

Series: Words & Deeds Matter Part 2: “The Accused and Jury”

Isaiah 5:1-7

Psalm 80:7-15

Philippians 3:4b-14

Matthew 21:33-46

Humans have a deep need for security, so when we sense things unraveling, we can easily project our need for security on our all-powerful, all-knowing, and always present God. This projecting of our need for security on to God can easily cause us to avoid “the harsh realities of suffering and defeat.”¹ Matt Woodley relates the following story:

A number of years ago our soccer-loving family helped host a boys’ soccer team from Costa Rica. With their advanced ball-handling and passing skills, this elite team reached the finals of the tournament. In that final game they obviously possessed better skills than the other team, a big and physical American team that relied on bullying and cheap shots. Unfortunately, the officials were oblivious to every foul. They called nothing, allowing even outright “muggings.” After the Costa Rican boys lost 2-1, I had to restrain myself from yelling at the inept officials. I just wanted them to notice the injustices, intervene like they’re supposed to, and make a few calls. Instead, they didn’t do their jobs, and the game wasn’t played fairly. Sometimes people feel that way about God and the way God “officiates” the world. We all know that there are big problems: world hunger, a global economic crisis, mistreatment of the poor, political oppression, and worldwide sex trafficking. Then there are also more personal problems: a friend’s addiction, a marital crisis, a church split, friends who despise each other. At times we feel like crying out, “Why doesn’t God intervene? Why doesn’t God make a few calls and keep the game fair? Why does God let the bullies of life win?”...²

Sigmund Freud refers to the human tendency to project our need for security on someone more powerful as an attempt for “happiness and protection against suffering...through a delusional remolding of reality.”³ I really want to stop being delusional. Don’t you?

Before I reach out to God, whom I know is not a delusional reality, I often view myself as

¹Stephanie Mar Smith in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, editors, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 130.

²Submitted to www.preachingtoday.com by Matt Woodley.

³Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York City, New York: W.W. Norton, 1961), 19-21.

the accused and respond to myself as the jury. I project that image onto God, and I even know better. Security is an outgrowth of being loved and loving, being judged and not judging. Due to our sin nature, we must never forget our desperate need for God. Trusting God is essential. We are not to ponder whether the threat to our security is fair or unfair, nor are we to blame, nor are we to see ourselves as accused and sentenced. Pondering whether something is fair or not, affixing blame, and playing the role of the accused and the jury is a zero-sum game.

Isaiah 5:1-7, Psalm 80:7-15, Philippians 3:4b-14, and Matthew 21:33-46 confirm this point: people look to God for salvation for a variety of reasons. Everyone has a past, and everyone deserves a future.

Everyone has a past, and everyone deserves a future. Isaiah 5:4 reads, “What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?” The vineyard is the people of God. God cares and nurtures us, but we often go astray. Your past has patches of brokenness, but the future God has for you is to be saved and to flourish in justice and righteousness.

Everyone has a past, and everyone deserves a future. Psalm 80:7 reads, “Restore us, God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.” Your patches of brokenness in the past need salvation. Then, the future God has for you is ongoing salvation to flourish in justice and righteousness.

Everyone has a past, and everyone deserves a future. Philippians 3:8-9 reads,

...I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.

At times, I stay rooted in a sentence from an action in the past. I'm imprisoned in shame and the

unfairness and injustice of it all. What about you? Like Paul we can be set free from the past through forgiveness from God, others, and ourselves.

Everyone has a past, and everyone deserves a future. Matthew 21:43 reads and Jesus is speaking, "...I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom." In this context, Jesus is condemning the Jewish leadership (Sadducees, elders, chief priests, Pharisees, and scribes) for their corruption and leading many of the Jewish people astray. The same can be said of some in Christian leadership today. The central charge is hypocrisy. What percentage of Christian leaders are afraid of the crowd's response. How often do Christian leaders deal with their hypocrisy and the hypocrisy of those they lead?⁴

Love God and others. Do not pass judgment on yourself or others. Deal with your hypocrisy. Look to God to save you from something specific for a specific purpose. This choice, in words and deeds, demonstrate love. Rob Bell, the author of *Love Wins*, addressing the extraordinary love of God writes,

...in speaking of the expansive, extraordinary, infinite love of God there is always the danger of neglecting the very real consequences of God's love, namely God's desire and intention to see things become everything they were always intended to be...Love demands freedom. It always has, and it always will. We are free to resist, reject, and rebel against God's ways for us. We can have all the hell we want.⁵

The message of Jesus is this: who you desire to become does not happen by chance, but by purposed change.

⁴In the five paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Anthea E. Portier-Young, Pamela J. Scalise, Donna Giver-Johnston, Cynthia A. Jarvis, Elizabeth M. Bounds, Whitney Bodman, and Shawnthea Monroe in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 353-356, 356-358, 359-361, 362-364, 364-366, 367-369, and 369-371.

⁵Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (New York, New York: HarperOne, 2011), 113.

Yes, we are at the beginning of the 2024 Generosity Campaign. Remember, God restores us deep to the core. God establishes a presence and strengthens you to believe for the long haul. God helps us know from what to be saved and for what reason. God beckons each one of us to come to terms with hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is defined as “...a situation in which someone pretends to believe something that they do not really believe, or that is the opposite of what they do or say at another time.”⁶ It does not take long for us to identify those things that are harming us and why we need help.

Be saved from flawed and hypocritical thinking about giving of your time, talent, and treasure to the work of Jesus Christ through this place, our church home, Geneva Presbyterian Church in order to be saved for loving God and loving others. Here these “Points for Success” for you to be generous with your Life Wallet filled with your time, talent, and treasure. I’d like you to ponder each point and its associated Bible verses.

2024 Generosity Campaign Points for Success

- i. Psalm 46: 1-3 Because of our previous overspending and use of one-time assets, even with one pastor and some trimming of other staff expenses, we need as far as possible to maintain (or increase) our current level of financial giving. (October 1, 2023)
- ii. Hebrews 12: 1-3 With a reduced staff, we will be more reliant on volunteer activity in many areas. (October 8, 2023)
- iii. Romans 12: 3-8 Supporting Geneva can take many forms, from financial giving to volunteering in missional life, congregational life, administration, or other areas — and simply connecting within or outside the congregation or praying. (October 8, 2023)
- iv. Mark 12: 41-46 We recognize that people’s ability to support via financial or volunteer activities may vary, given different financial situations, health situations, or other commitments — and so we ask people to help to the extent that they feel called and able in their current circumstances. (October 15, 2023)
- v. 1 Peter 4: 8-11 As we try to find a path that includes both a degree of continuity and a degree of change, and that tries to be effective in both our evangelical and social-

⁶As defined in the *Cambridge Dictionary*.

justice commitments in a changing society, we value the support of every single person who is invested in Geneva. (October 15, 2023)

It is true and biblical that each one of us must increase our giving, yes, financially and in service. You are to be “doers of the word, and not merely hearers...”⁷ You are to have the mind of Christ in order to be the best Jesus. Love as a noun and verb is the way God captures you during your time of being saved from a specific torment for a specific purposed change. God save you from the hells’ you choose. God creates and saves you for heaven on earth as it is in heaven. Amen!

This sermon was preached on Sunday, 8 October 2023 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California

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⁷James 1:22