

Scripture Reading:

Acts 17:22 “Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: 24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' 29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. 30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.””

"Calling the World to Repentance"

The Apostle Paul has come to Athens & Luke tells us he has been engaged by the Epicureans and the Stoics.

- Epicureans like our modern evolutionary materialists who believe that matter is eternal and that when you die it is **OVER**.
- And Stoics who like our modern mystics think that god is in everything and that we are just like another drop in the vast expanse of the pacific ocean!

I hope you can see why it is important that we understand how Paul preaches here at Mars Hill, if we are to reach our modern generation for Christ! His passion for the lost must be our heart as we learn the lessons that the Holy Spirit will teach us here in Acts...

- We are not trying to win an argument or learn how to destroy the world-views of our opponents!
- With Paul, we desire to “become all things to all men, that [we] might by all means save some!”

We are to be those beautiful feet that bring the Good News...

- Now that may seem a little strange after I preached on how we cannot compromise on presenting God as our creator and sustainer last week...
- And now this week I want to talk about Him being the Judge of all!

However, this is exactly what the Apostle Paul has done here on Mars Hill and we must do the same **IF** we truly care about the lost! **IF** we desire to do so out of genuine love for the lost then we must learn to take the opportunities that God gives us today, just as Paul has done here in Athens...

- Pointing to their very own idols to begin the discussion and quoting one of their own poets to make a point...

AND we must also be serious about demonstrating these great truths in our lives, just as Paul and the others do throughout these missionary journeys.

- **The unbeliever needs to not only hear you proclaim that God is the creator and sustainer of all things, and that He is the just judge of all, but he or she must also be able to see the joy and comfort these doctrines bring in our everyday lives!**

We cannot say God is our Creator & sustainer and then live as if we are in control doing whatever we want: For example, we should be seen as the REAL environmentalists who appreciate & respect the creation because we know the Creator!

When it comes to God's judgment, we must also walk the walk as well as talk the talk... Mike has done a masterful job of teaching this from Romans where in Chapter two Paul confronts the Jews... who were more than happy to see the judgment of the Gentiles in Chapter one...

- **But in chapter two Paul calls them to task for not seeing that they too deserve God's just judgment for violating His Law.**
- **When it comes to judgment, we must remember that God is in control and that He is the just judge!**

Yes, judgment begins with the household of God, but this does not mean that we are not to speak of God's judgment to those with hardened hearts as Paul does here on Mars Hill.

- **We must learn to be bold and humble at the same time... Something only the Spirit of God can accomplish in our lives!**

Think of Daniel's three friends as they approached the point of no return in confronting the King of Babylon: It was bow or burn time and yet, "16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered & said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17 If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. 18 But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

- **Did this sit well with the King?**

Not really, but in the end because of the faithful witness of these men and Daniel we do see King Nebuchadnezzar come to faith after he is humbled by God in the wilderness. Up until that time, I am sure Daniel and his friends often thought he was a lost cause, but they were faithful in their witness and their lives which is the example we are to follow.

So IF we are going to proclaim the truth of God as the judge of all, we must understand what this means and be willing to live under that understanding. Paul begins by saying something about the wicked idolatry of men that may seem contrary to the concept of God being just... "Truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent!"

- **So are there some sins that God overlooks?**

We know from chapter three of Romans, which Mike has not reached yet, that God has declared all men guilty because ALL are under sin:

- **We are all members of Adam's race and thus born in sin which brings God's just judgment.**
- **IF God is just than all must be judged and in fact we will all face his justice in the end.**

The final judgment of God was foreshadowed at the great flood of Genesis where the entire world, save Noah and his family, were judged and destroyed.

- **This flood was God's powerful reminder of the sinfulness of sin and how all sin must be judged...**

All of those who are alive in the world are destroyed because of their sin and wickedness; while Noah and his family are saved because they are found righteous in the eyes of God.

- Did God ignore the sins of Noah and his family? NO!
- The sins of Noah and his family were not judged by the waters of destruction, but at the cross of Christ!

This is why Paul continues by saying to the men of Athens, “But now [God] commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom he has ordained!”

The Great White Throne Judgment shown to John in Revelation chapter twenty is the final reality that was foreshadowed by the great flood of Genesis: Listen carefully to what John sees after Satan is cast into the Lake of Fire: Revelation 20:11 “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

[just as those in the days of Noah’s flood had no place to go] 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. *[note that we have books containing our works and a Book of Life]* “And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. *All those who do not rightly fear God and think that He will be fair with them and consider how they had done their best in this life will in fact have the opportunity to have such a “fair trial.”*

- John now repeats what is happening so that it cannot be misunderstood...

13 “The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.” 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

The Genesis flood brought death and destruction to all those who refused to repent after 120 years of witnessing by Noah and the Lake of Fire will bring eternal separation from God for all those who refuse to repent:

- All those who suppressed the truth of God in unrighteousness will be given the desire of their hearts!

Only Noah and his family survived the great flood because they were in the Ark that God had provided behind a door that God had shut before pouring out His just wrath upon a wicked world.

- Now here at the great White Throne, only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of life are saved, delivered from God’s wrath because of what Jesus has done as the one sacrifice for sin!

This is why Paul can declare to the Gentiles that they should repent “because [God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained!”

In Jerusalem, Peter and Steven were both brutally honest with God’s covenant people the Jews:

- ‘Repent because you killed the Messiah, the very Savior that God sent to deliver you.’

