



Marked for Salvation

Ezekiel 9:1-6a *Then I heard [the LORD] call out in a loud voice, "Bring the guards of the city here, each with a weapon in his hand." And I saw six men coming from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with a deadly weapon in his hand. With them was a man clothed in linen who had a writing kit at his side. They came in and stood beside the bronze altar. Now the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple. Then the LORD called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side and said to him, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it." As I listened, he said to the others, "Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary."*

We put marks on things for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes we mark things for ill. A logger might go through the forest and put a big red 'X' on the trees that are too diseased to be used for lumber. An outlaw on the run might be a "marked man" with the police or the mob on his tail and a bounty on his head. Other times we mark things to save and identify as our own. Perhaps you scrawl your initials on the inside cover of every book you purchase. A shepherd puts tags in the ears or paints an identifying mark on his sheep before going out to the open pasture so he knows at a glance which animals are members of his flock.

Ezekiel Chapter 9 is a continuation of the vision from last week in which the LORD showed Ezekiel the detestable idolatry that was taking place in Jerusalem, yes, even desecrating his own temple. Before the Israelites even entered the Promised Land, God had warned them that if they followed the idolatrous practices of the Canaanites the too would in turn be destroyed and driven from the land. And for hundreds of years thereafter God sent countless prophets to warn his people of the danger they were in, but they refused to listen and instead became even more perverse and determined and insolent in their idolatry. God is faithful and supremely patient with us sinners, but he is not mocked nor will he allow his grace to be trampled underfoot (cf. Gal. 6:7). He will not tolerate and endure rebellion forever. God, the Almighty Judge of All, will bring retribution on his foes either in this life, or certainly, in the judgement to come.

A casual reader might hear the words of this vision that foretold the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and think that God is responding rather violently and viciously, but he is only acting in line with perfect justice. Perhaps it would help to think of this situation as watching someone we love deliberately destroy themselves and doing so just to spite us and make us hurt. God had tried every option at his disposal, but the people of Judah became more and more entrenched and content in their idolatry so that they would not be moved by anything less than war. God wanted his people to love and trust in him and be saved, but they could not do so as long as they remained enamored with their idols.

Yet in the midst of this coming judgment God also showed his faithfulness and mercy to the few who were left in Jerusalem who had repented of their sins and lamented the idolatry surrounding them. These God had marked so that they would not be harmed. They would remain untouched while his enemies were slaughtered. It's significant that the Lord told the man in linen to put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieved over the ungodliness of their people. This mark was a tav, which is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In Ezekiel's day that letter looked like a sideways 'X', a cross. It's no accident or coincidence that a cross was put on those who turned from their wicked ways and believed in God. And so we see again that even in judgment God is working for the rescue of his own!

As children of God through faith in Jesus God has marked us as his own, marked us for salvation. In the waters of holy baptism he has put his identifying mark on our souls. He has forgiven all our sins and marked us with the cross of his Son, and the deposit of his Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 1:22), so that we need have no fear of being condemned with the unbelieving world. Dear Christians, live in humility, gratefulness, and daily repentance for you've been marked by the LORD!

Prayer: Lord God, help me to live each day in the awareness that you have graciously marked me as your own, and I belong to you in body and soul. Now I pray that you would keep me sensitive towards sin and secure in your fold until the end. Amen.