

Prophecy 107 (Retribution)

Ezek. 33:10-20, 36:24-29

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Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/prophecy-107-retribution/>

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This document was prepared by Heather Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Heather know. Thank you!

[Opening Song: "Rescue Me" by The Brilliance]

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I pray that you would help us to preach you, the Word of God. It's in your name that we pray. Amen.

Message

Video clip: Dave Allen—"First Day of School" bit from ITV 1993/94
Retrieved from YouTube ProjectEnglish2009

Dave Allen I went to school in a little village called Raheny (Rath Eanna) in county Dublin. My first day. The school. This convent. Long winding driveway up to it. One of those gothic doors. Great studs in it. I rang the bell and it opened. And there's one of these nuns, flapping. Terrifying. Terrifying. Three and a half years of age. Terrifying.
"What do you want little boy?"
"My mommy, my mommy and daddy said I had to come here."
"Yes, well, if you come here you've got to be a good little boy. Will you be a good little boy?"
And I could see past her, and there was a fellow nailed to a cross! I thought: You're bloody right, I'll be a good little boy!

That's a rather effective way to make a little boy act good, but not such an effective way to make a good little boy. The nun asks, "Will you be a good little boy?" And just the way she asks it makes that rather unlikely.

That's the Irish comedian Dave Allen, reflecting on his strict upbringing. He made a career out of being a practicing atheist. After each show, he'd toast the audience and say, "Goodnight, thank you, and may your God go with you."

He didn't want anything to do with that God that hung that fellow on that tree. He must have been taught, or maybe he assumed, that God will give us just what we deserve—we call that "Justice."

And he was also probably taught that getting nailed to a cross is what he deserved, for he'd been bad... And that even if he hadn't been bad, he had inherited the bad—that's what Augustine called "original sin."

He must have also been taught that although all humanity deserved to be punished, the man on the tree was punished in our place. How exactly it is that crucifying the man on the tree saves us from damnation—that is, how the atonement works—that has been the topic of debate for two thousand years. He must have also been taught that although all humanity deserved to be punished, the man on the tree was punished in our place in order to satisfy "Justice."ⁱ

In the fourth century, Augustine defined "Justice" as "Retribution" and the opposite of Mercy.ⁱⁱ Augustine (the first great Roman theologian—he really did not ever read the Bible in his native tongue) argued that for a few, God chose to exhibit his mercy, which meant that they did not get what they deserved. But for most, God chose to exhibit his justice, which meant that they did get what they deserved which was unending, perpetual punishment... He argued that this was necessary so that those who received Mercy would then be perpetually grateful that they had not received what they deserved—that is Divine Retribution that is "Justice."

So, little Dave Allen must have been taught that the man on the tree was punished in our place... that is, the place of those who agree to the terms and conditions of the Roman Catholic Church.

During the Reformation, Luther and Calvin taught that the man on the tree was punished in our place (that is, the place of those who have faith). And then they taught that if you had faith, you would agree to the terms and conditions of the Lutheran, Reformed, or Presbyterian Church.

Anabaptists soon taught that Jesus suffered in everyone's place, but it only worked for a few—those who exercised good judgment, which meant that they chose to become a Baptist, Methodist, Mennonite, or whatever.

It was these Protestant Reformers in the fifteenth century who came up with the full-blown doctrine of the Penal Substitutionary Atonement. But it has its roots in Augustine's concept of Retributive Justice. And now, ironically, it is what almost all American Evangelicals (Catholic, Protestant, or whatever) seem to believe.

Penal Substitutionary Atonement Theory goes something like this:

1. God is Just, and
2. Justice is Retribution, and so
3. God **must** punish offenders.
4. God is also Merciful, and so
5. God chooses to punish Jesus in our place—which is punishing himself in our place.

Now that sounds right, and I think, in many ways, it is right. But when we argue that he only did it for some, God seems awfully unjust. And the moment we defined justice as "Divine Retribution," and Divine Retribution as the opposite of Mercy, we literally rip God in half.

But it sounds right to us... doesn't it? I mean, isn't justice "retribution"? The word comes from the Latin *retribuere* meaning "to pay back." So, we say, "There's gonna be hell to pay—I demand Justice."

