



Matthew 22:33–36

33 “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? 34 Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. 35 And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Bere-

kiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.

Reflection

Today Jesus' tirade ends. It ends with some of his strongest language to date. His final indictment of the Jewish religious leaders begins with these words,

33 "You snakes! You brood of vipers!

Disparaging words, no doubt, in any culture. Poisonous, deadly creatures, that slither on their bellies, cunningly waiting for just the right moment to strike. Some of them even captivating their prey through mesmerizing, pendulum-like motion, be-

fore suddenly and unexpectedly sinking their poisonous fangs into their victims. But to people from Judaeo-Christian backgrounds the mention of snakes carries far more insulting overtones than even these. For the Jewish religious leaders, there would have been no missing Jesus' meaning. A brood of vipers: roiling and writhing newborn baby snakes, spawned by Satan himself, the primordial Serpent, about their father's venomous and deadly business, leading people to hell. Jesus continues,

How will you escape being condemned to hell?

Which is tantamount to saying that there will be no escape. John the Baptist made similar accusations before he was killed.

His blood is on their hands, as is the blood of all the prophets that their forefathers killed, and as will soon be the blood of Jesus. In yesterday's passage Jesus urged them on,

32 Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!

And in Matthew 27, chillingly, after being whipped into a frenzy by the chief priests and the elders, the crowds will be baying for Jesus' blood. The Romans know he's not guilty of anything, Pilate says to the crowds,

'I am innocent of this man's blood,' ... 'It is your responsibility.'

To which they reply,

‘His blood is on us and on our children!’

‘All this righteous blood, the blood of the prophets and my blood,’ says Jesus, ‘will be laid at your feet.’ How will you escape being condemned to hell? And he continues, damning them even further in verse 34 when he goes on to prophesy what they will do after they’ve murdered the son of God,

34 Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.

The prophets of old, even the son of God

himself is not enough to sate them. When Jesus is gone they will pursue his disciples, leaders in the early Christian church, and believers from all walks of life. Some of them they will kill. Like James whose head they cut off with a sword. Others, like Stephen, they stone to death. Others still they will crucify. Just listen to what they will do to the apostle Paul from in 2 Cor 11, one of their own number who gave his life over to Jesus,

24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers,

in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

Jesus continues,

35 And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Upon their wicked generation, this generation spanning 30 AD to 70 AD, will come down the wrath of God for the blood the righteous. Jesus mentions the blood of Abel and the blood of Zechariah. Chronologically in the Hebrew Scriptures they represent the first and last of the prophets that had been killed. 'You're responsible for their deaths, and everyone in between, and soon my death, and the death of all those who will be martyred in the blood soaked years that will give birth to the Christian church.'

33 "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"

And with these chilling words Jesus is done with the Pharisees and teachers of

the law, he's done with Jerusalem and he's done with temple. He'll encounter them just two more times. The next time he sees him they'll be arresting him and putting him to trial in a kangaroo court in the dead of the night. They'll pronounce him guilty and hand him over the Romans to be executed. But the time after that will be the most fearsome of all. On that day, when Jesus returns as judge of the living and the dead, at that encounter Jesus will revisit this catalogue of their sins in Matthew 23 and there will be no escape for their generation.

Think

The author of Hebrews asks a similar question of our generation, he asks us in Hebrews 2:3,

‘how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?’

The answer is the same. There will be no escaping for those who reject Jesus. And so when we read chilling passages like today’s one, in which the son of God holds people to account for their sins, it must drive us to think of the fate that is in store for those who live their lives ignoring God. Their sins too are heaping up. They too will be held to account. Their only hope is the good news of Jesus Christ.

What can you do about this today? When was the last time you shared your faith with someone? Is the driving motivation of your life the spread of the gospel? Is your deepest and most lasting joy see-

ing people come to faith and enter the kingdom of God? These aren't questions that should make us guilty, just questions that we should regularly ask ourselves as Christians, so that we can realign our lives to be in step with the priorities of God.

Take some time now to think deliberately and concretely about the people that God has put in your life, those who are not in a saving relationship with him. There may be few or many. How can you begin to influence them for Jesus? In what small ways can you begin to steer them towards Christ? What type of friend do you need to be towards them, how much do they need to trust you before they'll listen to and value what you say? How can you love, serve and live life alongside them in a way that it will most likely lead to opportunities for

you to share with them the hope that you have in Jesus; how he's changed your life for the better and how he can change theirs too?

Pray

Why not pick just one person this morning. Pray to God on their behalf. Beg him for them. Pray that he would save them. And then plan with God what role you might play in their salvation. What kind word, what action, what way can you show them God's love today? Win them for him.