

Judgment of a Faithful Herald

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[0:00] Let us pray.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight! O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen!

It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

Then each one will receive his commendation from God. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 4, verse 4 and 5. Now, have you heard someone say, Only God can judge me. Have you heard it?

Maybe you've said it at one point or other. It's quite a common phrase in our society. Only God can judge me. The irony is that those who often say that have no sense of the truthfulness of their pronouncement.

[1:12] When someone usually say it, it is usually to shift blame from themselves or to shift accountability for their bad actions when they say such things.

Only God can judge me. It's often said by those who have no earthly idea of the enormity of what they say. Who think there is no judgment for wickedness and for evil doing in the world.

Oftentimes, when people say that, they don't even believe in a God we judge. If I pass the buck on, then I'm free. I'm scot-free.

Well, our lessons on this third Sunday in Advent continue with the Advent theme of being prepared.

Oftentimes, when people say that, they're not actually prepared to meet the God who judges.

But we are reminded that we live between the two Advents. We hold on to the promises of God as we look back to the promise that we fulfilled, that is first coming.

[2:17] And we are ready to set our hearts and minds on Jesus during this period to examine ourselves and ask God to keep us steadfast until the day of Christ.

And hanging over this week's lessons in particular is the notion of impending judgment. That all evil in our fallen nature that we have committed against God's divine majesty will be answered for.

When the King will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Our attitude then, knowing this, that God is coming to judge, our attitude towards this coming judgment, our disposition towards this coming judgment, I think, is indicative then of whether our hope and our confidence is placed in the right places, in the right person, rather, really.

Many who say, only God can judge me, will find out on that day that there is no place to hide from the judgment of God.

And they will be terrified when they are brought to account for their rebellion and their wickedness.

Because they will find that there is no hiding from God. They may hide the truth from earthly judges for those who will seek to keep them accountable.

[3:42] But, as the kids say nowadays, Jesus, the great judge, has all the receipts. Are you familiar with that phrase?

He knows everything. So, others will welcome the coming judgment. Others will. We, I hope, are the kind of people who will welcome the coming judgment.

Why is it that we welcome that judgment? It's because we know that it comes, as God comes in judgment, He also comes with salvation in His hands and deliverance in His hands.

We know that He comes in judgment and He comes also to save. Such people, as I hope we are, are those who have entrusted ourselves, body and soul, to Jesus.

Who, although guilty and deserving of God's wrath, we have been pardoned. Because our sins have been paid for on Calvary's tree by the sacrificial death of our Savior Jesus Christ.

[4:48] And so we welcome the coming judgment. Knowing that it is the path to our salvation and deliverance. So, what path are you on this morning?

Are you longing for Jesus to come? Are you knowing your sins are forgiven and you are covered by His grace? Or are you trusting in your own righteous works to earn your way to peace with God? Only one of these two paths offers true hope and assurance. And it isn't the one that trusts in your own efforts.

So, in today's epistle, in the epistle lesson, we see St. Paul. And in the gospel lesson, we see St. John the Baptist. We see these two people, these two ministers of the gospel, who are longing for God's justice.

Trusting in His mercy. Trusting in His grace and truth. And because they long for God's judgment, they can faithfully and boldly live for God in this world.

[6:01] They're able to fear God rather than men. Because they know of the coming judgment. And so, we have, in the epistle reading, the Corinthian view, as Paul defends himself before the Corinthians.

He's writing to a church who he had come to, to preach the gospel, and to bring the goodness of the gospel. And they believed him. But now they are starting to become ashamed of the gospel.

And so, this is what the Corinthian church, most of them at least, would think of Apostle Paul. Well, they would say, if you were to interview them. They would say, well, we know he brought the gospel to us.

But right now, we think very little of him. He was great when he first came to us. But he's gotten stale. And boring. They might say, Apostle Paul, he's not sophisticated in his speech.

Like the other speakers in the city. He's low on the entertainment factor level. He's not entertaining enough. He doesn't grip.

[7:06] Attention. There's no pizzazz. He's too plain spoken, they might say, of St. Paul. He's not only plain spoken. He's also too plain in his manners.