Every time there's a mass shooting, like in Boulder a few weeks ago, the news will interview a local official who invariably says something like, "We don't yet know who's responsible, but rest assured we will get justice."

What do they mean by that?

They cannot mean that they are going to make it right, unless they think they have the power to raise ten dead people and give the shooter a new heart. What they mean is that they are going to find the one person who shot the other ten people, and punish that one person to the full extent of the law.

We all want that type of justice...

Every three-year-old knows how to demand it; they constantly say, "That's not fair! That's not fair! That's not fair!"

And then Dad says, "You want fair?— I'll show you fair."

We all want that type of justice until we really reflect on that type of justice, and then we find ourselves terrified that we might just get that type of justice.

We all complain that God is not just... But then we find ourselves running from God's judgment for fear that his judgment is just—"You want fair? I'll show you fair!"

So, we beg God to forgive, because we think that means that, at least for us, he won't be just... he'll let us off the hook. We beg God to be unjust (that is unfair)... but the moment we suffer, we complain, "You're not just, God... that's not fair!"

Or maybe we just think, "*There is no God, for there is no justice.*"ⁱⁱⁱ

My father was the most Christ-like man I've ever known. He was my best friend, and I loved him more than I can say. It was about 37 years ago that my father had come downtown to take care of some business, and something went terribly wrong. It was then that a group of men assaulted him with knives. They stabbed him in the chest, broke his sternum and several ribs. They knocked him unconscious and took a huge sum of money.

We wonder why people would do such things... But such things make me want to do such things to other people.

I was in California at the time. As my dad lay unconscious at Swedish Medical Center, my sister Lydia and I hopped on a plane and flew back to Colorado. He was still unconscious and on life support when I arrived in the ICU unit at Swedish. I sat by his bed and stared at what looked like a corpse.

It's at times like these that we wonder:

- "Are we being punished for something?"
- "What did I do, or my loved one do, to deserve such a thing?"
- "Is there a God, and if so, is he just?"
- And now, "How do I get justice? How do I get retribution?"

2,608 years ago, the Jews were asking all of these questions. And God answers through Ezekiel the Prophet.

Ezekiel had been taken into captivity in Babylon, along with the first group of exiles twelve years earlier. And even then, as he prophesies, Jerusalem is besieged, and more exiles will soon follow.

Ezekiel 33: 10 “And you, son of man [God refers to Ezekiel as “a son of man” and gives him his Word] —“And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, Thus have you said: ‘Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we rot away because of them. [In other words, paying for them] How then can we live?’ 11 Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you [literally, “do you”] die, O house of Israel?iv

Fourteen years ago, my denomination required me to publicly profess that it [quote], “pleased God to ordain [some of mankind] to dishonor and wrath... to the praise of his Glorious Justice.”

I said I couldn’t do that because of Ezekiel 18:11. And I didn’t think their definition of justice was quite the same as God’s definition of justice—I’m not sure that anyone’s actually is... Next verse:

12 “And you, son of man, say to your people, ‘The righteousness of the righteous shall [does] not deliver him when [in the day] he transgresses, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall [does] not fall by it when [in the day] he turns from his wickedness, and the righteous shall not be [is not] able to live by his righteousness when [in the day] he sins. 13 Though I say to the righteous that he shall [does] surely live, yet if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be [are] remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall [does] die. 14 Again, though I say to the wicked, ‘You shall [do] surely die,’ yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just [*mishpat*] and right [*tsadaqah*], 15 if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, not doing injustice, he shall [does] surely live; he shall [does] not die. 16 None of the sins that he has committed shall be [are] remembered against him. He has done what is just [*mishpat*] and right [*tsadaqah*]; he shall [does] surely live.

Now that is a challenge for us to follow, as is evidenced by all the confusion around how to translate the tense of these Qal Imperfect Hebrew verbs...But, I think God just said:

If you do all sorts of good things...and then you do a bad thing... you die... and none of your good things count. (They’re not even “remembered.”) And if you do all sorts of bad things and then do a good thing... you live... and none of your bad things count.

