

SI: This is a sermon series on the Gospel. We started out by asking:

What is the Gospel?

We saw that in the big picture, the Gospel is everything in the Bible,

it’s the whole grand story of God redeeming this fallen world.

But more specifically, the Gospel is the proclamation of salvation through Christ.

As Peter put it in his message to Cornelius:

Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Last Sunday we asked another question:

Why do we need the Gospel? Why do we need forgiveness of our sins?

We saw that sin is bondage, and the Gospel delivers us from bondage.

But suppose someone says: You can call it bondage if you want,

but I prefer to live with my immorality and my selfishness.

What’s the big deal if that’s the life I want?

INTRO: There’s a scene in *The Matrix* that has become part of popular culture.

It’s when the hero is offered the choice of the red pill or the blue pill.

Take the blue pill and you will continue to live in the world you prefer, the world you’re familiar with and comfortable with.

It’s not real, but that’s ok because it seems real to you.

Or take the red pill and you’ll see reality in all its hard, unvarnished, disturbing truth.

There’s a sense in which my job as a preacher is to serve you a red pill.

It’s to nurture in your minds and in your hearts a perception of reality that is profoundly different from that of the culture that surrounds you in America today.

There are many points at which the biblical worldview clashes with the secular worldview, but the one we’re going to consider today is a big one—

the final judgment.

The Bible says over and over that there will be a day when every person who has ever lived will give an account before God for everything they’ve done.

And as a result of this judgment, the human race will be divided into two and only two eternal companies:

The saved and the lost, the acquitted and the condemned,

the righteous and the wicked, the merry and the miserable,

the sheep and the goats, the living and the dead.

This judgment will be executed by Jesus Christ himself.

He's the eternal Son of God, so knows everything about everyone.

The standard of judgment will be God's law, written on the heart of every person. Every sinner who does not find forgiveness with God through faith in God's Son who gave himself to death for our sins will be punished. The Gospel is good news that everyone who believes in Christ will be acquitted on the day of judgment and will enter into eternal life.

We live in a culture in which the of a day of judgment never even enters the minds of many people as a possibility.

Many people truly believe that they make their own truth and decide own destiny.

So the idea that they will be judged by someone else's standard and their eternal destiny decided by someone else, that as far-fetched as the tooth fairy.

In addition, our culture is tolerant, relativistic, non-judgmental, pleasure-seeking.

So judgment is offensive, undemocratic, intolerant and a violation of civil rights.

Many Americans do believe in heaven and hell in some sense, at least polls say so.

But the vast majority are so sure they are going to heaven because of their goodness that the day of judgment is totally irrelevant.

And if they sense even the mildest challenge to their self-perception, and even a whiff of the idea that they may not be saved, they react with indignation.

But if there is no day of judgment, then there is no Gospel.

What is salvation if there is nothing to be saved from?

What is the cross if there is no punishment Christ had to suffer in our place?

What is heaven if it is not an alternative to hell?

Why urge people to believe in Jesus if unbelief poses no danger?

But there is a day of judgment coming—

as hard and unvarnished and disturbing as that truth may be.

And believing that makes the message that you can be acquitted on that day truly good news.

Let's look at this under three points.

1. The revelation of judgment in Scripture
2. The revelation of judgment in experience
3. The good news of acquittal from judgment

MP#1 The revelation of judgment in Scripture

I picked these verses in John 5 as my sermon text, but I could have chosen any

number of passages, because judgment woven throughout the Bible, Gen-Rev. Genesis 3, God warns Adam and Eve of judgment:

If you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you will surely die. Revelation, well, that's what most of the book is about.

Let's ask some questions: **Why will there be a day of judgment?**

Because God is the judge of all the earth.

Genesis 18 says: Will not the judge of all the earth do right?

We expect human judges to do right. We hate it when they don't.

It's a violation of their office to ignore the law and acquit the guilty.

God must be true to his just and holy character.

His good law has been broken,

His good world has been corrupted.

Exodus 34 says the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished.

