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Judgment Day

Following His resurrection, Jesus made many appearances to His disciples, one of which is recorded for us in Luke 24. This is the account of Christ's conversation with the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. Of the conversation we read this:

Luke 24:27, "And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He [Jesus] explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

We do not know the specific content of this conversation. However we do know that some of the conversation involved Biblical prophecy.

Luke 24:25-26, "And He said to them, 'O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?'"

Truly “it was necessary” because the Bible prophesied that the Messiah would suffer; a prophecy which these two disciples had missed! In fact, this probably wasn’t the only one they missed for there are 660 prophecies in the Bible relating to the coming of the Messiah? (Stoner, 1958) Of the 660 prophecies, 436 relate to Christ’s first coming, all of which were fulfilled when Jesus walked the earth!

Now think with me here: If every prophecy relating to Christ’s first advent was fulfilled when Christ walked the earth, what ought we to expect when it comes to the Biblical teaching regarding the Second Coming of Christ?

What is the Final Judgment? The Final Judgment is that time when all of mankind will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and be judged!

Matthew 25:31-32a, “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him...”

This is the Last Judgment. Every man, woman, and child that has ever lived or will live will stand before God on that day and be judged according to what they have done!

2 Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

While the standard for this judgment is God’s law, nevertheless the aim of the judgment will be to differentiate the genuine servant of Christ from the false.

Matthew 25:34-46, “Then the King will say to those on His right [those saved], ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. [On what basis?...] FOR I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty...⁴¹ Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels [again, on what basis?]; FOR I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I was thirsty...”

The Final Judgment is looming on the horizon of this world in which all will be judged on account of their deeds in the body (in order to separate the sheep from the goats)! As believers, we have the assurance that every sin that will be revealed on that day will be forgiven- “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1)! The non-believer does not have that confidence!

Now as believers if we are to stand before God and be judged as to the genuineness of our faith, we must be careful NOT to fall into the trap of the Pharisees who themselves believed in the doctrine of the Final Judgment. They also knew that they would be judged based on their deeds, and they labored in their lives to ensure that they looked good! They focused on the outside of the cup to the neglect of the inside (Matthew 23:25). If a focus of the Last Judgment is the genuineness of our faith (and it is cf. Matthew 24:34-46) then a proper response to this teaching is not to focus on the outside of the cup, but on the inside, specifically the object and ground of our faith, Jesus Christ! That is NOT to say that we don’t from time to time look at the fruit of our faith and use it to “examine ourselves” (2 Corinthians 13:5)! But it is to say that where we find ourselves wanting, the answer is NOT to DO more, BUT to trust/believe Christ more!

Now, the second question we must ask is this: When will the Final Judgment occur? The Apostle John gives us this glimpse:

Revelation 20:12, "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds."

Again, recall that at the Last Day, there is going to be a resurrection of both just and unjust men, Matthew 25:31-32. At this time, the souls of all of mankind that have ever lived will be reunited with their bodies to "stand before the throne" of God and be judged (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:12-13). This is what is known as the General Resurrection. The General Resurrection will occur at that time when all who have ever lived will be reunited with their bodies to stand before God's throne of judgment. Now based on Revelation 20:12, it is obvious that the Final Judgment will occur AFTER this General Resurrection. And yet, Scripture goes further when it comes to describing the "When?" of the Final Judgment.

2 Peter 3:11b-13, "...what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God [This is a reference to the Final Judgment. Following this Final Judgment, notice what is going to happen...], on account of which [the Last Judgment] the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells."

Based on this passage, it appears that the Final Judgment will occur after the General Resurrection, and yet before the creation of the New Heavens and the New Earth (cf. also Revelation 21:1). And so, the timetable/picture looks something like this:

1. Sometime at a day and hour no one knows (Mark 13:32), Christ is going to return!
2. And upon His Second Coming, our Lord is going to
 - a. Conquer Satan and the anti-Christ (Revelation 20:10).
 - b. Resurrect all that have ever lived on this earth and so reunite their souls to their bodies (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:12-13).
 - c. Judge the peoples of the earth- everyone who has ever lived and/or is living at the time of His Second Coming (Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20). At this time, the earth is destroyed and remade (2 Peter 3:10, 13).
 - d. Cast Satan and his followers into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10, 15).
 - e. Bring His people to the New Heavens and Earth (2 Peter 3:11b-13).

This again is why our hope and anticipation in this life revolves around and is centered upon the Second Coming of Christ!

This begs another question: Why have a public Day of Judgment? Why doesn't God just judge us in private? Why must the whole world witness it? And in the case of the believer, why have a judgment at all?

