

**“Judgment”**  
**John 5:19-30**

**January 25, 2015**

**SI:** John writes that the purpose of this Gospel is that you may know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The passage we’re about to read is a discourse by Jesus about himself,  
a sermon about himself. He makes remarkable claims.

These few verses are packed full of profound theology.

The deity of Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, regeneration.

You could preach a dozen sermons on them, and some preachers have.

But we’re going to focus on the last thing Jesus mentions—  
his appointment as the Judge of all people.

**INTRO:** A few years ago I was on an airplane  
and stuck up a conversation with the older couple sitting with me.  
He was a law professor at a state university and the wife proudly informed me  
that they were Unitarian-Universalists.  
I told her I had never met a Unitarian-Universalist  
and would she please tell me what they believed.

So she launched into their doctrine, and the very first thing she said was:  
We don’t believe in hell or judgment.  
We don’t believe God judges anybody.  
We believe he accepts everybody.  
And then she went on to explain more of their beliefs and a big part of it  
had to do with a helping the oppressed and the marginalized.

I was praying that the Lord would give me wisdom to say something  
that pointed them to Christ in some way.  
So when she was done, I asked her: Is justice important to you?  
And she replied: Of course, haven’t you heard what I’ve said.  
Unitarian-Universalists are greatly concerned with justice.  
We believe in justice for the oppressed and the marginalized, and all those  
who have been hurt by patriarchy and right-wing religion and capitalism.

So I said: But how can you believe in justice

if God doesn't judge anybody and accepts everybody?

It seems like your core beliefs are in conflict.

She said: What do you mean?

If God doesn't judge anyone, if he accepts everybody and doesn't send anybody to hell, then there can never be justice. Most oppressors get away with it in this life, and when they die they will get away with it for eternity.

So if you don't believe God judges anyone, then there can't be justice.

She got quiet and the wheels were turning. Then she said: I see what you mean.

I'm going to put that in my box of contradictions and shut the lid.

And that was that. She didn't want to talk about it any more.

Maybe some day another believer will pick up the conversation and explain how Jesus Christ will one day judge the world with justice.

I think there are lots of people like her.

Not Unitarian-Universalists, there aren't many of those—

What I mean is that there are lots of people who want justice, but the don't want God to judge the world.

When I read news stories on the internet, I like to look at the comments.

If the news story is about the latest atrocity by terrorists, child-abusers, rapists, or even if it's about white-collar criminals, the comments are things like— burn 'em, kill 'em, lock them up and throw away key.

It is a universal human longing. The world makes no sense if there is no justice.

And even closer to daily life, people talk about situations in terms of justice.

They think it's unfair that good, honest people work hard and can never get ahead, but unworthy, selfish people have it made.

That a fine, clean-cut young man, with the college scholarship is killed in a wreck, but the drunk driver who caused the accident walks away without a scratch.

Where's the justice? Lots of people want justice.

But like the woman on the airplane, they don't want a Judge.

They want justice, but they don't want God to judge the world .

They can talk all day about securing justice for the oppressed, and meting out justice for the oppressor.

But they don't want to talk about how Jesus Christ is going to judge the world.

Why is that? Because if there is a Judge, then I'm going to be judged.  
And God doesn't judge on a curve, he's going to judge justly.  
And deep down, because the law of God written on my heart, know in trouble.  
I haven't loved my neighbor as myself. Done unto others as would have do to me.

It's not just Universalist Unitarians who lock judgment in their box of contradictions and throw away the key.  
The doctrine of judgment has almost fallen out of sight in the American church.  
But it looms large in the Bible. And here it is before us in the words of Christ.  
This has to be part of our thinking and worldview as Christians.

So let's look at the doctrine of judgment from three perspectives:  
Future, Past, and Present.

### **MP#1 The future aspect of judgment**

The Bible says it a hundred times: There is going to be a judgment day.  
The curtain is going to come down right in the middle of the play.  
God is going to break in to history and call all people to account.  
Jesus tells us two important things about the day judgment.

First, it will be just. He says in verse 30: My judgment will be just.  
The way Paul describes it in Romans 3 is that every mouth will be stopped.  
In other words, on that day, as Christ metes out justice,  
no one will be able make any excuses or explain away or justify,  
because the reality and truth of it all will be so plain.

C.S. Lewis put it this way:

We have all encountered judgments or verdicts on ourselves in this life. Every now and then we discover what our fellow creatures really think of us. I don't of course mean what they tell us to our faces: that we usually have to discount. I am thinking of what we sometimes overhear by accident or of the opinions about us which our neighbors and employees or subordinates unknowingly reveal.

Has that ever happened to you before?

You hear people talking about you.

You get an email intended for someone else and it's about you.

When that happens, you find out how you really come across to people. Lewis says that experience might be sweet or it might be bitter, depending on what they are saying about you.

