

# "But Now..."

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[ 0 : 0 0 ]      worship of God. We're singing firstly tonight Psalm 103, Psalm 103, and this is from the Scottish Psalter version. You'll find that on page 369 of the Blue Psalm books.

Psalm 103, the tune is London New, and we're singing verses 1 to 5. O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me is, be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless. Bless, O my soul, the Lord thy God, and not forgetful be of all his gracious benefits he hath bestowed on thee. We'll stand to sing these verses to the end of verse 5 to God's praise.

O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord, and all that in me he is. Be stirred up his holy name to magnify and bless. Bless, O my soul, the Lord thy God, and not forgetful be of all his gracious benefits he hath bestowed on thee.

All thine iniquities who doth most graciously forgive.

who thy diseases, all and pains, doth heal and be relieved. Who thy diseases, all and pains, doth heal and be relieved.

[ 2 : 1 9 ]      Who doth redeem thy life that thou to death mayst not fall down.

who thy goodness, all and pains, doth heal and bless you. Who thy with loving kindness joth and tender mercies crown.

Who with abundance of good things doth satisfy the Lord, and all that in me is, be of all grace by thy mouth. So that in us the eagle's age, renew it is thy youth.

Let's join together now in prayer. Let's call upon the name of the Lord. Almighty God, in whose presence we appear once more in this place of worship.

We give you thanks again, O Lord, that we are found here, and that we are here with a desire to worship you. That we are here, O Lord, to listen to your voice speaking to us through the scriptures, and seeking to bring praise and honour and glory to you.

[ 3 : 5 8 ]      We give thanks, Lord, for every opportunity you give us to do this. We know that each opportunity we have is far more than we deserve. We deserve only to be forever cast out from you and kept from you for our sin against you.

And we thank you that you have made provision, as we were reminded this morning from your word, a provision where you have provided reconciliation in the Lord Jesus Christ and through his death.

And we pray that you would bless to us, Lord, all that we partook of this morning. Help us to carry forward in our hearts and lives the death of Jesus in such a way that would reflect our attachment to him.

And, Lord, we pray tonight for any who have not yet come to receive him, who have not yet come to respond believingly and repentantly to the offer of the gospel.

We pray that wherever they may be, and even in this gathering tonight, should there be such, we do, O Lord, ask that your Holy Spirit will draw us, that your Holy Spirit will impress upon us our need of repentance and confession of sin, and that you would draw us, Lord, to see the Lord Jesus Christ, your dear Son, as the one in whom you have made provision for us for our forgiveness, for our acceptance, and for our being made righteous with God.

[ 5 : 23 ] We thank you tonight, O Lord, for your word. We thank you for your word in its entirety. We thank you that we regard our Bibles as your word, and that we come to use our Bible in such a way as would seek to hear your voice speaking to us.

We pray, O Lord, that your word tonight, as we read it, and as we seek to expound it and listen to it preached, we ask that it may have that impact upon our minds and lives, by which we may be turned into your ways, by which those of us who are ready your people will be confirmed in our walk with you, and will be further established and rooted and grounded in the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

We thank you, O Lord, that you are risen from the dead, as we remembered this morning your death on the cross at Calvary. We give thanks tonight that we address you as one who is risen from the dead and exalted to glory, one who is set at the right hand of the Father on high, and who presides over the matters that take place throughout the universe.

We give thanks, O Lord, that you are Lord of all things, that we are answerable to you, thereby that we know that we can come to a God who is marked by longsuffering and kindness and patience toward us, graciousness and lovingkindness.

And, Lord, we ask that we may not take these things for granted or forget that there are other attributes that belong to you as well. Your view of sin, your wrath against sin, your power in dealing with human beings such as we are and with the world in which we live, your justice by which all things will ultimately be made right, right in the sense in which you will deal with all as you see fit and as we deserve to be and as Jesus deserves on behalf of his people.

[ 7 : 29 ] And we ask, Lord, your blessing tonight to be with us in the fellowship afterwards. We pray for Scott as he leads the fellowship. And we pray that once again as we are able to gather together in this way, O Lord, we do give thanks to you for being back together in this way.

We pray for Murdy as he gives us this testimony. We ask, Lord, that we, as we listen to him, may hear of things which will convince us, Lord, of our own need of Christ and convince us of how secure we are in Christ as you bring us to be joined to him.