Another question: **What will be the standard on the day of judgment?**

It will be God's law written on the human heart.

In other words, it will be a standard that every human being knows.

Paul spells it out clearly in Romans 2

When Gentiles, who do not have the law (he means the Ten Commandments) do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

Jesus himself stated it even more simply in the Sermon on the Mount:

With the standard you judge, you shall be judged.

Another question: **How will the day of judgment happen?**

It will happen suddenly. It's described as a sudden catastrophe.

The two great Old Testament foreshadowings of the day of judgment were

Noah's flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

One day it was dry, the next day it began to rain.

One day it was business as usual, the next day burning sulfur rained down.

Although people were warned, it caught them unaware.

Jesus describes the day of judgment in his parables as a thief in the night, a rooster crowing, a shout that awakens people who have been asleep.

In the passage we read in John 5, Jesus describes it as an hour,

which even heightens the sense of suddenness. When the hour strikes it comes.

Another question: **Who will face the day of judgment?**

Everyone will.

Revelation lists seven classes of people facing judgment, number of completeness.

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"

Kings will stand next to their subjects on judgment day, masters and slaves, princes, celebrities, the glittering people next to the ordinary people.

Paul asks a question in Romans: Why do you judge your brother? Why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

Everything that created distinctions and gave certain people advantages over other people will be meaningless on that day.

Prophet Zephaniah says:

Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD's wrath.

Just one more question: **Who will execute the day of judgment?**

The Old Testament says God, more specifically the Lord, Yahweh.

Throughout the Old Testament it's called the Day of Yahweh.

The New Testament gives sharpens the picture and tells us that it is actually Jesus Christ who will carry out the judgment.

Paul told the Athenians in Acts 17.

God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

The early church included this in the Apostles Creed.

The third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

We don't have time for questions about the signs preceding the day of judgment.

Or question about the outcome of the day of judgment—

heaven or hell, eternal life or the second death, glory or shame.

We've barely scratched the surface. This teaching permeates the Bible.

The day when God will judge the world through Christ is fundamental to the vision of reality that Scripture presents.

But let's not stop here, let's now look at . . .

MP#2 The revelation of judgment in experience

Not only does the Bible tell us over and over there is a day of judgment,

many points of human experience also affirm it. Got this list from Rayburn.

1. The law of retribution. A man reaps what he sows.

I opened a letter this week and there was fine for speeding in a town in Tennessee.

67 miles per hour in a 55 zone. I thought, wait a minute. I haven't been there.

I looked at the second page and there was a photo of our Honda CRV which is registered to me, but guess who was driving? Will. Guess who gets the ticket?

Infidelity ruins your marriage.

Misuse of alcohol leads to addiction and bondage.

Patterns of speech and patterns of behavior that you form early in life bring you and other people pain for years.

Unkindness, indifference, and even self-pity destroy the respect people have for you and make you a lonely person without friends.

Misbehaviors of all kinds dog us all our lives.

We cannot escape them. We are in their grip and we suffer their judgment.

This world rings with judgment. Why should it be different in the world to come?

2. On the other hand, there is often significant lag between misbehavior and consequences. Look at the Jeffrey Epstein case, abusing girls for years, even getting a slap on the wrist, but now finally wheels of justice are turning.

A drunk does not immediately find himself with cirrhosis of the liver.

A philanderer sometimes escapes the consequence of infidelities for a long time.

A lazy person does not always immediately suffer the loss of the rewards that come from hard work. It often takes time for our sins to find us out and for consequences to catch up to our moral failures. In the meantime, think escaped.

3. A related observation, all sins are not punished in this life.

When I was in seminary one of my fellow students was murdered.

The case was never solved. There are over 10,000 unsolved murderers in LA.

But even more to the point, most of the evil things done by people to other people aren't criminal acts they could be arrested for anyway.

How many husbands have blasted the hopes and dreams of wives.

And how many wives have made their husbands' lives miserable.

How many children have had to bear terrible burdens in life because of what their parents or some other adult did to them or never did for them.

