

Let God Be Judge / “The Lord Comes”

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I want to echo David's welcome and to just remind you that unlike the bulletin, I'm not the canon David Short. I'm Dan Gifford, and David offered to be a ventriloquist and speak through me, but I would have to be his puppet, and I would be responsible for anything that he said.

So I'll do the preaching today. And I'm very happy to be doing the preaching this morning because we are continuing a series in this Advent season on disciplines of this season. And Advent is just a wonderful season. I love Advent because it speaks to what is at the heart of our Christian faith, of the good news of Jesus, and that is that God comes to us. The first thing in all of our lives is that God comes to us. He has come to us in Jesus Christ, born as a baby in a manger, God and man, to save the world, to bring the forgiveness of sins, the new life that only God can give.

And he will come again in glory to bring what is good and right and to make all things well that has been broken. And in the midst of all that, the Holy Spirit comes to us as we believe. So that Jesus is in our lives. He's in our hearts as Lord and Savior. And all of our life is a response to the coming of God to us. The grace of God is so strongly emphasized in Advent because of this. And that's why in these four Sundays of Advent, we are talking about disciplines, spiritual disciplines of Advent.

And spiritual disciplines are really the joyous response to God's grace in coming to us in Jesus Christ. And so that's why in the first week we talked about putting on Christ, who has already covered us with his righteousness, with his acceptance. Last week we talked about embracing the certain hope that Jesus gives to us. And today, interestingly, we're going to be talking about looking at the discipline of shaping our lives around the judgment of Jesus, which is something you don't often think of as something glorious and good. I think one of the reasons I was chosen to do this was I found out last week at the Children's Focus that my name, Daniel, means God is judge. So I'm uniquely qualified to talk about the judgment of God and why we shape our lives around that. Advent is a great season because we're called to take inventory of our lives around those two comings of Jesus, that he has come to save us and be our Lord, and that this means he will come again in glory that all the world will see to judge the world. Now, ever since Adam and Eve, the world has not done well with the idea of God as judge. It's not a popular concept because it means God knows best about everything. It takes away my autonomy, my right to determine what is right and wrong, and if I'm accountable to God, I know that I am guilty. But Jesus turns all of that thinking upside down because Christians have always longed for Jesus to come as judge. So we don't think of it as something to reject or something to push away and hide. He has lifted our judgment off of us, that we will one day see him face to face. The one that we worship, the one that we love, we will see as he truly is. And he will make all things right that have been wrong and destructive, as Arnold was telling the kids. And most importantly, at that judgment, I will worship him forever.

That we will know this life of adventure of worshiping him forever. And that's why Christians from the very beginning of Jesus rising from the dead and ascending to heaven have said, come quickly, Lord Jesus. Amen.

[4 : 38] Come quickly, Lord Jesus. So Advent calls us to consider how does the truth of Jesus coming, His judgment, His judgment, how does that change me? How does that change my priorities? How does it shape the way that I think and what I do and what is important in my life? Advent does this for us. That discipline of evaluating our lives in the light of Jesus coming strengthens us. It's crucial for our health as Christians, our spiritual health. Because we are thinking very specifically today about how the nearness of Jesus shapes our lives. So let's turn to this reading from Corinthians. It's chosen for the third Sunday of Advent because in it we see how the apostle Paul's life is shaped very directly by the future coming of Jesus in glory to judge him. And his purpose in teaching us this is that we might learn how it shapes our life as well. We'll learn from Paul's life here. So let's briefly look at the profound effect this has on Paul's life. In verse 1, down at the bottom of page 953, he says, right away, this fact of Jesus coming shapes my identity. And in a time, in a culture now where we talk a lot about identity, where we want to choose our own identity in the world's thinking and be autonomous in it, he says, the identity has been given to me. This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. See, there's two things that Paul says about his identity. The first is that he's a servant of Christ. Now the word he uses is an interesting word. He hasn't been using it much. It is the word that means an under rower. That's how it was first described, that word. Somebody who's in a ship and they are a slave who is rowing down in the bottom tier of the ship. And they are constantly living a life where they are hearing directly or indirectly the directions of the captain. Their life is really shaped by listening to these commands and obeying them. It's the nature of what they're about. There's a deep humility in that position because he is saying here that he belongs to Christ first of all. And his life is all about doing what Jesus commands him to do.