And we pray that you would bless each and all tonight who meet in other places throughout this town, throughout our whole land, indeed throughout the world. We pray for those again who meet in very different circumstances to ours, O Lord.

We so often hear about your own believing people surrounded by adversity and surrounded especially by persecution and war and terror.

And, O Lord, we commit to you tonight all those of your people who are in these circumstances. Remember those throughout the world who deal with tragedy on a large scale.

[ 8 : 47 ] We think of the war in Ukraine. And ask, Lord, that you would bring peace about. And you would be pleased, Lord, to come to intervene. And we pray for the people of Ukraine who have shown such resilience and determination against the aggressor.

And we ask, O Lord, that you would bless the aggressor as well, that he may be turned from his way. And that those who are serving in the army of the Russian army will themselves see the futility of all that they have been driven to do.

We pray, O Lord, to you. We pray, too, for places in the world, Lord, tonight where there is severe drought, where there is lack of food and resources to keep people alive. We pray for all those in refugee camps.

We ask for all who seek to bring them aid. And, Lord, we ask that in all of these different circumstances, so very different to our own, we pray that you would be at work.

And, Lord, show us, as you have shown many times in the past, that these acts of your providence can be means by which you reveal yourself, by which you draw people to yourself, by which out of desperation itself they may come and place their trust in you and look to you for relief.

[ 10 : 07 ] We ask your blessing again for our children. We thank you for them, for all who attend this place of worship, for all who come to creche with their children, for the children who come, for the tweenies, for the Sunday school and the different age groups, for the Bible class, for the youth fellowship.

Lord, we pray that our children and young people and young adults will be further nurtured in your ways. Help them to resist the pull of the world.

Help them, Lord, to set their face daily towards you and to seek prayerfully that you would guide them through life. Hear the prayers of their parents and Sunday school teachers and all of us here in the congregation, O Lord, who pray for ourselves and for our young people and for the upcoming generation.

Remember us then, Lord, we pray. We pray that you would continue to bless every effort to witness to the Lord's day as important to our society.

Remember the rally at the end of this week. And help us to value your day, O Lord, and to realize the great blessings that are attached to its keeping on our part.

[ 11 : 17 ] We pray that you would enable us to see how relevant your day is yet for our society. Forgive us, Lord, we pray as a people for having done so much against the keeping of your day holy.

Forgive us for our despising of your day, for our neglect of it, for treating it as if it were no different to any other day. And especially forgive us, Lord, we pray for abandonment of worship and of giving God the glory on this day of rest.

We ask that throughout our land, your Holy Spirit will once again work to bring our people to see the importance of the Lord's day, of the ordinance of your church on the Lord's day, of the services of worship.

And we ask that in all of these things, Lord, you might be pleased to come with your blessing and restore and revive and quicken us again as a people. We ask now your blessing for those who are ill.

We pray that you would bless them, those who are bereaved. We commit to you all the families who tonight mourn the passing of loved ones, whether during these days or else in times gone by.

[ 12 : 30 ] Remember them all and comfort them, console their hearts, we pray. I receive our thanks now and as we offer to you our thanks and confess our sin, we pray these things seeking pardon and cleansing for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Now we're going to read from God's word. We're reading tonight from the book of Acts. Acts chapter 17. I'm going to read from verse 16.

I know it says in the bulletin from verse 22. But if we read from verse 16, we can see where Paul begins this incident.

So Acts chapter 17 and at verse 16. Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.

So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him.

[ 13 : 33 ] And some said, what does this babbler wish to say? Others said, he seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus saying, may we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears.

We wish to know therefore what these things mean. Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

So Paul standing in the midst of the Areopagus said, men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For I passed along and observed the objects of your worship.

I found also an altar with this description to the unknown God. What you therefore worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man.

[ 14 : 35 ] Nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth.

Having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place. That they should seek God in the hope that they might feel their way towards him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.

For in him we live and move and have our being. As some even of your own poets have said, for we are indeed his offspring. Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone.

An image formed by the art and imagination of man. At times of ignorance God overlooked. But now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

Because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed. And of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

[ 15 : 44 ] Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, we will hear you again about this. So Paul went out from their midst.

But some men joined him and believed. Among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite. And a woman named Damaris. And others with them.

Once again we pray that God will bless to us that portion of his word. Our next item of praise is Psalm 130.

