

WHAT DID JESUS SAY? PART 4 ABOUT JUDGMENT

“The Dark Line In God’s Face”

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Jn. 3:16-18; Mt. 25:46; Jn. 3:36

A little five-year-old was busy one day with her colors and coloring book. Her mother watched her with great interest because the child seemed so intent on what she was doing. Finally, the mother said, “What are you drawing, Mary?” The little girl answered, “I’m drawing a picture of God.” Her mother said, “But, Mary, nobody knows what God looks like.” With a look of triumph on her face, the child said, “They will now.”

Well, what does God look like? Is he “sugar and spice and all things nice?” Is he a kind of cosmic Cheshire cat sitting on some sunny slope gazing down indulgently upon the sinfulness of man with a sickly smile frozen on his face? Is he, as someone has characterized him, “A big, genial, expensive benevolence with as much moral authority as Father Christmas? Is he one who can be trusted completely to deal leniently with sin and the sinner?” Is he “an easy-going Deity with the vertebrae of a jelly fish” who can be manipulated and wheedled into winking good-naturedly at our rebellious disobedience?

There are some people who believe in a God like that. One German philosopher said blithely: “Forgiveness? Of course God will forgive you. What’s he for?” In a reaction against the savage, bare, cold concept of God which came to us out of the Dark Ages, our generation has fashioned a God more to their liking. But is this feeble, mushy, sickly concept of God reliable? Is it child-like or childish? Simple or naive? Is God’s love nothing more than shallow sentiments? Is he all sweetness and smiles, or is there a somber side to his countenance?

Before the answer we must turn to Jesus. Many times we have looked at a boy and said, “He’s a chip off the old block.” “He’s the spittin’ image of his father.” Well, Jesus is like that. He is a photograph of his father. And if we want to know what God is like, we need only look at him.

And when we look at Christ, what do we see? We see love, compassion, mercy, goodness, graciousness and understanding. But that isn't all. We also see the flashing fire of righteous indignation as he drives the money changers from God's temple.

We see a gaze of cutting contempt for the false religiosity of the Pharisees as he denounces them with such words as “whited sepulchres,” “generation of vipers,” “hypocrites,” “blind fools.”

We see loving arms outstretched inviting "whosoever will (to) come and drink of the water of life freely." But we also hear him deliver such phrases as "straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life eternal." "Not everyone that calls me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven."

No, if we look into the face of Jesus, we do not see a Cheshire cat's frozen grin. We see love and compassion, but we find them intermingled with tears of grief as he contemplates the impending judgment of those who have rejected their day of grace.

We only need to see Jesus standing above the city of Jerusalem with head and heart bowed low to know there is a somber side to God's countenance. We only need to hear him crying out, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but ye would not. Behold, now is your house forsaken.” We only need to hear this to know that after the day of opportunity will come the day of judgment.

It was William Temple who said that if it is idolatry to worship God with a false *metal* image, it is also idolatry to worship God with a false *mental* image. And against the half-a-Christ which our generation has served up to please the tender minds of those who cannot bear the sight of a majestic God whose law is truth and whose judgment is sure, we need to proclaim the Christ of the New Testament.

And when we have seen *that* Christ, the Christ who put the “dark bubbling cup” of man's sin to

his lips and drank it dry, the Christ who picked up the staggering burden of man's rebellion and bore it to the hill of Calvary that it might be nailed with him to the cross, when we have seen *that* Christ, we know God is *not* “sugar and spice and all things nice.” There is a somber side to his countenance. Because of sin, your sin and mine, there is a Dark Line in God's Face.

The Bible teaches there will be several judgments and this morning I want to mention four.

The first is --

The Judgment Of Sin

That took place nearly 2,000 years ago when Jesus Christ, bearing the sins of the world, was taken to a place called Golgotha and nailed to a cross. It was then that God dealt fully and finally with sin. As we read in 1 Peter 3: 18, “For Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” And “there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

The Bible is plain beyond any shadow of doubt that when a man receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he “shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death to life” (Jn 5:22). In other words, no Christian will ever appear at the Great White Throne Judgment. His sins have already been judged at Calvary and he has “everlasting life.” He is held securely between the clasped hands of the Father and the Son...safe ever more (John 10: 27-28). Excuse me, but hallelujah! The second judgment is --

The Judgment Of Self.