And his appearance. He's a tent maker, you know. His hands are dirty and filthy. And he comes around us the same way.

He's not respectable enough. You know what? He's always going around. Going on about the cross. How the cross is God's glorious means of victory.

He never shuts up about that. But everyone in the Roman world just laughs at us. Because they know the cross is an instrument of death and shame. And they think we're foolish for boasting about it.

That's what they might say about St. Paul. He's not willing to let things go, they would say of St. Paul. He insists on calling out sin. And he's even calling us to repentance all the time.

[8:15] And to a holy life of discipline. He even insists that we confront those in unrepentant sinful behavior among us. He wants us to confront them head on.

And not hide it. Or not to be silent about it. Or not brush it under the rug. You know, this St. Paul. We don't... We used to rate him high, but not so much anymore.

That's the way they're thinking about the Apostle Paul. And without all of that, worthy thinking comes division among them. And so Paul then comes to them.

In this epistle reading in chapter 4. The first five verses. And he says, This is how one should regard us. That is, himself as an apostle, as a minister of the gospel.

As a servant of Christ. You should regard us as servants of Christ. As stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

[9:18] That's what Paul says about himself and his ministry. But with me, Paul continues. It is a very small thing. That I should be judged by you or by any human court.

In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself. For I am not thereby acquitted. He's not saying he's without wrongs. Or he's beyond judgment.

But he knows it is the Lord who judges me. Here is Paul's view of his ministry. And of his defense of the gospel message.

And this is where he gets his boldness from. The Corinthians may think all they want of him. They may think of him as unsophisticated. As plain spoken.

As boring. And all the other things that comes with it. But he knows. That the Lord is the one who judges. And he knows that his Lord judges.

[10:19] By different criteria. Than the Corinthians are judging. And he is the right judge. And the true judge. And the just judge. And so Paul brings these two ideas.

To the Corinthians. As a minister of the gospel. In this context. He's saying to them. You are judging on the wrong basis. And you're judging with the wrong scale.

You're judging by worldly. The world views. Point of view. But he's saying. Myself. And Apollos. And Peter. Cephas. Will you compare us together. And try to break divisions. We don't judge ourselves on that basis. We are servants. Servants. And the word actually.

That Paul uses there. Often times he uses the word *doulos*. When he's referring to himself. As a servant. As a slave rather. But here. In this. In this verses. He uses the word. He uses different words.

[11:18] To denote. Someone who is. Is a horseman. In a. In a Roman. Galley ship. The word there. Detects someone who's in the galley.

If you've ever. Seen Ben-Hur. Or read the book. You might have a picture. Of what that means. A slave in the galley. Who's just. Going back and forth.

To the beat of the. In the temple of the drums. Is there. Doing the work. Of hard labor. You don't survive much. In the galleys.

You don't survive long. And doing that hard work. Hard labor. And you're at the mercy. Of the captain. He determines. Where you go. And you just keep doing it.

Back and forth. With. With the intensity. That is required. At the temple of the drum. That the captain determines. And when. There is time for battle.

[12:13] You're the most vulnerable. Because you're chained. To the galleys. That's how Paul describes himself. And his fellow apostles. Not just a slave.

I'm a galleys slave. And only God will judge. Me. Not you Corinthians. And he knows.

He's accountable to his God. To Jesus Christ. As his captain. Alone. And he knows. That God will come. And judge at the right time. And this shows. As a warning for us.

As the people of God. Wherever we are. What are the criteria. By when we judge one another. How do we judge ministers of the gospel. Do we do.

Do we do so from the same. Earthly. Worldview. That the Corinthians are doing. Or do we do so.

With a mindset. That. They are servants.

[13:07] Of God. Of Christ. Primarily. And here's the thing. Brothers and sisters. You. As well. As I am as well. Even though I'm in ordained ministry.

You as well. Are part. Are ministers. In the. In the household of God. How do you judge one another? Father. I think.

What Paul says. He says. There's a warning for us. And then we come. To John the Baptist. In our gospel reading. John the Baptist.

Also. Longs. For justice. He longs. For justice. To roll. Down. Like waters. And righteousness. Like an ever. A flowing stream. He's a minister.

