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WHY JUDGEMENT?

“If we are saved if we believe Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and accept him as our Lord and savior then why do we have to have judgement day?” Someone asked this perceptive question recently, and it deserves a good answer. People generally have misconceptions about judgement in general and “the judgement” in particular. Perhaps a little closer look at the scriptures can shed a little light on this subject.

One common view of the judgement is that (with all eternity to complete it) each of us will stand before God and watch a video of our lives, especially the sins. Then, if our good outweighs the sin we will be allowed into heaven. This is how most children seem to view it. It is also the view of the legalist, who has to ask, “Will I go to hell if.” Of course, this is also wrong. It is similar to the ancient Egyptian view. When one dies, they said, his *maat* (roughly equivalent to a soul) is weighed against a feather. If it is heavier than the feather, the *maat* was consumed by the crocodile headed god and the person was obliterated.

Christian scriptures paint a different picture. Our good is not weighed against the bad; none of us can do enough good to counteract one sin. A single sin is enough to make us guilty before God. “Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” (Jas 2:10) That is where Jesus comes in. “But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” (Heb 9:26) His blood removes sin, so that there is no guilt to weigh against anything. But, then why is there a judgement?

Another view of the judgement is that of a criminal court. We are the defendants, standing with our lawyer at our side. If our lawyer is good (that is, if he is Jesus) then he can convince God not to condemn us. If our lawyer is not so good, then we don't stand a chance. Depending on who is standing beside you, it is a foregone conclusion what the sentence will be. While there may be some validity in this, it again begs the question, then why is there a judgement? If we go into the trial knowing who is innocent and who is guilty, why hold what amounts to a mock trial?

A variation on that view is that the judgement is the sentencing phase, and we were pronounced guilty or innocent at death. This ignores that if we are innocent, there should be no sentencing.

There is another possibility that depends on the meaning of the phrase, to judge. In the Greek, the word is that from which we get the term critic, or criticize. It really means to separate or to distinguish between two things. The forensic meaning of the word is way down on the list of possible interpretations. How does this make a difference?

Consider what Jesus said in Matthew 25. He describes a judgement.

But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. (Matt 25:31-34)

This judgement is not judicial. It is not that the judge hears testimony and passes sentence. Rather it is more like the individual in the vegetable packing plant, who watches the produce come down the conveyer and plucks out everything that is rotten or blemished. He is not considering guilt or innocence. He is simply separating the good from the bad.

Taking this view, there has to be a judgement. At the end of all things, God separates the saved from the unsaved. No videos; no testimony. Are you in Christ, or not? Technically, it is not even a condemnation. Saved or unsaved; sheep or goats, ripe or unripe? If there are two possibilities of eternity, heaven and hell, then there must be a separation. That separation is what is meant by judgement.

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KANGAROO COURT

If the situation had not been so serious, it would have been funny. I have read about some of those Roman comedies. I always thought they sounded a little implausible, until I witnessed this farce. Now I have a new respect for Roman playwrights. If we Jews can act this way, surely the Romans have a right to do so, as well. But I guess I had better explain what I am talking about.

It all started innocently enough, if you can call any of the Teacher's healings innocent. In fact, you could say it started with playing in the mud.

Well, actually it started before that. We were walking with the Teacher one sabbath, knowing that such a walk could be just a matter of getting from one place to another, or that it could end up quite interestingly. As we walked along we passed a blind beggar. Nothing unusual in that. In this country many people are blind, and when you are blind you generally become a beggar. Someone apparently knew this particular blind man, because he asked a question.

"Teacher, who sinned that this man should be blind from birth; this man or his parents?"

Now, that should have been the first indication of the farce that was to come. Most of us believed that birth defects could result from sin. There was nothing wrong

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with that question. The funny part, to me, was the idea that this man could be born blind because of a sin that he could not have committed until after he was born. How could he have been born blind because of his own sin? We all knew the words of the prophet, Yechezkel, who said that the soul that sins would die. But I could not conceive how a man could sin before birth. He could not be sinful at birth, simply because of those words of the prophet.

The Teacher, however, treated the question as he treated every question. He did not laugh the man who asked it to scorn. Instead he replied as if it were the most natural, though misguided, question in the world.

"Neither this man's nor his parents' sins caused his blindness. He is blind so that God's work can be shown in him. He is here so I can do what the One who sent me wants me to do. He was placed here today so I could work, because the time will come soon

when I could not heal him. While I am still in the world, I am light to the world."

I admit I didn't fully understand what that last sentence had to do with this blind man. I didn't even understand why he said "while I am in the world." But his point was that we were all wrong. This man was not blind because of sin, but because God had a higher purpose for him that we knew nothing about. What appears to be a tragedy can be the set up for glory. When God created the great fish at the beginning, Adam might have said that it did not appear to serve any purpose. At the time it did not. But years later when Yunas was shirking his mission to Nineveh, the fish served the purpose for which he was created. Adam did not know God's timing; nor did this man. But his time had come.

The Teacher did a strange thing. He played in the mud. Actually, he took some dirt up, spit on it and made it into mud. Then he put the mud on the blind man's eyes. He sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam. I guess God had a purpose for me in all this, because the Teacher sent me to take the man to the pool. That is how I know all about what happened afterward.

We got to the pool. The man washed the mud off of his eyes. And he could see! Such a thing was almost becoming commonplace to me, but to this man it was beyond believing. He shook off my arm and walked up the steps from the pool as if he had been able to see them all his life. Things he could only previously identify by touch became clear to him. He had never seen a person's face before. He had never been able to move around freely. Even sounds had been abstract things, but now he could see the bird that sang or the cart in the street. He walked taller. He even seemed to physically change.

Maybe that was why, as we walked the streets to try to return to the Teacher, some people started to come up to him, and then turned away, saying "I thought you were someone else." Some even called him by name, but then said, "Oh, you only look like the person I thought you were. A lot like him, in fact."

When he told these people that he was indeed who they thought he was, they scarcely believed him.

"If you are the beggar," they said, "then how did you get your sight?"

"A man called the Teacher put mud on my eyes and sent me to wash in Siloam. And here I am."

"Where is he?"

"Hey, I just came from Siloam. How should I know where he is? I couldn't see the path to Siloam, so I don't know where we came from."

When someone in authority asks a question, it is never good to give a sarcastic answer. Because of his

impudence, they took him to the Pharisees of the Council. I followed along, because I felt responsible for him; never having seen buildings, he would get lost otherwise. That is when it started getting good. He had to explain, again, how he got his sight. Funny how this simple answer could cause such a split in a group of people. Some said the Teacher must not be from God because he spit in his hand to make mud. Others said that a little mud was nothing compared to the ability to give sight to a man blind from birth. I think I even heard one of the latter group mutter something about the others being the real blind men if they could not see a miracle.

Since the Council could not agree (an all too common occurrence), they did something strange. They asked the witness to be the judge.

“What do you think of this man?”

What was he supposed to say? Wasn't it their job to determine the quality of the miracle?

Nevertheless, he answered, “He is a prophet. He must be.”

“A prophet you say? What should you know? You are the one who allegedly was healed. But we will see about that. Call his parents.”

When the parents came, they were asked if the man before the council was their son, who had been born blind. Maybe, the Pharisees thought, they could explain the healing. They were to be met with the same derision that had brought the man into their presence.

“Well, he is our son. We know that. He was born blind, and was so until today. We can testify to that. But we can't tell the court how he got his sight. Tell you what. You ask him. He's not a kid anymore. He is old enough to be a witness.”

I see where he got his sarcastic tongue. The apple does not fall far from the tree. Still, who can blame them? They must have been afraid of the agreement that anyone who confessed that the Teacher was Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.

The council let the parents go, and called the formerly blind man back. I could see he was getting tired of the whole procedure.

“Give praise to God, not this man,” he was told. “We know this man is a sinner.”

Maybe that wasn't the wisest thing to say to him at the time. As a beggar he had not been required to abide by all the niceties of social conduct.

“I don't know about his being a sinner. All I know is that I was blind, and now I see.”

Then they compounded the issue by asking him again how he was given his sight. Big mistake.

“I have already testified to that. Why do you keep asking? So you can become his disciples?”

That offended the Pharisees who were trying him. They, after all, were followers of Moses. They knew Moses was from God, but did not know where the Teacher came from.

“Wow, that's strange. He opened my eyes. God doesn't listen to sinners, but here God listens to him and does something that has never happened in the history of the world—giving sight to a man born blind!”

Having no further answer, they responded that they would not be taught by a man who was obviously born in sin, since he was born blind. They formally cast him out of the synagogue, even though he may never have been allowed in it in the first place. So they escorted him back into the street, and I followed. So did some of the council members. Maybe they wanted to see if he went back to the Teacher.

