

**GOD'S AWESOME JUDGMENT FOR RITUALISM AND HYPOCRISY**  
**(SUNDAY, JULY 19, 2020)**

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**Scripture Reading:** Hebrews 12:18-29; Psalm 50

The truth of God's Word is not based on what we determine to be its relevance.

But the truth of God's Word is seen in that passages written thousands of years ago are still very relevant.

Our text, Psalm 50, comes from the second book of the Psalms and was written by Asaph.

This is the first of the Psalms of Asaph.

**Psalm 50** and **Psalms 73-83** are all attributed to Asaph.

Asaph was one of the leading musicians and leaders of David's choir as well as being a man known for his great wisdom.

As Spurgeon points out, several of the Asaph Psalms appear to be written later in the history of Israel than the time of David, so some of the Psalms that bear his name, might be merely dedicated to him.<sup>1</sup>

But we can say, this Psalm was written approximately 2,500-3,000 years ago.

Think of that.

It was written for God's people of old and for God's people today to shake us out of our spiritual slumber and routine.

How easy it is for us to lose sight of God's glory, the fearsome nature of His judgment, and what God most desires.

He lacks nothing. He doesn't need anything from you, but He does call for your thanksgiving, obedience, and trust so that you will glorify Him.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 2004), paragraph 7746.

As you look at this Psalm you might see that your Bible has it formatted into a number of paragraphs.

There are different ways that commentators outline this Psalm, but a simple outline is to see three main sections.

- 1) vv. 1-6: God's awesome presence as He comes to judge
- 2) vv. 7-15: Rebuke of Ritual
- 3) vv. 16-23: Rebuke of Hypocrisy along with a final charge

From Hebrews 12:28-29 I present a summary of this Psalm.

**Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God *is* a consuming fire.**

### **1) VV. 1-6: GOD'S AWESOME PRESENCE AS HE COMES TO JUDGE**

The opening verses of this Psalm can be compared to Exodus 19, a description of God's mighty presence at Sinai.

The language is called a theophany - an appearance or revelation of God.

A number of weeks ago, we looked at Hebrews 12 and how it compares and contrasts Mt. Sinai with the heavenly Mt. Zion.

When Israel was called to gather at Mt. Sinai, all of Israel came to know their own unworthiness before God's awesome presence.

The children of Israel could not endure what was commanded, we read in Hebrews 12:20, which I explained as meaning that they there **overawed by the glory of God's presence.**

But what happens over time after some dramatic event?

Isn't it very natural that people forget?

This can be true of our own lives.

Haven't there been times when it seems that fellowship with God can be very sweet and then there can be those seasons when our walk with the Lord just becomes a routine?

There is a lot of very troubling news in our own nation as we see how few people faithfully attend worship services on a regular basis.

I don't know what the exact statistics are, but we can say that the number of people who faithfully attend services is lower than 20-30 year ago.

We will see this theme later in the Psalm, but how much of attendance at these services was merely routine and ritual?

Importantly this Psalm is a reminder of the awesome nature of God's presence and His judgment.

He is the Mighty One. He is God, Yahweh.

Who can stand before Him?

And yet because God's mighty presence is not manifested constantly like it was at Sinai, many people think nothing of God's judgment.

Here in verse 2 Asaph speaks of how God will shine forth out of Zion.

Jerusalem, Zion, was the city that God determined was to be a special reminder of His presence.

And we see from the opening verses of this Psalm, that all people on earth were called to consider God's mighty power.

And specifically, in verse 5, God's people were called to gather in God's presence in Jerusalem for judgment.

**Psa. 50:5** "Gather My saints together to Me, Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."

The NET Bible points out here that the word saints means those who have outwardly sworn allegiance to God, not necessarily those whose loyalty is genuine.<sup>2</sup>

This Psalm is a powerful reminder that there will be a Day of Ultimate Judgment.

This judgment is the Final Judgment connected with the Resurrection and the Final Return of our Lord.

And as Jesus reminded, you must always be ready for His return, because it is easy to become lethargic and think, it is not going to take place now.

In time, however, we are reminded that God calls for all people to come to Him in faith and repentance.

And weekly, God's people especially are called to consider God's judgment and mercy.

The great theologian of the early church, Augustine, wrote:

Nothing has contributed more powerfully to wean me from all that held me down to earth than the thought, constantly dwelt upon, of death and of the last judgment.<sup>3</sup>

Listen to a portion of Hebrews 10.

**Heb. 10:26** For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, **27** but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. **28** Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. **29** Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the

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<sup>2</sup> W. Hall Harris, eds. *The NET Bible Notes*. 1st, Accordance electronic ed. (Richardson: Biblical Studies Press, 2005), paragraph 37258.

<sup>3</sup> John Blanchard, eds. *The Complete Gathered Gold: a Treasury of Quotations for Christians*. Accordance electronic ed. (New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), paragraph 8223.

covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? **30** For we know Him who said, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*" says the Lord. And again, "*The LORD will judge His people.*" **31** It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

## **2) VV. 7-15: REBUKE OF RITUAL**

Think again of the reference to Zion that we see in verse 2.

God's people of old were instructed that they were to bring their sacrifices to the tabernacle and later the temple in Jerusalem.

Three times a year all the males in Israel were also specifically called to come to Zion for the celebration of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

Going to Jerusalem for worship and sacrifice was to be a regular pattern.

But what can easily set in when you have a regular pattern?