Psalm 130. That's again in the Scottish Psalter. To tune Martyrdom. Lord from the depths to thee I cried. My voice Lord do thou hear.

And to my supplications voice give an attentive ear. Lord who shall stand if thou O Lord shouldst mark iniquity. But yet with thee forgiveness is that feared thou mayest be.

[ 16 : 44 ] So the whole of Psalm 130. That's on page 421. Lord from the depths to thee I cried.

Lord from the depths to thee I cried.

My voice Lord do thou hear. My voice Lord do thou hear. And to my supplications voice give an attentive ear.

Lord who shall stand if thou O Lord shouldst mark iniquity.

But yet with thee forgiveness is that fear thou mayest be.

[ 18 : 14 ] I wait for God my soul doth wait.

My hope is in his word. More than they laugh for morning watch.

My soul doth wait for the Lord. I say Lord than they laugh to watch.

The morning night to see. Let Israel, O Lord, O Lord, O Lord.

Our with him mercy speak. And plentiful redemption is ever found within.

[ 19 : 48 ] And from all his iniquities he is shall redeem.

Now we're going to look for a short time this evening at some verses from the passage read in Acts chapter 17. Acts 17 and beginning at verse 30.

Or we can take verse 29 as well. The times of ignorance God overlooked.

But now he commands all people everywhere to repent. Because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.

And of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. Paul's presentation of the gospel and the gospel message was very much shaped by the circumstances in which he found himself at any given time.

[ 21 : 11 ] We don't mean by that, of course, that he changed the shape of the gospel itself. That he changed what the message actually was. But he changed the method sometimes by which he presented it.

Or the ways in which he emphasized certain things. Such as you find here in this passage. You go back to chapter 13 and verse 16.

You'll find that there he was dealing with Jewish people. And so he took them to the Old Testament. Because he knew very well, of course, that they would actually understand what he had to say.

Chapter 13 and verse 16. Well, you find him saying to these people of Israel. So, men of Israel and you who fear God. Listen, the God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt.

And so on. And he went through then various details about the history of the Jews. And the history of God dealing with them. Right through to the early times. So there he is actually presenting the gospel.

[ 22 : 20 ] Using a method or a shape of message that he knew would very well fit in with his audience. He wasn't pandering to his audience.

He wasn't giving them what they wanted to hear. But he was shaping the message knowing the kind of situation he was in. And then when you come to chapter 17, he's in very different circumstances.

He's actually in Athens. In a pagan city. A pagan city that's crammed full of idols. And as he went through the streets there, we read there in verse 16, His spirit was provoked.

He was intensely moved within him as he went through the streets of Athens and saw that the city was full of idols. And then he came across this altar which had an inscription to the unknown God.

And that was the basis on which Paul approached his message. He shaped the message to suit the audience of the time. He shaped the message not by emphasizing the God of the Old Testament, which they would not understand, but God the Creator.

[ 23 : 27 ] And then from there, God the Creator coming through to emphasize Jesus and coming to emphasize in these verses we're looking at tonight, the way in which Jesus has been appointed to be the judge of the world at the end of the age.

So you can see how different the shaping of the message is given the difference in the context with which Paul is dealing. But whether it's to the Jews or whether it's to these pagan people in Athens, the message always comes to this point of presenting Jesus.

Presenting Jesus as the Savior. Presenting Jesus as God's provision against the plight of human beings in their sin and in their lostness.

That's the point to which Paul always brings his message. That is the core of his message. That's really above everything else what he wants to emphasize. Whether he starts with the Old Testament scriptures or starts with even quoting some of the pagan poets as he did in Athens.

He ends up always emphasizing Jesus, his death, his resurrection, his return. And it's that emphasis that you find in these verses 30 and 31.

[ 24 : 49 ] Because the focus there is not just on Jesus, but especially Jesus and his resurrection. But also the implications of that for the final judgment for the day of judgment.

Now the day of judgment is an awesome thing. It's something which the world of our day disbelieves by and large. It's not something that we ourselves naturally want to think about or hear about.

But it's such an important and integral part of the message of the gospel. And it's very much attached, as we'll see, to the person of Jesus himself and where he stands in relation to the judgment of the world.

So we want to look at two things from these verses tonight. First of all, there's what Paul actually calls the times of ignorance God overlooked.