Of the gospel. He's the forerunner. Of Christ. And he's been tasked. With a mission. To proclaim. The coming. Of the Messiah. To tell Israel. That the time.

[14:10] Of fulfillment. Of the promises. To them. And their fathers. Has come. As the angel. Gabriel. Foretold. To Zechariah. His father. John the Baptist.

Went. Throughout Judea. In the spirit. And power. Of Elijah. Calling all. To repentance. And to turn. To God. And to turn away.

From their wickedness. It was his bold. Declaration. Of God's truth. Without respect. For anyone. Either Pharisee.

Or soldier. Or prostitute. With no respect. For anyone. Proclaiming. The good news. Of God's. Of God's. Of God's Messiah.

Is coming. And calling people. To repentance. It was this. Bold declaration. That landed him. In trouble. It was his unwillingness. To sugarcoat. The word of God.

[15:07] That landed him. In prison. In Herod's prison. And like Elijah. Before him. He stood up. To this wicked king. Pronounced. The judgment of God. Upon this wicked king.

And he was jailed for it. But in prison. Hearing of the mighty deeds. Of the Messiah. His cousin. He sent word to him.

And he says. To tell Jesus. Are you the one who is to come? Or shall we look for another? John had probably been in prison.

For months by now. Going on. Probably. Probably going on a year. At this point. And he's in prison. Awaiting execution. He had preached. That the Messiah.

Would come. And install the kingdom of God. He had described. The coming of this Messiah. As judgment. On all unrighteousness. He had said. In Mark 3.10.

[16:00] The axe is already. At the root of the trees. And every tree. That does not produce good fruit. Will be cut down. And thrown into the fire. That's John's Baptist words. He says. In Matthew 3.12.

His winnowing fork. Is in his hand. That is the Messiah. His winnowing fork. Is in his hand. And he will clear. His treacherous floor. Gathering his wheat.

Into the barn. And burning up the chaff. With unquenchable fire. This is a picture. Of judgment. That the Messiah brings. But here. Is John.

Languishing. In prison. Months. After he had said. These things. Concerning Jesus. Jesus. And he sees. And he sees. That Israel. Is now rallying.

To a Messiah. As he had hoped. He sees. Still. That the wicked powers. Of the world. Still seem to rule. And reign. In the world. This.

[16:55] So. The hope. The second. The next. The next. The next. The next. The next. The next. The next. The next. The next. The next. The next. The next. This. The next. The next. The next. ■■■. And he's wondering to himself, where is this deliverance? Where is this judgment that I've preached about that I'm hoping will come?

So John is thinking, where is this kingdom and when is it coming? And so John's question to Jesus was not, it's less a question of doubt in Jesus' identity as it is in Jesus' identity as the Messiah.

It's more a question of what's the plan, Jesus? I know you're the Messiah, but what's the plan?

When is it going to happen?

And Jesus' response to his cousin shows us what he means to tell John. That the kingdom had already taken root.

But the kingdom has taken root not in the way that John or anyone else expected to take root.

Jesus' answer to his cousin was this, Go and tell John what you hear and what you see.

[18:01] The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk. The lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear. And the dead are raised up. And the poor have good news, preach to them.

And blessed is the one who is not offended by me. John wanted to see the power of God displayed in bringing judgment against the wicked.

That's what John wants to see. He wants to see the deliverance of the faithful like himself. And yet he is there languishing in prison. Ivan?

Ivan? He wants to see deliverance. But here he is languishing in prison. He wants to see Jesus exercise his kingly prerogatives.

And if Jesus were to do that, that would mean his rescue from jail. It would mean the deliverance of Israel from the oppression of Herod, the fourth king, and from the Roman false rule.

[19:10] But instead, Jesus sent word to his cousin that he was doing just that, but not in the way that John hopes he would do it. He sends words to his cousin that he is, in fact, that the kingdom of God has indeed come.

But he has not come in judgment yet. It's come in showing mercy. That's the picture that Jesus paints for John.

Jesus here is making his blessings flow, as that hymn writer says. His blessings is flowing as far as the curse is found. The blind, the lame, the deaf, the lepers, even the dead.

All signs of the curse brought out by our sin and our rebellion against God are now being rolled back through the blessing of the Messiah. All the signs of the curse are being rolled back.