But the difference is there is a joy about this. He says, I am glad that this is my identity. And that is because of the goodness and the glory of the one who he is listening to, of the one that he is responsive to every day in his life. It is a joy to be identified as a servant of Christ in this way.

But secondly, he is also a steward of the mysteries of God. Now you may know that in Paul's time, stewards were educated servants and they oversaw landowners, people who had wealth. Their job was to distribute money and goods on behalf of that owner, on behalf of the master of an extended household.

So Paul says, I'm like that steward. I'm entrusted with the job of distributing a treasure, something very valuable. And it is the mysteries of God.

The question has to come, what is the mystery of God? What is this treasure? Well, what Paul has said in 1 Corinthians is that it is the gospel that he preaches, very simply.

[8 : 36] Because in the New Testament, the mystery of God is not a puzzle that still has to be figured out. It is a plan of salvation that has been long hidden, but is now revealed.

So if you read the Old Testament, throughout there are promises that God will deliver his people. He will save them. But they did not know how that would happen.

In fact, they probably couldn't imagine how it possibly could happen, given their circumstances. But in Jesus, that hidden way, that hidden plan of salvation from the beginning of time, is now made completely open.

And it is clearly shown to the person who hears someone speak about Jesus, who died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins and rose again in power, they are hearing that mystery revealed.

The curtain is pulled away, and they see the answer. And so Paul is saying that like a steward, I've been entrusted with that treasure of the good news of Jesus now revealed.

[9 : 44] And I am all about giving away that revelation to people intact, complete, whole, in the right way. And that's why he says in verse 2, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

That they are completely trustworthy. It's the nature of a steward. It only works that way, to have a steward. In other words, they must give it away in the exact way in which it was given to them.

And this was an important concept, because in Paul's time, stewards were known to line their pockets by skimming off the top. They would dilute the bags of grain that were being sold.

They would skim the wealth that they were distributing. So Paul's saying being trustworthy with the gospel means giving the whole thing away. Not parts of it.

Not something that's watered down. Not something that is distorted. But the clear, complete revelation of Jesus Christ. And really, this is not just the description of Paul.

[10 : 52] It is the description, the job description, for every single Christian pastor in every church in the world. A man named Dr. Bruce Winter, who is an expert on 1 Corinthians and the culture of that time, and also spends lots of time training pastors and helping them in their work.

And he also preached here as well. He reckons that when a pastor comes to a new church, he should always preach this passage as his first sermon. And the reason he said that is because pastors and churches are often confused about what the primary role of a pastor is.

Is it as administrator? Is he the chair of meetings? Is he the inspiring leader? Is he the counselor? Is he the fundraiser?

Is he the service leader? But Paul is clear here. What the chief responsibility here of every pastor is first of all to be a servant of Christ and to take care of the treasure that God has entrusted to them.

The gospel. And like a trustworthy steward, he must be completely faithful to that revelation of Jesus Christ. Now, that doesn't let any of you off the hook because Paul is speaking to each of you as well.

[12 : 19] It's not just true for pastors. It has implications for every person in this church and in every church who hears the gospel. That's why Paul urges his hearers in verse 16 in this chapter, be imitators of me.

In other words, he's saying that each of us who believe are meant to be stewards of his gospel as well. That the nature of the treasure that we have heard is that it's not ours to keep.

We must be trustworthy in giving it away. Giving it away to our families, to the people that we work with, to the people that we are serving in this church, to the friends that we know socially.