God overlooked the times of ignorance. Now remember, Paul is dealing here with idolatry, the massive idolatry he found in Athens. And as he deals with that, and as he seeks to bring a message that takes account of that, he says to these people in Athens, the times of ignorance, that's to say, when people in the past, before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, were very much given to making idols of different substances, the times of ignorance, gold and silver and stone formed by the art and imagination of man, as he puts it in verse 29.

[ 26 : 22 ] The times of this ignorance God overlooked. And that's sometimes maybe a strange thing for us to read because it's very clear from the Old Testament, right through the Old Testament, what God thinks of idolatry.

Because idolatry is substituting someone or something for God himself. It's worshipping an idol instead of God. Whether the idol is carved out of wood or stone or gold or silver, or whether the idol is just our own philosophy, our own person, our own self, whatever it is, as it's replacing God and the worship that God is due, that is what the Old Testament all the way through is saying is abhorrent to God.

And that really involves other religions other than the Christian religion other than the faith that is in Christ. I know that's not popular today at all in our own society, in our own world, because we are so used to hearing of equality that there has to be equality given to every sort of thought, every kind of philosophy, every kind of lifestyle, every kind of religion, that they're all on the same platform.

And ultimately it doesn't really matter whether you exercise your faith in relation to God and to Jesus, or whether it's to Buddha or in Islam.

We're told that they come to the same thing, and that's of course not what the Bible teaches us. And we have to reckon seriously indeed with what the Bible calls idolatry.

[ 27 : 57 ] That doesn't mean you go out and untactfully actually address people in a way that just makes them aggressive, although that may happen anyway. But we present the gospel lovingly and yet with a certainty that every alternative to Christ is idolatry and is offensive to God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we mustn't be afraid in saying these things and saying that we believe the teaching of the Bible, even if that draws attention to us and if it draws opposition to us.

We don't do that deliberately. We don't set out just to provoke people. We don't set out to denigrate people, to belittle their freedom of choice.

We believe in freedom of religion, even if we don't necessarily believe everything that's in the alternative religions to Christ. And so God's view of idolatry is very clear.

Look at all the times in the Old Testament. In fact, the very beginning of the Bible, the first two chapters of Genesis, and the first chapter in particular is really a polemic against idolatry.

[ 29 : 14 ] Now, that doesn't come out necessarily on the surface of the page. But when you go through the way that the first chapter of Genesis tells us about God creating the heavens and the earth, and then giving shape and order and substance on the different days of the creation, bringing things into being, including the sun and the moon and the stars.

Well, all of that is directed against the pagan ideology that there are many gods and all of these deities exist, such as the sun and the moon, as you know yourselves.

That was something that pagans and pagan idolatry included in their worship. And there is the very first chapter of the Bible actually setting out, actually God created this.

The Christian God created these. And all the way through, especially you'll find it, of course, in the prophets of the Old Testament, because very often they were actually meeting with idolatry in the practices of Israel, of Judah, of God's covenant people.

They had imbibed the teaching of the pagans around them. When they entered the land of Canaan especially, they took some of the Canaanite idols and attached them to their own practices and worship.

[ 30 : 32 ] And some of the behavior attached to these idols also was imported into the practice of Israel. That's why you find people like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Hosea and these prophets of the Old Testament denouncing in the strongest terms the behavior of the people they belonged to because they had turned to idolatry.

So what does it say here? What does it mean when it says here, the times of ignorance God overlooked? Is this really suggesting to us that after all, the Old Testament description of the prophets and of even the opening chapters of the Bible, that does it mean that God overlooked them in their idolatry in the sense that he was indifferent to them and didn't really bother to think too much about it?

Does it say that it wasn't really that serious to God after all? Well, it doesn't at all, of course. So what does it mean? It means that while God did not approve of the idolatrous ways of the pagan nations, he made a certain allowance, we might say, for their ignorance, for their darkness.

You see, the gospel had not yet come to these pagan nations, nor could it indeed, until Jesus had come and died and risen again from the dead. That's really what provided the basis and the foundation for the gospel message as Paul is bringing it here to the people of Athens.

What he is saying to them, yes, God treats idolatry as really serious, but he's a God who is patient. He's a God who overlooks in the sense of not bringing his judgment immediately upon something that deserves it.

[ 32 : 20 ] Because God, in his long suffering and patience, allowed for that ignorance, not approving of it, not allowing it in that sense, but acknowledging that these people lived in darkness, the light of the gospel and of God's truth that not penetrated to the pagan nations of the world.

