

Judgment in the Third Heaven: My Testimony



This is a story I rarely share but my friend Dinah encouraged me to a while back, and in the interest of keeping the leaven out of our homes this week I am going to go ahead and share it here. This is not a complimentary story about me –

it doesn't make me special; I think it happened was because I was such a desperate case and such a dangerous person – and yet, God still had a plan for my life.

(FYI: It took me forever to come up with a title to this and I am still not happy with it – it sounds pretentious but if you keep reading you will understand why I have no reason to be proud of what happened)

I was living in a small town in New Mexico in 2008 – my kids were in first grade, and it was Fall – I remember because I was in the backyard raking leaves. I had, a few months earlier, prayed the kind of prayer that only insane people pray, “Lord Jesus, judge me in this life while I still have time to change.”

I meant that prayer with all my heart. I was an angry, wounded, hot mess of a person. I distrusted God, loved Jesus, and saw no way around that inherent conflict – but although I distrusted God, I desperately wanted Him to love me. I won't go into the reasons why I felt that way about Him. There are too many, and that isn't the point.

I was a racist, and my specific brand of racism was on full alert living in a town that was largely illegal aliens and their children and grandchildren. It was also helped along by the fact that, in that town, it was a definite two-way street with all too many people.

But I also didn't know anything about how to be a loving person – I knew how to be a critical, unpleasable person. I knew how to justify my harshness as the “truth spoken in love.” In short, I was an expert at coming up with reasons why everything I did and thought was really okay, and those justifications went up quickly, and without a thought every time the Holy Spirit approached me about what I was actually doing.

I was the most dangerous kind of believer – I was incredibly intelligent, well-read, zealous beyond belief, confident in what I was doing and in my “anointing” – but on the inside, I was as much of a murderer as Paul ever was. I would tear a person who disagreed with me down without so much as a look backward. The problem was this – I was also having dreams about being surrounded by children, and during those moments when my guard was down, the Spirit was urgently impressing upon me that I was in no way prepared to be the kind of person whom children would need.

That's the easy part of the story to tell – the part no one has any trouble believing. That actually isn't embarrassing anymore to talk about – what God had to do to me to get me to begin to change is why I am crying right now.

Like I said – I was raking leaves. Then all of a sudden I wasn't in my backyard anymore. I guess maybe I was in what Paul called the “third heaven” – I don't know. To be honest, I didn't look around, I was aware of the Shekinah enthroned in front of me, and a man standing to my left, wearing white. I never saw His face; I never looked up. No one ever spoke at all. When you are being judged, you don't notice much of anything else. You just can't. Or at least I couldn't.

There is a verse about being judged by every careless word and another which explains that the Word judges the thoughts and intentions of our heart.

I want you to imagine every terrible thing you have ever thought and said – not the things you knew were wrong and repented of, but the things you quickly made excuses for and

lied to yourself about – the things you did to hurt people because you wanted to be hurtful, you wanted them to know you were a better believer, or superior; think about the real intentions and hidden motivations in your words and actions that you lied to yourself about, and lied about so often that you actually began to believe your own lies. Those lies that worked to protect you from the truth about how cruel you really were and even intended to be – truths that hurt so bad that you dare not face one at a time, let alone all of them at once.

No one, and especially not me, ever said a word. I was in agony that I cannot describe. We are used to our own egos coming to our rescue when we behave in evil ways – those defense mechanisms pop up before we know it and they are so deft at deceiving us that we rarely even get a twinge to our conscience after a while. We want the lies, not the truth. It is easy to say otherwise before you stand before God to face them all at once.

I realize now that I was taken there, not because I deserved a glimpse of the throne room of God, but because that was the only place where my ego would stand down. In the presence of pure light and truth, not only was my physical mouth shut – but so was my internal voice. I had no defense attorney in that room – I was exposed completely with no ability to justify anything. What I became aware of was the truth about everything I had ever said or thought or did – and the truth about why I said and thought and did those things. You just can't imagine seeing yourself for who you really are.

Funny – to be in the room with Father and Son and not to hear their voices, or condemnation. No instruction, no revelation of doctrine, no corrections to what I already believed. No calendars, no Names, no challenges about what I was eating or doing on my Saturdays. Everything was about my character, which was very, very bad. That was the reason I was there – evidently, that was my most important issue – the biggest problem.

I am still shocked that I was able to stand, but sometimes I

wonder if I was just frozen in place. I don't know; all I was aware of was the agony of seeing myself as I was, with no respite and nowhere to hide. I don't know how long it took – eternity is just different. What I became increasingly aware of as it went on was that Father and Son were not there to condemn me but to expose and support me. I started to realize that if they were not there, I probably would have died from the strain. I cannot even begin to relate how horrible it is to see yourself without the self-deceptive and protective filter of ego.

When it was over, I was back in my backyard – rake in hand as if nothing had ever happened. I was ashamed – in some ways I felt very empty, and in other ways, I felt very full. As I recall, it was actually a week or two before my ego tried to kick back in and start lying to me again – but it has never been nearly as successful as it used to be. Ego gets stronger when I am angry, hurt or have been betrayed – but my success at deceiving myself has been hampered – when I am acting like a jerk, I am generally keenly aware of it and have to force myself to believe otherwise – self-deception is no longer effortless. I am constantly faced with my shortcomings.

No, I can't tell you what color Messiah is, I saw hands, but it wasn't like that – color like we think of it. White but certainly not white, and yet, white. I never lifted my eyes past the hands. No, I didn't see nail holes either – just hands from the side view where they wouldn't be visible anyway. I was aware of much but saw little; the experience was too overwhelming and terrible. It was also the best thing that ever happened to me. Drastically bad character requires drastic measures from God. I had a calling to work with children – that's why I prayed that prayer in the first place – I knew I wasn't ready. Ministering to adults is bad enough, but with kids, there is no room to be in the flesh all the time.

I hate sharing this because someone might think I am bragging – but believe me, this was not like any of the throne room trips of the prophets. I wasn't hearing the secret counsel of God or seeing the glorious things there. I didn't eat a

covenant meal or hear His voice or listen to the Angels singing. I didn't deserve any of that. In very human terms, I was taken to the principal's office and stripped of my unearned false pride, deprived of every excuse and any pretense of – it's still hard to explain. When I returned, it was without a shred of faith in myself. I have never trusted myself since that day, and that's why I am constantly questioning myself – especially when I feel like I am in the right. Most people have no clue the depths of self-deception they are capable of – but that knowledge was God's gift to me. It is an undeniable truth. The awareness goes deeper with each passing year – what I faced in the throne room was just the correction, it wasn't the end. It spurs me on to be more like Him because remaining the way I am is just too painful to contemplate.