

Scripture Reading:

Acts 1:9 “Now when [Jesus] had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. **10** And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, **11** who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."”

Revelation 20:1 “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. **2** He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; **3** and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. **4** And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. **5** But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. **6** Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

7 Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison **8** and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.

9 They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. **10** The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. **12** And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. **13** The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. **14** Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. **15** And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

"Coming to Judge the Living and the Dead"

In the last chapters of Luke's Gospel we focused on the portion of the Apostle's Creed that declares that Jesus was crucified, dead and buried. Then we spent many weeks celebrating that fact that on the third day Jesus rose again from the dead

- So far here in Acts chapter one, we have considered how Jesus ascended into heaven and now sits at His Father's right hand of power

Before moving on with Luke's orderly account I want us to also consider the implications of the angels declaring to the disciples that Jesus would return in like many as they saw Him go: Yes, there will be a bodily return of the Lord Jesus

- In Revelation chapter 5 we saw the bodily ascension of Jesus from the heavenly perspective
- This morning we saw His bodily return at the Great White Throne judgment in Revelation 20!

The Apostle's Creed declares: "From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead."

- Talking about judging or judgment is not very popular in these modern days where everyone speaks of love & tolerance

Even in Christian circles we have those who believe that God was pretty mean and judgmental in the Old Testament but when Jesus came He brought a message of love and forgiveness...

Not the kind of forgiveness that Jesus actually brought, mind you, where the penalty for sin was paid for by His death on the cross and a turning away from sinful ways is required...

- NO! They want what they like to call 'unconditional love' where the person is loved and embraced no matter how sinful their actions or attitudes might be:
- These false shepherds join with the world in declaring that we MUST at all times be tolerant!

And of course they have the same sort of hypocrisy that we saw last week: Where Mr. Rousseau declared men should be free & if any resisted, they should be 'forced' to be free!

- Today, if we refuse to be tolerant, then they simply will NOT tolerate us!

In our time, the tolerance police want everyone to be nice and have calm discussions... Unless of course you disagree with them: Then you are a bigot, a racist or a violent agitator. The hypocrites in the Church want us to be loving & to accept everyone and everything... BUT if we even mention God's Law, then we are tagged as narrow-minded bigots...

- And they will not tolerate that!

These folks not only have a problem with hypocrisy, but their view of the Bible is very wrong as well...

- The Bible has a LOT to say about judgment and NOTHING to say about this modern talk of tolerance

- Yes, Jesus did come to bring peace & joy and He showed real love for the world by offering His own life as the price for sin...

But this is a very different kind of peace, joy, love or forgiveness than the world has in mind... They want no judging or judgment, except for their own of course...

- But the New Testament is full of judging and judgment!

You will find the concept of judging or being judged used over sixty times in the New Testament...

[More than the Old Testament by the way]

The word judgment is used almost seventy times in the New Testament and as we saw from our reading from Revelation 20 this morning is it often very strong language.

- The Bible declares that God's judgment is comprehensive which is why our creed says that Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead.

We will see all sorts of judgments in the Book of Acts:

- There will be swift judgment on individuals in the here & now: Like Ananias and Sapphira, Simon the sorcerer or King Herod
- We will see Stephan and Paul warn the Jewish religious leaders about impending judgment
- We will see Paul warn the gentiles in Acts 17 where he says that God, "commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead."
- In all of these cases these followers of Jesus are being the witnesses that He called them to be...
- They are proclaiming God's truth to a fallen world.

BUT we must also remember that the Book of Acts is the story of the Church and how it is to fill the whole earth with the Kingdom of Jesus

- That is NOT done only with proclamations of judgment
- It predominantly comes with proclamations of the Good News and the loving service that follows in the lives of those who believe!
- Believers will be judged on how well they obeyed these commands

Our Creed uses the comprehensive phrase 'the living and the dead' to describe the judgment of Jesus: It is interesting that the first use of this term comes from Naomi where she declares in Ruth 2:20, "May he be blessed by Jehovah, whose kindness has not forsaken the living and the dead!"

