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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
December 14, 2014
3rd Sunday in Advent

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 40:1-10; Matthew 3:1-12
Hymns: 64; 604; 60; 399:3 (Liturgy-377:10)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Romans 2:12-16

For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law 13 (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; 14 for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, 15 who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) 16 in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.
(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, The Judge of all, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: You're judging other people's hearts.

That is a sharp accusation that is made frequently toward those who try to exercise some church discipline, or point out dangerous error in the lives of others. It is often coupled with the Scripture "Judge not lest you be judged" (Matthew 7:1). That is often thought to be an adequate response to anyone pointing out sin and wickedness in this world. And all too often we don't know how to respond, and so respond with silence.

However, there is a growing movement in the churches of America of accepting of people as they are, and not to speak of sin and repentance. Often times what is in the heart becomes very apparent by the actions

which one sees in the lives of others. It is also said that actions speak louder than words. Sin that mocks God is evidence of unbelief.

So it goes back and forth, and we are hesitant to say too much because we know the sin in our own lives also, and we know all too well how difficult a struggle it may be to root out one or another particular sin once it has set its claws in us.

However, sin remains a dangerous thing, and it can and often does take hold of the heart. And there is one who sees the heart perfectly well. That one is the Lord and the Lord doesn't simply accept people the way they are. He desires all men to repent, not just in word in deed and in truth, from the heart. The Day is coming when Jesus will come again and on that day He will be the one --

THEME: Judging Men's Hearts.

People can be very defensive about their own lives, seeking to minimize the guilt they see in themselves. Our text provides --

I. God's Answer to Man's Moral Persuasion

Romans 2:12-13 For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law 13 (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified.)

The law will very adequately reveal the sin of mankind. People throughout the world will find themselves condemned by the law. Our text addresses both those who know the Scriptures and those who don't. If one knows the Scriptures and is well versed in what the Ten Commandments say, they should be well aware of their own sin, **"for by the law is the knowledge of sin"** (Romans 3:20). Now there may indeed be those who say they agree with the law that it is good and holy, but our text makes the point that agreeing with the law is not enough. Hearing the law read in church, or memorizing the Ten Commandments isn't what makes you righteous before God. One must **keep** the law, observing it down to the last detail for one to be found righteous according to the law. That's what the Scriptures teach us. **"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all"** (James 2:10).

If you violate one law just one time you are a law breaker. That's the way even our imperfect judicial system works. People don't have to be found guilty of every crime before they are found guilty and sent to prison.

Often they have broken only **one** law, and are charged and convicted of **one** crime, and they are **criminals**. So also those who violate the law of God are guilty, even if they know the law is good, even if they would violate the law only once, which just isn't true for anyone.

It just isn't so that those who know the law and agree with the law that it is good have kept the law. Even Paul confesses: **“I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’ 8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire”** (Romans 7:7-8). Most certainly Paul agreed with the law of God, even when he was a Pharisee, before he believed in Jesus! All it takes for our flesh to rebel against the authority of God is for the law to tell me, “No, you can't do that!” that is when Paul saw his flesh rebel with many sinful desires arising in his heart.

Sin is present with me too. My flesh also rebel against the law's demands. The law's first function is to show me my sin, to show me exactly how much I need a Savior, that Savior born in Bethlehem.

But what about the millions of people in this world who do not know the Scriptures? There are some who argue that we should leave them in their ignorance. They have their own culture and their own gods, and they are getting along just fine without us sending our pushy missionaries into their world making trouble for them. Our text speaks to that as well. It makes it clear that --

II. Ignorance of the Law Will Is No Excuse.

Romans 2:12,14-15 “For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, ... when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, 15 who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them).

No matter where one goes in this world people know evil when they see it. People living in ignorance of the Scriptures will not know God's law perfectly, but they will still live according to many of its principles. It is very common to find most world societies forbidding adultery, or stealing, or murder, or disobedience to parents and others in authority. When they structure their lives according to God's; law without even knowing the Bible, they show that the law of God is written in their hearts. They know right from wrong, and they are found culpable and

guilty of sin. **“As many as have sinned without law will also perish without law”** (v.12).

On the last Day the Savior of the world will return and He will judge the world in righteousness. And this is exactly where it comes down to knowing the hearts of men. And our text reminds us of the fact that Jesus knows the hearts, for in that day **“God will judge the secrets of men”** (v.16). Yes, all the intents of the hearts of men are known to the Lord. He knows the evil that dwells within the heart. He knows that the intent of the heart of man is only evil continually (Genesis 6:5). And yet in His grace God did not simply annihilate the earth and send all mankind to eternal death. What the Lord reveals instead is grace, grace so great that we receive double for all our sins (Isaiah 40:2).

III. Jesus Comes Judging According to the Gospel.

Yes, God reads the hearts of men. It is not only that God looks for righteousness within a person’s heart. He looks for faith. Not simply faith that God exists. The Lord looks for faith in Christ, and that righteousness which comes by faith. When the law shows us our sin, and we are brought to despair of achieving any righteousness of our own by the works of the law, the Lord calls us by the gospel. It is in the Gospel that the righteousness of God, that righteousness which is apart from the law, is revealed. This gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).

Of those who persist in seeking righteousness by their own good works we are told later in Romans chapter ten:

Romans 10:3-4 “They being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

When the Lord sees this rejection of the righteousness of Christ in people’s hearts they are condemned because of their own sin. Those who look to the cross for the remission of their sins, and take hold of the obedience of Christ for righteousness, they shall be saved. Then it is of grace, that it might be by faith that we are saved.

It is Jesus who knows the heart. It is Jesus who has come into this world and has entered our hearts that we might have life in His name.

It is the coming of our Lord Jesus that we celebrate this Advent Season. He came into the world to be our Savior. He comes into our hearts by His

gospel that He may rule our hearts and lives by grace, and give us the gift of His righteousness. He finally comes to judge, not finding pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11), but joy in bringing His children home to be with Him in heaven.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.