The first answer to this question is that a public day of judgment occurs to vindicate Christ's name. Christ's crucifixion was in public for the world to see it because it was God's intent to demonstrate Christ's righteousness to the world. This could not be shown to the world with a private slaying/execution in a dungeon in Jerusalem. Paul said this about the public crucifixion of Christ.

Romans 3:25b-26, "*This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*"

Through the public execution of Christ, God manifested Himself for the entire world to see that He is both righteous God and a righteous-making God! We see this focus throughout redemptive history; God acting in such a way to vindicate His name.

Ezekiel 36:22-23 (cf. also vv. 24-32), "Therefore, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Lord God, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.'""

This theme is repeated again and again throughout Scripture (cf. Isaiah 5:16; Ezekiel 20:41; 38:23; 39:7, 25; Deuteronomy 9:6)! Truly, God is wholly jealous for His name! He made us for His glory and He is unwilling to share that glory with another (Isaiah 42:8)! In light of this, what do you suppose is behind a public judgment of all of mankind? The manifestation of the righteousness of God! Speaking of the Jew who represents the religious unbeliever Paul declares:

Romans 2:5, "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

One thing we learn from this is that the Last Judgment, if it does anything, will demonstrate the righteousness of God! And yet, it will also demonstrate Christ's mercy.

2 Thessalonians 1:7b-10a, "...the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed..."

This is beautiful! As the world beholds the revelation of the sin of God's elect, no doubt the worldling will respond with accusation and attack (just as Satan did when gazing upon Joshua the High Priest in Zechariah 3:1)! Will we be frightened and shaken? I don't know! But this I do know: at this time the glory of God's grace will be manifested in our forgiveness such that all the world will marvel and give praise to God! The Final Judgment is ordained by God that the world might know that God is righteous and glorious in His grace!

The second answer to why we will have a public Final Judgment is so that the child of God might not presume upon God's grace. There is a class of Scriptures which seem to imply that a believer in the end could be lost. At first glance, they are rather difficult to understand.

John 15:6, "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

Hebrews 3:6, "But Christ *was faithful* as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end."

If you can't lose your salvation (and you can't), then why give a warning like these? To understand these passages we must go to the book of Acts. Acts 27 details Paul's journey from Jerusalem to Rome where he was to be tried as a criminal before Caesar on account of the gospel.

Acts 27:14-15, "But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo; and when the ship was caught *in it*, and could not face the wind, we gave way *to it*, and let ourselves be driven along."

Paul and his shipmates were in a horrible storm. In fact, it was so fierce these seasoned sailors all begin to fear for their lives! But then, God spoke to Paul, who then spoke to the crew these words:

Acts 27:23-25, "...this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told."

I love this promise! Many of us would believe that if God had ordained that no one on board was going to perish, then they could have done whatever they wanted and lived. They could have taken a gun out and shot each other with complete certainty that all would be fine; this would be the ultimate war game! They could have taken poisoning... just for the fun of it. They could have climbed to the top of a sail and done a swan dive into the deck. But to do so would deny the doctrine of Secondary Causes! Yes, all on board would be safe, but they needed to act responsibly. If they didn't, then they most assuredly would have died. You say, "But that contradicts what Paul just said!" Ah, but it doesn't for notice that when some in the crew decided to man life boats to escape, Paul gave this sober warning:

Acts 27:30-31, "And as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship, and had let down the *ship's* boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, 'Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.'"

Paul just finished espousing the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Crew! How is this warning consistent with that doctrine and/or genuine? Because on account of the law of Secondary Causes in order for the crew to live, they had to obey God (an obedience which, on account of the promise of the crew's safety, they would proffer)! Charles Hodge put it this way, speaking of Acts 27:

[The] appeal secured the accomplishment of the promise. So God's telling the elect that if they

apostatize they shall perish, prevents their apostasy. And in like manner, the Bible teaching that those for whom Christ died shall perish if they violate their conscience, prevents their transgressing, or brings them to repentance. (Hodge, 1950, p. 149)

Though a child of God could never lose his salvation, nevertheless the warnings are real; if we in Christ reject the Lord and live out our fleshly desires, if we don't abide in Christ, we will not be saved!

John 15:6a, "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up..."

Yet we won't do this, because we are saved! Yet don't allow this truth to set you at ease and so nonchalant about the return of Christ and the Last Judgment! Speaking of the Second Coming and thus the Last Judgment, John wrote this:

Revelation 16:15, "Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame."

This refers both to unbelief and/or unrighteous living! Speaking of the unbelief, notice what John uses to exhort people in the body of Christ unto perseverance in their faith: the Last Judgment! In essence he says: *Hey, on that day, you don't want to be found naked/without faith! Stand firm in your confidence and so trust in Christ! Do not falter! For we are going to stand before Christ's Judgment seat!*

We need to hear this for the tendency in the body is to presume that all is well. Warnings therefore are cast aside and ignored. Yet it is possible to be part of a genuine church and long for the Second Coming of Christ and NOT be saved.