In 1 Cor. 11:31 we read: “For if we judge ourselves, we shall not be judged.” What does that mean? Another verse sheds some light on it. “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins...” (1 John 1:9). If you realize that you have done wrong, admit it. Don't wait for God to chasten you. Sooner or later a judgment of sin must occur. It is better that we judge ourselves than be judged by God.

Right now I am thinking of a couple found in a hotel room in New York City, apparently the victims of a suicide pact. Each had left behind a life mate and children. Both left a note. The woman's note read as follows, “We have been accustomed to laugh at the moral law, Fred and I. We had said it was a man-made law to frighten timid people into being good. But now we have learned through experience that ‘the wages of sin is death.’” Too late, that couple discovered what it means to face a judgment of self.

Someone has said that the whole basis of conversion is a willingness to recognize that we are sinners, for if a man is not a sinner, then for him there is no Savior. Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” And the Bible says, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”

So, if we are to escape the judgment of God upon our sin, we must be willing and ready to judge ourselves... to confess our sin... to repent, that is, turn away from sin and stop doing what we're doing that defiles the image of God in us... that we might be forgiven. The third judgment is

The Judgment Of Works.

In 1 Cor. 3:15 Paul describes how every Christian will have his works tested by the fire of God's judgment and he says: “If any man’s work shall be burned, he, himself, shall be saved, saved as by fire.”

In other words, there are some people who will get into heaven as Lot got out of Sodom. Burned out! They will stand before God with empty hands. They will come before the Christ who loved them and gave himself for them with no trophies of thanksgiving to lay at his feet. What a sad and tragic moment that will be.

A famous painter, who was well known for the careful manner in which he went about his work, was approached one day by a friend who asked him why he took such pains with his work. His answer was one we would do well to remember. He said simply, “I am painting for eternity.”

There are those who say that because they are now Christians, it doesn't matter what they do. They can live as they please. They can ignore the edicts of God if they want to. They can tithe or not tithe. Worship or not worship. Serve or not serve. Witness or not witness. But Jesus said that isn't so. “As a man soweth, so also shall he reap.” Those words are as true of Christians as they are of unbelievers.

It is a solemn thing to contemplate the fact that the future will be the harvest of the present. And yet that is what Jesus assured us is true, “As a man soweth, so also shall he reap.” Eternal issues are at stake. Someday every Christian will have his life, his works, his influence, his stewardship, his use of the opportunities which were his, tested by the fire of God's judgment. If his works are burned he shall be saved... but he shall stand before God and Christ with empty hands, no gifts of love, no trophies of thanksgiving to lay at their feet. There is a fourth judgment and that is --

The Great White Throne Judgment.

If you have never listened before, I want you to listen with all your might for the next few minutes as I tell you what Jesus said about this awful judgment.

There are several verses of scripture which record what Jesus said about the fate of those who rule God, his love and his son out of their lives. And I want you to note that in speaking about God's judgment, Christ prefaced his words with a reminder of God's love. We cannot understand the Great White Throne Judgment apart from the fact of God's redeeming love. A love so great it took upon itself the full force of judgment by sending Christ to the cross in our stead.

“For God so loved in the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent his son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed on the name of the only son of God” (John 3:16-18).

“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal” (Mt. 25:46).

“He that believeth on the son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the son shall not see life but the wrath of God abideth upon him” (John 3:36).

I want you to notice that each of these verses speak of judgment in some form: “Perish.” “Condemn.” “Everlasting punishment.” “The wrath of God..” This is not some Old Testament prophet raining down fire and brimstone upon a hard-hearted generation. This is the loving and gentle Jesus who said God is a father and assured us that as a father pities his children, God pities those who fear him.

This is the sweet and compassionate Jesus who spoke about a God of love who knows how to give good gifts to his children. This is the beautiful Savior whose outstretched arms beckon all men everywhere to come and find peace in their souls and a satisfying sense of security that banishes the fear of life and death.

This *same* Jesus also knew about The Dark Line In God's Face. So he spoke of perishing, condemnation, punishment and the wrath of God. He wanted the whole world to know it is a “fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God.”

And what is the nature of God's judgment? Someone has characterized it in one word: Recognition. Just as a mother knows her children because of the characteristics of heredity, so too, God knows his children because they bear the image of his son. And when a soul, re-created in the likeness of Christ stands before him, the light of recognition beams from God's eyes and he says: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of the Lord.” No Christian... mark this! *No Christian* will ever face the wrath of God at the Great White Throne.

Even as a mother knows the rest of the children in the neighborhood are not hers because they have never been a part of her, so, too, God knows the soul who bears no resemblance to his son. Therefore, when that soul stands before him, there is no light of recognition; only those dreaded words: “Depart from me, I never knew you.”

Judgment, you see, is a matter of recognition. The soul who has been born again by faith in Jesus Christ has taken on his likeness... has been clothed in his purity... and he stands before God, not as an alien, but as a son!

A Puzzling Question

Now, whenever we talk about judgment the question is always raised: “How can a loving God condemn people to hell?” The answer, of course, is that he doesn’t. God does not *condemn* people. He merely *judges* them.

My friend, Dr. Paul Kopp, illustrates it this way. The doctor who accurately diagnoses an ailment as fatal unless his patient submits to an operation, does not *condemn* that patient. He only *judges* him. If overestimating his health, the patient underestimates the diagnosis and dies, he has condemned himself.

In exactly the same way Christ was and is painfully honest about our condition. Men are lost, he said. They are sinners whom he has come to seek and to save. They are suffering from spiritual death and must yield to a divine operation in order to receive eternal life. Jesus called it "being born again." But if we ignore his diagnosis... if we've refused to submit to this divine operation... we perish. But the condemnation is ours, not his. We have condemned ourselves.

William James spoke about what he called “life’s living option.” He pointed out that every man has a choice to make... that every man has the ability to make that choice... that there are consequences to that choice... and that while the man is choosing, he is in one of the choices. In other words, he is in “life’s living option.”

Dr. Kopp brings this into focus with the illustration of a man whose car is stalled on a railroad track. A train is rapidly approaching. This man is in “life’s living option.” He has a choice to make. He can stay in the car and die, or he can get out of the car and live. But while he is making up his mind, he is in one of the alternatives... he is in the car!

Or again, a man with a serious ailment is told by his doctor that he must have an operation or die. That man is in “life’s living option.” A choice must be made, operation or no operation. And the consequences are life or death. But while he is making up his mind, he is in one of the alternatives... he is dying!

Now bring this idea into the matter of spiritual judgment. Jesus said, “God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved. He who believes in him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already” (John 3:17-18). A loving God does not condemn a sinner to hell... the sinner condemns himself.

The final judgment of God at the Great White Throne will not catch a sinner by surprise. Throughout his whole lifetime he will have been judged by God a thousand times and in a thousand ways.

He will have been judged by the memory of his mother’s prayers... by the influence of a Godly wife... by the witness of a faithful teacher... by the preaching of some man of God.

He will have been judged by the message of this Book... by the music of a gospel song... by the sweet innocence of a little child... by the testimony of a loving friend.

No man, at least in this great country of ours, will be able to stand before God and plead the excuse that he didn’t have the chance to receive and confess Christ as his savior.

Nor will he be able to plead the Fifth Amendment. It will do no good then to say, “I refuse to testify on the grounds that it might incriminate me.” For with infinite knowledge of the human heart, Almighty God will flash before him every sinful act, every evil thought, every selfish deed. And he will see why it is that in the eyes of God a man outside of Christ is “condemned already.”

But I cannot bring this message to a close without making it as clear as I can that you need not stand before the Great White Throne Judgment.

“Calvary covers it all,
Our past with its sin and shame.”

When Jesus died upon the cross, God judged your sin for all time to come. And if “anyone is in Christ he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). And, “there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, our Lord” (Rom. 8:1).

This morning if you have never received Christ as Lord and Savior, you are in “life’s living option.” You face the greatest choice anyone *can* face. You have the ability to make it. You are equipped with free will. The power to choose. This morning you must choose to accept Christ and receive eternal life, or reject Christ and receive the judgment of God upon your sin. But remember, while you are making your great decision, you are in one of the alternatives... you are without Christ! Therefore, in the words of Jesus, you are “condemned already.”

Such is the teaching regarding Judgment of Jesus who “spoke as never a man spoke.” God grant you will have the faith and courage and wisdom to heed his warning...today... that you might “pass from death unto life.”

“When the great business plants of our city
Shall have turned out their last finished work;
When the merchants have sold their last order

And dismissed every last tired clerk;
When our banks have raked in their last dollar
And have paid their last dividend;
When the Judge of the earth wants a hearing
And asks for a balance — what then?

“When the choir has sung its last anthem
And the preacher has voiced his last prayer;
When the people have heard their last sermon
And the sound has died out of the air;
When the Bible lies closed on the altar
And the pews are all empty of man;
When each one stands facing his record
And the Great Book is open — what then?”