

Glimpses of God's Glory God Judges

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[0:00] Good morning, church. Happy Mother's Day for the mums out there. My mum's up in Lura, and my mother-in-law is down from Parks visiting, which is fantastic.

We're continuing now as our series. This is not a Mother's Day talk. And so our series today continues, and it's God judges. So this is a bit heavy.

Maybe spend a few minutes scanning a newspaper or watching the news, and you'll have a strong sense that something should be done.

The human heart has an instinctive longing for justice. I want justice. We want justice. There's nothing new here under the sun.

Thousands of years ago, the writer of Ecclesiastes highlights, I saw a great injustice under the sun. And he rattles off quite a lot of things. We want evil to be punished and wrongs to be righted.

[1:02] We want this on a large scale, and we actually want justice even on small and petty issues.

Working my way through university some years ago, I was working at a Caltex petrol station, and one day a regular customer came in, and he filled up, you know those barbecue gas bottles?

He filled up that barbecue gas bottle, and it was \$20 worth. And then he said, oh, I actually don't have any money. Can you spot me, and I'll pay you back next time? Now, he was a regular customer, and so I thought, yeah, I'll see him again.

So I paid out of my own pocket the \$20, and he went his way. He never came back. At least on the days I was working. I remember one time seeing him drive past, and I was like, but he never came and paid that \$20.

Now, that might not seem like much, but for a struggling uni student, it was a lot. And someone still had to pay the debt, so I absorbed the cost. And all these years later, I still haven't forgotten the injustice.

We all want justice. If we cry out, I want justice, do we really want that? Most people are comfortable with judgment as long as it's out there, and it's not them being judged.

[2:21] Judge everyone else except me, please. If we were to get what we deserve, I can guarantee you we wouldn't be demanding justice. There's a truth we hesitate to mention.

We often hesitate to mention this truth because it's unpopular. And it's so much easier to talk about God's love, yet there's no one avoiding the uncomfortable truth that one day God will judge humanity.

People don't like to hear this. The thing is, we're never going to fully understand God's love if we don't fully understand God's justice. In one hand, we have love.

In the other, we have judgment. And it's untruthful to focus on one without the other. As we have seen, Isaiah 13 to 23 contains a collection of the prophets' declarations of judgment against the nations around God's people.

Now in chapters 24 to 27, Isaiah's vision of God's coming judgment expands to embrace the devastation of the whole earth.

[3:34] The judgments taking place in Isaiah's day are pointers to a global judgment at the end of history. Today, as we catch glimpses of God's glory and grace in Isaiah, specifically God judges, it's important to note a few more truths, including the fact that the God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament.

There's a common misconception that the God of the Old Testament is wrathful and judgy. I think, not if you've heard this. And the God of the New Testament is loving and accepting.

But it's the same God. Malachi reminds us, I am the Lord. I change not. Hebrew reminds us, Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

And Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. God doesn't change. And here's the nature and character of God. Not ready to smite us, but the Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. This is our foundation. Same God of the scriptures doesn't change. God is slow to anger, loving, forgiving, gracious.

[4:56] Yet there will be a time when God says, enough. And the guilty will be punished. This is actually good news.

We want justice. It's also good to know that God isn't impulsive or moody or flippant or erratic. Constantly changing his divine plan so we never know where we stand.

I want us to consider today God's judgment in Isaiah 25. God's judgment at the cross. God's judgment now and in the future. And address a few big questions we might have near the end. And what Jesus' return means for us while we wait. So remember in Isaiah's day, people were affluent, a lot like Sydney, and had become complacent.

The poor were neglected. There were injustices. Priests were going through the rituals. But their heart wasn't aligned with God's word.

[6:00] Their hearts weren't in it. They had aspects of God's creation. God's good creation that actually turned into idols. And they were idolatrous.

Who needs God when everything is going well? And then when a threat did come, instead of making peace with God, repenting and putting their trust in God, they were trying to make alliances with other nations.