We will see Peter use this phrase in Acts chapter 10 as he presents the Gospel to Cornelius & his household:

- "And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead."

It is in the instruction that Paul gives to young Timothy in chapter four of his second letter:

- "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom:"

And it is in the warning that Peter gives in the fourth chapter of his first letter:

- "They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."

So are we as Christians to run around yelling and screaming about judgment as much as they shout about tolerance?

- **Not hardly!**

When it comes to judgment, I believe we have three responsibilities that are repeated over and over in the Scriptures...

- **We are to know & understand what it means for Jesus to judge the living and the dead.**
- **We are to warn believers and non-believers alike about the severity of God's judgment**
- **AND finally, we are to live a life of service to the one who we believe judges the living and the dead as a witness to those who are in danger of God's judgment.**

If I had to roughly estimate how the Scriptures prioritize those points, I would say the focus should be about 10%, 10%, and 80%!

I want to argue this morning that forgetting this Biblical balance has allowed the world to trip us up!

- **When we put most of our focus mainly on the first two points we give them the opportunity to turn on us with that often miss-used verse where Jesus says, "Judge not, that you be not judged"**
- **Suddenly we feel a little guilty and back off, often way back**

Our proper example is to be Jesus, who often taught about how God would judge our actions, our motives and ultimately sit as the final judge on the Great White Throne pictured in Revelation.

- **Jesus also had no problem warning those who ignored the reality of God's judgment...**
- **Often very strongly, as He did with the cities of Galilee who ignored Him or with the religious leaders who sought His life.**

BUT the vast majority of the earthly ministry of Jesus is filled with patient teaching, loving kindness & healings, more patient teaching, service to others like His washing of the Disciple's feet, more patient teaching and prayer for His disciples at that same supper and finally the ultimate act of love that a friend can give as Jesus gives His very life for the world. AND after He was raised from the dead there was MORE patient teaching as we have seen in the past few weeks!

So as we think about how to apply the truth that Jesus is coming to judge the living and the dead to our lives, I would encourage us to learn to have the right priorities! First we need to make sure we understand that it is true: If you have any doubt, set yourself on a course to read through the New Testament and ask yourself this one simple question:

- **Are the examples we see in the teaching and practice of Jesus, as well as the commands He gives to His Church better described as tolerant or judgmental?**

Next we must have the confidence to share what we believe: A good example was Theron's response to the News & Review reporter who suggested a scenario where one of his children converted to Islam, asking very piously, 'would you be OK with that?' Theron, very calmly and firmly said no: Explaining that if that happened it would mean that this child would be going to hell and thus, how could he be expected to be OK with that?

- **Understanding, explaining and even proclaiming God's justice and judgment is an important part of being always ready to give an answer for the faith!**

BUT more importantly we must remember that about 80% of the teachings and commands in the Scriptures call on us to live as though we believe that Jesus comes to judge the living and the dead...

It starts with that verse the world loves to take out of context and beat us about the head and shoulder with:

- **Matthew 7:1 "Judge not, that you be not judged."**

Funny how the next few verses are seldom quoted... The world, and those who are worldly in the Church, have to skip over them since they clearly go on to explain what Jesus is teaching here!

2 "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

- **In modern terms, we had better be prepared to take judgment as good as we chose to dish it out!**

Jesus continues on with the point of the lesson: "3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye?

5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

- **Jesus understands that we ALL would rather just DISH IT OUT**

Over & over again we see this type of warning in the New Testament:

-- Paul tells the Saints at Rome not to judge someone over what they will or won't eat for conscience sake

-- Peter tells us to follow the example of Jesus who when He was persecuted both by the Jews & Gentiles, "committed Himself to Him who judges righteously."

-- And James warns us that if we try to play God by improperly judging our brothers [*or in the words of Jesus pointing out their specks while ignoring our logs*], then we "speak evil of the Law and judge the Law."