It's our identity that we give that away in some way, intact and clear and pure. And the church in Corinth really had to learn this because it was different from what they saw was so important in life, so important to them in the church and in the community.

Their ideas were very different. They were very proud of spiritual gifts that they had. They were attracted to people who were great public speakers and impressive teachers, even if they did play fast and loose with the gospel.

[13 : 35] And so Paul really didn't make the grade. At the beginning of chapter 2, he says, Look, when I first came to you, Corinthians, I came, I was not eloquent.

I was not speaking with superior wisdom. I came in weakness and with much trembling. My words weren't that plausible. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words.

Now, I've been helping one of our Anic churches, Emmanuel Church, in their search for a new pastor for their congregation. And in doing this, I've received lots and lots of cover letters and resumes from pastors all over North America.

And I've got to tell you, I haven't seen any of this in any of my resumes, what Paul has just written here. And in fact, I wonder if Paul was applying to any church in Vancouver or in Canada, whether he would be hired if he wrote that in his cover letter.

What would be the chance of him being hired? Well, many churches wouldn't want anything to do with him. But in all this deficiency, Paul says, there is a demonstration of God's power by the Holy Spirit.

[14 : 51] He says this in chapter 2. There is power because he faithfully preached Jesus and him crucified, he said. So you see what he's saying here.

He's saying that God changed hearts and minds forever, which is what every pastor, every Christian wants. Not because of these incredible gifts that Paul would have, but simply because he was a trustworthy steward and a faithful, humble servant.

And I think there's a great encouragement for us in Paul's teaching. Because each of us, if we're honest, often feel like we're not qualified to speak about the gospel.

We are not outgoing enough or wise enough or eloquent or I'm not confident enough. But Paul destroys that argument here.

And the one thing he says that qualifies you is that you have received the treasure of Jesus Christ and that you know it through God's word and also that you are faithful in giving it away.

[15 : 58] It is that simple. That is what has qualified you. And that is what God uses by his powerful Holy Spirit to bring this transformation of the gospel into people's lives.

And I think this is where the Lord's judgment really comes into us. Because in Corinth, Paul was criticized for not meeting people's expectations, for not living up to the priorities of the world around him.

So the Corinthians compared him very unfavorably to the impressive wisdom teachers that were all around. He was criticized. He was personally attacked. And his credentials as a legitimate apostle were always being questioned.

And not only that, but it seems from verse 3, and we're going to read in a moment, that he judged himself, that he accused himself, that he condemned himself.

He probably thought, what am I doing wrong here? How could I dress things up? How could I really get through to people by taking on these things that are so important to them? And maybe changing the gospel a bit.

[17 : 05] He was in a very difficult situation. Must have been very tempted to adjust his message a bit more to make it acceptable. But he tells us in verse 3 that he stood firm.

Let's read it. It says, But with me, it's a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. Literally, he's saying by any human day, which is a contrast to the day of the Lord.

I do not even judge myself, he says. I'm not aware of anything against myself, but I am not hereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.

And that's what's foundational for him. He's saying that the judgment of the Corinthians or any other person means very little in comparison to the Lord who judges him.

Now, he's not saying that pastors should not be accountable in what they teach or how they live. He says later on in this letter, Woe is me if I don't preach the gospel. He says in Thessalonians, Test everything.