Isaiah warns, turn back to God. God, in Isaiah 1 verse 17, he says, Isaiah 25 is a song of great reversal.

When the ultimate judgment comes, wrongs will be righted. The strong will become weak. The weak will become strong. The ruthless will be subdued.

It's also a song of joy where refuge can be found in God. Lord, you are my God. I will exalt you and praise your name.

[7:25] Praise your name for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things. Things planned long ago. You've made the city a heap of rubble. The fortified town a ruin.

The foreigners stronghold a city no more. It will never be rebuilt. God's judgment is relentless. And if we find this vision disturbing, it's actually meant to shake us out of our complacency.

The song they sing of destruction in Isaiah 25 seems counterintuitive to us. Why will we sing when we see destruction?

Think about it. How many movies do we watch and there's a baddie or something terrible in it and it gets to the end and the baddie gets it in the end and we go, yeah, that's great.

Or we might not yell that out loud, but there's some kind of heartfelt satisfaction that the baddie gets it in the end. Now look across the depth of human history.

[8:29] The evil and pain. The abuses of power. The genocide. The things that have been done to helpless people. The cases which are unsolved. The travesties of justice.

The oppression and exploitation of the poor. These things God is able and willing to put right. One day God will bring all this to an end and declare, enough.

And we will sing for joy when it's all finished. All the distinctions that so often matter in human interactions between employers and employees, between haves and have-nots, will be swept away on that day.

Isaiah 25 uses up and down language. It describes a great reversal. The strong become weak. High fortified walls will be brought low.

The ruthless will be subdued. And the proud humbled. Isaiah 25, that phrase, in perfect faithfulness God will accomplish this, actually translates in, God is faithfully faithful.

[9:37] God speaks again and again in the Bible of this coming day of judgment. Of a great reversal. And he'll prove faithfully faithful to his word. Isaiah is talking about a day in the future.

In verse 11, where the proud will be humbled. Jesus was explicit when he said, he will return and he will separate humanity from the sheep and the goats.

For heaven and hell. For life and death. We hesitate to mention this because we assume the talk of hellfire will put people off our message.

People are very keen to hear about God's love. But they don't want to hear about God's judgment. God's not just a God of love.

God's not just a God of love or a God of wrath and judgment. He is both. If your concept of God can't include both, it will distort the way you live.

[10 : 47] If you see only a loving God who never says no, then you'll act like an entitled child. If you see only an angry God who never says yes, you will live like a mistreated child.

I want to explain this a bit more. Two questions can assess whether this is the way we see God.

The first question to ask ourselves. Do you have an enlightened view of God?

You don't believe in the parts of the Bible that you find outdated. God is a supportive spirit of love and life. God is an assistant on your road to the goals you have chosen.

And you live as you see fit. You pretty much live unaccountably and do whatever you want as long as you're not hurting anyone. You don't want God to condemn anything you do.

God needs to inspire you, not lay down rules that you must obey. You assume God rubber stamps your life choices and the danger here, anything goes.

[11 : 50] But this free-range, godless living where you seek affirmation from career or success or romance only ultimately yields dissatisfaction. This is the entitled child liberal approach, that God is only all about love, sin is not taken seriously, and grace is cheap.

The second question. When something happens that reveals your sin more clearly, more clearly than you ever wanted to see or admit, does it move you away from God?

Or does it move you closer to him? If it wants you to stay away from God in prayer and church, that shows you have little understanding of what happened on the cross. You'll be a driven person.

You'll try hard to be moral. You'll try hard to be good. But you'll always feel unworthy. And you'll surprise yourself when you don't even keep the standards you hold others to.

This distorted view of God, where God is ready to pounce at my slightest mistake, is the mistreated child approach. It doesn't understand grace. You'll either have a works-based view of salvation, thinking, I'm never going to be good enough.

