

Introduction

This is a day of hope and excitement and rejoicing. There is no occasion of earthly rejoicing that has anything on the fact that Christ Jesus died, that he lay low in the grave, that his heart stopped beating, that he committed his spirit into the hands of the Father, but that on the third day he arose. This is the reality of which we enthusiastically remind each other with these words, *Christos anesti, alithos anesti*. Christ is risen indeed!

The world celebrates championships. Exuberance abounds. Euphoria overwhelms. Delight produces mile-wide smiles. Confetti flies. Tears of joy flow. But it is short-lived. Every year a new champion is crowned. As soon as they win this year, they must start preparing for the next.

But it is not so with Jesus. When up from the grave he arose, it was a mighty triumph o'er his foes. He arose the eternal victor from the dark domain and he lives forever to reign as king. No worries about next year. No worries for all eternity. His people share with him in a victory incomparable to all other victories. It is the victory over sin and death. Death is swallowed up in victory. As the Apostle says, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Christ is raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Because he is risen, so shall be all his people for all time.

It is right for God's people to be excited and joyful not only on Resurrection Sunday but every single day. The resurrection is a reality and it is reason to rejoice. It is foundational to the hope of Christians. At the same, however, the resurrection of Jesus is a testament to all the world. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Lord of Heaven and Earth is making an important statement to the entire planet. It is a testament Christ's people need to take to the world. Along with the victory and joy of the resurrection of Jesus, I want every Christ-follower today to take from this time together a fresh sense of the urgency of bringing a sobering testament from God to those in your sphere of influence. We see it in the message of the Apostle Paul to the Greeks in Athens found in Acts 17.

[Read Text; Pray]

From the day that Jesus rose from the dead and the gospel began to be proclaimed with greater clarity than ever before, Christ's resurrection has been at the heart of the message. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached that the Jesus whom the Jews had crucified and killed, GOD RAISED UP, loosing the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul summarized the gospel he had preached to them. He preached that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, and that HE WAS RAISED on the third day.

In this morning's text, we find Paul in the city of Athens, Greece, a city filled with idolatry. There had been an uprising against the gospel in Berea and brothers had conducted him safely out of town all the way to Athens, where he awaited Silas and Timothy to join him. And what did he do there but preach the gospel in the synagogue and in the marketplace. What was the substance of that gospel? Luke tells us in Acts 17:18 Paul was "preaching JESUS and the RESURRECTION." The message gained the interest of the philosophers and they brought Paul to the Areopagus, a tall rock plateau outside the city, and gave him the floor. So he began to preach the gospel. And his preaching came once again to highlight the RESURRECTION of Jesus.

But that is not where he started. Paul captured the attention of the Athenians by pointing out what he had observed while walking the streets of Athens. The city was a hotbed of worship, but the citizens were ignorant. They worshiped gods of all kinds. They even had an altar in the city that was built to the unknown god. They were covering all their bases.

Paul took the occasion to declare to them the God they did not know. He is the God who made the world and everything in it. He is the Lord of Heaven and Earth.

The Athenians had completely missed this God. They were ignorant of him. They sought to worship the unknown god with temples and sacrifices and gifts as though, like the other gods they worshiped, he was in need of them. "Not so!" said Paul. This God made the world; is not contained in

man's temples; is not served by humanity as though he needed anything. In fact, he is lord over all nations. He made humans to seek him. And in darkness humans have groped for God, but in ignorance. They have depicted God with gold, silver, and stone images, but this is not who God is. He does not derive from the imagination of man. Rather man is made in the image of God. Paul charged them with breaking the first and second commandments. They have worshiped gods other than the Lord. And they have worshiped idols which grossly misrepresent who God is.

But, says Paul, the times of ignorance God overlooked. This does not mean that God has not accounted their sin because they were ignorant. Rather, during the times of their ignorance, he did not confront them. He looked over them. He simply allowed them to go in their way of ignorance. But not any more! Now, he is commanding all people everywhere to repent. God is breaking out of his silence toward the nations. He is breaking in to the darkness which is the ignorance of the nations. In a great display of mercy, the Lord of Heaven and Earth is confronting the people spread across the earth. He is commanding them to repent.