As we were going back to where the Teacher was, he had already heard that the man had been cast out. So he met us on the way. He had only one simple question for this man who had endured many questions already.

“Do you believe in the son of God?”

“Who is he, so that I might believe?”

He didn't recognize the man who had given him

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sight. Why would he? When he was last before the Teacher he couldn't see.

The Teacher replied, “You met him once before, and now he stands before you. I am the son of God.”

That was all it took. At that simple confession of who the Teacher was, the man who had been born blind fell on his knees. He would not stop crying and praising God and worshiping the Teacher.

Looking around to the crowd, the teacher said, “This is why I am here. I came that the blind might gain their sight. But I also came that the ones who think they have sight might be shown how blind they really are.”

The Pharisees are a sensitive lot. They are easily offended by remarks that they think were directed at them, even if they were not. Those who had followed us from the council were among this sort of people.

“Are you talking about us?” they asked. “Are we also blind, like this man was?”

The Teacher replied, “Blindness would at least excuse you for what you did to this man. If you were blind you would be guiltless in this matter. By claiming to be able to see, though, you show yourselves to be sinful.”

He then entered into a discourse about sheep and shepherds. It did not change the situation of the man born blind, and only resulted in an argument among the Jews. So that discussion will have to wait for a different story.

(Based on John 9.)

BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON

American holidays can be strange things. Many celebrate events, but only a few fall on the actual date of the anniversary of the event. Independence Day is always July 4. Christmas is always December 25 (even though that date really isn't close to the date of the event it is supposed to celebrate). January 1 is always New Year's Day. February 14 and March 17 are always Valentine's Day and Saint Patrick's Day respectively. Some days are moveable simply because they were originated that way. Thanksgiving is always the fourth Thursday in November, and Mother's Day and Father's Day are always on a Sunday in May and June. The formula for Easter was not dictated by Americans, but is a complex calculation based on the full moon and the calendar, sometimes taking it far away from Passover, on which it was based. Then there are the Monday Holidays. Veteran's Day (formerly Armistice Day) used to be on November 11, commemorating the armistice ending World War I. For a while it was moved to the closest Monday, but is again on the designated date. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday is celebrated on a Monday, regardless of the actual birthdate. Labor Day and Memorial Day are now on Mondays, although the latter used to be on a specific date. Sometimes you don't even know if a holiday is a Monday holiday or a specific date holiday. God's calendar for the Jewish people, on the other hand, seems simple.

Maybe it is simpler because the Jews base their calendar on the moon. The first appearance of the new moon is always *rosh kodesh* (the head of the month). Once a year, interestingly in the seventh month, the new moon signals *Rosh haShanah* (the head of the year, which is September 4 in 2013). This corresponds with the holiday of the blowing of trumpets (Lev 23:23). When is Trumpets? Easy to remember. It is on *Rosh haShanah*.

Three major holidays required that Jewish men travel to Jerusalem for their celebration. These are *Pesach* (Passover), *Shavuot* (Pentecost), and *Succos* (the Feast of Booths, September 18 in 2013). All three of these happen to fall on the fifteenth day of their months. The scriptures don't give a reason they should fall on that day, but one can make a reasonable speculation. Since the people had to travel to Jerusalem, and since they did not have rapid transit, the fifteenth of the month would be the best possible day for the holiday. If the month begins with the new moon, the fifteenth is necessarily the full moon. If you are traveling by foot or by donkey, you may want to travel into the night. Going to the holiday, then, you are traveling by the waxing moon, getting brighter each night. Going home, travel would be by the waning moon, beginning with a period of relatively bright moonlight. In the cases of *Pesach* and *Succos*, the week-long celebrations would be accompanied by bright evenings. Perhaps with air and automotive travel, these considerations are not as great today, but when travel was more leisurely it may have made a great difference.

If this is the justification for these holidays falling on the middle day of the month, it merely emphasizes God's care for his people. If he is going to insist on their traveling to one location three times a year, at least he is going to make it as comfortable as possible for them. And as safe as possible, because travel in the dark of the moon can be both physically dangerous and allow cover for those who would rob travelers who are known to be carrying money for the festivals.

Then there is *Yom Kippur*. It falls on the tenth day of the seventh month (September 13 in 2013). But it is an unusual holiday in many ways. Generally, though, one could say the Jewish holidays were very enlightening.

Timothy J. O'Hearn
737 Monell Dr NE
Albuquerque NM 87123