[13 : 08] I've got to try harder. Newsflash, we're never going to be good enough. That's why we need Jesus. Or you'll find yourself comparing yourself to others and pointing the self-righteous finger, I'm glad I'm not like them.

If we understand the cross, then the discovery of new depths of fault, weakness, and evil in our life drives us closer to Jesus, not further away.

In Isaiah 25, verses 4 and 5, our refuge can only be found in God. Shelter from the metaphorical storms and heat of life. Those who mock and despise will be silenced.

The high will be brought low. After God's intervention in history to judge, there's this central section of the song, verses 6 to 8. There will be a renewal as God prepares a feast.

And there's echoes in this passage of the great banquet, that Jesus, the parable of the great banquet, Luke 14, where God invites all those. And there's also parallels here to Revelation 21 of the new creation.

[14 : 15] Let's have a read. On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast. On this mountain, he will swallow up death forever. That veil which is over all the nations.

The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces. He will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The feast speaks of satisfaction.

Our emptiness will be filled. Our needs will be met. We will be in communion with God and one another forever. What a song to sing. There'll be no more death or pain or disgrace.

The disgrace of sin will be removed. This is a song of joy. It's a song worth singing. Justice will be ultimate and those who find refuge in the Lord will be renewed.

Verse 29, Isaiah 25. Surely this is our God. We trusted in him and he saved us. This is the Lord. We trust in him. Let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.

[15 : 26] Isaiah is describing our future if we have our trust and faith in Jesus. So is God a loving God who forgives the guilty or just a God who punishes the guilty?

We may struggle with the idea of a wrathful God who condemns but the Bible puts judgment in proximity of the most famous verse on love which is for God so loved the world that he gave his only son.

John 3.16 whoever believes will not perish. So perish is an option as judgment for our sin. God's wrath and condemnation will perish.

But by trusting in the son because God loves us so much we have eternal life. That's the best option. The Bible sees God's love and anger sorry the Bible never sees the Bible never sees God's

love and anger as being opposed to each other.

In fact the Bible tells us that in God not only is love and judgment not intention but they are meaningless apart from each other and indeed they establish each other.

[16:40] Think about it as a parent if you never set boundaries and discipline your children I'd question whether you love your children. The law of God is summed up by Jesus in Matthew 20.

Love God love others. The command to love properly proportionately completely any failure to do so destroys our own heart the creation other people and all things God made and loves.

So God's judgment on disobedience to his law is both a call to love and an expression of his love. In this world and in our hearts love and anger are at odds with each other.

In fact our nature is always to get even. When we are wronged we want justice we want vengeance. Remember I mentioned a moment ago absorbing the cost of a \$20 barbecue bottle.

Did you know there's a sequel to that story? Some years later I was playing cricket for my university team and someone got out and then someone said captain from the opposing team and it was customary to applaud the captain as they came on and I was fielding in first slip and my captain was in second slip and I just glanced across to him and I said this guy ripped me off \$20 the captain from the other team and he came out to bat and he faced up and Anton was our left hand fast bowler he came in and the ball hit the pitch and it cut off the seam and the batsman I think probably went to play the right shot but he snicked it first ball and I dived forward and I got my hand under it just before it hit the grass and I caught him out golden duck at which point everyone yelled out how's that not me I said that's \$20 worth you're out of here and he looked at me like what are you talking about mate but I knew

[18:42] I hadn't forgotten I paid his \$20 but I still had a grudge and I thought that was sweet vengeance and justice I was still out of pocket thankfully that's nothing like the way God works the Lord is gracious slow to anger and abounding in love we need more help in understanding God if the real God is a God of both love and justice then God's reality is supremely revealed on the cross that is where we must go to heal our understanding find refuge and receive a renewed heart law and love one cannot give way to the other both meet together they both must stand in many ways this is the tension that drives the plot of the entire Bible the cross gives us clarity it's where God's love and judgment meet if someone asked me prove God loves you prove God's love