- **Jesus goes on to say that it is OK, and even good, to help a brother who has a speck in his eye: A sin or problem in his or her Christian walk.**
- **However, we are only in a position to do this if we have taken the time and effort to remove the boards from our own eyes first!**
- **Jesus expects us to remove what HE considers to be boards in our eyes before we try and help others,**
- **This will impact our lives in some very practical ways...**

This morning we read the 20th Chapter of Revelation, which shows the coming judgment at the end of time from a heavenly perspective. This is a sobering passage, but there is an even more sobering account of judgment day given by Jesus Himself in Matthew 25 which should remind us about what counts in this life... What Jesus sees as priorities!

- **And trust me, it is NOT keeping a good inventory of all the specks that other folks have in their eyes!**

Listen carefully to these final words that Jesus gave to the leaders of Israel before presenting Himself as the great sacrifice for sin.

Matthew 25: 1 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory."

➤ **That Great White Throne pictured for us in Revelation 20**

32 "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. 33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left."

➤ **The wheat & tares have been separated: Now listen to how Jesus describes the judgment that will then take place...**

34 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for

I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me;

I was in prison & you came to Me."

➤ **These were the 'good works' that God's Saints were foreordained to walk in and yet they hardly realized their importance as they carried them out, responding with a series of questions...**

37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'"

40 "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'"

➤ **All of the righteous service that we as God's children give here on earth is service unto the Lord**

➤ **But those who have not served Jesus, have no way to serve God:**

41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; 43 I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

➤ **Then all those who thought they had done pretty well down here, living life as best they could, which God should be pleased with, also have a question for Jesus:**

44 "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'

45 "Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' 46 And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

➤ **Saying such things is considered arrogant intolerance and hated by the world today?**

➤ **Those in the world, and even some churches, will object and say that certainly these folks did some 'good works' of mercy in their lives even if they were not Christians!**

We need to consider again the perspective given by Mr. Uttinger in his little book on Revelation: “fallen man has not lost the ability to build bridges, devise governments, or tell stories. What he has lost is the ability to do these things to the glory of God and in obedience to His Word. Man needs grace and righteousness far more than he needs ‘literature 101’

This is why the Prophet Isaiah can declare that all our righteousnesses, that is good works including works of mercy, are “as filthy rags.” ...And he means really filthy rags.

Greg went on to say that, “On the other hand, the man who knows God will want to tell his stories well because he is telling them for the glory of God.”

- As those united to Jesus, we do not do these works because we are earning brownie points, we do them because of who we are and because they bring Glory to God

We can see the practical outworking of this in Paul’s instructions to Titus: I would commend this little book as your homework this week asking how all the commands Paul gives here are related to the picture of the final judgment that Jesus has given. I will read just a few highlights beginning at verse 15 of chapter one where Paul makes the very point we just discussed about ‘good works.’

Titus 1:15 “To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. 16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.”

- In other words even their “righteous acts” or good works are as filthy rags because of their rebellion against God, no matter how subtle it is.
- For those who are in Christ it is quite a different story and is what Titus and all the church leaders down through the ages are called on to teach:

2:1 “But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: 2 that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience;...”

- So that all the actions in our lives are like those drinks of water or visits to the sick that Jesus speaks about...

3 “the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things-- 4 that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.”

- All with very practical implications for compassion and care for others

6 “Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded, 7 in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, 8 sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.”

- This is what brought down the empire of Rome and it can tear down all the strongholds of today.

9 “Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, 10 not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.”

- Even if we become slaves, God will still judge how well we treat our new task masters!

Paul then explains to Titus that all of these things should be manifested in our lives as a response to God's grace looking forward to Jesus coming again in the same manner...

11 "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."

- Paul is telling Titus that God's people are NOT to run around with boards in their eyes!
- We are to proclaim the great love of God: The grace of God that has appeared to all men, in large part by letting them see this Grace in our lives on a daily basis
- BUT we are NOT to tolerate sin or rebellion: NOT in ourselves, not in our brothers & sister in Christ, nor in the world:
- Rather we are to remember that Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead

Paul continues on in chapter three which we can all continue to study...

Paul concludes as I will by saying "these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men."

Communion Meditation: I Corinthians 11:

"23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world."