

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Epiphany 6
Saturday, February 11, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, February 12, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

“I Deserve the Hell of Fire”

Matthew 5:21-37

Last week I told you, “don’t believe the lie.” That could be the theme for this week’s sermon also. With all of the chaotic noise in our world, it is increasingly difficult to avoid the lie and seek the truth. Our world is filled with lies that sound plausible. This is especially true when the conversation is about God and what is the actual Gospel – what is the actual Good News. Satan is the father of lies, and he doesn’t come at you with horns showing, breathing fire, pitchfork in hand. He is much more crafty than that.

As we have been working our way through the Sermon on the Mount these past few weeks, there is the temptation to think that the only lie we have to look out for is the temptation to see Jesus’ words as a set of rules: “Here is what you must do! Obey these words! Then will you be right with God.” And we smugly sit in our Lutheran Orthodoxy understanding the heart of the Gospel that we are saved by God’s grace alone, through faith, apart from works, can quote Ephesians 2:8-9 by heart – I even have it printed on the back of my business cards – Satan has a sweet little lie for us also.

We hear God’s Word of Law that if you are angry with your brother, you are a murderer and are liable to judgment. Have you ever been angry

with your brother? Then you deserve judgment. You deserve death and the hell of fire. You do. Jesus says so.

Satan's sweet little lie is that God's Word of Law is really no big deal for us. I am baptized. I have the Gospel. It doesn't matter if I get angry. I am covered. It doesn't matter if I look at a woman lustfully or look at pornography. The lie is that it doesn't even matter if you act upon those desires. The lie is that God's Law has been abolished by the Gospel.

We heard Jesus say last week that He has not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. He has kept it for you. But do not think that God's will for your life doesn't matter. God takes sin so seriously that Jesus says it would be better for you to gouge your eyes out than to look upon sin which leads you astray and into the hell of fire.

If you are angry with your brother, you deserve death and the hell of fire. If you say "You fool!" you will be liable to the hell of fire. The Greek word for fool is "mwros" from which we get the word "moron." Me blurting out, "You moron!" as the Dallas Cowboys lose another football game demonstrates that I am a sinner who deserves the hell of fire for all eternity. I am very serious. That is what I deserve. Let that serve as a warning for all of those who have a vested interest in today's game. Thanks be to God that we are saved by grace, through faith, apart from works, it is a gift from God, this is the truth that brings true comfort and joy.

The world stands condemned already, as Jesus says in John 3:18 – you know, just a couple verses after John 3:16. We are liable to judgment. We would all stand before the judgment if it were not for the Son of God fulfilling God's Law. Jesus came not to abolish the Law, not to get rid of it, but to fulfill it, because you or I could not keep the fullness of what God demands. We are sinners who deserve the hell of fire.

This is the balancing act with the truth of the Gospel in the middle and Satan's lies on either side. For those who are gung-ho for the Lord, Satan says, "Did you hear what Jesus said, 'If you don't obey all these rules, then you are liable for judgment, for the hell of fire.'" Satan knows we all fail. He knows that we get frustrated. He knows we get angry. He knows that there are days when we are surrounded by morons. And he wants you to look upon your life, upon your failure to keep the Law, and despair.

We cannot obey this word of Law. It would be easier for me to tear out my eye and throw it away, or cut off my hand and throw it away, so that I would stop sinning with my hands and my eyes. If only keeping God's Law was that easy. Satan wants you to look at Jesus' words and despair, as if your sin has disqualified you from the grace of God.

On the other side of truth, Satan says, "Aren't you baptized and forgiven. Don't worry about all these words of Jesus. That is just for those "unbelievers" out there. And he turns the Gospel into a pillow so that your sinful mind can sleep in the comfort of your sin. As I said last week, you cannot be comfortable in your sin and comforted by the Gospel at the same time.

In between Satan's lies is the truth – the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Eph. 2:8-9, salvation by grace through faith, a gift from God, apart from works, but responded to by our works which God prepared beforehand for us to do (that is Eph. 2:10). As we heard Jesus say last week, "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" – not for the praise of you; not so you can get to heaven; but for His glory.

The message of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount is not "Do this! Obey!"; and it is not "Don't worry, be happy." Rather, Jesus says, "I bless

you: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, (those who are empty of themselves; who know they have nothing to offer God) for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Your salvation has come from outside of you. (We see that so clearly played out in Baptism.)

The Lord says, "You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world; because you are Mine: And your Heavenly Father would pay any price for you – even the cost of the life of His own Son. And I have prepared good things for you, but your life on earth will most likely be even more difficult because they will hate you because they hated Me first." That is His message of hard truth.

Adam believed Satan's lies. You and I have believed Satan's lies. Sin is our rejection of what God has designed for our life to be.

His Law is a demonstration of His will for you and your neighbor. It expresses all of the good that He wants for you and for your neighbor. He wants you to be free from anger; free from sin of all kinds. But don't look at what Jesus says and despair because you can't keep yourself free from anger and all sin.

And on the other side of the lie, if you get rid of the Law, you will lose your awareness of sin, and eventually you will lose your awareness of the need to be wary of sin. So you will get rid of the Gospel too. Why would you need it? That is the whole point of Jesus' sermon. You and I still deserve the hell of fire. You can't fix this on your own. He says, "I came to keep this Law for you."

You are saved by grace alone, through faith, it is a gift from God, not by works. Don't believe the lies. Trust in the grace of your Baptism. You have been washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. Amen.