I'd point them to the cross the cross where Jesus absorbed God's judgment for our sin in our place because God loves us and someone has to pay the price for sin like the \$20 gas bottle someone had to pay for it and this is so much bigger than that who pays our debt of sin who pays our debt of sin for breaking God's law either we do or the one who we owe the debt to does Jesus he said I came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it because you guys can't we never will be able to so Jesus steps in and then pays our sin debt on our behalf and this is all sufficient once for all God's wrath is satisfied the guilty judgment is paid by innocent

Jesus John Stott puts it this way in the cross of Christ the concept of substitution may be said then to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation for the essence of sin is humanity substituting themselves for God while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for humankind humanity asserts itself against God and puts themselves where only God deserves to be God sacrifices himself for humanity and puts himself where only we deserve to be humankind claims prerogatives which belong to God alone God accepts penalties which belong to us alone the cross shows God's loving commitment to justice and forgiveness this still leaves us with some big questions what right has God to judge how do we even know right from wrong when we cry out for justice what about people who have never heard of the gospel who will judge how will God judge when will God judge what do I need to do well God judges because he's our loving creator and his perfect laws and statutes have been broken we are not a result of natural selection if we were there's no justice in the motto survival of the fittest we judge because we're image bearers of a just God there are times when we must judge we have a judicial system to uphold law as we cry out for justice Jesus himself turned tables when he saw injustice and he wants us to do the same while we console ourselves that while on earth no justice is complete ultimately God will put all things right we also make personal judgments on a daily basis what am I going to wear what am I going to eat and we can find ourselves judging others we can be judgy and like with the \$20 gas bottle and the cricket \$20 moment we want vengeance we want wrongs righted but our judgments are often flawed by our subjective biases even our views of right and wrong are tainted by our culture or our upbringing our selfishness and sin when Jesus says in the sermon on the mount in Matthew 7 do

not judge and in Romans 12 we're reminded vengeance belongs to the Lord the cross helps us refrain from sitting in the judgment seat or pointing the finger at others
God's objective morality means right and wrong exist and hold true no matter who you are and what you believe in so when God judges it's because we have broken his objective law God judges perfectly and thankfully his judgment is not like ours Romans 2 reminds us that there is no partiality with God so there's no favoritism for the people in the world who've never heard trust the sensible thing for us to do is trust our loving God because his judgment and love cohere they're perfectly holy and good holy love holy wrath and judgment so who will judge it's Jesus who will be doing the judging John 5 verse 22 we read the father has entrusted the judgment to the son that's good news the one who knows the world and who knows us will judge us one day

[24:40] Romans 14 says we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of our lives to God which means there's nowhere to hide and no one to hide behind we can't hide behind our parents if we don't have faith but they had faith we can't hide behind our good deeds which don't add up all will be laid bare all secrets will be revealed all ulterior motives will be exposed and Jesus will judge everyone the living and the dead if you're trusting in Jesus do not fear judgment don't be afraid be assured Jesus is on your side he will vouch for you because you believe he took God's judgment for you yet even on that last day I think as Christians judgment day is going to be on a cosmic scale and it's still going to be terrifying every knee will bow the scriptures tell us and Revelation says this on that day rulers generals the rich the mighty and everyone else will hide in caves calling to the mountains and the rocks fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb for the great day of wrath has come and who can withstand it remember God is faithfully faithful and when

Jesus physically returns and brings justice it will be a wonderful thing the world really deep down longs for justice to be served so when will all this take place we can be confident that Jesus who did come will come again because it was a massive teaching of his John 14 I will come again and take you to be with me God is faithfully faithful and keeps his promises but we're not told when this will happen no one will know the day or the hour and that's good because it means that every morning we could get up and say it could be today it could be in the next 30 seconds I might not get to finish this talk and that would have good effect on us if we knew exactly when Jesus was coming we'd probably slack off a bit for a while and then get enthusiastic toward the end but because Jesus said nobody knows except the father and Paul said therefore he will come like a thief a thief not because he's going to do something immoral but because we don't know when thieves come he's coming back