And so God made an allowance. We can call it that, the times of ignorance God overlooked. Until the coming of Christ, until the coming of the gospel age, and then things changed.

That's why you've got these very strong words, But now. You see the emphasis on these words? The times of ignorance God overlooked.

But now. Now that this has happened. Now that the very event we commemorate and remember this morning in the Lord's Supper, the death of Jesus on the cross. Now that Christ has risen from the dead.

Now that the gospel has gone out to the nations. Now that the darkness is being penetrated by the light of the gospel. Now that the ignorance that existed before, the darkness that existed before, has actually come to have the light of the gospel shining toward it and into it.

[ 33 : 40 ] Now, he says, God commands all people everywhere to repent. It's no longer a pre-gospel age.

And it's the cross of Christ, the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the light that came with Christ and with the work of Jesus. That's what's made the difference.

That's the turning point between the times of ignorance, the times of darkness, and the times of gospel light. Now he commands all men everywhere to repent.

And you see the emphasis there too. Now he commands all people everywhere to repent. It's a command.

The gospel comes to me and comes to you in a way that addresses our need. In a way that highlights our guilt and our sinfulness and our sin against God.

[ 34 : 39 ] It comes to us in such a way as, yes, presents us with the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. But alongside of that, and related to that, God commands repentance.

You see, the gospel message tonight, if I were to stand in this pulpit tonight and say, this is the gospel message. Here is God saying, there is salvation for you. Take it or leave it. It's up to you.

Make of it what you will. And leave it at that. You know very well that I wouldn't be true to the Savior, to God, to the gospel itself in saying that.

Because God commands all people everywhere to repent. That's not a mere offer. It's not just an extending to us of good news without anything else attached to it by way of imperative.

Here is God saying, here is the gospel. Here is the great event that makes all the difference in the world. The event of Christ's death and resurrection.

[ 35 : 44 ] And now God commands all people everywhere to repent. And that's me and you. God is not saying to you tonight, if you have not yet repented, or even if you are a Christian and there is sin in your life, that you have not yet repented and confessed to God.

He is not saying, well, I advise you to do this. He is not saying, you know, it would be really a good thing if you could consider doing this. And an appeal on those grounds on the part of God. God is saying, do it.

That's something that I require of you. Something that I demand of you. It's a command to repent. And when we don't repent, or refuse to repent, we are actually sinning grievously against God because we know that God has commanded us something, and we've not obeyed that command.

And that's why it's so serious. I know that this sounds, in the world of today, it sounds rather harsh. And I don't mean to present it harshly.



Forgive me if you think that's what I'm doing. It's maybe sounds harsh in the ears of a world that really doesn't want to know anything about God, about Christ, about the Christian religion, about following Christ, about any of those things.

[ 37 : 08 ] But the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is saying, repent. Do this. Do this. Believe. Turn to me.

Turn from your sin. All of that is within the context of an imperative, a command from God Himself.

And what is it that He's commanding? Well, He's commanding repentance. Now He commands all people everywhere to repent.

And what is repentance? Well, repentance, as I'm sure you very well know, can be described as a U-turn spiritually and morally.

Because our life is going in one direction naturally in our sin, in our sinfulness, in our lostness. That's the direction we're heading in.

[ 38 : 05 ] There's the prodigal leaving home with us back to his father's house, and he's heading in one direction, and it's away from his father. It's away from the security of his father's house. It's away from everything he could have in abundance.

That's what a sinner is. That's what you and I are naturally. That's what you and I do naturally. That's what our sinful hearts, if you like, are programmed by sin to do.

God is calling us back. God is calling us to turn round, to repent, to do a U-turn. Remember the famous incident where the late Margaret Thatcher, as Prime Minister, at a conference, I think it was, where people were calling her and her government to do a U-turn, just to turn round from the direction they were taking in their policies and do a U-turn.

And you remember how famously, I'm not preaching politics, whatever you think of Margaret Thatcher, that's your business. But you remember how famously she said, people are saying to me, do a U-turn.

Well, the lady's not for turning. U-turn if you want, she said. The lady's not for turning. Now, unfortunately, some people react that way to the Gospel.

[ 39 : 28 ] God is saying, do a U-turn. Turn round from the direction that sin is taking you in. Turn away from death and back to life. And sadly, we find some people saying, this lady, this man, this person is not for turning.

I'm fine as I am, thank you. I can be religious without that sort of U-turn, that commitment. Well, tonight, I hope, if there is anyone here tonight who needs to make that U-turn, who has not yet come back to Jesus, back to God through Christ, who has not repented of sin, confessed their sin, and desires to get back to fellowship with God.

Listen to what God is saying. I command you to repent. Of course, it's an offer. It's an offer of life. It's an offer lovingly made on the part of God.

It's an offer that's based on the staggering event of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, at Calvary dying the death of the cross. That's what we remembered this morning.

And on the basis of that, and in relation to that, God is saying to you and is saying to me tonight, turn back to me. Give your heart back to me. Turn round from the ways of sin.

[ 40 : 56 ] Accept what I have to offer. But it is my authority, and I'm commanding it, is what God is saying.

And you notice what he's saying. He commands all people everywhere to repent. Here is Paul in the Areopagus in this public square in Athens. And here he is actually addressing these pagan people and presenting this God that he knows himself as his Savior God, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And to these pagan people, that's what he's saying. He commands now all people everywhere to repent. Every pagan nation in the world. Every single kind of person.

Every background. Every kind of viewpoint. Every kind of philosophy. Whatever it is, he commands us to repent. And it sounds not just ridiculous, but it's actually very offensive to people.

If you were to say this to them even lovingly and tactfully, that God commands their repentance. But he does.

[ 42 : 08 ] You see, it doesn't matter whether we accept this as the truth or not. The truth does not go away just because we reject it. It doesn't become other or different to what it actually is, depending on our reaction to it.

It commands people, all people, everywhere to repent. And that's the problem, one of the problems, many problems, that we are facing today with presenting the Gospel to people.

Because the whole idea of repentance is repugnant to the world in which we live. And it comes into all sorts of areas of human behavior.

Where you find such things as conversion therapy mentioned as something very distasteful. Something completely against what people should be presented with.

Well, of course, that terminology itself is open to lots of interpretation. We're not in the business, as we've said many, many times, of forcing people into any point of view, even the Christian point of view.

[ 43 : 16 ] That's not what the Gospel is really about. The Gospel is not forcing people to repentance. The Gospel is actually saying, God is actually commanding you to repent. You can choose to ignore that if you like, but it's not going to go away.

And this is the truth of what God is actually saying. And it's everywhere and for everyone to repent.

There's no getting away from it. That's what God is commanding of us. And tonight we should be thankful that we have this message.

You will find it dealt with far better than I'm able to deal with it tonight. You'll find much, much better preaching. You'll find much, much better presentation of the truth of the Gospel in this way.

I know that. But I know also that you will not find a different Gospel, a better Gospel, as Spurgeon put it, than the Gospel that Paul commended to the Athenians.

[ 44 : 20 ] The Savior that God spoke of to the Athenians. The God that Paul presented to the Athenians as the God who commands repentance. And for you and for me tonight, that's something, of course, that we must never ourselves overlook or treat in any other way but to accept it as God's own command to us.

And he then goes on to say, because, he commands all people to repent everywhere, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness, by a man by whom he means, by which he means Christ, of course, by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." You see, it's a fixed appointment.

God has his own diary. And in God's diary, this day is marked down and fixed. He's made this his appointment.

He's going to judge the world by this Jesus Christ. At this particular point, whenever it may be, only God knows. But it's there and it's fixed in his diary, and it's not going to go beyond it.

He's not going to go beyond it or be short of it. He has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.

[ 45 : 56 ] And it's a universal appointment, because it's everyone who is going to be judged, not just one or two people. He's going to judge the world in righteousness.

All the despots who have ever lived, all the dictators who have ever lived, all the mass murderers who have ever lived, all those who have persecuted Christians as well as Christians themselves, every single person who ever lived, whatever the circumstances of their life were, however long ago they were in this world, however long before this they died and were buried and went out of existence in people's memories, He will judge the world.

There are no fugitives from this judgment, from this judge. Nobody can turn up on that day and say, Can you accept my apology? I've got other things to do.

He will judge the world in the day that He has fixed. And that means you and I as well. 2 Corinthians 5 9-10, I often quoted at gravesides, that we commit these remains to return to the dust until the return of Christ.

When, as the Bible tells us, we shall all appear before, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that we may receive the things done in this body, whether good or evil.