- [18 : 08] Hold to that which is good. Everything that you hear, test by God's word. But Paul is talking here about being condemned and personally attacked because he himself does not measure up to their expectations.
- He's criticized because the gospel's not dressed up enough. And so what he said and how he said it was not nearly as impressive or relevant as it should be.
- And Paul is saying, I am not going to be accountable to you in that way. But in everything, I am accountable to Jesus Christ first. He is the Lord who judges me.
- I will face the one who has given me the job of steward. And I am a servant now above everything else. That's the identity that strengthened him.
- That is the identity that strengthens you and me and allows us to stand firm as well. That's what gives courage in the face of opposition to the gospel.
- [19 : 09] He's much more concerned with Jesus' judgment than any human judgment that can come against you. And I think that speaks to you and me, particularly in our culture today.
- Because we really do live in a minority position. The gospel that we are entrusted with is an offense to the majority of the society around us, as it was for Paul's society.
- The message of Christmas is very simple, that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in order to save us by dying on a cross for the forgiveness of our sins.
- And so the implication of this is that humanity is lost, that we are sinful. We desperately need Jesus because he alone, he alone can save us.
- He alone has the right to rule every aspect of our lives. Now does that sound like that would be a popular message in our culture? There's just such a great pressure to hide that gospel or change it or to make it more popular.
- [20 : 15] The pressure even comes from within the church. We want to look successful. But Paul says, that we are accountable, first of all, to the one who makes us stewards, that Jesus has entrusted us with that treasure, and we are to be faithful in that work and to him.
- Now notice what Paul has been doing here. He is drawing the attention of all the Corinthians, including those who are attacking him, away from himself and to Jesus, who is the judge.
- He says, he is my judge, he is yours as well. And remember, as you think, and as you speak, as you set your priorities, that you will stand before Jesus, who sees into the hearts of every person, perfectly.
- So if that doesn't make a person evaluate their life during Advent, nothing will. You know, that's why Advent really moves us very specifically to self-examination and repentance.
- Now our passage concludes with praise in verse 8. And I love how this passage ends. There's actually a bit of surprise in it. He says, Therefore, having said all this, don't pronounce judgment before its time.
- [21 : 40] Before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart, then everyone will receive their commendation from God.
- So Paul's saying, here's your application. Humans are completely wrong in thinking that they can condemn a person. people are all able to hide their thoughts and their intentions from one another.
- We're all very good at doing this. We've developed the skill to a high level. And we cannot see these things in others. But the nature of judgment is that Jesus has the authority to bring to light the things that are hidden in darkness.

It's important for us to see here that darkness is not something that is badness, necessarily. It is a neutral term. It means that everything that people kept hidden, the good thoughts and intentions along with the bad.

So in other words, our private prayers, our ministry, our serving that nobody sees are brought to light in judgment. But also our grudges and our complaints that can be so destructive to the mission of the kingdom of God are also brought to light as well.

[22 : 59] as well, Jesus will disclose all of it. And we will see at that time what was worthy of praise in our lives and what was not.

And he will deal with all of it rightly. That is the judgment that all Christians face even as we are secure in heaven. Even as we know for sure that the love of God will never separate from us because of Jesus.

There is a good and holy awe and respect that comes from this. This understanding of judgment brings us wisdom which is knowing what is the best.

What is the best for the well-being of others and yourself? What is the greatest good that can be brought into people's lives? That is what wisdom is in decisions and what we do.

And that's why Psalm 111 says this. It says that the fear of the Lord that fear that awe that reverence of God is the beginning of all wisdom.

[24 : 03] And wonderfully and I want to close this sermon with this Paul says that everyone will receive their commendation from God. That's how this passage ends.

That's how he wraps it up. Isn't that a shock to us? Literally the Greek says each will receive their praise from God. It's extraordinary that God who is worthy of all praise of all worship who is almighty and glorious he will praise us for the things that we were faithful in.

And we don't know exactly what that will look like what it will sound like but it's very likely that it will be similar to what we hear Jesus talk about in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25.

The nature of judgment is this that we will hear God say well done good and faithful servant you are faithful over a few things I will make you ruler over many things enter into the joy of the Lord.

Those are words that we should live for. Each of us ought to have a strong ambition to live our lives so that we will one day hear God praise us in this way on the day of judgment.

[25 : 20] That's how judgment wonderfully shapes our lives. That's how judgment is our joy and the thing that we look forward to most of all. That's why Christians long for that day of judgment and said over and over again come Lord Jesus quickly.

Amen. Come quickly Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen.