

Late Breaking News

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] St. John's Shaughnessy Church You'll find it helpful if you turn to Genesis chapter 3.

After the loveliness and goodness of creation two weeks ago, and the disappointment of the fall into sin last week, we come at last this week to our accountability before God.

And some areas of the Christian faith are more difficult to speak about than others. It's simply because they don't line up with the way that we think. And no area is more difficult than judgment. And the reason for that is because there is a great big white elephant in the room and nobody wants to acknowledge that it's there. And the elephant has a name and the name is we must think positively.

We must think positively. And so if something is not positive, well, I'm not sure I want to believe it. Do you remember when Satan came to the woman in the garden?

[1 : 36] Satan said, did God say you shall not eat of any tree? And he's saying, what do you think of God's word?

Do you like it? How do you feel about it? Is it positive? And I think many reject what God says today basically because we don't like it.

Although we know deep down that it's true, we say I don't like it, I won't believe it. And one of the most wonderful things about God is that even though we turn away from him in disobedience, and even though we pretend we know much more about life and our good than he does, he continues to love us and to pursue us with his grace and his goodness.

And that's what happened in the garden. As soon as man and woman turned away from God, God comes into the garden and says, where are you? Who told you you were naked? What have you done?

Because in the end, you see, the real issue is not our questions of God. It's God's questions of us. God's question of God's question of God. And our accountability before him. The Bible's view of judgment is crucial for us and it teaches us about three areas, three different parties.

[2 : 57] The first is it teaches us about God. Some people say the idea of judgment and wrath are somehow unworthy of God. After all, God is a God of love.

How can he be a God of judgment and wrath? And it's true. The Bible describes God's wrath as his strange work. In one sense, it grieves God to do anything of the kind of judgment.

He takes no delight in dealing with our disobedience and the effects of our sin. And if sin and evil had not entered the world, there would be no wrath or judgment.

But the Bible makes clear that the opposite of love is not wrath and judgment. The opposite of love is indifference.

You see, if you do not love someone, you will not care what happens to them. But if you love someone, you will care deeply about whether that person receives justice.

[3 : 57] And love and justice go together. In fact, love without justice and wrath is meaningless. It's sentiment, but it's not biblical love.

Because love always rejoices in what is right. And I think one of the problems for us is that so often we have misrepresented God. Preachers have talked hard about the judgment of God without speaking about his love in the same breath.

And so we have a distorted God. Others have spoken only about the love of God without the judgment, and it's just as big a distortion. You see, when the judgment of God falls in the Garden of Eden, it's not like a guillotine.

Bang! It is personal and perfectly shaped to each individual and each guilty party. Just look at chapter 3, verses 14 and 15.

The Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this, curse to you above all cattle and above all wild animals. Upon your belly you shall go, dust you shall eat all the days of your life. [5 : 07] I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. Satan's great plan to take humanity away from God will not succeed.

God says, I will establish a permanent hostility between the two of you, between Satan and humanity, which is why people are never utterly given over to evil.

I understand Hitler was very kindly to his secretaries and loved Eva Braun. And we have evidence that some of the mafioso bosses love children and small animals while at the same time think nothing of executing those who are disloyal.

It's a distorted morality. But it comes from here, where we retain the horror of evil even as we commit evil. And you see, what this is saying is that God's judgment or his condemnation and salvation belong together as the two sides of the one coin.

And he says, after a very long warfare between humanity and Satan, there will come one who will crush the serpent's head. Or look again in chapter 3, 16.

[6 : 22] To the woman he said, I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing. In pain you shall bring forth children. Yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you.

You remember being made in the image of God means receiving the blessing of God of being able to be fruitful and multiply. And now the blessing becomes a burden.

The good gifts which God freely gives, which we take and use to play God, are taken by God and the punishment now exactly corresponds to the sin.

God's good intention still remains, but every area, even of the blessing, is touched with our own disobedience. And now the wonder of procreation itself is touched with pain and with danger and even death.

And the rivalry between man and woman, sorry, the harmony between man and woman now becomes rivalry. And the woman seeks to be loved and even to master her husband.

[7 : 32] And the man abuses his status, takes advantage of his position and exploits and dominates the woman. And it is the logical harvest for sin.

The blessing is turned into a caricature of itself. See, this is how it works. When we take God's gifts and seek to use them without reference to God, the gifts no longer live up to their full promise. And the more we use them without reference to God, the more they turn to dust in our hands. That is the way that God's judgment works in this life for us.

We play God and we say to God, I'm going to live the way I choose. What God does is he takes a step back and he allows us to do and to live with the consequences.

And I think it's almost impossible for us to imagine what punishment is like when it is righteous. We just can't, we can't manage to do it. Which is why in our culture we call the prison system correction.

[8 : 41] But God's judgment says a great deal about God, firstly. Second, it says a great deal about us. Let's turn to chapter 3, 17 to 19. And to Adam he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat it.

Cursed is the ground because of you. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you. And you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground.

For out of it you were taken. You are dust. And to dust you shall return. Which explains our obsession with gardening. We continue to cultivate and subdue the earth.

But now it becomes toil and work. Instead of being a spontaneous area of fulfilment and meaning, there is pain and burnout. And the only thing that seems to grow naturally are weeds.

And then after a life of struggling with the dust, we lose. And we are swallowed by the dust. To dust you shall return. Remember when God set man and woman in the garden.

[9 : 58] He said, Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For in the day that you eat of it, you shall die. And now we come to the climax of God's sentence. And he says, To dust you shall return.

Which means that death is punishment for disobedience. Physical death entered the world because of sin. None of us are created immortal.

None of us naturally are immortal by ourselves. God alone possesses life. And in the beginning, he gave us access to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

So that we might enjoy communion with God. And so long as we had access to that tree, we could have lived forever. Because of sin, we have been cast out of the garden. Cut off from that tree. And death itself is the punishment for sin. And don't get me wrong, that doesn't mean if you're very sinful, you'll die young. Or if you're very old, you've lived a very good life.

[10:57] I know that's not true, looking at some of you. What it means is, whether you are young or old, you and I have chosen to separate ourselves from communion with God, who is the source of life.

And we are all under the same judgment of sentence of death. But more striking, when we come to the person of Jesus Christ, we discover that the judgment of God is not ended and exhausted by death.

Death is not the end. God remains the Lord of the living and the dead. And his punishment extends beyond death itself. And you will know that Hollywood likes the idea that this life is not all that there is.

And there's a small industry now devoted to designing afterlives. And the one thing they have in common is that they eradicate Jesus from the central place of the afterlife.

But in Jesus' mind, he has the central place. In fact, he says that he is the one who will be the judge of the living and the dead.

[12:11] And that our acceptance by God ultimately has nothing to do with how many good things we've done or how many bad things we've done, but whether we have accepted Jesus Christ and what he says and turned to him in repentance and faith.

That's why the words of the text on that bulletin are so important. Man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment. I mean, that text just dismantles a number of our favorite fallacies. It means that reincarnation cannot possibly be true. It is destined for us to die once and after that judgment. It means universalism cannot possibly be true.

All roads lead to God will all somehow make it in the end. No, it's destined for us to die once and after that the judgment. It means that annihilation, the idea that after death that's it, is also false. It is destined for us to die once and after that the judgment. What I want to impress upon you is that it is Jesus who again and again and again speaks of judgment.

[13:19] There is this idea around that somehow the God of the Old Testament is a harsh and severe God and talks about judgment to scare us. But the God of the New Testament, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is all love and light and sweetness.

That is not true. It flies in the face of the evidence. The one person in the Bible who speaks about hell more than any other is Jesus Christ himself. I mean, listen to these words of Jesus.

Do not fear those who kill the body and cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Or again Jesus says, truly, truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself and has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man.

God has fixed a day in which he will judge the world and Jesus himself is their judge. And on that day, the Bible tells us, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess and every single one of us must give an account of himself or herself to God.

[14:40] I have a good friend who grew up as a Buddhist. Kanishka was a model citizen and a tax lawyer, which is not impossible.

And finally one day, he was intrigued by his Christian friends. He mustered up courage to ask one of his friends, why on earth are you a Christian? And without thinking, his friend said to him, well, I have someone to be accountable to.

Who are you accountable to? Kanishka. And in his fury, Kanishka took up a Bible to try and find the loopholes. And as he read through John's Gospel, he discovered that Christ was real and placed his trust in Christ.

He said, judgment demonstrates that we are accountable to God through Jesus Christ. Our lives are not meaningless. That right and wrong, in the end, do matter.

That there are final implications for trying to play God. And our lives have consequences beyond death into eternity. The judgment tells us a great deal about God, firstly, about ourselves, secondly, and thirdly and finally, about our world.

[15 : 51] Because this world is not the good, right, perfect garden of Eden that God created in the beginning. Somehow the cosmos itself has been caught up in the futility and the effects of our sin.

We are still able, still very able to see the residual goodness and beauty of creation. But it is not as it was. The Bible tells us that creation itself longs to be freed from this slavery to decay, from the effects of our sin, from our own greed and mismanagement.

That creation longs for the day of judgment to come when everything will be put right. And what that means is that evil is not an optical illusion as Christian science would have it.

It is true that evil has no separate existence in itself. that it is a parasite on what is good. But as Christians we're not dualists. We don't believe that there are two forces, God and good over here and Satan and evil over here.

Two kind of equal forces duking it out until the end. No, evil is merely a perversion and a corruption of all that is good. And judgment demonstrates that God has not abandoned his purposes in the first creation.

[17 : 09] His intention to have a creation with unfettered goodness and harmony and joy and peace and justice, it remains. And he has announced that he will one day take this creation and dismantle it and transform it into a new creation in a new heaven and a new earth where everything will be dealt with in perfect justice and evil itself will be finally eradicated and all those who belong to Jesus Christ will dwell in a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

And what that means is that, you see, judgment means that history itself is not a meaningless jumble of accidental events. History has a beginning and it is moving towards an end.

This world is moving towards a new creation. The wonderful thing is that God has given us a sneak view of that new creation when he raised Jesus from the dead.

Because in the resurrection the new creation has begun so that when we place our trust in Jesus' death and resurrection we become new creatures and we realise suddenly why we have felt homeless all our lives and we have a deep and strange longing to be with Christ and with his people forever.

And I know you might think this is all a bit negative and it is true that if you believe in the judgment of God then all the fine accoutrements of this life are nothing more than a funeral procession.

[18 : 43] But I would not want you to dismiss the fact of judgment just because you do not like it. And so I want to conclude by saying three things, three indicators that even in judgment God's grace is at work.

Three things, the covering, the bruising and the warning. Firstly, the covering. Look down to chapter 3 verse 21 please.

And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin and clothed them.

It's lovely. I mean, God doesn't chop down the tree of life in a fit of anger and burn it up. No, no, the tree of life he protects it. It's still in paradise waiting for us.

No, God turns to us and he covers us. He wants to remain our God. Now he wants to be the God of sinners.

[19 : 49] And the method of his grace is not to turn the clock back and pretend that nothing went wrong. It is to cover our shame and our guilt and our sin.

And that is what forgiveness is. It's pictured in the Bible as God giving us a robe of beautiful and pure cleanliness.

and it's true our personal history is irreversible but God is able to do a new thing. Not us turning over a new leaf but covering us.

He covers us with his mercy and his loving kindness. The covering. Secondly, the bruising. Back to 3.15. I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed.

He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. Here is God's promise that after a long history of conflict between Satan and humanity he will send a man and the man must represent God to defeat Satan and he must represent humanity to be born of woman to be the seed of woman.

[20 : 58] And at the climax of that long hostility there will be two bruising. The source of evil Satan will be irreversibly crushed but in the process the son will pay a terrible price.

And that is the promise that drives the Bible forward. That is the promise that drives our Christian faith. For we know that Jesus Christ came born of a woman and in his death he was born and he died to destroy the works of the devil.

He died to free us from the power of death and he did it by taking all the venom that the snake had into himself. Jesus is the one seed of woman who allows himself to be struck on our behalf and in doing so he opens the door for us to the tree of life.

And that is why his death is at the very core of our hope and faith because his death is the place of victory and judgment of grace and of love.

But it's not just the covering and the bruising that reveals God's grace. Thirdly, it is the warning. It is the fact that he warns us. I don't know if you've ever thought about this but God doesn't owe us a warning.

[22 : 25] He doesn't owe us anything. But in his kindness and his mercy he calls to us even as we turn away from him. And he offers us his hand and he continues to offer us his hand in very costly friendship.

And in the beginning God warned the man and the woman of the consequences of their sin. And despite the fact that the very first thing that Satan denied was the reality of judgment God was faithful to his word.

And we have been living with the consequences ever since. And throughout his word God reasons with us and pleads with us to turn away from sin to turn to him in forgiveness and mercy and salvation.

Without the judgment of God salvation means nothing. God has sent his son to live and die for us paying the highest possible price to rescue us from the coming judgment and now he holds his hand out to us and invites us to take it.

And the way in which we take it is that we turn to Christ and cast ourselves on his mercy and we look to him and we see in him our hope and our joy and our life and our strength.

[23 : 44] May God give us the ability and the grace to take his hand. Amen. This digital audio file along with many others is available from the St. John's Shaughnessy website at www.stjohnschaughnessy.org That address is www.stjohnschaughnessy.org On the website you will also find information about ministries, worship services and special events at St. John's Shaughnessy.

We hope that this message has helped you and that you will share it with others. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

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