

Here Comes the Judge! REJOICE! 2 Timothy 4:1-5, Revelation 20:1-6, 11-15

Since early this Fall, we have been "Majoring on the Majors", looking into those uncompromisable truths of the Christian faith. And perhaps you may have astutely noticed that basically I have been following Apostle's Creed; that ancient declaration which outlines the essential truths of the Christian faith. Today we come to that portion of the creed which asserts that Jesus having ascended into heaven, and is now sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; ***From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.***

This worisome phrase about Jesus' return as our judge, concludes the longest portion of the Creed focusing on the past, present and the future work Christ our savior. What He has done, what He is now doing, and **what He still has to do**, which is of no less importance than his life and sacrificial death in our behalf.



What Jesus has yet to do, is to return as Earth's king and judge. This is known as the **2nd coming of Christ** and it is a major theme of our Christian faith. The early Church referred to this event as the **blessed hope**, and it is mentioned over 300 times in the New Testament, so Jesus' return was definitely on the minds of early Christians. It

was their central hope in a hostile world

Now it has been 2,000 years since Jesus' death, resurrection, departure and promised return. Some may have begun to doubt that he will ever return; which is exactly what our Bible warned would happen.

in the last days scoffers will come,
scoffing and indulging their own lusts
saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming?
For ever since our ancestors died,
all things continue as they were
from the beginning of creation!

2 Peter 3:3-4

but the Bible ends with the emphasis that hope for Christ's return should always be on Christian minds and in our prayers: Jesus concluded the last book of our Bible saying, ***"surely, I am coming soon."*** And we reply: ***"Amen, Come, Lord Jesus"*** (Revelation 22:20). In fact the Greek word "***Maranatha***" which you may have heard but not understood is literally is a brief prayer saying ***"our Lord come!"*** (2 Corinthians 16:21).

However, a big hindrance to our praying this prayer, to our looking forward to Christ's return is our worldly-mindedness. We are so caught up in the affairs of our life, even in

the good things of this world, to the point that we fail to seek the better things (Colossians 3:1-3). Wealth has always been a distraction, keeping us from hoping for and looking forward to the coming of Christ to finally judge and then remake our world sinless and perfect where we will live in eternal fellowship with Him.

But we have been warned that we stop looking forward to the return of Christ at our own peril. Our Bible repeats loudly and often: **Be prepared. Be alert. Live expectantly. Jesus is coming again, be watching for his return.**" Over and over, Jesus in His teachings along with the Apostles Peter, Paul, and John, have all reminded us to live our lives in expectation of the **immediate return** of Christ so we will not be caught unprepared.

But perhaps some of us may actually fear the day of Jesus return. And there probably is some wisdom in that, because when he returns, Jesus will judge all of us – the living and dead – according to how we have lived.

a friend of actor **W.C. Fields**, was visiting him in the hospital just before his death and was surprised to find this famously irreligious person thumbing through a Bible. Asked what he was doing with a Bible, Fields replied, "I'm looking for loopholes."

Friends, there are no loopholes when Jesus returns as our Judge, but accompanying his judgment there is also Grace – for those who have accepted it. This is what turns the return and judgment of Jesus into our "**Blessed hope.**"

Listen to another of Jesus' concluding remarks from the book of Revelation, but also listen for a clue as to what makes his return our blessed hope.

*See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me,
to repay according to everyone's work. ...
Blessed are those who wash their robes,
so that they will have the right to the tree of life
and may enter the city by the gates.*
Revelation 22: 12-14

See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.'
Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. (Revelation 22: 12-14)

This verse repeats three truths that are often taught in the New Testament.

1. that Jesus *is* coming again.
2. that when He comes, He will not come as He first came – as our sacrificial savior – but as our Lord and king who will judge all who have ever lived on this earth.

3. And He will render justice to each man and woman according to the way we have lived.

So even believers may for good reasons fear his return, but do not forget Jesus' reference "***to those who have washed their robes***"— this is what will turn our fear of his coming judgment into our blessed hope.

While these themes are repeated multiple times in the New Testament, the idea of God coming to judge and to render according to our deeds, is not a New Testament idea. It's an Old Testament idea, and was repeated there just as frequently; that God will one day judge everyone according to our lives.

The New Testament addition to this theme is that it is Jesus whom God has appointed to be that one who will do the judging of the living and the dead.

Let's look at some O.T. passages signaling this coming judgment of God – which will be carried out by Jesus. Then, we will ask the question, "What does it mean **to have washed our robes -- and why should this give us guilty sinners access to the tree of LIFE?**

First, as an example of how the Old Testament saints viewed God's coming judgment, here's a portion of Psalm 96 (11-13). The whole psalm is a call to joyous worship and it concludes:

*Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice
before the Lord; for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with his truth.*

Psalm 96:11-13,

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

This is a standard Old Testament refrain. Believers in the Old Testament experiencing a world of persecution, experiencing a world of sin, experiencing a world where everything is not right, often looked forward to the day when God would put everything right. They, like we, could look around the world and see things that were not simply a little wrong, but grossly wrong, and they like we could see things even within our own society that are horribly unjust.

Think of all the mass random shootings that now regularly mar our news accounts almost every evening. Just this last Tuesday, a Chicago man shot and killed his ex-fiancé and then walked into Mercy hospital to randomly a kill police officer, and a pharmacy worker and wound four others, before killing himself.

I am not sure where the count is now, but according to one website the November 8th massacre at California's Borderline Bar and Grill, which left 13 people dead, was the 307th mass shooting in the past 311 days of 2018. In all, 328 people died in those incidents, and 1,251 were injured.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2018/11/08/thousand-oaks-california-bar-shooting-307th-mass-shooting/1928574002/>

And just this last Monday, a judge sentenced Christopher Watts to three consecutive life sentences without the chance of parole – for which he plea-bargained to avoid the death penalty - for brutally murdering his pregnant wife and two young daughters ... just so he could "start over fresh" with another woman.

We are shocked and outraged by such acts of wickedness. We have a right to be shocked and outraged, and to hope that one day God will put things right. He will render justice to all according to their deeds. This is an Old Testament hope

We hear this promise of such justice from prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 11:4) "*But with righteousness [God] will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth, and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.*"

Living in the midst of a corrupt and abusive culture it was Isaiah's hope, that one day God would set things right.

For those who are poor and afflicted,
for those who are overlooked by the world,
for those who are mistreated by the world:

One day, God will settle accounts and He will do that which is right for those who have been abused and towards those who have done the abusing. It is the grand hope of the Old Testament.

It should be our hope as well. Looking at the world around us, we see that there are some things that will never be put right in this life, and our hope should be that in the last day God will put all things right. That may be the only hope that we have in some of the hard circumstances of our lives.



One week ago, on Friday, November 16th forty years after the world learned of Cambodia's notorious "killing fields" where over 2 million people, one quarter of the country's population, were murdered by the brutal Khmer Rouge regime, two of Pol Pot's confederates have finally been found guilty of genocide; for which they each received an additional life sentence. But where is the justice for all those they murdered.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/two-former-leaders-khmer-rouge-found-guilty-genocide-180970843/#hFqSMRx5FE7ysTjo.99>

For the victims of such people there can be no justice in this life, but it is the hope of every believer in God that in the end, no matter what has happened in this life, He will put all things right.

In the New Testament, that hope for God putting all things right, is now firmly centered in Jesus Christ. As he said

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory ...
All the nations will be gathered before him,
and he will separate people one from another
as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.
Matthew 25:31*

Jesus is returning not just to reign, but to judge; to judge the entire world: making a simple division between the good and the bad - among all who have ever lived.

From the book of Acts, You hear in Peter's words the language of the Creed.

[God] has ordered us to preach to the people...
that [**Jesus**] is the One who has been
**appointed by God as the judge
of the living and dead.**
Acts 10:42

Jesus is who?

He is the one who has been appointed as the judge of the living and the dead,

Later in Acts, Paul warns the Athenians, "**that [God] has fixed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness....**" That part of the sentence is Old Testament..... The rest is uniquely a New Testament hope. "*He has fixed a day in*

which He will judge the world in righteousness, through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”
(17:31)

In his letter to the Corinthians to the Paul expands upon Jesus’ work as judge:

Wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the purposes of the heart.”
I Corinthians 4:5,

Jesus will not only uncover all the hidden injustices, but **He will also uncover even the motives of our hearts.** This should remind us that when our conscience blames us of guilt, repentance, **personal repentance**, is the only appropriate response. That my deepest thoughts and motivations are going to be uncovered, is an unsettling thought apart from the grace of God, and this provokes me to repentance, to pray, *Lord forgive me, a sinner.*

In the same letter, Paul would add,

For **ALL OF US must appear before the judgment seat of Christ**, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil
2 Corinthians 5:10

Notice, Paul the preacher of salvation by grace, says that there will be a judgment – even for Christians – in which our lives, our works, our deeds, even as God’s child will be taken into account. That’s not a contradiction of the doctrine of grace, it’s an explanation of how Grace will apply when we stand before our judge.

That is why in one of his final letters, Paul was able to write, “*from now on there is reserved for me the **crown of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, **and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.**” (2 Timothy 4:8),*

If we are going to be judged in *recompense for what we have done in the body*, how then do we end up with a crown of righteousness on our heads?

The answer is, that when we as Christian believers come to the judgment seat of Christ, what we all deserve is condemnation (we are all goats) But in Jesus Christ what we will find is that God is more than just, God is also forgiving.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast.
Ephesians 2:8-9

When he returns, Jesus will bring justice to all who have cried for justice and he will judge fairly all who demand to be fairly judged. But Jesus can also extend mercy to all those who have asked him for mercy. After justice has concluded the sin and handed down the guilty verdict, mercy continues on to offer forgiveness.

Paul explained to the Roman Church this interworking of Justice and grace; fairness and forgiveness:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; **they are now justified by his grace as a gift**, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
Romans 3:23-24

When Jesus comes to judge the earth, He will give justice – but he will also offer mercy. Mercy does not nullify justice – it goes beyond justice.

God does not wink at sin. Standing before the judgment seat of Christ we will all be guilty of sin. Along with all our actions, the thoughts and intents of our hearts will be laid bare, before the judge. But before we even asked for mercy (while we were yet enemies – the Bible says) this same judge, Jesus Christ, before whom we are now standing, took the penalty we deserved and went to the cross for us; nailing our sins to that cross he triumphed over them.

So when the day comes that I appear before my savior, Lord, and King, I will stand there potentially condemned; for I have not lived a fully righteous life. I am guilty according to the Biblical verdict: "**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**" And Jesus who will be my judge, has all the facts; he knows my all of my life and all of my deepest darkest thoughts – there is no need for a prosecuting attorney, my record will speak for itself. And he will review my record which should find me guilty.

But then, the most amazing thing happens, Jesus will rise from his judgment seat, he will walk over to me the defendant, put his arms around me, and serving as my advocate, my defense attorney, he will declare "*Yes, all this was true. But I have paid the penalty for your sin in my body on the cross.*" And then He will walk back to his

judgment seat and declare, "on the basis of my atoning work on the cross and John's acceptance of that grace, I declare him righteous. Case dismissed."

I am guilty – but I have been forgiven. The Bible is clear and insistent on this.

For the wages of sin is death , but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23

**These are not conflicting truths – they are comforting truths.
We can look for both justice and mercy from God.**

Baptist preacher, Harry Ironside, told this story of pioneers who were making their way across one of the central plains states towards a distant territory that had been opened up for homesteading. Traveling in covered ox drawn wagons their progress was necessarily slow. One day they were horrified to see a long line of smoke in the west, stretching for miles across the prairie. Soon it was evident that a fiercely burning grass fire was rapidly coming towards them.

They had crossed a river the day before but it would be impossible to go back to that before the flames would be on them. But one of their leaders seemed to understand what could be done. He gave the command to set fire to the grass behind them. Then when a space was burned over, the whole company moved back onto the charred ground.

As the flames roared on toward them from the west, a little girl cried out in terror, "Are you sure we shall not all be burned up?" The leader replied, "My child, the flames cannot reach us here, for we are standing where the fire has been!"

Ironside concluded, "What a picture of the believer, who is safe in Christ!"

The fires of God's judgment burned themselves out on Christ as he hung there on the cross, and all who are in Christ are now safe forever, for they are now standing where the fire has been. OUR HOPE OF SALVATION IS IN CHRIST, NOT OURSELVES.

That's what it means to **wash our garments white in the blood of the lamb**. And That is how the final judgment of all people can also be for believers our **blessed hope**.

Come now, let us reason together,
says the Lord: though your sins
are like scarlet, they shall be like snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.

Isaiah 1:18

This is the promise as God first made it to us long before it was fulfilled for us by Jesus the Christ. This is how we "*wash our robes*" this is what gives us *the right to the tree of life and to enter the city by the gates*.

And because Jesus was able to accomplish this for us,

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9-11

Christ the King Sunday, celebrates the completed work of Jesus in our behalf that now awaits only the fullness of time when he will return to judge the earth. And it is his completed work in our behalf that should encourage us to join with all Christians down through the ages who have joyously prayed, MARANATHA! Our Lord Come!