

**The Faith We Confess:**  
*A Series of Sermons on the Core Doctrines of the Christian Faith*  
**Jesus Christ Our Judge: “The Coming One Who Will Judge the Living and the Dead”**

“Bernie deserves a longevity pill- not death- so he can watch each generation suffer and see what he did.”

Those words came from a woman named Jackie Stone. She is angry at Bernie Madoff because his dishonest investment practices have endangered her whole family’s financial future. They lost everything. And she is hurt by the courts decision to sentence him in prison for 150 years.

She is mad because the man will not live 150 years. He will die well before his time is up. She wished that he wouldn’t die, but that he would live long enough to agonize over the suffering that he will have inflicted on future generations. There is a sense of righteous indignation and a longing for justice in her words. (Richard Mouw, *The President’s Blog: Mouw’s Musings*, August 17, 2009)

Today we are going to talk about a subject that is not very popular- the judgment of God.

There is a real irony here because as much as some of us hate to think of the idea that God would judge people the fact of the matter is that God has hardwired the human heart to long for justice and judgment. This quote from Jackie Stone is proof that we humans long for justice to be served in this world.

When someone commits a grievous crime we want to see him brought to justice and in our longing we sometimes say strong things about such people. “I hope he rots in hell.” “I hope he gets fried.” “I hope he lives a long time so he can sit in his cell and be tormented by the thoughts of what he did to that family.” Humans want justice and the reason we want it is because God made us that way. The Bible says we are created in the image of God and one way that we reflect that truth is by virtue of the fact that God has put within us all an inward sense of right and wrong and when that inner sense is violated we long for justice to be served.

The point here is that if we long for justice then how much more so does God! Our sense of justice, of right and wrong, and of being offended by evil is pale in comparison to God’s sense of justice, his sense of right and wrong, and his sense of being offended by wickedness. God is holy beyond our comprehension; therefore his intensity for justice is much greater than ours.

**The Judgment of God Permeates the Whole Bible**

The Bible speaks at great length about the judgment of God.

When Adam and Eve sinned they were banished from the garden and given the ultimate sentence for their rebellion-death. Life apart from God and life against God leads to death.

In the time of Noah the world had grown so wicked that God judged it with a catastrophic flood.

God judged Sodom and Gomorrah for its flagrant sexual immorality.

God judged the Egyptians for their harsh treatment of his chosen people the Israelites by sending the 10 plagues upon them and by drowning their army in the Red Sea.

God, after 400 years of patience, judged the Canaanites for their idolatry, sexual immorality, and their practice of child sacrifice, by devoting them to destruction through Holy War and giving the Promised Land to the Israelites.

To be fair, God even judged his very own chosen people, the apple of his eye, the Israelites, for their repeated failure to keep God's covenant commands, by banishing them from the Promised Land and letting them go into foreign exile.

In the New Testament we actually see an intensification of God's judgment.

We often like to think of the OT as portraying a harsh judgmental God and the NT as portraying a loving, non-judgmental God, but the fact of the matter is that God's judgment actually intensifies in the NT. For it is in the NT that the Bible speaks most explicitly about hell, which is the ultimate form of God's judgment, and ironically Jesus had more to say about hell than the apostles ever dreamt of saying. That might come as a shock to anyone here who may have been duped by liberal theology that so often tries to portray Jesus as being non-judgmental and tolerant of everything.

There is no getting around the judgment of God without getting around Christ and the Bible. If we deny the judgment of God we are basically saying that the Bible is wrong and that Jesus Christ is wrong.

### **There Are Some Things That Are Not Perfectly Clear As It Concerns the Judgment of God**

As we think about the judgment of God in the Bible we must maintain a spirit of humility because there are some things that are not made 100% clear to us. The Biblical passages on judgment are often some of the most complex and difficult to interpret in all the Bible.

There are different ideas about when and what must happen before Christ comes back to usher in the final judgment of God. There are different ideas about the tribulation. Will the church go through the tribulation (a time of trial and persecution) that precedes the final judgment of God or will she be spared of it? Christians of good character hold to many different positions on these matters.

