

EASTER 3
1 Peter 1:17-21

Christ pays no attention to persons. He is impartial. The Greek implies that He doesn't look at the face. No, He looks at the heart. You can't honestly read the Gospels and not realize that? And so when I stand before Him, no matter what my titles and connections were in the visible church in this life, I will stand before Him to be ***judged impartially according to my deeds***. And, my dear friends in Jesus, so will you. To some of you that might sound odd or inconsistent with the gospel, but it isn't. It's as biblical as biblical can be. St. Peter plainly says as much.

So have your works marked you as a Christian? Would those who know you suspect that you're a Christian without you telling them? Would they know simply from your conversation and behavior, from what you say about your neighbor, what you do with your possessions, what is posted on your Facebook page, what entertainment you choose, and what vocabulary you use? You will not get into heaven by flashing a church membership card. We don't have those. And you won't get into heaven by knowing a secret handshake, could as that perhaps would be. No, when the time comes for you to be judged, you will stand before your Maker and Redeemer, and ***He will judge you according to your deeds***. That's why when Jesus began His ministry His message was short and sweet: ***"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."***

When John the Baptist preached and baptized at the Jordan, some men came to him overly confident in their own righteousness and lineage. Do you remember what he said to them? He said, ***"Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire"*** (Matthew 3:8-10).

So what about us? We could well ask like those repentant souls who were moved by John's preaching, ***"What then shall we do?"*** (Luke 3:10). John made application for them, and there is application for us as well. The rebellious son or daughter should treat his or her parents as God's representatives. The exasperating father or mother should treat their child as a gift entrusted to them by their own compassionate heavenly Father. The selfish husband should love His wife as Christ loved the Church, not putting himself first, but his wife, his beloved. The capricious wife should submit to her husband as the Church submits to Christ, not as a slave, but as an equal partner freely doing so, and not begrudgingly. The couple living together contrary to God's will before marriage should push forward the wedding day or move apart until they are ready, not to play marriage, but enter into that blessed estate. The judgmental elder Christians should be patient with the younger believer, remembering his or her own youth. The one incapacitated by sickness or some other obstacle should spend their extra time, not second guessing our gracious Lord, but using it as an opportunity to ponder the Word, to uphold the arms of God's servants through prayer, and to make intercession their brothers and sisters in the faith. The lazy employee should serve his or her employer as he would serve God

Himself, fulfilling his or her vocation with the confidence that our Lord is pleased with such service. The arduous employer should treat his or her employees as he or she would have Christ, his or her Master, treat him or her. The gossip should labor to defend the reputations he or she has tarnished. The one who has held a grudge should forgive as he or she has been forgiven by our Lord Jesus. You get the point, hopefully. It's not rocket science, even if we do make it harder than it needs to be sometimes.

But what if you haven't lived in such a way? Or what if you have tried but failed? Should you throw in the towel? Have you blown your shot? Permit an illustration. As most of you know, I love to coach. Right now I'm coaching baseball. One of the things I have to drill into the kids is not to watch the ball when running to first. No, stare at the bag and the base coach and run as hard as you can. Why? Because otherwise, when they watch the ball, they almost instinctively slow down if they think they're going to be thrown out. It's human nature. The proper response is counterintuitive. You should run all the harder if you think you might be thrown out. Who knows what might happen? Perhaps that bag isn't as far away as it seems, and maybe the throw to first won't be on target. It's why I like Boesch for the Tigers. Watch him run to first. He runs the same way whether he's grounded it in the infield or bounced it into the corner of the outfield.

When we run our race in Christ convinced that we'll fail, or only we sense an opportunity for the glory of a home run, we're not going to spend a lot of time on base or help our team much. And when we run it as though we were born losers, we forget the price at which we've been bought, and who we have waiting to drive us home, into whose victory we've been baptized and born again.

We are still in the Easter season. Don't forget, then, Easter truth. ***You are more than conquerors through Him who loved you*** (Romans 8:37). And your sins, having missed the mark, do not rob you of that victory when you've repented of them. No, they prepare you to run better the next time. The Christian life is letting the confidence of that truth sink in, so that we need not fear living for God and our neighbor instead of for ourselves, whether bunting or swinging for the fences. The fact is, someone has already lived for us and our eternal security. We don't have to worry about that.

While the unbeliever who has rejected Christ's saving work will be judged according to his works, which will be evidence of unbelief, believers will be judged according to their works in Christ. God will see the fruits of your faith while those trespasses of which you've repented in this life, your time of grace, will be forgiven. You are not some piece of junk from the dollar store. No, you are the apple of His eye. ***You've been bought, not even with gold or silver, but with Jesus' own precious blood.*** And that forgiveness and that truth puts the wind at our backs as we run our race for Christ, as we boogie to the bag, as we walk in the works, seemingly big or small, that He has prepared in advance for us to walk in, even if we struck out last time at the plate. Luther put it well when he wrote about this text, "*Through faith the spirit is already in heaven, and this makes [the Christian] lord over all things. But God permits him to remain alive in the flesh and lets his body walk the earth in order that he may help others and bring them to heaven too*" (LW 30, 35). Amen.