This is the message that was needed by the Athenians. It is the message needed by a culture of idol worshipers. It is the message needed by a city groping for God but seeing him as one among many, as a pitiful and helpless deity who depended upon them and their offerings, who existed as a part of the creation. They needed to turn from creating God in their image. They needed to see rather that the one true God made them in his. They should repent because they have sinned against this great and mighty God who needs nothing from humans but upon whom human beings depend for everything. They need to repent. They need to admit their offense against heaven. They need to be filled with sorrow and sadness for their crime against the Lord of Heaven and Earth. They need to turn to think of him rightly. They need to seek reconciliation with this great and mighty and merciful God.

Why? Why should they do that? Why should they repent? Because of judgment. That's why. God is going to judge. He is going to call human beings to account. He is not a god who is subject to human beings. No, human beings are subject to him. And they will give account. God is going

to judge the nations. And I want you to see three aspects of this judgment as proclaimed by the Apostle Paul to the Athenians. I want you to see The Certainty of the Judgment; The Standard of the Judgment; and The Testament of the Judgment.

I. The Certainty of God's Judgment.

A. Paul brings the command of God to all people everywhere to repent because He has determined a day on which he will judge the world. The various translations use the wording, "he has set;" "he has appointed;" and "he has fixed." The Greek word is used in other instances in Scripture to speak of setting something or someone in a place of prominence so as to be seen. Ladies, it is what you do with flower arrangements you place on the table. When the disciples were asking who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus called a child to himself and he set, he placed, he fixed that child before them in the midst in order that the attention would be directed to the child.

B. As soon as a couple gets engaged everyone starts asking, "have you set a date yet?" Often they will send out "save-the-date" cards and so that all their friends and family can clear their calendars. That date will then take precedence over other plans. When we go to the doctor, we will make an appointment. We put it on the schedule. We fix it; we set it.

That is what Paul is saying here about the judgment of God. He has set the date and put it on the calendar of his universe. Everyone needs to know that judgment is not a possibility about which God is to decide but a certainty for which we must be prepared. When you were a kid and you disobeyed, perhaps one parent said, "just wait until your other parent gets home." As you waited you hoped that maybe the parent who made the threat would forget and you would get off scot free. Or maybe the other parent would come home in a really good mood and discipline would not be so bad. Maybe you would not even be disciplined at all.

There is no such possibility with regard to the judgment of God. He has fixed the day. He has made the appointment. He has set it forth so as to assure you of it. Listen, do not mistake the patience of God to mean he will

not judge. He has fixed the day. It is appointed. It is set. One day it will come.

C. Melissa and I were engaged on June 6, 1987. And within a few days, the date of our wedding was set—July 26, 1987. We didn't have to wait long. There was so much to do to get ready. There was counseling and books to read, not to mention the logistics, invitations, the wedding itself. Me, I was working, saving, and planning for the honeymoon. It was almost as if the date slipped up on us. God has set the judgment date on his calendar, but he is keeping it to himself. When is it? That is not something God is disclosing. But here is something you can be sure of: you won't miss it. It won't come and go without you. And if you do not keep mindful of it, it will surely slip up on you.

D. Now, God has not only fixed the day of judgment, he has also fixed the subjects of judgment. On the day that he has fixed, he will judge the WORLD. No one will escape. No one will be overlooked. Everyone will stand before the judgment seat. Everyone will have to answer to God. Everyone will be sentenced. The day of judgment is a day of reckoning. The books will be opened and the sins of every human being will be exposed. It will be a great and terrible day. And you can be sure it will come. Because God has FIXED the day. And he has determined that on that day the world will be judged. Don't think that you will escape because he is captivated with everyone else. Do not let it catch you by surprise.

From the certainty of God's judgment, we turn to . . .

II. The Standard of God's Judgment.

A. The standard of the judgment of God will be perfect righteousness. Righteousness will guide the judging, and righteousness will be the standard by which human beings are judged. There will be no compromise. Jesus was clear in the Sermon on the Mount that the standard of measure that it takes to be acceptable to God is perfection. He took his listeners through the law and showed them that real righteousness starts on the inside, in the thoughts and motives of the heart. Righteousness is deeper than we think and purer as well. Jesus declared, "You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." That is the standard—absolute perfection.

This is an impossible standard. A simple look at the law of God reveals all the world to be sinners who will stand condemned at the judgment. It is a standard which presses us to acknowledge that without mercy we are without hope.

B. The standard bearer at the judgment of God will reinforce righteousness. He is the man that God has appointed. God has appointed the day and he has appointed the judge. It is a man. It is Jesus. Paul was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. Jesus is the God-man, the word made flesh. He is the only human who is an exception to the rule that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. He did not abolish the law. He came to fulfill the law. And that is what he did. He was tempted, but he never sinned. He is the only man able to judge with righteousness. And the Father has committed all judgment unto the Son.

C. So, righteousness will be the rule and the Judge, the Son of God, will implement the rule with perfect righteousness. Judgment will be righteous through and through. In our world justice and righteousness are often thwarted. The standard and the judgment of men are flawed. Injustice often triumphs. The greatest miscarriage of justice occurred in Jerusalem at the trial of Jesus. The judges were the chief priests and the council. They shamelessly sought false witnesses to put forth testimony against Jesus. Numerous false witnesses came forward, but their stories did not corroborate. Finally, Jesus was misquoted by two men. And in the end, he was convicted and sentenced for speaking truth.

Can you imagine the moment when these who tried Jesus this way stand before him and are judged by him! There will be no shenanigans when Jesus the judge exercises the judgment entrusted him by the Father. Completely on the basis of the facts, they will be convicted as sinners. And so will it be for all. The perfect standard and the perfect judge will reveal that aside from Jesus there is none righteous not even one. All have turned aside and become worthless. "Every mouth will be stopped and the whole world will be held accountable to God."

God's judgment is certain and it is done in righteousness. Now we must see
III. The Testament of God's Judgment.

A. The conclusion of Acts 17:31 sets forth that God has provided a sign which certifies the certainty of the coming judgment. It reads, "Of this [judgment] he has given assurance to all by raising [the appointed man] from the dead." He is not a god who depends but on whom all humanity depends.

When a person is making a huge and important purchase, the parties involved want to know that they can depend upon payment. When you come to the table to close on the purchase of a house, the closing company wants to be absolutely sure the funds that are brought to the table are legitimate. So they will require something more than a personal check. Generally they want a certified check. A certified check is issued not on your personal account but on the bank's account with certification from the bank that the funds are there. When you bring that certified check to the table, the confidence level is at a very high level. It is as good as taken for granted.

B. In commanding the world to repent, in assuring the world that he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness, God has been incredibly merciful. He has given the world a sign, a compelling reality which is a witness to it of the certainty of what he says. That sign is what we celebrate today. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is God's certification that the funds are there, that the warning is legitimate, that the world should hear and take the warning with all seriousness. The reality of the judgment of God is not an idle threat. It is not a hollow attempt to manipulate. It is as certain as creation.

Followers of Christ identify with the joy of the women who came back from the tomb that resurrection morning bewildered and struck by what they had heard from the angels. We rejoice greatly because we know it is true. He is not dead but has risen from the dead! This is our hope! In this we greatly exult. The resurrection of Jesus is far more than just a sign. Those who are united with Christ by faith are crucified with him, buried with him, and raised with him to newness of life. His victory over death is ours. The judge of the world is also our advocate. Having been reconciled to God by the death of Christ, we have forgiveness of sins. If our judge has met the

demands of justice, then we have confidence for the day when we stand before him.

And yet the resurrection of Christ is a sign to the world. It is a testimony of assurance that should seize the attention of the world and bring it face to face with the need for repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Paul preached the resurrection to those in Athens who had never heard the gospel. He declared to them that God was calling them to repent with the warning that he has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by Christ Jesus. And he has assured the world of the certainty of this judgment by raising him from the dead.

If the Athenians needed to hear that message, so do the people of our generation today. Despite the riches of America's heritage, our generation worships multiple gods (not so much statues but stuff) and they create the one true God in their own image and to suit their own passions.

As we glory in the hope of our risen Lord, pray with me that the Lord will put within us a fresh sense of urgency to warn the world of judgment and to certify that warning with the fact that Jesus is risen. Let us be about telling everyone around us that God will judge the world in righteousness. Let us urge them to repent of sin and to turn to the risen Christ. He is the only advocate sufficient to provide redemption because on the cross he paid the debt, he paid the penalty for those who are joined to him in faith.

Perhaps there is one here this morning who is not prepared for the judgment of God. God warns so that you can prepare. The way you prepare is to repent. Turn from sin and trust in Jesus for forgiveness.

Righteousness, the righteousness required to pass by the judgment seat is counted to those who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Don't wait because when that day comes, it will be too late.