Isn't easy to just go through the motions or lose sight of what we are doing?

The sacrificial system as given in Exodus and Leviticus was of divine origin. It wasn't men who came up with the laws of sacrifice; it was God's divine instruction.

Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.

In verse 7, God speaks to those who are identified as His people and God says I will testify or admonish or even bring an accusation against you.

Sacrifice is not just something that Scripture commands, but many pagan cultures also have the notion of sacrifice.

And yet there is a vast difference between the true idea of sacrifice and the pagan idea of sacrifice.

The pagan idea of sacrifice is that God needs something that we bring.

We somehow have to fill a need that God has.

Or another perversion is that we can think we are something special because we are going through the outward motions of what God commands.

John Calvin wrote on these verses:

God now proceeds to state the charge which he adduced against them. He declares, that he attached no value whatsoever to sacrifices in themselves considered. Not that he asserts this rite of the Jews to have been vain and useless, for in that case it never would have been instituted by God; but there is this difference between religious exercises and others, that they can only meet the approval of God when performed in their true spirit and meaning.<sup>4</sup>

Now look at verses 14 and 15, which are very precious and encouraging verses.

There is a question we have in looking at verse 14.

In Leviticus 7 we have instructions for Peace Offerings given either as an expression of thanksgiving and the fulfillment of a vow.

So, is verse 14 speaking of literal sacrifices or spiritual sacrifices connected with thanksgiving and vows of obedience?

There is some disagreement on the answer to this question as you read commentators.

At this time in redemptive history, the sacrificial system was still in place. So, it was not in vain that God's people would still offer sacrifices.

But in these sacrifices, we must keep in mind two things.

1. We are not meeting any ultimate need that God has.

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 14271.

2. God desires not just outward actions, but full commitment, love, trust, and obedience from the heart.

Thousands of years later, two thousand years after the sacrificial system has been fulfilled in Christ, these words still shine powerfully.

God does desire true worship.

He calls for you to give unto Him the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

He doesn't just want you to go through the motions and think you are pleasing God, that we just check off the box and we have done our duty.

**Eph. 5:18** And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, **19** speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, **20** giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **21** submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Now let us consider the precious promise in verse 15.

**Psa. 50:15** Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."

### **3) vv. 16-23: REBUKE OF HYPOCRISY ALONG WITH A FINAL CHARGE**

It is probably best to see that with verse 16, the Psalm is specifically addressing another group within Israel, those who are guilty of even greater transgression.

These are what we can call hypocrites.

Verse 16 speaks of them as the wicked.

It is the same word used 4 times in Psalm 1 translated as ungodly.

So why do we call these wicked people hypocrites?

Because of what we see in verse 16.

Though they are wicked, yet they **declare** God's statutes and **take** His covenant in their mouths.

Further their hypocrisy is seen in verse 17.

Though God's word is on their lips, yet they hate instruction and just throw away God's word.

Further we see in verses 18-20 other violations of God's Laws:

**You consented with thieves.**

The verb consented means you have become friends with such people.

You were a partaker with adulterers.

You hang around people who are guilty of such disgusting behavior.

Additionally verse 19 speaks of the sins of the tongue.

You do damage with your words.

You use your tongue to deceive.

You plot against your brother.

You slander your own brother.<sup>5</sup>

James Boice points out quite well that those who plotted the death of the Lord Jesus Christ were concerned that they would not become ceremonially unclean.<sup>6</sup>

Though they planned the murdered of the Lamb, the Son of God, they later sat down for a meal of lamb in celebrating the Passover.

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<sup>5</sup> NET Bible Translations.

<sup>6</sup> Boice, 418.



Because of our sin nature, there is an incredible capacity we have for inconsistency and hypocrisy. It should not be!

James comments on this in **James 3:8-10**.

But no man can tame the tongue. *It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.*

Returning to Psalm 50, we have another powerful description of human nature in verse 21. Because God does not always bring immediate judgment, the wicked think that God doesn't mind what they are doing.

The Apostle Peter wrote about this same attitude in 2 Peter 3.

**2Pet. 3:3** knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, **4** and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation."

We could also add the words of Scripture in Romans 2.

**Romans 2:3** And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? **4** Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

With verses 22 and 23 we have a powerful conclusion to this Psalm.

John MacArthur observes very well that these two verses address the two main categories of sin addressed in this Psalm.

Verse 22 speaks of serious repentance for those guilty of the hypocrisy already described.

You think that you are getting away with your wickedness.

Don't test God's patience and mercy to you.

Hear God's call before you are destroyed with no deliverance.

Verse 23 speaks of the remedy of repentance for those guilty of ritualism, just going through the motions.<sup>7</sup>

Don't just go through the motions.

Offer true praise to our great God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Walk in God's truth.

This is far from self-earned salvation or impressing God with our own obedience.

No, those who truly obey the call of verse 23 know that they cannot please or obey God in their own strength.

This is all of grace.

This is only through the work of our great God.

### **Conclusion:**

1) Reverence for God's mighty power and presence

- Scripture

- Focus on God's power in creation and in redemption

2) How do you keep from just going through the motions?

Confession of sin

Humble prayer to God

We desperately need the reminder of this passage and many others.

**Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.**

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<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), paragraph 9866.

**Prayer**

**Closing Hymn - 239**

**BENEDICTION - NUMBERS 6:24-26**

“The LORD bless you and keep you;  
The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you;  
The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.” ’