Then Lewis makes this connection:

I suppose the experience of the final judgment will be like these little experiences, but magnified to the Nth. For it will be infallible judgment. If it is favorable we shall have no fear, if unfavorable, no hope that it is wrong. We shall not only believe, we shall know, beyond doubt in every fiber of our appalled or delighted being, that as the Judge has said, so we are.

The day of judgment will be perfectly just.

Jesus Christ will speak an infallible verdict over every human life, including yours, including mine.

Second, Christ says, judgment will be on the basis of deeds.

He says in verse 29: Those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

For Christians, that statement is troubling, even unsettling.

Because I know that I am profoundly, thoroughly, inexcusably a sinner.

I not only sin every day in thought, word, and deed—  
but even my good deeds are corrupted by sinful motives.

It's also puzzling, because it seems to advocate salvation by works.

We know that's not right. Salvation is by grace through faith.

Bible says that over and over. It's the message of the Gospel.

So why doesn't Jesus say: Those who have trusted in me will rise to live?

Well, he does say that just moments before in verse 24.

Whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned.

So which is it? Salvation by faith or by works? Judgment by faith or works.

Jesus is saying here what the Bible says in dozens of other passages.

He is saying that your deeds are an index to your heart.

What does the index of a book tell you? It tells you what's in the book.

Your deeds are an index to your heart.

You're not saved by your deeds, you're revealed by them.

The fruit on the tree does not give the tree life, it confirms the tree is indeed alive.

Those who are saved on judgment day are not those who say they believe, but only the people who really believe.

And if you really believe it changes your heart, and that changes your life.

That is why the Bible teaches that we cannot claim to be forgiven  
if we are not, at the same time, living a righteous life.

In this world our righteousness is deeply imperfect, but still,  
that is the way the Bible always speaks.

1 John 3:10 This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the  
devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who  
does not love his brother.

Now, we want to qualify that statement.

We want to quickly take the bite and sting out of that statement, which by the way,  
was made by the same John who wrote the Gospel we are studying this morning.  
We don't like to hear such definitive pronouncements about the absolute necessity  
of obedience if we are to stand in the judgment of God.

But such statements are everywhere in the Bible.

We need to feel the weight of them. Even if they make us afraid.

Even if they make us wonder at times if we are really true believers.

They are there to make us take the future reality of judgment seriously.

But we're not going to stop here. This is just part of the picture.

We're going to move on to next point . . .

## **MP#2 The past aspect of judgment**

The past aspect of judgment is Jesus Christ suffered judgment in your place.

He was judged in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, so you can face judgment unafraid.

When Christians talk about Jesus suffering judgment for us, usually mean the cross.

And rightly so, because the cross was the pinnacle of his substitutionary work.

He had to go all the way to death to pay the penalty for our sins.

But it is important to understand that every part of Jesus' suffering was for you.

Have you ever wondered why the Apostles Creed has the line—

Suffered under Pontius Pilate?

Apostles Creed, like all historic creeds was an attempt by the church  
to summarize the Bible's teaching.

Early church was saying: This is the Christian faith in a nutshell.

There are lots of things in the Bible, but these essential truths  
on which our faith stands or falls.

So it's easy to understand why the Apostles Creed says: "born of the virgin Mary"

The virgin birth is a pillar of our faith.  
But why: Suffered under Pontius Pilate?

Because Jesus had to be judged so that he could save people who face judgment.  
What was Pilate's judgment of Jesus?

At most trials, if judge or jury declares not guilty, then acquits.

Or, if declares guilty, sentences to punishment.

Pilate's judgment unique: affirmed Jesus' innocence, then sentenced him to death.

Pilate said, this man is an innocent man, law-keeper, righteous man.

Point is made over and over in Jesus trial.

Pilate knew out of envy Jews had handed him over, he had broken no laws.

His wife's dream. This is an innocent (righteous) man.

"Why?" he asked crowds, "What crime committed?"

"I have found no basis for your charges against him."

"He has done nothing to deserve death."

His hand-washing, I am innocent of man's blood. Nothing wrong.

Pilate's judgment of Jesus was: This is a righteous man.

Then, Pilate condemned him to death. "Handed him over to be crucified."

Pilate's sentenced him to a death reserved for worst kind of criminals.

Jesus was declared righteous, sentenced to death.

By the amazing accounting of God's grace, when you put your faith in Jesus,  
his judgment before Pilate becomes your judgment before God.

If you trust Jesus, believe in him and his sufferings,

then God the Judge will let Jesus' judgment be your judgment.

So that even though you have not kept God's law, a sinner and law-breaker,

God will declare you righteous on account of Jesus' perfect life.

Even though you have not been punished for your sins,

God will forgive you because Jesus already sentenced to death for them.

As the hymn says: You can then face your Judge and Maker unafraid.

Because have already been judged in Christ.

On the day of judgment, the good news for you will be—

that your sentence has already been passed and served.