I forget this sometimes happy for you to remind me of it we need reminding constantly we need to remind one another that Jesus is returning soon but we don't know when so while judgment is delayed it will not in the end be denied we currently live in an age of grace where while we see injustice and the tyranny of free will humanity God gives life experiences and circumstances to act as a wake up call to our mortality he gives us opportunity to turn to Jesus and trust in him before God ultimately says enough if your current circumstances are pretty ordinary don't think bad things are happening to you because God is judging you at this moment it could be the case God does discipline his children but it's more likely things are tough because we live in a sinful broken world and where bad things happen even when we're doing the right thing there are times though where you might be reaping what you sow and this is not karma this is just if you sow seeds of sin you're going to reap the consequences of that or you could find yourself in a difficult situation because someone is sinning against you trust that God will make all things new at the present people make the decision about

Christ they either respond to him with resistance or repentance they take a position with Christ I am against or I am for and then of course at death that decision is locked in Hebrews 9 27 after death comes judgment the decision that people are making will be locked in when they die or on the day Jesus returns and then it will be announced publicly by Jesus a word which is either welcome or depart this will be the great verdict and in a sense it will reflect the way a person has treated Jesus the welcomer will be welcomed the person who says to Jesus depart I don't want anything to do with you will hear the words depart while we wait don't become complacent don't doubt

Jesus will return Isaiah 26 verse 8 yes Lord walking in the way of your laws we wait for you your name and renown are the desires of our hearts so while we wait for that day which we don't know the day or the hour be ready walk in the ways of God keep taking that next step what is the next

step for you repent put to death the idols that have captured your heart remember an idol is anything that is not in alignment with God's word feed on God's word speak to him prayer love God's people fellowship with one another encourage each other as the day of the Lord approaches grow in godliness serve in faithfulness seek justice bear fruit of the spirit use your gifts for God's glory and honour and love the lost this is pen pen gillett the one with the glasses on recognize him he's half of the tree of the pen and teller magic act in vegas and we're just about to show a clip it's after one of his shows and a man from gideon's has come up to him and the man from gideon's approached him he's looking pretty washed out in this clip and he gives him a bible and says [31:13] I want you to have this and pen is an atheist who actually identifies as beyond atheist like an atheist of atheists yet this is what he has to say about christians proselytizing and sharing their faith thanks wendy and then gave me this bible and i've always said you know that i i don't respect people who don't proselytize i don't respect that at all if you believe that there's a heaven and hell and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever and you think that well it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward and atheists who think that people shouldn't proselytize just leave me alone keep your religion to yourself how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize how much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that i mean if i believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming at you and you didn't believe it that truck was bearing down on you there's a certain point where i tackle you and this is more important than that and i've always thought that and i've written about that i've thought of it conceptually this guy was a really good guy he was polite and honest and sane and he cared enough about me to proselytize judgment is coming the good news is that god loves us and jesus absorbed god's judgment on the cross so we can be forgiven it's not good enough to say i'm in and ignore the future of those who aren't how much do you not care about someone to not share the gospel and warn them that judgment is coming it's what we've been all tasked with get ready for jesus return and go and tell the good news for whoever calls on the renowned name of jesus will be saved on that final day of judgment let's pray heavenly father as we bow our heads before you we thank you so much for this extraordinary promise that jesus will return and make all things new we pray that you would help us to be mindful and ready every day and we also thank you for this justice this day of justice that is around the corner when you will be greatly honored when evil will be subdued your people vindicated and we will be filled with praise for your grace we ask that you would help us to live faithfully for you in this world and to help others to come to know jesus and believe as well we ask this in jesus name amen thank you thank you for this answer as well as i said as i said as i said as i said as i said as well as i said as i said as i said as i said as i said