[ 47 : 27 ] See what he's saying? The judgment is a judgment of everybody. Christians, saints, those who have placed their trust in Jesus, will be judged and acquitted and counted righteous and displayed as righteous with the righteousness of Christ.

On the other hand, there will be the remainder of mankind who will be sent away from God to everlasting damnation.

That's the judgment with which God is going to judge the world. And you see, He's doing it in righteousness. Because the standard that God uses to judge the world is not a human standard.

It is God's own standard. He's going to judge the world in righteousness. Remember Paul, when he came to his final letter to Timothy, where he said, I am already being poured out. The time of my departure has come.

I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day.

[ 48 : 44 ] And not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing. He's talking there about Jesus, the righteous judge. What is your guarantee as a Christian, as a saved sinner?

What is your guarantee that when the Lord returns, He will actually invite you into His everlasting kingdom to be with Him there forevermore? It's the fact that He's the righteous judge who judges righteously.

And none of those who are righteous in Christ will be anything other than accounted righteous and displayed as righteous when the Lord comes.

But you see, the fact that the Lord is the righteous judge means that, as 2 Corinthians 5 puts it, that we may receive the things done in this body, whether good or evil.

And His righteousness, His judgment, His justice is included in His judgment. You know, one of the things that should convince us of the reality of God, the very existence of God, against those who may come to you and say, do you believe in someone you cannot see?

[ 49 : 54 ] You're just being foolish. Why do you believe in God when science has really pretty much almost disproved the existence of God, or certainly the teachings of much of the Bible?

Well, one of the things you can say in reply to that is, do you believe in justice? Oh, yes, I believe in justice. Do you believe in ultimate justice? It's a big question, isn't it?

Where is there going to be justice for the victims of the Holocaust? Where is there going to be justice for those who were murdered in this world by evil people, who then did not actually face up to the charge or the penalty they ought to have had?

One of the things that convinces me about God and the reality of God is that human society needs ultimate justice.

Because the justice in our court system must itself be based upon the righteousness of God, upon the justice that God speaks of in His Word.

[ 51 : 09 ] And that justice, of course, is justice in God Himself. He is the just judge, as Paul put it to Timothy. And as you come to think of meeting the just judge, be afraid if you're not a Christian.

Be thankful and rejoice if you are. Because at one and the same time, His justice ensures that you will be accounted righteous.

On the other hand, His justice, if you die unsaved, is what persuades you that you will not be accounted righteous.

That God must deal with you as your sin deserves. He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed.

And there's a certainty about this. And in fact, what He's saying here is, Of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.

[ 52 : 17 ] You see, when we think about, when we speak about the judgment of God, and God, the Son of God, the righteous judge, the Lord Jesus Christ coming as the judge of all the earth, people will scoff at that.

Of course they will. Just as they did here, some of them in Athens. But Paul is actually saying, Actually, God has given proof of the truth of this.

Where is the proof that there is a coming day of judgment? Well, of course, it's there in the word of God, which ought to be enough for us. But for these pagan people in Athens, Paul was actually preaching the resurrection of Christ, the risen Christ.

And he says, That is the proof that the day of judgment is coming, because He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world by the man whom He has appointed. And He has given assurance or proof of this, in that He has raised Him from the dead.

And if you remember your catechisms, there's one of the questions there that asks where the exaltation, what the exaltation of Christ consists of.

[ 53 : 26 ] And the answer is that it consists of His being exalted to the right hand of God. But it finishes by saying, And in coming to judge the world at the last day.

You see, this is part of Christ's own office as the exalted Lord. You cannot leave out the element of the final judgment, because it belongs properly to Christ as God's appointed judge.

And if we're saying the judgment is just something that people would, that weary people can hardly believe in that, where is the proof that such a thing will ever take place?

Well, the proof is here. If you believe tonight, as I hope you do, that Jesus rose from the dead, that He's exalted to glory, that He's in heaven with the Father, then you believe in the day of judgment.

Because that's why God raised Him from the dead. And He has given assurance to us that He will in fact judge the world by this man, because He has raised Him from the dead.

[ 54 : 34 ] So if you believe in Jesus and in His resurrection, it follows that you believe in the judgment. The two things are inseparable here in the teaching of this passage.

And you can see the mixed reception. I'm finishing with this point. The mixed reception that was given to this, this preaching to this message that Paul actually pronounced to the Athenians.