Amos 5:18, "Alas, you who are longing for the day of the Lord, for what purpose *will* the day of the Lord *be* to you? It *will be* darkness and not light."

Christian! Beware of empty religion! If atheism as destroyed it thousands, dead religion has destroyed its ten thousands!

Matthew 7:22-23, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

So why will forgiven saints go through the judgment? Why the warnings? The same reason Paul warned the crew to sober us that we might not presume, but remain strong in our faith! J. C. Ryle put it this way:

God's sovereignty was never meant to destroy man's responsibility. One thief was saved that no sinner might despair, but only one, that no sinner might presume. (Ryle, 1993)

And that brings us to a third reason that all will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, in order to sober us unto Godly living!

Romans 13:12, "The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand [when everything is going to be exposed]. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light."

We've talked much about this. Knowing that the day is going to come that we will stand before the Judgment seat of Christ, the Bible calls us to spiritual vigilance.

Matthew 24:42, "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming."

If you takes God to be a Celestial Santa Claus, then as long as you are in Christ (you've been made nice), you can do whatever you want knowing that a great Christmas lies on the horizon of your life. In truth, glory does await us; but not before all that is hidden in your life is exposed before the throne of God's Judgment. In the words of Peter; "...what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God..." (2 Peter 3:11b-12a)?

So why a public day of Final Judgment?

There is a public day of Final Judgment in order to vindicate God's name. It is to sober all that we might not presume, and to sober us unto godly living!

And that brings us to the final question; who will do the judging.

Matthew 16:27, "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds."

From this we conclude that Christ is going to be the judge on the Last Day.¹ Yet with this, notice a rather important text: In his exhortation against going to a civil law court to work out a problem with a brother or sister in the Lord, Paul said this:

1 Corinthians 6:2-3, "...do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life?"²

Laying aside Paul's point about bringing matters concerning brothers and sisters before a secular law court, consider Paul's teaching. At the Last Day, we will have the incredible responsibility/privilege of participating somehow in the Final Judgment.

In what way will we participate? While there is debate as to the degree in which we shall participate, Revelation 19 gives us at least a partial answer.

Revelation 19:1-2, "After these things [Christ's Judgments] I heard, as it were, a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her.'"

Whatever else might be said about our participation in the Final Judgment, notice that God's children will at least give the "Hallelujah!" and so the "Amen" to all that Christ pronounces in that day. This is how we will participate! Richard Baxter put it this way:

They shall not only judge the world, in Christ their Head, by way of communion with Him, by their works compared with those of the ungodly, or by way of testimony against them, BUT they shall be assessors of Jesus Christ the Judge, giving their voice against them, consenting to His judgment as just, and saying *Amen* to the doom pronounced against all the ungodly... (Boston, 2000, pp. 418-419)

On the Last Day when Christ judges every man, God's people, themselves having been judged and forgiven, will participate. While the degree in which we shall participate is unclear, this we conclude: our participation in the Final Judgment at least will include our approbation of all that Christ declares! Truly on that day when Christ judges Satan and his wicked followers, we shall proclaim with the loudest of all voices, "Amen!"

Now how ought we to respond to such a doctrine as this? As children of God should we:

- Fear it?
- Hope for its delay?
- Bury our heads in the sand in the hope that we can ignore it?

Amazingly, God's word calls the child of God to rejoice in it! It will be a day of:

- Great refreshment for us all, Acts 3:19.
- Deliverance from all our misery, Luke 21:28
- Participating in the marriage feast of the Lamb, Matthew 25:6.
- Crowning, 2 Timothy 4:8.

Furthermore on that day, our Lord Jesus will Himself be glorified in all His saints (2 Thessalonians 1:10), such that the Final Judgment represents nothing less than Christ's Victory day (1 Peter 1:6-7)! And if that were not enough, notice that the Final Judgment also will be the time that Christ will confess before the angels and all men that

- He loves us!
- He has atoned for all our sins!
- We are heirs of eternal life!
- We are His people and He is our God (Revelation 21:3-4)!

It truly will be a day of vindication (which is why in Scripture we have seen that for the believer, the Day of the Lord is something we anticipate)! To that we all corporately sigh, "Come, Lord Jesus! Come!" (Revelation 22:20)

End Notes

¹ cf. also Acts 10:42; 17:31; Mt. 25:31-32; Jn. 5:22; Ps. 72

² cf. also Ps. 49:14; 149:6-9.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on April 14, 2013. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.