But if you do all sorts of bad things, how could you ever do a good thing, because at that point you would be dead?

It’s hard to sort all of that out, and it’s really bothered me over the years... most of all because it just doesn’t seem fair. Next verse:

17 “Yet your people say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just [*yit-takan*].’”

That means: “be fair.” *Takan* is a verb translated “be equal,” “weigh,” “balance,” “measure,” and so it’s an obvious reference to *retribuere* in Latin, that is, “paying back,” that is, “retributive justice.” It’s interesting that the translators translate this word as “just,” but they also just translated a completely different word as “just,” and that word is *mishpat*.

It’s a hugely important word in the Old Testament. It’s a noun built on the verb, *shaphat*. *Mishpat* comes from *shaphat*. *Shaphat* is normally translated as “judge,” or “to judge.” And *mishpat* is normally translated “Judgement,” “Justice,” or “what is Just.” *Mishpat* is obviously “Good Judgment” ...and that is not necessarily what we would call “fair: *yit-taken*.”

17 “Yet your people say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just [*yit-takan*, “fair”],’ when it is their own way that is not just [*yit-takan*, “fair”]. 18 When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall [does] die for it. 19 And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just [*mishpat*] and right [*tsadaqah*], he shall live by this [literally: just “does live”]. 20 Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just [*yi-takan*: fair].’ O house of Israel, I will judge [*shaphat*] each of you according to his ways.”

In other words, “You want fair? I’ll give you fair.” That is, “the judgment you pronounce will be the judgment you receive.” (And we can only hope that after we’ve tasted our bad judgment, God will show us his Good Judgment.)

Well, there’s an awful lot going on in Ezekiel 33, and I still don’t claim to understand all of it, but reading it recently, a few things, with enormous implications, just became rather clear.

If Ezekiel 33 is correct:

#1 Our notion of “Retributive Justice” is an illusion.

1. “Retributive Justice” is a myth. Or maybe I should say, our notions of “Retributive Justice” are myth and illusion.

At times, God prescribes retributive justice for his people.^v For if we want fair, Dad will show us fair. That is, the judgment we pronounce will be the judgment we receive. That is, if we want to try and justify ourselves with knowledge of good and evil, Dad will allow us to try; if we want to justify ourselves with works of the law in the power of the flesh, Dad will let us give it a shot. That is, we can *try* to pay, but no one can pay.

There is no “retributive justice” with God (at least not in the way we mean “retributive justice”). However, there is punishment and reward, but neither is payment.

It is hugely important to always remember that, to a group of people (none of whom called themselves “Christian”), Jesus said, “When you talk to God, say ‘Our Dad.’” He didn’t say, “Call him ‘your honor,’ ‘our boss,’ or ‘executive director.’” He said, “Call him ‘Our Dad, Our Father in Heaven.’”

You may have had a bad dad, but I had a good dad, and with my dad, there was no such thing as ‘Retributive Justice.’” There was definitely punishment, but never with the idea that I was paying for my crimes but always with the idea that I was learning something important. All his punishment was discipline; it was a gift.

There was punishment, and there was reward, but never with the idea that I was being paid for my labor but always with the idea that I was being invited to share in my father’s joy—his work. All the rewards were grace, for it became abundantly clear that everything was gift.

My father gave me life—including the desire to work. He gave me life, but never even suggested that I ought to pay. Often, I remember him saying—apparently with great joy, “Peter, everything that is mine belongs to you.”

It brings tears to my eyes, because that is exactly what the father says to the older brother, standing in the outer darkness, weeping and gnashing his teeth, in Jesus’s story of the prodigal son. And that is exactly what the father had demonstrated to the younger son, even while his plan was to simply use his father to gain his riches by becoming his father’s employee.

And that, the Father’s generosity, is exactly why the older brother had refused to party and was now standing in the outer darkness—He thought his dad was unfair; he thought that he had paid, and his little brother had not paid, and all the while he was breaking his father’s heart.

The word “retributive” never appears in my ESV Bible. And the word “retribution” appears twice: Hebrews 2:2 and Romans 11:9.