And most importantly, the good news of salvation, Jesus tells John, is being proclaimed throughout the land. That all may hear it and believe and receive this salvation by faith through grace in Jesus Christ.

[20:18] John knows that all that is reported to him about the blessings of the Messiah, all that Jesus reports to him, John knows that these are fulfillments of the prophecy concerning the Messiah.

He knows it. Jesus' message was meant for John to confirm in him that he is indeed the Messiah and that he is indeed at work.

But then, what of Matthew 11, 6? John adds, the last sentence of that message to his cousin John is this, And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

And this, come sit over here. Thank you. So, this is what Jesus says.

In Matthew 11, it says, Blessed is the one who is not offended by me. Think about that. Blessed is the one who is not offended by me. Jesus is reminding his cousin that you, John, are a herald.

[21:37] I am the king. The herald's job is to declare what the king has given him to say. Not to sit in judgment over the message or how it's implemented.

The herald's job is to just declare and to proclaim faithfully, accurately, the message that is given to him. This gentle reminder from cousin to cousin, from master to servant, is one which we will do well to listen to as well.

How often does the temptation come to soften the message of God? To minimize the emphasis of salvation by faith alone? To tell people of the futility of self-righteousness?

How often does that temptation come to us, even in our world? This is the challenge to all gospel ministers. This is the challenge to all Christians in the world.

To soften, to compromise, to minimize the truth of God's word. For since Paul and John the Baptist are examples of faithfulness in the face of opposition, both within and without, they are unwilling to compromise.

[22:59] They are unwilling to minimize or to soften the truth of God's word. No matter what may come. As your pastor, I hope, and I hope you will pray for me, I hope that I will not be offended or ashamed or cowered into fear from being a faithful herald of the good news of the gospel.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, although you may not be in ordained ministry, yet you bear a royal priesthood, and therefore you also are heralds of the same good news.

So I pray that you as well as me will not be offended by your Lord. Jesus says, Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

And what of hearing the good news? What of hearing that message? The Corinthians were ashamed of the message of the gospel.

And therefore they were ashamed of its messenger. And it's so easy to become like the Corinthians. We see many Christians and many churches who, out of shame, or out of love for the world, have compromised the gospel.

[24:12] Many churches have hitching ears. Many people in churches have hitching ears. And they've jettisoned the truth of God's word for lies from the people, from the people of hell.

They've become one with the world. They've called good evil and evil good. We must not be like them. We must remember that Jesus came into our world proclaiming a gospel of peace.

Here's what he says to his cousin John. The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, lepers are cleansed, good news is preached to the poor throughout the land.

Although he has risen and ascended to heaven bodily, he is still proclaiming that gospel of peace through his church in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Even now, the gospel is going out. You are recipients of that good news as you sit here today. And we long for God's judgment, don't we?

[25:25] We do long for it. We hope for it. Like Paul and John did. We long for God's judgment and his salvation. But as we long for it, we are also called to endure.

To endure even to death. We are called to do the same as they were. To be faithful heralds like Paul and John the Baptist unto death if needed.

And maybe not. And in fact, probably for most of us, for probably all of us, we would not necessarily come to physical death. But we are called, brothers and sisters, to deny ourselves, to die daily to ourselves, our selfish pains and our sinful proclivities and to the shame that comes from the world to endure the pain, the shame and the rejection of this world.

And we must be willing to count it all joy when we face trials of various kinds that the world throws at us. And we must remind ourselves of what Isaiah 25 reminds us of our first lesson this morning. That this same Lord who has come in peace to proclaim good news is coming again in judgment. The wicked powers of this world who assail him and those who belong to him will have to reckon with him on that day of judgment.

[26:57] And for those who are his, we have this word of promise. We have this word of promise that was also given to John the Baptist and Paul the Apostle.

who, by the way, both share the same faith and share the same faith. They were both beheaded. Well, this promise is theirs and is ours as we endure. He will swallow death forever, Isaiah says. And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces. The reproach of his people he will take away and we will say on that day, Behold, this is our God. We have waited for him that he might save us. This is our Lord. We have waited for him. Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Thank you.