Jesus, in his teaching on the final Day of Judgment, told us something very important. He said, "No one knows the day or the hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Mt. 24:36)

I like the analogy that John Leith, a late great Christian theologian in the Presbyterian tradition, once used to describe the judgment of God. He likened it to that of going to a football game and knowing what the final score was going to be beforehand, but not knowing what plays would actually be run, and who would be scoring all the touchdowns. You know how the game's going to turn out, but you don't know all the details until after the game is over. The judgment of God is the same way. We know that God's final judgment will happen, but we do not know all the details of that judgment until after it happens. (Leith, *Basic Christian Doctrine*, WKJP, p. 300)

## **Four Truths Concerning the Judgment of God**

There are four truths about the judgment of God that I want to lift up to you this morning:

### 1. Jesus Christ will be the one who executes the judgment of God.

Today's sermon is the fourth and final one on Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity. Thus far we have looked at three aspects of his character. We have learned that he is Lord. The church, through the affirmation of the creed and based upon the Bible, confesses him to be Lord. "We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ." To confess him as Lord is to confess him to be God. We Christians believe Jesus is fully God in human flesh. This affirmation is what makes us distinct from all other religions of the world. There are no other Lords for us or anyone else to confess. "Every knee will bow down to him," either willingly or begrudgingly.

We also learned that he is Savior. Here we looked at his glorious work on the cross. Here on the cross Jesus takes upon himself the judgment of God for our sins. He steps in our place and pays our debt price so that we might be freed and forgiven. Only he can do this because only he is sinless in his humanity and only he is God.

Last week we considered the fact that Jesus Christ is not just a past event but his ministry is ever continual today. He is our intercessor. He is our mediator. He is the gap closer between us and God. He prays for us, he sustains us, and keeps us in the fold, by constantly offering up to the Father his ministry on our behalf. He can do this because he is both God and man. It is because he is all of these things- Lord, Savior, and Minister- that he is able to also be our Judge. God has invested that much power in His Son. The creed says "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his Kingdom will have no end."

In our text today Jesus tells us that when the Son of Man comes in his glory he will sit on his throne and "all the nations will be gathered before him" and he will "separate the sheep from the goats." He will execute his judgment. In many other places in the gospels (far too numerous to reference in a sermon) Jesus speaks of his future judgment. Both Paul and Peter and speak of Jesus Christ judging "the living and the dead." (II Tim. 4:1 and Acts 10:42). John the beloved apostle, in the book of Revelation, speaks extensively, colorfully, and vividly of the final judgment of Jesus Christ: The slain Lamb of God who "opens the scrolls;" the Rider who "rides on the White Horse" to fight evil one final time; the one who sits on the "great white throne" and opens up the Lamb's "Book of Life" to judge mankind.

Jesus Christ will be the agent of God's judgment on the world.

## 2. The Judgment of God of is Real.

Our world has turned God into someone He is not, a “Cosmic Candy-Man” who makes no demands upon our lives and who judges no one. The love of God has been preached to the exclusion of the judgment of God and it is having a profoundly negative effect on our thinking about God. Consequently, it will have a profoundly negative effect on our life with God. There will be many who will be in for a rude awakening on the Day of Judgment. “Depart from me you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

The love of God in our day has been perverted into meaning a radical inclusivity (acceptance) and tolerance of all, any, and everything. This is not the Biblical definition of God or the love of God. I have shared this quote with you before and I offer it to you again because think it speaks so well of our current dilemma. It comes from Richard Niebuhr’s famous book *The Kingdom of God in America*. He says that Americans prefer "A God **without** wrath who brought men **without** sin into a kingdom **without** judgment through the ministrations of a Christ **without** a cross."

God is not that way because if He was (that is if he failed to judge and execute his wrath) he could not be God! In order for God to be God His character and nature must be perfect and in order for it to be perfect he must execute his justice on sin and evil. If you were God would look upon the earth and fail to judge it for its wickedness? Would you turn a blind eye to sin and evil? For God to fail to execute his wrath and judgment would a far greater travesty of justice than Bernie Madoff’s 150 year sentence in prison ever was.

Please do not fall for the lie that God’s judgment is not real.

## 3. The Judgment of God is Radical.

By this I mean that God’s judgment is extreme and intense. His judgment is not a mere slap on the wrist. As I said earlier, the Bible actually portrays an intensification of God’s judgment in the New Testament. The most extreme form of God’s judgment is hell and Jesus spoke quite frequently about it.

Our text today ends with our Lord saying, “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (v.46)

Again, this is an idea that many people in our world today find utterly repugnant. Consequently, many reject the concept of hell, or they try to redefine it into something that it is not.

There is a little book with a catchy title called, “Being Presbyterian in the Bible Belt: A *Survival Guide for Youth, Parents, and Other Confused Presbyterians*.” It portrays a very accurate truth concerning our mainline church. It basically says that there are many PCUSA Presbyterians who have redefined hell to mean something that we experience here on earth. This book not only accurately portrays what has happened in our church as it concerns hell, but even worse, unfortunately, I think it actually gives credence to this “new understanding.” Because we have

been so influenced by the world and unbiblical teaching coming from our pulpits and ultimately our seminaries many have rejected the doctrine of hell. It's a free world and you're free to believe what you want that but please know that you can't do that without rejecting the words of Christ and biblical authority. It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that when the scriptures speak of hell it is clearly talking about a real place where real people go to exist in a real state of eternal separation from God. While it is true that the Bible uses vivid metaphorical language to describe hell, it does not mean that it is a fictitious place. The reason Bible metaphorically speaks of hell as being an "eternal lake of fire" where there will be "the weeping and gnashing of teeth" is because as horrific as that language may sound, hell is actually a far worse place. Man, as he gropes for human words to describe the agony of hell, cannot come close to describing what eternal darkness and separation from God will really be like.

#### 4. The Grace of God is Far More Radical than the Judgment of God.

This final point get us to the good news and the reason I took so long to get there is because you cannot understand the good news of the gospel unless you first understand the bad news of man's dilemma. Besides the fact that the bad news is true; all mankind are sinners and are deserving of God's judgment and wrath, the bad news provides the proper kind of contrast (just like the color black does for the color white) that we need in order to understand what it is that we are being saved from, and just how gracious God is to us in the giving of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul says in his letter to the Romans,

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the man (Adam), how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! For if, by the trespass of the one man (Adam), death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:15-17)

The other side of the coin is that God is a God of love. Love defines God's character, along with his justice, throughout all eternity. The sin of man necessitates the justice of God. Because we sin and are sinners God must deal with our sin, but because God is a God of love He is also desirous of saving us from the consequences of sin and he has provided the way of salvation through Jesus.

In Christ God comes down to us and does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He lives the life of righteousness that none of us can live and he does it not for himself, but for us. His righteousness stands as an acceptable substitute for our own unrighteousness. That's why Paul speaks of "the gift of righteousness" in Romans 5. Jesus also comes to us to make payment for our sin. This act is the love of God extraordinaire because on the cross God takes His judgment on our sin upon himself through the giving of his Son. Jesus is the Lamb of God who was slain for the sins of the world so that God's judgment could be satisfied. This is how we are saved. It is a radical grace and it becomes real when we embrace it by faith.

## **Conclusion**

In our text today Jesus speaks of our eternal destinies being determined by our deeds (or lack thereof) done toward those who have the greatest needs in their lives- the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the imprisoned. This does not mean that we are saved by our works. No, what Jesus is describing here is what a life that has been saved by grace looks like. He is describing the fruit of one's life that has been saved by the radical grace of God given in the man Jesus Christ.

We most certainly ought to believe and fear the judgment of God and the roaring lion of Judah who comes to execute that judgment, but we ought to even more so rest in the joy and assurance that the "coming one who comes to judge both the living and the dead," will not condemn us if we have trusted in his provision of salvation that he has made for us through his sacrificial death on the cross.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.