Hebrews 2:2 reads: “...every transgression...received a just retribution,” but that word translated “retribution” is more commonly translated “reward.”

And the next sentence, Hebrews 2:3, reads: “...how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?”

It’s as if this great salvation, that is a “just reward,” is stalking us like a lion...

Romans 11:9 reads: “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution.”

Paul is quoting David, who is talking like Jesus in Psalm 69, and I think Paul is implying that the table is the table of the Lord...

And so, the stumbling block on the table is the body broken and the blood shed.

It’s the divine judgment upon the human ego.

It’s the knowledge that we cannot pay.

It’s the recompense for your every sin—burning hot Grace.

Paul then writes just a few verses later, “God consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all.”

Paul then quotes Job, saying, “Who has first given a gift to him, [which can also be translated, “who has betrayed him” or “who has prevented him”] that he might be repaid.”^{vi}

Then to make things abundantly clear, Paul sings, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

Do you understand? If God is really the Creator who creates everything from nothing, and space and time are themselves his creation, then belief in our version of “retributive justice” or paying God for anything is like a form of insanity. And Salvation, by Grace through Faith, is waking to reality from a dream that has become a nightmare, which we often call “this world” and sometimes “hell.”

Salvation is simply coming to terms with the fact that you did not create yourself, and you are, in fact, your Father’s Good Creation. So, anxiety, insecurity, possessiveness, envy, greed, rage, and competition are all forms of insanity; and all sanity is gratitude, worship, and praise.

There is no “retributive justice” in relation to God, which demands that He must simply punish us for the sake of punishing us. And so, there is no “penal substitutionary atonement,” if by that we mean that God the Father needs to torture sinners to satisfy justice...or needs to torture God the Son in order to feel better about you.

And yet, if by “penal” we mean “discipline,” well then, Jesus did suffer for us and with us—he bears all the pain of the illusion in which each of us is trapped. And if by “substitute,” we mean that Jesus does what we cannot do, well, that is abundantly clear; he literally is our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and redemption...

He is literally *mishpat* in us, he is our Father’s Good Judgment coming to life in us; he is Justice rising from the dead in the Sanctuary of your soul.

So, like I was saying, if Ezekiel 33 is true, so that “when the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice, he [does die]. And when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he [lives]...” (v.18)

And “none of his sins are remembered against him...” (v.16)

Well then:

1. Our notion of “Retributive Justice” is just an illusion. And

If Ezekiel 33 is correct:

#1 Our notion of “Retributive Justice” is an illusion.

#2 What matters is right now.

2. It seems that... the only thing that matters is “now.”

The past doesn’t matter, at least not how we think it matters. It won’t be remembered. And I suspect that if we are truly righteous right now, we have no reason to ever be unrighteous in the future.

Like John says in 1 John 3:6, literally: “No one who sins has seen him or known him.” So, once you truly see him, you won’t sin. But I do sin...and don’t sin. So, it appears that I’ve seen him, but also haven’t seen him... I haven’t seen him well, so I have a new man that cannot sin, and an old man that can only sin. How I sacrifice the old and liberate the new is all about *now*.

Ezekiel makes it clear, God cares about “Now.”

Like Eckhart Toll writes, “For the ego to survive [that’s my “old man”], it must make time—past and future—more important than the present moment [that’s “now”].^{vii} The ego knows nothing of being, but believes you will eventually be saved by doing,”^{viii} that is by paying.

And so, we run from the presence of I am that I am, the presence of the Lion, by hiding in plans for the future and hiding in anxieties from the past, when the lion wants us to stop and look at him *right now*.

Like the Father in the story of the Prodigal Son, I have two sons, and honestly, I really don’t care what they’ve done as long as I have their hearts right now.

1. Our notion of “Retributive Justice” is an illusion.
2. What matters is right now.
3. We’re dead... or, at least, we were dead.

If Ezekiel 33 is correct:

#1 Our notion of "Retributive Justice" is an illusion.

#2 What matters is right now.

#3 We're dead... or were dead.

Ezekiel 33:18 · "When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does injustice [iniquity] he shall [does] die for it." *"When he does iniquity, he does die..."*

- Didn't that already happen in a garden at a tree?
- Didn't that already happen for you when you were just two or three years old?
- And aren't dead people incapable of doing anything?

So why is God telling us these things through Ezekiel? And why, for that matter, was Jesus crucified on the tree?

Well, in Ezekiel 33:20, God says, *You say that my judgment is not fair; I will judge each of you according to your judgment. I will show you what is fair.*

In the next verse, a fugitive from Jerusalem arrives with news that Jerusalem has now been utterly destroyed. God gave. Israel thought they had earned. And God took it all away.

"You want fair? —I'll show you fair."

Next, God promises to make Israel a desolation and bring her proud might to an end:

33:29 · "Then they will know that I am the Lord...," says the Lord.

33:33 · "When this comes—and come it will!—then they will know that a prophet has been among them." Then they will know the Word of the Lord.

Maybe he's telling us so that one day, when we're alive, we will know.

In Chapter 34, God promises to rescue them all (11-16) and "feed them with *mishpat* (Justice)."^{ix} They will literally eat his Justice, his Good Judgment.

In Chapter 35, He issues his judgment on the people who [quote] "have cherished perpetual enmity,"^x which is a good description of what most people call "Hell" ... if you like hell, it seems you'll get some hell, some perpetual enmity... for a time^{xi}.

v. 9 · "Then you will know that I am the Lord," says the Lord.

That line is like a refrain all the way through Ezekiel: "Then you will know. Then you will know. Then you will know."

In Chapter 36, to Israel, the Lord says:

²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit [breath] I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to [*asah*: “do”] my [*mishpat*: “Justice”]. ²⁸ You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.”

v. ³⁵ “And they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden...’”

Salvation is literally heart surgery.

God takes from you a heart of stone, incapable of pumping blood—blood, in which flows the life. The Breath, the Spirit, the Life is in the blood. God takes from you a heart of stone, that’s full of itself, that trusts in its own righteousness... and gives you something new.

In Hebrew-thought, the heart is the seat, not only of a person’s feelings, but their intellect, and most certainly their will. The heart is that thing that makes judgments.

Salvation is heart transplant surgery. And you cannot pay... because you’re dead.

Ezekiel 37:13 · And you [“you” being “the whole house of Israel (v.11)”] shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.”

“Then you shall know. Then you shall know. Then you shall know.”

“I will do it. I will do it. I will do it,” says the Lord.

“It is accomplished. It is finished. It is accomplished,” says the Word of the Lord, as he hangs on the tree in the garden.

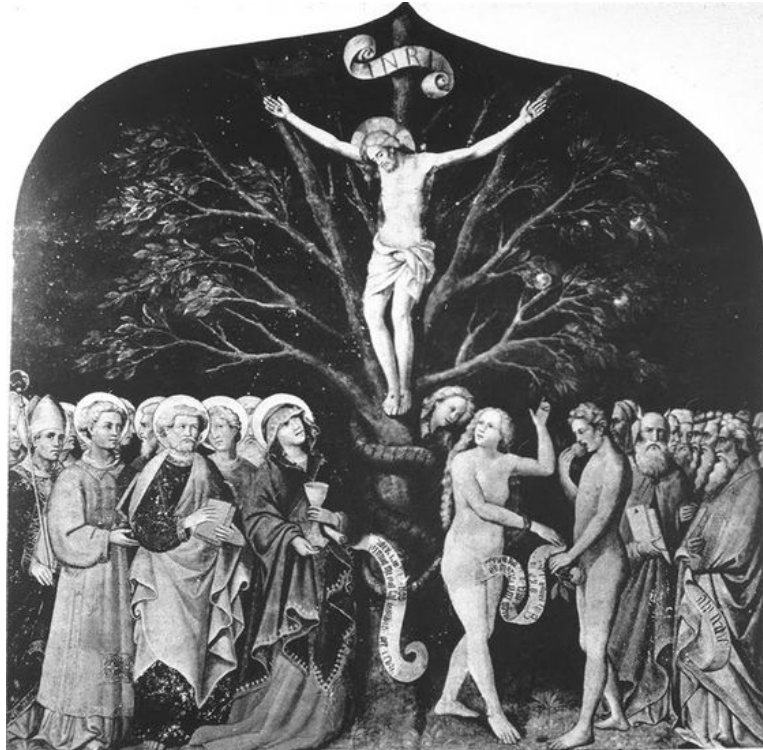


Figure 1 "Mystery of the Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena (1420)

So, why was Jesus crucified on that tree in that garden?

Listen to a very literal translation of John 1:18: "No one has yet at any time seen God," and yet John makes it clear, we see God when we see Jesus. And we see him truly when we see him enthroned on his cross at the edge of time and eternity, according to John.

God told Moses, "...man shall not see me and live. (Exodus 33:20)" So we die with him and rise with him at the cross.

So anyway, John 1:18 · "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten God [and some versions will say the "only begotten Son] who is in the bosom [the *kolpos*] of the Father, he has made him known."

He is God, the Good in Flesh. He is the Life. And he "has made him known." Seeing him is death, and "knowing him" is Life," according to Jesus. ^{xii} He is the Judgment of God.

And this [Peter hits his chest], this is the *kolpos*—the sternum. It's right where the physician cuts when he's performing open-heart surgery.

So, why was Jesus crucified on that tree in that garden?

Well, because he is the heart of our Father given to us, his children. And to know our Father and our Father's heart, it is absolutely imperative that we know that we cannot pay, and absolutely everything is gift. Including knowing. Otherwise, we'll be utterly unable to enjoy the great banquet

that our Father is throwing for older brothers and younger brothers, for Pharisees and sinners, for everyone.

When I look upon that tree and the one whom I have pierced, God removes my heart of stone, my ego, my pride—that thing that thinks it must pay, that is full of itself, that cannot lose its life and find its life, that cannot pump blood, that is incapable of love.

When I look upon the one whom I have pierced, God removes my heart of stone and gives me his own heart, his *mishpat*, his judgment, his good judgment, his *justice*, his righteousness. Justice and righteousness are one word in Greek and Hebrew, and both of them are a decision called “Love.”

I love because I have been loved, and I come to know that Love at the tree.

[Image on screen of illustrative artwork of Jesus on the cross]

So, when little Dave Allen was sent to that Catholic School, and he peeked behind the nun as she looked down upon him and asked, “Will you be a good little boy?” she should have noticed the shock and fear in his eyes as he gazed upon Jesus Christ and him crucified, as he looked upon him whom we have pierced.

She should have notice and said, “Oh Sweetheart, I think you misunderstand...That’s not what our Father does to people who aren’t good... That’s what people who aren’t good do to our Father—they break his heart. That’s what people who aren’t good do to our Father, and what our Father does to all of us people who aren’t good—he gives us his own heart.

And once you know this—once you really know this—you cannot help but be good, for you too will have a new heart.”

Sometimes people ask, “What difference does this knowledge make?” and I just don’t know what to say, because there’s just way too much to say.

So, for right now I’ll just say that as I sat by my father’s bed in the intensive care unit at Swedish Medical Center and watched the color begin to flow back into his lifeless pale skin...

- I wasn’t wondering why people would do such things...
- I wasn’t gnashing my teeth and plotting vengeance in a rage...
- I wasn’t asking what I had done wrong, or he had done wrong...
- I wasn’t making deals with God in shame, fear, and desperation...
- I really wasn’t even nervous...

I was just overwhelmed with gratitude, and I couldn’t help but worship. There was a huge scar running down my father’s kolpos...that’s where they stuck the knives and broke his bones...

- It’s true that he’d gone downtown, and something had gone wrong—he had had a heart attack while under the care of his doctor.
- It’s true that they cut him, broke his bones, and committed great violence, but not in order to take life, but to give life—to give him a new heart.
- It’s true that they took a whole lot of money, but my dad had freely given that money—and when he awoke, he knew what they had done.

Then he knew, and he was forever grateful.

Actually, Dad did pay for his heart surgery; but you cannot pay for yours. Yours is a transplant, and God himself is the donor. And when you awake, you will be forever grateful.

And now, if you are tracking, you might think, “OK fine... nice story, pastor...

- But it wasn't heart surgery for those who died in the shooting in Boulder...
- And it isn't heart surgery for their families who now suffer that loss...
- And it's not heart surgery for me... right now!

Is that so? Because, you see, I think Jesus thinks that it is.

He claimed to fulfill The Law and The Prophets... including Ezekiel. And when he gives you his body and blood, what part of the Father's body do you suppose that he is giving? And he did say that his Word was a knife... maybe it's cutting you right now?

Sometimes people say, “I know this stuff, but it doesn't make a difference.”

Maybe you know about Good and evil—maybe you've pierced the lion of the tribe of Judah and you run—and he can catch you, but you haven't let him catch you.

Maybe you know about the Good, but haven't yet been known by the Good. You see, it's not knowledge that you could take from a book; it's living knowledge that you must receive from a person—even from a person's heart, even their heart.

And so, our strategy for change is not to take more knowledge of good and evil from the tree, and then work harder to justify ourselves.

- Our strategy is to surrender to God's Judgment, his Justice—our justification
- Our strategy is to surrender to the Surgeon.
- Our strategy is to stop, and look on him whom we have pierced.

That's why I hope you come to worship, to hear him in the music, listen to him in the message, and see him in body broken and blood shed. It's why I hope you spend time each day reading Scripture and offering your heart to him as you gaze upon him in prayer. It's why I hope you are part of something like a small group, so you can confess your sins one to another, experience mercy, and see him in the eyes of friends. It's why I hope you find places to serve, so you can find him in the last and least of these—not to pay, but to learn that you cannot pay; He has paid.

The Heart of God is Grace, and that is his Judgment; that's Justice.

If Justice is people getting what they deserve—what's fair, there is no justice, for people deserve nothing—what could they deserve it with?

Justice isn't people getting what they deserve; Justice is God getting what God deserves, and that's people who love in his own image—people who love as they have been loved.

So, is there a debt to pay?

Well yes, you must return the life that you've taken and that's also been given in order to receive more life in return—actually a river of life, eternal Life. But it's God's life, and he even gives you the will, the decision, the good judgment, the *mishpat*, to return that Life... Dad always pays.

So, is there such a thing as “Divine Retribution”?

Well, our notion of Divine Retribution is just an illusion... But I suppose there is Divine Retribution...

Communion

[Peter goes to the communion table.]

This is Divine Retribution...This is how our Father places his own heart within his children.

You are the debt that God owes to himself. He owes it to himself to make you in his own image and likeness. *This* is Divine Retribution.

On the night that we least deserved it, Jesus from the *kolpos* of the Father, took bread and broke it, saying, “This is my body given to you. Take and eat, and do it in remembrance of me.”

And in the same way, he took the cup, saying, “This is the covenant in my blood. Drink of it, all of you.”

This is *mishpat*. This is justice. But is this Penal Substitutionary Atonement?

I don’t know; I suppose it depends on what you mean by that. But whatever it is, I know that this is Love... from the bosom of your Father. This is your new heart.

Amen.

Benediction

And so, Lord Jesus, thank you for washing us white as snow. And thank you for the incredible irony that we ought to pay attention to, and that is that you wash us in your blood. You are good, and we’re beginning to know. Thank you for showing us, Jesus, the heart of our Father. In your name we pray, Amen.

What is sin? Sin is hanging onto your life. It’s hanging on to the life. It’s “mine, mine, mine—that’s not fair.” And, you know, the picture of him washing us white as snow, that comes from the Revelation, that we are washed in the blood of the Lamb. That’s what gives us our righteousness. And we’re washed in the blood of the Lamb that becomes a river. The river of Life.

So you owe him everything, because nothing was yours in the first place, and yet when you read Scripture, God’s never like, “You owe me, owe me, owe me.” The thing that we owe him is gratitude. And that comes with a certain knowledge that he gives us. That’s what the father wanted at the banquet—he wanted his sons to know, he paid for everything, and so he wanted them to enjoy the dinner. And that’s what every dad wants from their kids—that they would enjoy him...and each other. And all things with him.

So, anyway, Jesus said to his disciples on the road to Emmaus, “Why are you so slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken?”

And I've really wondered about that: Why are we so slow to believe that God could make all things new? Why are we so slow to believe, as Isaiah says that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess?

You see, I think we're so slow because we just find it incredibly hard to believe that God could give us a new heart... because that means a new decision, a new judgment, a new desire.

We're so slow to believe that he created us in the first place, let alone recreate us and give us a new heart. But he will. And what gives me hope is that when you believe that, that's already that new heart beginning to pump in your chest.

And so, by way of the benediction, may you exercise your new heart. May you believe the Gospel. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Which means that Justice is a god that our God must satisfy...
Or justice is an attribute of God and so he must satisfy himself...

ⁱⁱ They ["the tender-hearted" in Augustine's words] could not harmonize endless punishment with what Scripture says about God as the Compassionate One. Nor could Augustine! But the endlessness of the punishment was beyond discussion. Thus, there must be some other element in God. This Augustine found in what the Bible says about God's "righteousness" (Lat. *iustitia*) [This is where we get our word "Justice;" not from the Hebrew or Greek of Scripture, but the Latin of the Romans], which he interpreted as "revenging justice." We will simply ignore the fact that nowhere in Scripture does the word "righteousness" refer to God's act of punishing. There is no question that the Bible teaches unequivocally that God punishes evil. Our concern is the contrast Augustine discerns in God: retribution as opposed to compassion. God wants two things. For some people He wants to be the Compassionate One. But for most people he wants to be something else: the One who is just-the Judge, who "requires that sin, which is committed against the most high majesty of God, be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment" (the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 11). Since Augustine, this theory of the two contrasting divine goals has dominated the western faith tradition.

~ Jan Bonda, The One Purpose of God, p. 21

ⁱⁱⁱ Or maybe we wonder, "What did I do wrong, because God is Just?"
Or we think, "Maybe there is no God for supposedly God is just, but this world is entirely unfair."

^{iv} God is not pleased to endlessly punish.

But God is pleased with repentance and the resurrection of the dead... and, perhaps, death is necessary to experience an eternal resurrection.

But God does not punish to satisfy some other god, named "Justice."

And God is not divided, wanting to punish some and not punish others.

God disciplines (some call this punishment; some don't) in order to make us in his own image; all his "punishment" is Love.

v "An eye for an eye," the *Lex Taliones*, is "retributive justice."

vi The word *prodidomai*, translated "first given (a gift)" can also be translated "betrayed" like *paradidomai* translated "handed over" or "betrayed"

In Job 41:11, God himself is talking and says in Hebrew, "*who has first given to me* [which is also translated "*prevented me*" or "*gone before me*") So...

"Who has first given to me, (prevented me, betrayed me, or done anything before me) that I should now repay him?"

vii Eckhart Tolle, *A New Earth, 10th anniversary edition* (Penguin Books), P.207

viii Ibid P.103

ix 16 I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice [mishpat]. – Ezekiel 34:16 NRSV

x "I will lay your cities waste, and you shall become a desolation; and you shall know that I am the LORD. Because you cherished perpetual enmity, and gave over the people of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment..." – Ezekiel 35:4-5 RSV

xi "Perpetual" is a reference to a duration of time, but time comes to an end. The aions come to an end, and in the same way "perpetual" comes to an end—Jesus is the End. But perhaps one will experience perpetual enmity as long as one cherishes perpetual enmity in their heart. We need a new heart.

xii

We know, from John, that Jesus said to Philip, "*If you've seen me you've seen the Father.*(John 14:9)"

We also know that God said to Moses, "*Man shall not see me and live.* (Exodus 33:20)"

Paul wrote, "*If we have died with him, we will also live with him.* (2nd Timothy 2:11)"

Jesus Prayed, "*And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent* (John 17:3)"

When we truly look on the one whom we have pierced we see God... and die.

But when we know him, for he has known us, even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, we rise from the dead.

"For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2nd Corinthians 4:6)"