

# Sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent

*“Behold, at that time I will judge all your oppressors.”*

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There is doubt. Is this man Jesus *the one that is to come, or should we look for another?* For the one who would come to redeem Israel was to be a great king, in the line of David, arrayed in glory; he would come with power to redeem Israel from the unclean nations which oppressed them. He would *ask of God, and be given the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. He would break them with a rod of iron, and dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.* He would reign in majesty; and dread would be his judgments.

And yet this man Jesus comes in meekness, and [John,] His Elijah, His herald, was no honorable man, but a desert dweller, lost in wandering, a preacher of riddles, eating locusts, and wearing rags of camel hair.

To them that were there, this John who baptized unto repentance would have not appeared as among greatest of saints, exalted above all born of woman, as we know him to be. Rather, he is as a madman, proclaiming a peasant-carpenter, of no influence, to be the true king of the universe, the liberator of Israel, who would wash the world with fire.

What the Jews desired was vengeance against their oppressors; what they wanted was freedom to worship their God in power and in peace.

Now, do not be too quick to chasten these Jews for their desire. They have desired rightly. They are right to desire revenge, to crave liberty from the oppression of their enemy; they were right to long for peace.

For it is written: *‘behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you.’ ‘He shall scatter away your enemies.’[‘And your adversaries he shall make his footstool.’]* Their desire is born

of faith in this promise.

Yet they have misunderstood who indeed is their enemy, even as we misunderstand who indeed is our enemy, who indeed is our oppressor.

It is not Rome who oppresses them. Nor is it the rich and powerful of our time that oppress us. Rome is, as any other nation, any other empire, raised up by the All-Knowing for a purpose, and is disposed of once His purpose is accomplished in them, even as '*God gives wealth, possessions, and honor to men*' which '*come in vanity, and depart in darkness.*'

No, the enemy of Israel is in fact the enemy of all mankind, the oppressor of all humanity, our ancient foe, the devil himself, who in the beginning seduced Adam and Eve into adultery against the God who loved them, the God who created them.

For in the beginning, the Spirit of the Lord hovered over the waters, and out of these waters, called all of creation. And on the sixth day, when all the universe had been prepared, He formed His masterpiece, Adam, drawn up from the earth. The Lord then breathed into Adam, and he became a living soul, the image of God, and placed him in the lushness of the garden. So man, as God's viceroy, He set above all creation, as the ruler of the universe. Yet the devil, in his consuming envy, caused man in his weakness to sin, to rebuke the divine image within him, and so to fall.

In his fall, God cursed the first man: '*thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return.*' '*Man lives but a time, and his life passes like a shadow.*' And for him '*all is vanity.*' For '*death comes to all.*' And '*in sheol, there is no work or thought or knowledge of wisdom;*' '*in death, there is no remembrance of the Most High*' Such is the calamity imposed upon hateful mankind.

Yet we should not think that God hates man merely because He has burdened us with this curse, for the *Lord chastises those whom he loves*. No, the divine wrath is not poured forth upon fainting mankind, rather, it has been turned against him that has mutilated the Lord's bride, who has bruised and shattered His image, who has stricken His beloved: His wrath is turned against *the devil and all his angels*, the true enemy of Israel, and the only enemy of God. It is against this enemy which the Lord has promised recompense; it is from this oppressor that the Lord has promised liberation. Therefore it is written: '*Vengeance is mine,*

*sayeth the Lord, I will repay.'*

*'Satan fell because of pride'* and so did man, as the devil tempted Adam and Eve with the promise of exaltation. So it is fitting that the true exaltation of man should be accomplished by Him that is most humble. So we look toward Christmas. The Lord became flesh, and was born of a virgin, and *'came not to be served, but to serve.'*

Yet the disciples of John the Baptist are confused. Even more so, they are offended. They have kept watch for the manifestation of God's violent power; they see only this man's gentle meekness; so they doubt. *'Are you the one that is to come, or should we look for another?'* Christ answers them: *'Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.'*

It is as if Our Lord said: *'Why do you doubt? Do you not know that it is necessary that glory be made perfect in humiliation? That power be made perfect in weakness? How else should man be raised up, if the true Son of Man is not first brought low? For it is not in majesty and might that the kingdom of God shall be revealed, but in mercy, and in servitude; in binding and in healing. You remember well the promise of Zephaniah for judgement, and of Isaiah for vengeance, and vengeance you will have, for I came not to bring peace, but a sword.'* But if you listened to the Prophets a little further, you would have known what form this vengeance would take, *'the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.'* *'And I will save the lame, and gather in the outcast.'*

Yes, it is in the life of humility that Our Lord's divine wrath shall be revealed against Satan; and it is in the ultimate act of His humiliation, the Crucifixion of Our Lord, that He will finally overthrow that demonic tyrant, for in His dying, He shall descend into the depths of Satan's power, there to do battle with him, there to bind the strong man in his own house, and to bridle Satan's chief weapon, death, and make it for God's people the portal of everlasting life. The cross is lifted up, Our Lord suffers every torture, and with His last breath, the earth is shaken, the sun hides itself, the temple is riven, for there, in that moment, the tumult of the cosmic battle has ensued. Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, against *the prince of this world.*

And who then can speak of the victory, who shall sing of the conquest of the Son against the evil one, and exalt the Crucified above every infernal power? Our Lord is risen from the dead, and the strong man is bound. Our Lord is risen from the dead *with mercy in his wings*. The vengeance of the Lord is revealed against the devil and all unrighteousness, and forgiveness is won for all who repent. See now, in the risen Christ, that *'justice and mercy kiss one another.'*

Now Israel has its deliverance from the power of the devil. Now Israel has its freedom from the oppression of sin and death. Now Israel has peace, *the peace which passes all understanding*.

Adam and Eve are drawn out of hell, and once again *'The King of Israel, the Lord, dwells in our midst.'* *'See then, the Lord will judge all your oppressors'* *'and He will exalt over you with loud song.'* *'He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you by his love.'*

Therefore *'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.'* *'Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel. Exalt with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.'*

*'For never again shall you fear evil.'*

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*Preached by Pastor Fields*

*Sermon Texts: Zephaniah 3:14-20; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 7:18-28.*