

Jesus as Judge – John 5.19-30 & Revelation 14.14-20

Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.

Paul argues in the opening pages of his letter to the Romans that everyone will come under the judgment of God, but for the moment the world is experiencing (whether it knows it or not) the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience so that men and women will have an opportunity to repent of their sins (Romans 2.4; cp. Joel 2.13; Lamentations 3.33; Ezekiel 33.11; 2 Peter 3.9). When God does execute His temporal judgment, his retribution is never a capricious or reflexive act. To the contrary, God patiently endures the rebellion of human beings in order that they may have time to repent (2 Corinthians 6.2). However, when great day of judgment finally arrives, there will be no more time for repentance. Mankind's only defense, Jesus Christ, will become their prosecutor (John 5.24-30). The day of deliverance will have passed and the full fury of God's holy wrath will be unfettered by His mercy.

God is the source of all righteous judgment as well as the source of all grace and mercy. John, often referred to as disciple who wrote most fervently of love, speaks equally passionately about the judgment of God (John 3.16-18, 36; 8.24; 9.41; 12.47-48). "The lamb of God who bears away the sin of the world" (John 1.29), is also the Lamb from whose wrath the impenitent and unbelieving will seek in vain to flee (Revelation 6.16ff) (cp. Philip Hughes, *Revelation*, p. 171). The church has often, to its peril, neglected the Scriptural teaching about God's anger with man's sin. This is an indictment on the church for its failure to take God's holiness seriously. If God's holiness is inconsequential, then so is the idea of God's retribution against sin. It is logically inconsistent to believe that one's salvation is personal, if he does not also believe that God's judgment is personal. Just as Jesus knows His sheep by name (John 10.3), so He knows those who are not his sheep (John 10.25-30).

JESUS AS JUDGE (John 5.16-30)

The New Testament informs us that Jesus is the Judge of all things (e.g., John 5.22-27; Acts 10.42; 17.32; Romans 2.16; 2 Corinthians 5.10; 2 Timothy 4.1; 1 Peter 4.5). At first glance John's statement that *God has entrusted all judgment to the Son* (5.22) seems to conflict with his previous statement that *God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him* (3.17). The solution to this seemingly conflicting passage is readily at hand. Salvation is available to everyone who trusts in Christ alone for the forgiveness of his sins. Everyone who rejects Christ remains in darkness: *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men*

loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil (John 3.18-19). So, in the end, there are only two classes of people: repentant sinners who have appealed for mercy on the basis of Christ's bloody sacrifice and unrepentant reprobates who disain the grace of God.

God intends that Christians have a balanced understanding of his mercy towards those who trust his Son for their salvation and of his judgment against sinners. Calvin sheds some light on this truth when he says that not only is the unbeliever subject to the wrath of God, but the elect were considered enemies of God until they were reconciled by Christ. Believers are restored to favor with God through Jesus (Romans 5.10; cp. Galatians 3.10, 13; Colossians 1.21, 22). All of this is written so that the Christian may come to appreciate how miserable and calamitous is their condition without Christ. For if it were not clearly articulated for us in Scripture that Divine wrath, vengeance, and eternal death lay upon us all, then we should be less aware of our wretchedness without the mercy of God, and less disposed to value the blessing of our great deliverance (cp. Calvin's *Institutes* II. 16. 2).

THE SON OF MAN (Daniel 7.13-14)

Using the words of Daniel, Jesus is described by John as one like the son of man coming in the light-giving cloud of His own heavenly glory (Daniel 7.13 cp. Matthew 17.5). Jesus frequently deferred to this title in the synoptic gospels when describing himself. For example, when the disciples questioned him about the sign of his coming at the end of the age, Jesus depicted the scene of final judgment as follows at: *that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all of the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with great power and glory* (Matthew 24.30; cp. 26.64).

DAY OF JUDGMENT (Revelation 14.14-20)

On the occasion of Jesus' triumphant return John depicts him as wearing a victor's crown. This is in stark contrast to the crown of thorns he ignominiously wore at his crucifixion. Jesus, the king, will come to reign over the righteous and he will judge the wicked, condemning them to everlasting torment. That his forbearance is at an end is evident from John's image of the sickle used for the harvesting of souls that still remain on the earth at his coming. John describes an angel who comes out of the temple and calls in a loud voice to the One sitting on the cloud, announcing that the time to reap has come. That there is a time for redemption (2 Corinthians 6.1) as well as a time for judgment (Joel 1.15; Zephaniah 1.14) should make everyone take care how he uses what very little time he has at his disposal. "*Wake up O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*" *Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil* (Ephesians 5.14^b-16). John the Baptist foresaw the day of judgment and used it as the basis of his call to repentance: *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His*

winnnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3.12).

HARVESTING THE ELECT

Jesus, in the parable of the weeds, spoke of the wheat and the tares growing up together. It would not be until the last day that there would be a separation of that which is good from that which is worthless (Matthew 13.24-30). However, on that day Jesus will bring into his barn those who belong to him. This final harvest is described by John as taking place in two stages, both overseen by the Son of Man. In the first, the harvesters (angels) wield their sickles over the earth and the elect are brought home. In the second, there is a reaping of the tares (cp. Mark 4.26-29). The image of reaping is reminiscent of Joel 3.13, *Swing the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow – so great is their wickedness!*

In the imagery of the Apocalypse there is a fifth angel who comes from the temple with a sharp sickle. The angels here described are the harvesters of Jesus' parable in Matthew 13.24-43. This angel is followed by another who had charge of the fire before the altar (possibly the same angel as in Revelation 8.5). This angel directs the fifth angel to take his sickle and harvest the wicked of the earth who are represented by the clusters of grapes. We may think of the clusters as representing the nations of the earth and the grapes as the individuals. If this angel is to be associated with the angel in Revelation 8.5 (cp. 6.9), and this is quite reasonable, then we may think of God's judgment as being associated with the prayers of the righteous who cry out; *How long sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?* (Revelation 6.10).

HARVESTING THE IMPENITENT

In the coming final day of judgment, when the conquering Son returns, the angels will execute the wrath of God's judgment upon the wicked. The 'harvest' in the parable of the weeds (Matthew 13.30f) makes it clear that the angels are doing Christ's bidding in the separation of the wheat from the tares. The tares are consumed by a great fire. Fire is commonly associated with judgment in the New Testament (Matthew 18.8; Luke 9.54; 2 Thessalonians 1.7) (Robert Mounce, *Revelation NICNT*, 281). However, John suggests a new image to the reader, the image of the vintage harvest being cast into the winepress for their complete destruction.

The vintage is now cast into the great winepress of the wrath of God. In Biblical days grapes were trampled by foot in a trough which had a duct leading to a lower basin where the juice collected. The treading of grapes was a familiar figure for the execution of divine wrath upon the enemies of God. In Isaiah 63.3 God the warrior returns from Edom with his garments stained as one who has been treading in the winevat. He says, "I have trodden the winepress alone ... I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments" (cf. Lam

1.15; Joel 3.13; Rev 19.15). The vintage of the earth is a collective expression for all who by their obstinate refusal to embrace righteousness have made themselves the enemies of God (Mounce, p. 282).

This judgment is located outside the city, as was the execution of Jesus (Hebrews 13.12). Unjustly condemned, Jesus was treated as one unclean and blameworthy. He was put to death, the innocent for the guilty. He drank the cup of God's judgment to its bitter dregs and, enduring the winepress of God's wrath, he bore our sins and absorbed the punishment due us so that we might be clothed in the purity of his of righteousness. When the moment of final retribution comes, it likewise will be outside the gate and all those who have rejected the Son will experience God's righteous wrath because they have chosen for themselves, by reason of their impenitence and ingratitude, their eternal destruction (cp. Philip Hughes, *Revelation*, 167).

John says that the blood of the impenitent flowed out of the winepress to a height of a horse's bridle and continued for about 184 miles (1600 stadia), that is, the approximate size of Palestine. Although some have attempted to interpret this literally it seems obvious that it is figurative number representing the full-orbed judgment of God upon the reprobate. It is the number of the earth, four (four corners of the earth [20.8]; the four winds [7.1]), squared, multiplied by the number of completeness, ten (5.11), squared. It means that God's judgment is complete and all men everywhere will be subject to it. No one shall escape!

FOREBEARANCE OF GOD (2 Corinthians 6.1-2)

There is a season of gracious forbearance wherein God affords men and women the opportunity to repent of their sins. He was patient with the unregenerate inhabitants of Canaan, just as he was with Israel. After the reign of Solomon, when Israel was divided into the northern and southern tribes, God patiently endured the disobedience of Israel (ten northern tribes). He graciously warned them of impending judgment (Hosea and Amos). While Judah (the two Southern tribes) languished in captivity, God patiently endured their neglect by giving them both encouragement and warning (Daniel and Ezekiel, i.e. *Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the sovereign Lord. Repent and live* [Ezekiel 18.31]). The pattern of Scripture is this: If after a season of grace there is no repentance, God will bring judgment upon the unrepentant (Exodus 33.34; Numbers 14.26f). When that great day of wrath comes there will be no turning to the Lord, for the day of grace will have passed (2 Corinthians 6.1-2).

God warns sinners through the teaching of the prophets, apostles, and supremely through the prophetic ministry of Jesus to repent of their sin and receive forgiveness of sin through the atoning work of Christ. When it becomes apparent that the warning judgments of God have produced no thawing of the heart, Scripture records that God will give people up to the natural effect of their sin (e.g., Judges; Romans 1.24). If this

“mercy” also fails to produce repentance, God will destroy them (e.g., Jude 5-7, 14-15). This frightening pattern is obvious throughout Scripture (Ezekiel 33.11; Isaiah 42.8; 48.11; cp. Hebrews 12.10). The unbeliever is warned of his sinful behavior (Romans 1.24; Exodus 10.27), and the believer cautioned to test his actions (2 Corinthians 13.5). The Bible is replete with these warnings of judgment, not because God desires men and women to live in fear (2 Timothy 1.7), but that they may not be subject to God’s judgment (Matthew 10.28). History has a record of temporal judgments, but the Bible warns of a great day of God’s final judgment when the Lord Jesus Christ will return to judge the living and the dead. As this day approaches, there will be an increase of wickedness (1 Timothy 4.1-2).

Since we have such a sure word from the Lord, it is expedient for the believer both to take heart in his patient endurance of affliction resulting from his faithful perseverance in righteousness, and to take warning of any temptation to follow the way of the world. Indeed, the day of the Lord is nearer than when we first believed; moreover, no man knows the hour of his judgment. Consequently, none who name Christ as savior can afford to be lax in his calling.