You see, there are three categories of response. When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. Others said, we will hear you again about this. In other words, they're not dismissing it.

They want to actually learn more of what Paul is saying. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius, the Areopagite, a member of the Areopagus, and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

And it's great the way it finishes there, others with them. It mentions these specifically, Dionysius, Damaris, this woman, and then just says others with them.

[ 55 : 39 ] And so it leaves it open to you and to me to place our own name in this passage. And to ask ourselves tonight, well, what's my reaction? What's my response to the teaching of this passage with regard to Jesus, the just judge, and the judge of all at the end of the world?

I hope it's not in any way mocking. I'm sure it isn't on you, pardon. You know the gospel.

You respect God too well for that. I hope it's more than just, well, I want to hear you again about this. Let me delay it for the moment until I find out more about it.

That may not be possible. You may have to go and face the judge tonight before morning comes. So don't leave it like that. I hope that it is, in fact, as it was for some of them.

They joined Paul and believed. They placed their trust in Christ. And so they came to follow the people of God and join them as they followed Jesus.

[ 56 : 54 ] I may finish with a hymn that I came across. It's written by Paul B. Henkel. He lived from 1754 to 1825.

And I like these very simple words that he uses for such a profound and solemn thing as this judgment. The last judgment, the judgment of the just judge of all who have ever lived everywhere.

Must I in judgment stand before my Lord appear? Shall I appear at his right hand or sentenced to despair? Will then my Savior say, come, join the heavenly hosts?

Or must I then be driven away to the infernal coasts? Oh, what will be my state when I from hence shall flee? Oh, matters of the greatest weight to launch eternity.

Oh, how shall I appear in that tremendous day when I, my judge's voice, shall hear, say, come or go away? Oh, Savior, hear my prayer.

[ 58 : 01 ] Such witness grant to me. Make me assured when I appear that I shall go with thee. May you and I be found among the saved on that momentous day when the judge returns.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord, we give thanks for the reminders that you give us so often in your word of how we need to come back to the main teachings that you give to your people.

How you come to present us with the truth of the gospel and how we find so much in it that to our own natural sense and to our own lost condition is unpalatable and we often reject.

Lord, bring us, we pray, to love your word. Love your word for all the things that are solemn in it, as well as those that make us rejoice. We cannot properly rejoice, O Lord, except as we have already reckoned with the seriousness of our sin, our lostness, our guilt.

But help us to rejoice in forgiveness, in salvation, in acceptance, in anticipation of your coming as the just judge who will take your people to live with you forevermore, whose justice ensures that in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 59 : 25 ] Bless us each one, Lord. We are so familiar with the gospel. Forbid that we should be lost. But we come to face the judge when he comes and only expect to be turned away from him.

Be pleased, we pray, to bless your word to that end. For Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen.  
Amen. We are singing now in conclusion tonight from Psalm number 9.

Psalm 9 in the Sing Psalms version. And that's on page 8. And to the tune Martyrs, we are singing verses 7 to 11. The Lord forever reigns on high.

His throne for judgment stands. He'll judge the world in righteousness. With justice rule the lands. The Lord will be a hiding place for those that are oppressed. And he will be a strong defense for those who are distressed.

And those who know your name, O Lord, in you their trust will place. For you do not abandon those who seek your gracious face. Sing praises to the Lord who sits in Zion on his throne.

[ 60 : 34 ] Among the nations of the world proclaim what he has done. We'll stand to sing these four verses. The Lord forever reigns on high.

His throne for judgment stands. He'll judge the world in righteousness.

With justice rule the lands. The Lord will be a hiding place.

For those who are oppressed. And he will be a strong defense.

For those who are distressed. All those who know your name, O Lord.

[ 62 : 06 ] In you their trust will place. For you do not abandon those who seek your grace.

To seek your gracious face. Sing praises to the Lord who sits in Zion on his throne.

And on the nations of the world proclaim what he has done.

Amen. Amen. Amen. After the benediction. Lord our God we ask that you would bless us now as we come to a time of fellowship together.

We ask that you would bless the food prepared for us, make us thankful for it. We pray that you would bless the speaker, Murdy, and help him, Lord, as he gives an account of his testimony of your dealings with him.

[ 63 : 35 ] And we with Scott as he leads the fellowship. And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen.