

We Believe Part 13

This morning we are examining a part of the Apostle's Creed and part of the doctrine of the Christian faith that most people don't want to think or talk about: judgment. Let's state the creed together: **I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy, apostolic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Last week we talked about the ascended Lord, that Jesus ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. We pointed out that the ascended Lord has been given authority to rule and to reign over everything, over every power and ruler and nation, over Satan and sin and sickness and finally over death itself. Part of the authority given to him is the authority to judge the souls of all humankind.

Jesus said, **"...the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father."** John 5:22-23 In calling people to repentance, the apostle Paul declared, **"[God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."** Acts 17:31 Jesus has been given authority to judge the world as evidenced by his resurrection. Consequently we believe, as the creed states, Jesus "will come again to judge the living and the dead."

None of us like the idea of judgement. Anytime we have to give an accounting it's a bit frightening. The thought of an IRS audit makes even the most righteous among us a bit queasy, trying to account for every penny, justifying every deduction. Perhaps you or someone you love has had to stand before a judge for sentencing, your future in the hands of the judge. But most of us think that won't happen to us and odds are, we might make it through life without an IRS audit or a prison sentence. But a judgement day is coming from which none of us will escape. It is in fact one of two obvious and essential things we learn from the Apostles' Creed: **He will come**

again. He will judge the living and the dead. These two things are certain and sure. Jesus is coming again. We don't know the day nor the hour, but we know he is coming because He said he would. We also know he will in fact judge both the living and the dead.

Regarding judgment, there are actually several judgments referred to in the Bible. There is the judgment of our sins which took place upon the cross. Jesus took our judgment as he died in our place. If we have made Jesus Christ the Savior and Lord of our life, then our sins have been judged and we have received forgiveness and eternal life. We are no longer judged as sinners in God's sight if we have Christ in our heart and life.

There is the judgement of the nations, the judgement of Israel, the judgement of the fallen angels. There is what we refer to as the Judgement Seat of Christ which is when the works we have done as believers will be judged. The apostle Paul said, **"So we make it our goal to please Him...for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."** **2 Corinthians 5:9-10** (This is the judgement of the believers and we are going to talk about this judgment next Sunday.)

Then there is the final judgement, what we refer to as the Great White Throne judgement. This is the final judgement at the last resurrection and is referred to in Revelation 20. This is the judgement we are going to focus on this morning. Look at this passage. **"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne and books were opened. Another book was opened which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."** **Revelation 20:11-15**

This is the final judgment and occurs after the final resurrection from the dead. There are a couple of resurrections in the bible. The first is the resurrection of the believers at the rapture of the church. Paul wrote, **"...the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who**

are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. So the first resurrection is of the righteous. That is all those who have placed their faith in Christ as Savior and Lord and have lived for him, they are resurrected to eternal life with him. Their sins, and the sins of believers who are alive at Christ's return, have already been judged at the cross, forgiven and buried. The only judgement we face is at the judgment seat of Christ when deeds are examined and rewards are given and we will talk about that next Sunday.

The second and final resurrection is that of all those who refused Christ and his offer of salvation and died without having made him Savior and Lord. They are resurrected to stand before God at the Great White Throne judgement at the end of time. All the living and all the dead from the beginning of time will stand before him in judgment. The books will be opened and you will be judged. In spite of all the good works you may have done, a final book is opened and if your name is not written in the book of life, the sentence is immediate and you are thrown into the lake of fire.

With that said, let's talk about this final judgement. We've already pointed out **Judgement is certain.** There is no opting out, no avoiding it. It is inescapable. The bible says, **“Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment.” Hebrew 9:27.** King James says it is appointed unto man to die. It is an appointment everyone will keep.

Judgement is the administration of justice. Let's face it, not everyone gets justice here on earth and the righteous are no exception. The wicked prosper, liars win in court. Evil men and women cheat justice and get by with their crimes, but a day is coming when justice will prevail. Each person will receive exactly what they deserve. God's judgement will settle accounts and set everything right. Judgement day will be a vindication of the righteous.

In Revelation John saw an angel pouring out the wrath of God upon the earth and heard the angel say, **“You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.” Revelation 16:5-6** If you think the wicked are getting by with their wickedness and like Billy Joel, you think only the good die young, think again. Judgment day is coming and all those who have faithfully served the Lord will be vindicated.

Judgement is a just declaration of what truly is. When you stand before God at the judgement, there is no hiding. The passage in Revelation 20 said “earth and sky” fled from his presence and there was no place to hide. There is no place to run. You can’t nuance your way out of this. “Well, God what I meant was...” There is no positive spin you can put on anything. You had opportunity to repent of your sins and make Jesus your Savior. You had opportunity to stop living in sin and serve Jesus but you chose to ignore him and his salvation. You chose to go on living to please and satisfy yourself and now you have to face the truth. You can’t fool God and you won’t be able to fool yourself any longer. Judgment will be a brutal realization of the truth, a declaration by the ultimate judge of what truly is.

Judgement peers beyond deeds done to the motives and intent of the heart. The judge opens the book and says, “I have the full report. I know everything.” And it’s not just the deeds you did, the sins you committed, the wrongs you inflicted on someone else. It’s not just the forensic evidence or circumstantial evidence presented that incriminates you. The bible says, **“Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts.”** **1 Corinthians 4:5** Nothing is hidden. Everything is revealed to God! We think we can con God, convince him we meant well even if things didn’t turn out as we planned, but God knows the motives of our heart!

The bible says in Romans 2 that we won’t even be able to use our ignorance of the bible and God’s law as an excuse. “I didn’t know it was a sin!” Paul says our own conscience bears witness against us and our own thoughts accuse us. You won’t be able to sell that argument to God because God knows your heart, your thoughts. You’ll have to admit, “yeah, deep down inside, I knew it was wrong all along.” The bible says, **“This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ...”** **Romans 2:16** There will be no hiding. There will be no basis for appeal. There will be no miscarriage of justice. His light shines on even the hidden places of our life. Even the secrets of our heart will be judged.

Notice what Paul says in Romans 2:16: **The basis upon which we are judged is Jesus Christ.** We aren’t judged on the basis of our own standard of goodness or righteousness but we are judged through Jesus and his righteousness. The bible tells us we have all sinned and missed the mark. We have come short of God’s standard of righteousness because God’s standard is

Jesus Christ, the perfect, sinless Son of God. He is the template, the criteria against which all of our righteousness will be measured.

By our own standards we think we have done pretty well, but when compared to his sinless perfection, we are all sinners and without hope. The apostle Paul wrote, **“My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.” 1 Corinthians 4:4.** By my own conscience I’m thinking I’ve done pretty well. But still, I’m not the judge, He is! We are judged by his standard.

Do you remember being in school and the teacher would say, “I’m going to grade this test on the curve” and you knew there were a couple of smart people in the class who would always score 100%. God could stand at the Great White Throne Judgement and announce he was going to grade on the curve but the problem would still be, Jesus is in the class and he scored a perfect 100%. You aren’t judged by the moral standards of your buddies, or by your own conscience, but you are judged by Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God.

“But that’s not fair because He’s God!” Yes, but he became man and lived and died among us. He lived and was tempted in every way, just like all of us, yet he never sinned. He set the curve in his own flesh. We are without excuse. This is why, with judgement in mind, the apostle Paul states, **“Since then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.” 2 Corinthians 5:11** The King James Version reads, **“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.”**

There is terror because there is no place to run, no place to hide. The secrets are exposed, the motives and intentions are laid bare and the judge with the nail prints in his hands understands how difficult life and all of its temptations and struggles can be. We are without excuse! Think about it. You will stand before the judge of the whole universe someday, unable to hide, laid bare and exposed before him. With eyes of truth and justice that penetrate to the very core of your being he will judge you and your motives and your deeds and your heart. He will examine the truth of who you are and how you lived and how you failed to live. You will have no defense. It all comes down to this one thing:

The outcome of judgement is based solely upon your obedient relationship to Jesus Christ. It’s not your works that will save you, it is obeying Jesus and being in a relationship with him as your Savior and Lord. The outcome of judgment, whether you are headed to heaven

or to hell and eternal punishment is based upon knowing Jesus in his forgiveness and his grace. Jesus said, **“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” John 3:36.** It is just that plain and simple.

I suppose we could think of it like this. We are offered a plea bargain that is good for today only. Admit your sins, plead guilty and ask for mercy and Jesus will take your place and bear the penalty for your sins and your crimes. You will be free to go, not back to sin, but to live a life that is pleasing to Christ. But if you wait until you are standing before the judge in the courtroom of heaven, it will be too late. There is no negotiating at the Great White Throne judgment. All that will await you is judgment and hell.

Jesus is coming to judge the living and the dead and that’s the only two kinds of people - the living and the dead. If you will believe upon him and repent of your sins, he will forgive you and save you. Believe upon him, surrender your life to him, live for him, serve him, then you will have no reason to fear judgement because you will cross over from death to life. You will have his eternal life and you will not be condemned. But if you chose not to make Jesus the Savior and Lord of your life; if you choose to live a life of sin rather than surrendering to Jesus, you are already dead in your sins and you are condemned. And even though you come to church on Sunday, if you choose to keep sinning, refusing to repent and turn your life over completely to Christ, hear what Jesus says, **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” Matthew 7:21-23**

I’m not trying to undermine your salvation, but as Paul said, ‘Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.’ I’m trying to tell you that because you said some words at an altar one time, or you recited the Creed this morning, or because you walked the aisle when you were nine years old, that’s all good, but if you haven’t been living for Jesus and you’ve been living in rebellion and sin, it sounds to me like you are dead. No righteous fruit, no signs of eternal life, no evidence of salvation. You’re dead and judgement is ahead. Time is running out and today is the day you need to enter that guilty plea. Throw yourself on the mercy of the court and ask Jesus, the righteous judge for forgiveness and he will forgive and cleanse and give you eternal life. There is another chance waiting for you. Don’t wait because Jesus is coming soon to judge the living and the dead.

