

JESUS: THE COMING JUDGE¹

We take today the next step in our exploration of the "Hereafter." Today we look at the Second Coming of Christ. If we stand back from the whole grand drama of our faith, we see that all the high points are marked by a coming of Jesus. Jesus came to us with the incarnation—Christmas. He came back in the resurrection. And Jesus will come and be present when God's reign will be fully established. For reasons we don't have time to review fully, churches don't adequately talk about the second coming. Nevertheless, it is an essential part of our faith. The Bible speaks of it in many places, and the first Christian all believed in it. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

The Bible teaches that when that day comes, Jesus will judge the earth. You and I hear judgment and immediately think, "uh oh!" We think of being hauled onto the carpet and our whole life reviewed with all our sins being trotted out. Yikes, that sounds scary.

What is worth paying attention to is that when the Bible talks about judgment, it always casts it in a positive light. And when the Bible depicts judgment, it suggests that it isn't errant individuals being judged but nations and evil regimes being brought back into a state of justice and truth. Now, I'm

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not saying that you and I will not also be put to rights when Jesus Christ returns. And isn't it reassuring for us as disciples of Christ, that we are friends and apprentices with the judge? And...judgment in the Bible is depicted as a world event. The world and her peoples, the authorities and principalities and powers of this world will be set right when Jesus comes. That indeed is really something to take comfort in!

By the way, have you noticed in these sermons about the hereafter that this world and life, this earth and her peoples isn't abandoned? This world will be restored. Our bodies will be restored or resurrected. There is a this-worldliness about all of this that is very refreshing.

So, how then shall you and I live? Here we are in between the times of Jesus' coming and his return. We know that our future belongs to God, because Jesus someday will come. The simple fact that you and I can see a good end, sets us apart from other worldviews that might see the world as in an endless cycle or a winding down to a stop. What our faith is saying is that God's yearning for the world will one day be established. I would add to that thought that some elements of that final consummation are already in place. Jesus has risen from the dead, and reigns above. Every once in a while you and I see a

wonderful little miracle or a moment of grace what hints of what all of life will be like. And our task is to contribute to that kingdom. We're certainly not responsible to make it all happen. But we can add something to it.

Do you remember how they constructed the great cathedrals in Europe? Those were tremendous projects. They weren't finished in a lifetime. Rather, master architects drew up plans, artisans worked for a while and added their little bit, and at length in a couple of generations the project was completed.

You and I are like—say, one of the stone masons. Maybe we're making specially shaped stones that someday will be placed in one of the towers or turrets. We work without an entirely clear vision of how the final cathedral will look or where our shaped stones will fit in. We follow our precise instructions from the architects knowing that we're making an important contribution. We work confidently knowing that in a generation or so, a beautiful cathedral will rise in a spot and our hewn stones will play an important part.

Transfer this image of the cathedral to the contribution of William "Wilberforce to the abolition of slavery. Many of us know this story because of the recent movie, "Amazing Grace." Wilberforce was a British member of Parliament beginning in

1780. Shortly after his election Wilberforce began appealing to his fellow politicians to abolish the slave trade.

Set me state this in the thought pattern of this sermon. The institution of slavery will never be a part of the kingdom which Jesus is bringing into the world. In the judgment, slavery is doomed. Wilberforce, as an ardent Christian simply began the process of setting that little piece of the world to rights.

It's worth taking note of the resistance that Wilberforce ran into the Parliament. The majority of the MPs scoffed at young William. "It isn't practical, it isn't enforceable, it'll wreck the economy, it's unrealistic, the world just doesn't work that way. And so on."

Well, we know what happened. Slavery came to an end in Britain and later in America and in much of the rest of the world. And that victory will be one fine stone that will fit into the great edifice that we know is coming—the Kingdom of God.

The king of God's kingdom is coming to judge and restore this world. Our task is to look around, figure out what is going to be restored, and joyfully take up the work of getting the restoration started now. It's a certainty that the grotesque imbalance in wealth ownership is something that the

coming judge will be fixing. Worldwide wealth has pooled in the hands of a few and indebtedness burdens others. Many developing nations can never pay back what they owe. Like slavery before, this situation may appear unavoidable. Seemingly wise voices plead, "This is just how the world works." But my hunch is that such disparity will be judged and fixed in the world which is coming.

Ask yourself, what in your life in your workplace, in your neighborhood will likely need to be corrected? You can be pretty certain that wherever people are estranged or wherever they despise or diminish one another that that situation is under the judgment of God. You can be pretty certain that wherever people are blocked from being their full and best selves—say in grinding poverty or in completely bleak, ugly, or morally defunct surroundings that that situation is under the judgment of God. Wherever tyranny exists either through addictions or social control, those situations are under the judgment of God. Wherever ugliness dominates in a way that blocks out the essential beauty of God's creativity; wherever sleazy amusements or degrading social interchange prevails, those circumstances are surely under the judgment of God. Wherever Jesus Christ is not known or acknowledged as Lord. That is a situation that will be restored and made right.

And whatever God intends to set right is also the focus of our mission. I've been thinking about our mission trip to Honduras two years ago. In view of the upheaval in Honduras right now, I'm pleased that we've worked to form friendships there. I believe that that kind of reunion of peoples will one day prove to be a contribution to the kingdom which is coming into the world.

How do we say it every Sunday? "...And sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." From thence. "Thence" means "place" or "circumstance." Put bluntly, from the Father's side Jesus will head back into our world to judge...to set things aright. That's the future that makes so important what we do right now.