

No one could understand it fully unless they experienced it themselves. Thankfully only a small percentage of people living in the world have. Soldiers in battle know the heart pumping adrenaline that comes with a combat mission. Thankfully they have all sorts of backup watching out for them. Literally watching them. Technology means soldiers can be marked by other friendly soldiers. This way everyone knows the movements. They're marked by reconnaissance aircraft above to give a bigger picture of the area around them, what enemies might be near, and call in support if necessary. But those soldiers also expect to be marked by the enemy. They must prepare and act like the enemy knows exactly what they're doing and where they're going. That's part of what keeps them safe.

For us non-soldiers, people are around us every day. But how many are noticing you, much less marking you to specifically track? In offices, classroom, out in the world, no one. But no matter if someone in the world is marking you, friend or foe, you do have an enemy that has marked you. It's an enemy that knows exactly what you are and where you are. And he's coming after you. If he succeeds in tripping you all will be lost. Satan wants to defeat you, wants you judged by God as guilty, and sent to hell for eternity.

As we listen to the vision of the prophet Ezekiel in the first lesson we can easily see God's point. Judgment is coming and it's serious. Thankfully we don't have to worry. Destruction and judgment will happen all around you, yet you'll be safe because...

You've been marked
What that means now
What that means then

Ezekiel may have been already sick to his stomach by the time God called out to the guards of the city. These executioners hadn't done anything yet, but Ezekiel knew they would have every reason to soon. This vision doesn't start in chapter nine. The whole previous chapter Ezekiel was shown things that were not good. Evildoers were about to be punished. They'd be struck down and killed without compassion or pity. And God was the one doing it. Shouldn't God have compassion? Shouldn't he show these people pity? Where's the love God?

Unfortunately Ezekiel saw there was no reason for compassion. God's judgment isn't indiscriminate. While it was tough to hear about a whole city being struck down and killed, it was even tougher to hear they deserved it. God led Ezekiel to see detestable things. The elders of the city, the religious leaders, worshiped images portraying crawling animals of Egyptian influence. They were worshiping false gods of the Egyptians in the dark thinking God wouldn't see and therefore wouldn't know. They set up shrines to these idols, and that wasn't the worst. Later God showed how the women mourned for a false god, how the men were bowing down to the sun as a god, and all this inside the temple to the true God. The people of Israel had turned their backs on the true God and invited violence and judgment. **"Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children..."** They provoked God to anger and received destruction for their actions.

Things like that are tough to hear coming out of the Good Book. Sometimes I think we'd rather pretend those portions aren't in the Bible. God killing without compassion and bringing judgment on people is hard to listen to. Maybe that's because we wonder if we deserve similar treatment. Have we also done things in secret under the cover of darkness hoping others wouldn't see? Darkness gives us a feeling of daring. Have we done things hoping God's back was turned and he didn't catch it? If it was small and he was busy we might just get away with it. Have we enjoyed our things, spent our money, and elevated our relationships higher than God? I'm not saying we bowed down to our spouse or a pile of money. But if we treated them as more important than God that's just the same. They can at times become like little gods to us.

For these sins and many others the executioner should come after us. We deserve to be struck down, judged a sinner. The executioner approaches close enough we fear he'll strike. But he doesn't swing his instrument of destruction. You've been marked. **"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."** This mark delivers from destruction. The destroyers move along and let you live. It's a mark that allows you to skip judgment. Instead of cowering in fear, you're spared and saved. What's the mark? It's not visible. You won't see its reflection in the mirror. I see nothing on your foreheads. It's possible the mark was the shape of an X. If that's the case it isn't too much of a stretch to rotate it 45 degrees. Whatever the mark was, it marks you as belonging to God. Whether X or cross, you've received the mark of Christ your Savior. That I do see when I look at all of you. Christ Jesus ensured that you were marked with his cross, placed on your head and heart at your baptism, marking you as a redeemed child of God. You've been marked and that saves you now.

This mark declares you a child of God. It calls to mind every promise you have because of the cross. With Jesus in your corner and the cross freeing you from sins, you stand confidently before God. You stand before the world and say, "I'm saved by Christ. I'm free in him. Nothing that happens to me now matters, but only Jesus' love for me." Now you can look forward to Judgment Day. Look forward to it now with no fear because you have the mark of the cross on you. And what about later, what about then? Then, Judgment Day will be when you who are marked by God are saved.

The sins of the people of Jerusalem were very very great. Bad like we can't imagine. The wicked and the idolaters were getting what they deserved. God was ashamed of them as his people. So ashamed he moved out. **"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."** God prepared to remove his presence from among his people. That was the worst thing imaginable, God leaving people behind. That was a very bad sign of what was to come.

Look for the bright spot in this really hard section of God's Word. God marks those who are his to save them. They're the remnant Ezekiel spoke of. You're part of that remnant. You've been marked. Marked with Jesus, brought into God's family, forgiven and set free. But on what basis? Was it something you did? Was it something you said or maybe how good you've been? None of those. You were lost without God; so God did something. God acted in his grace to put a mark on you. He set you aside as belonging to him in Christ Jesus. Then he sent Jesus for you. Sent him to die for you, to pay the price for your sins. That cross is God's promise that you are his completely. No harm will come to you in eternity. You're in. You've been marked in Christ for heaven then.

Judgment Day is still in the future, it's still a then. Every sign points to it happening just as God says. We can prepare ourselves to have no fear then. Start living the confidence we'll have then already now. With confidence in Christ we look forward to judgment as if it's already here. Because in Christ it is already. Jesus was judged in your place. Placed under God's punishment for sins he never committed. That leaves you with no more judgment to take. Judgment Day will not be about judging you, causing you worry about what the results might be. Judgment Day will be about taking you home. There's nothing to fear in Christ.

If it's about going home then we can live like we're going home already now. Give glory to God and live under Christ. Share Christ with others. You want them to have this same confidence. Let them know what Jesus did for them. Stay close to Christ yourself. Remain in him. Not just periodically but daily. Judgment Day is coming, literally at any moment. Now is the time to be prepared for then. Take actions that promote growth in faith. Worship regularly, be encouraged in the Word, and remember you've been marked.

If you're marked by the enemy in battle you have reason for fear. But if friendlies also have you marked, you've got cover. There's reason for feeling safe. Satan has eyes on you. But you've been marked. Now that means rescued and redeemed in Christ Jesus. Then it means Judgment Day will be a day to look forward to. No fear in judgment now or then because you've been marked under the cross of Christ.