And now before the Gentiles, the Apostle Paul is equally brutal:

- ‘Repent because you have ignored the just judge of the universe!

In both cases we see some who repent and believe and some who harden their hearts against the truth: Some savor the sweet aroma of life and others smell only the stench of death.

What we must remember is that it is NOT our job to figure out who is in each group and why they are there...

- That is God’s job!
- Our job is to be the watchman on the wall who warns the city of the coming danger!

And as we do so, we must be careful that we do so with the proper attitude:

- **Avoiding pride and arrogance on the one hand.**
- **And avoiding complacency on the other.**

Paul is not standing before these Greeks saying, I am in and you are not, just as Noah would never have said to those who would be lost... 'I have a boat and you do not!'

- **In both cases they preached the truth calling on those who were lost to repent and come to salvation.**
- **We are called upon to speak the truth in love and we must NEVER forget either!**

The other problem is having an attitude of complacency: 'I am saved so who cares if the world goes to hell in a hand-basket!' This is an attitude which those of us who sincerely believe in the sovereignty of God, those of us who rightly hold to the reformed faith must ALSO be very careful about:

- **We 'good reformers' know that God is completely in control: So all those who are to be saved will be saved & those being lost cannot be saved, no matter what we do!**

Again, we must remember that such an attitude is a complete rejection of what Paul commands us to do in Romans chapter ten, right after giving us the doctrine of sovereignty in chapter nine!

Romans 10: 13 For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." 14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" 17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

The responsibility for who responds in faith and who does not lies wholly with God and Paul reminds us that we can never fully understand His mind in these matters. The responsibility to make sure that those who are to come to faith hear the Word of God lies completely with us:

- **God does not use a bull-horn to proclaim the Good News from the heavens... He has chosen to use our feet, our hands, AND our vocal cords!**
- **Need I remind us which of these two concepts we tend to spend much more time thinking about?**

We are not called to be the judges who have to weigh all the evidence and make sure that God is being fair about how He handles the American Indian who did not have a Bible, or the abused child that was never given an opportunity to attend church or even the infant that dies at birth never having a chance to live...

- **No one has the right to demand answers to all of these questions before they respond to the call of the Gospel**
- **Or, as is sadly the case with some Christians, before we confidently preach the Gospel.**

We must join with the Apostle Paul in saying that they should not worry about the past or the state of others because God is now calling all men everywhere to repentance.

- **The Good News that their name can be written in the Book of Life because of what Jesus has done!**
- **We are commanded to preach this good news and they are commanded to respond in faith with repentance and a new life.**

I want to close where I began by reminding us that we must not only talk the talk, but walk the walk when it comes to the truth about God being our Creator & sustainer as well as our Judge!

I want to remind you that we learned last week how we must hold fast to the doctrine of creation as it is given in Genesis chapter one.

- **AND how firmly holding these truths gives us the joy and comfort that we need in this life!**
- **Joy and comfort that will be seen by the watching world**

The same is true when it comes to God's judgment...

- **Obviously knowing that our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life brings great comfort!**

But that is a comfort that must be demonstrated: We must live as those who are forgiven, honestly coming each week to confess our sins and celebrate the victory that we have in Jesus in in Song and Word and Sacrament.

As I have already pointed out, our call to repentance must come from a heart that cares for the lost, sincerely desiring that they know God's forgiveness as we do.

- **Demonstrating this by forgiving others as Jesus has forgiven us!**

We must also live as those who know they are forgiven: This is why Paul calls on us to anxious for nothing! Listen to the context in which Paul gives that demanding command...

Philippians 4:3 "And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

And finally, having peace and comfort in this life comes not just from our understanding of the final judgment, but also from the knowledge that God rightly judges all that we do in this life.

How does that bring peace and comfort you ask...

- **A good question because I know the horror I feel in my heart and mind if I dwell on the fact that God knows my every thought, no less my secret actions!**

This can be a real downer unless we realize how God rightly judges even our works as Christians...

We have no fear of the final judgment because we know that our sins have been cast into the depths of the sea, separated as far as the east is from the west because of what Jesus has done!

The wrath of God has been fully propitiated [*kids, what does that word mean?*], God's wrath has been satisfied and our names are written in the Book of Life where they cannot be removed.

- **However, we still wrestle with sin in this life, knowing all the struggles that Paul describes in Romans chapter seven!**
- **Here too God's judgment brings joy and peace, not just because we are forgiven in the end, but because God rightly judges all of the works in our Christian life as well.**

Listen to what the Apostle Paul tells the Saints at Corinth...

A church that was not perfect by any means!

I Corinthians 3:9 “For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

When we come to embrace God as our Creator and sustainer and embrace Him as our just Judge then we will have no fear of the refiners fire...

- **The unrepentant sinner should fear God's fire because it will be an eternal torment always reminding him or her of the wickedness of their life and their separation from God.**
- **But as those who have fled to Jesus, we have eternal life and the confidence that God's refining fire will only remove the impurities that do not belong and leave only the precious metals and jewels as they should be!**

May we come to fully understand all of this so we can know the peace and comfort that God offers.

May we come to fully understand all of this so we can rightly proclaim the Triune God of the Bible, as the Creator & sustainer of all, and to proclaim Him as the just judge of all the world.

- **And may we always be faithfully calling all the world to repentance and new life in Jesus!**

Communion Meditation: Isaiah 55:

“ "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.

2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance.

3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you-- The sure mercies of David.”