sprinkled over the doorframe caused the angel of death to pass over the homes of the faithful Israelites in Egypt, so also on Last Day of judgment, the angels of death will pass over you, for you have received the mark, the blood of the Lamb of God. Ezekiel heard the LORD say in his vision, “**Do not touch anyone who has the mark.**” There will be the angels of death on the Last Day, but there will be other angels who do God’s bidding. Scripture tells us that they will come and gather the elect, you and all believers, into heaven. There you will be protected by God’s presence. There will be no more death, weeping mourning or pain. (Rev 21:4). There you will always be protected, for your enemies will have been destroyed.

In a few minutes God will remind you and reassure you through his Son’s blood and body given with this bread and wine that He has indeed put his mark on you, that the blood of Christ took God’s righteous judgment upon himself, and that you are sheltered from the fires of hell.

When we observe the world around us, it would make sense that each of us live in constant fear; tornadoes, accident, disease, the dangers of war, earthquakes, hurricanes, death all around. When we ponder our own mortality it would completely natural to shake in fear, knowing that we have to answer to our Maker for all that we’ve done. But you are different. You will live as a composed individual. You will face your disasters with resolved and hope. You will even look at death with confidence, because you know that are sheltered by the cross of Christ. Amen.