

## ***TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST***

*Isaiah 65:17-25; Psalm 98; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19*

There is a story told about a monk who once approached Buddha and asked, “Do the souls of the righteous survive death?” As usual the Buddha gave him no reply. But the monk persisted. Each day he would repeat the question, and each day he would get silence for an answer, until he could take it no longer. He threatened to abandon the path to enlightenment unless this crucial question was answered, for to what purpose, he wanted to know, was he sacrificing everything to live in the monastery, if the souls of the righteous perished with their bodies?

Then Buddha, in his compassion, spoke. You are like a man, he said, who was dying from a poisoned arrow. His relatives rushed a doctor to his side, but the man refused to have the arrow pulled out unless three vital questions were first answered.

First, the man who shot him, was he a white man or a black?

Second, was he a tall man or a short man? And third, was he a Brahmin or an outcast?

How many of us are in the same position as that monk? How many of us question God, and refuse to go on in our faith walk until those questions are answered to our satisfaction? How many of us have had friends and family leave the church, leave the faith, give up on God, because they have not received the

answers they wanted to hear when they wanted to hear them? Many people refuse to believe in God, they refuse to act as God wants them to act, until their questions are answered. Lest we become too judgmental about these people, remember that many of those who ask these questions are very sincere people. For them, it is not so much a matter of avoiding God, or of refusing to consider the path of faith, as it is a matter of being convinced that they will not be wasting their time.

For many, the questions that they have revolve around one simple matter, it revolves around the apparent success that evil people have in this world. They are concerned by the fact that while God is supposed to be a God of justice, the wicked do not seem to be hindered in their evil ways at all. They cry out: "It is vain to serve the Lord. What do we profit by keeping His commandments, or by going about as mourners before Him?

What does it prosper us? The arrogant are happy, and evildoers not only prosper, but when they put God to the test, they escape".

These are tough questions and statements from both those who openly disbelieve, and from those who claim the name of God as their own. We want to know what is in it for us? How do we profit if we do all that God says we should do? Why should we follow the Lord since we see that wicked people do very well, and that evil people, all too often, do not suffer? These are tough questions

There is a point to all this, a point to our worship of God, a point to our serving Him and obeying His laws, even when all around us evil seems to prosper and wicked people seem to go off scott free.

Actually there are several points, but today let us look at one of the most fundamental ones, the one that we so often forget when

we look at the world, and complain about how things are going, and question what profit there is in following God. That point is the one made by God when He said: “There is a day coming when all the arrogant and all evil doers will be stubble. The day that comes will burn them up, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch, but for those who revere My name, the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in his wings. They shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And they shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of their feet, on the day when I act.”

There is a day coming when the wicked will perish, they will be ground underfoot, they will be burned up like so much straw and stubble, while the righteous, those who keep faith with God, those who attempt to follow in the path of Christ, will be spared as parents spare their children who serve them. They will be more than conquerors through Him who loves them, they will be richly blessed and live eternally.

So indeed, there is a point to all this, a point to faith, a point to keeping the law of God, a point to believing. Even when the wicked seem to prosper, and the good seem to suffer and die without any kind of relief. Those who are righteous live by faith.

Those who are evil perish at the last day. That is the long and the short of the point to all this.

We should never say to anyone, believers and sceptics alike, do not ask questions about evil, do not ask questions about the fate of the righteous. Indeed, between now and the time of Christ's return, there is a place for the questions we have for God, and God has provided an answer for nearly all of those questions within His holy word, and within the faith we have inside ourselves.

But that really is the secret of it all and we must be willing to act

in faith, and live in faith, before the answers to the questions of faith are revealed to us. We must be willing to allow God, to pluck out the arrows that poison our lives, before we have all the answers as to who shot us, and why poison arrows are allowed in the first place. Hearing about the judgement to come will tell us nothing as an answer to our questions, unless we are willing to allow Christ to enter our hearts, and minister to us His life giving word, and share with us His life-restoring powers.

We all end up in this life the same way, we all die, whether young or old, good or bad. The question we need to ask is not why do the wicked seem to prosper, but rather, with whom do we want to be numbered?

God gives everyone a fair chance before the time of judgement to observe His life giving laws, and to follow His Christ, the one who was willing to die so that we might live, willing to suffer so that we might not perish. There is a point to all this, and there is an end. Those who endure in faith will win their souls. Jesus came to tell us this, and to ensure it.

**AMEN.**