Your final judgment has already happened:

It happened in a Roman courtroom, downtown Jerusalem, 2000 years ago.

When you affirm: “I believe he suffered under Pontius Pilate”

Say those words with joy. That’s your judgment too. You can face God unafraid. Jesus says in John 5 that the Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son, and that he has given him authority to judge, and that the Son will be the one who summons all people to judgment, even the dead, who come to life at the sound of his voice, and that the Son will receive all honor in the execution of judgment.

The reason Christ has received authority to judge is because he himself suffered the judgment, and he suffered that judgment for you.

That ought to give you great confidence and gratitude as you live before him and await the day when you hear his voice, calling you an all people to stand before him for judgment.

That brings us to the last point . . .

### **MP#3 The present aspect of judgment**

And what I mean by that is simply, how do we live in the light of these things?

We’re not like the Unitarian Universalist on the airplane.

We do believe God judges and that there will be final justice and that all people will be judged according to what they have done. And that makes us tremble.

But at the same time, we know the Judge personally.

We know he has suffered judgment for us, so we live in anticipation of the day.

And we want to please him.

In Randy Alcorn’s book, *In the Light of Eternity*, he has a parable of sorts.

Let me read it to you. A group of travelers were journeying through a kingdom on their way to an audience with the King.

Nick and his fellow travelers were met by the King’s messenger. She gave them burlap sacks and instructions to fill them with stones from the riverbeds they would cross at night. Then she left them with the cryptic words, “In the morning you will be both glad and sad.”

But, in the morning, they were unable to open their bags to see what was inside. In fact, throughout the journey they were only able to open the bags at night when and if they choose to add more stones. Nick was reluctant to follow these apparently senseless instructions. “Isn’t the added weight of these worthless rocks just an unnecessary burden for a weary traveler?,” he wondered. Later, as they finally neared the City, they were met again by the messenger and told

to present their gifts to the King. “Gifts?” the travelers asked. “Yes. The stones you picked up in the riverbeds.

Nick’s heart pounded. He put down his worn sack, just over half-full. He pulled out a stone. It glimmered in the sunlight. “It’s gold!” he said. He reached back into the sack. “Silver! A ruby. Look—two diamonds. An emerald! And this one . . . I’ve never seen anything like it!” Vaguely aware of the others shouting, he looked up to see them rifling through their bags, holding up precious stones in the rosy sunlight. He reached further into his bag and found what he’d thought were some light stones. He pulled them out and stared at them. “They’re not stones at all,” he said. “They’re just crumpled balls of straw.” He turned the bag upside down. One last gem fell out, a small one. The rest was straw and stubble.

The contents from Nick’s sack were then placed on a grate above a raging bonfire. The fire immediately consumed the straw, while it burned off impurities from the gold and silver and gems. They glowed with an otherworldly beauty, and he stared at them breathlessly, held captive by their radiance.

Nick then saw the stones from his companions’ sacks. From one he saw dozens of precious gems, perhaps twenty diamonds and chunks of gold and silver. Another companion, whom Nick has thought of as dull-witted, had filled and carried two sacks in his journey. “Here he was,” Nick discovered, “with three times as many precious stones as I.”

An angel’s voice whispered to Nick: “Choice and consequences. What is done in one world has profound effects on the next.” Then the angels began to forge their fire-refined stones into crowns. “You will cast these at the King’s feet,” the travelers are told. “And sometimes you will wear them. The King and all the citizens of the City will be forever reminded of your faithful service. You will remember the meaning of every stone, and so will he. Elyon’s book says, ‘A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the King and honored his name.’ All your works are recorded here—every cup of cold water given in his name.”

Nick stared at his gemstones and saw animated images within each of them. Pictures that portrayed each of his prayers and other good deeds—some long forgotten—done in service to the King. Finally he understood those cryptic words of the King’s messenger.

The long night was over, and morning was here at last. He looked at the stones he’d picked up, knowing they were his tribute to the King. Seeing them, he’d never felt so glad. Then he thought about all the stones within his reach, all those he could have picked up but didn’t. And he’d never felt so sad.”

You see the point of that allegory, don’t you?

Everywhere you look, stones to be picked up and put in your bag!  
The knowledge that Christ will judge the world is the inspiration and summons



for a zealous life. This is what the Lord is after in us today.  
A new consecration of ourselves to an obedient life of Christian service,  
a life seeking hard after all that pleases him.

And we all know what pleases him. He wants us to grow in grace.

Are you really growing?

Are you more patient than last year, especially with that difficult person?

Are you listening more willingly to the godly counsel of those who love you?

Are you showing more courage to do the hard things God wants you to do—

like forgiving that person who hurt you, or asking forgiveness yourself?

Is your heart softer, is your laugh deeper, are your concerns wider.

Look at your life. The Judge will.

God has appointed a man to judge the world with justice,  
and that man is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you,  
O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.”