When people are on the receiving end of this kind of unpunished evil, they long that somehow, some way justice will be done.

4. And related to that is the fact that all people make moral judgments.

Someone recently called social media: a vast universe of moral condemnation.

People judging people. People outraged at other people.

What they said or didn't say or what they did or didn't do.

Some of this is a matter of different personal opinion, but the most important

moral judgments are universal.

Even thieves and murderers are offended when they are lied to, or their property is stolen, or when people tell lies about them, or when they get cheated on, or when their people are assaulted or murdered.

If it wasn't God who wrote his law on the heart, it's hard to explain why a moral code exists in every person and why we apply it to everyone else's conduct.

Some people say it came from evolution or our animal instincts.

But if that's the case then morality is just random and arbitrary.

And that means love is meaningless, justice, goodness, badness—all meaningless.

Whatever people say about this when they are philosophizing, everyone makes moral judgments and cares deeply about them.

So doesn't it make sense that the person who wrote these laws on the heart of mankind also cares deeply about them and will ensure justice is done.

5. We're still not done. Another observation about life is that catastrophes happen.

Sudden, terrible, life-ending events—Twenty people murdered in Walmart.

Sometimes there are civilization-ending events—Vesuvius burying Pompeii, a whole city wiped out. We could list hundreds throughout human history.

So its entirely believable that there will be one final catastrophe orchestrated by God to judge the world.

There are some people who worry about such an event all the time,

but instead of believing God will do it, they think it will come through global warming or nuclear war or something like that.

There are probably other things we could list, but the point is that there is plenty of evidence in human experience that points to the reality of a final judgment.

But it's a hard, unpleasant truth that secular culture would rather ignore.

And, of course, there's a spiritual element.

From the very beginning the Devil has been working hard to convince people that it won't happen. Remember the lie he told Adam and Eve?

You will not surely die. That lie continues to be repeated.

But by God's grace, some people see the truth about judgment and then embrace with all their hearts . . .

MP#3 The good news of acquittal from judgment

You might be familiar with Christopher Hitchens, the famous atheist writer who died a few years ago. He has a brother name Peter who is a Christian.

He was an unbeliever until one afternoon, while he was on a vacation in France, he went to see a famous 15th century painting of the Last Judgment.

Imagine something like Michelangelo's Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel.

Peter Hitchens was just going to see this painting as an art lover.

But something happened as he was staring at it:

I simply had no idea that an adult could be frightened, in broad daylight, and after a good lunch, by such things . . . a large catalogue of [my] misdeeds, ranging from the embarrassing to the appalling, replayed themselves rapidly in my head. I had absolutely no doubt that I was among the damned if there were any damned.

And that began his journey to Christ.

It has always been God's plan for the Son to come to earth twice.

The first time he came as a little baby. Born in Bethlehem, in a stable.

Mary laid him in the manger.

Jesus lived a life of perfect, humble obedience to God in every way.

Then, even though good, he died on the cross and while he was hanging there he suffered in those three hours of darkness the wrath of God for sin.

If you repent of your sins, put your faith and trust in Jesus—give life to Him.

Then his death on the cross is counted as your death.

And his perfect obedience of God's law is counted as your obedience.

That means that when Jesus Christ comes the second time—

not as a little baby but as the Judge of all the earth,

you will stand on that day—you will not suffer total loss.

God's holy judgment against all lawbreaking cannot touch you.

Because in God's books—your sin has already been punished by death.

And in God's eyes—when he looks at you he sees the perfect obedience of Christ.

So you can read the promises of the coming Day of the Lord, and you can simultaneously tremble and rejoice.

You can tremble at God's wrath for sin, and know that you deserve that wrath, and you can rejoice at the deliverance you have in Christ.

The promises of the Day of the Lord cause you to shudder and therefore love Jesus more for having delivered you from all of that.

That is good news not just for the future, but it's good news for you right now.

Because it means the biggest problem of your life is already solved.

You've been acquitted beforehand for judgment day.

That puts every other problem in your life in its proper perspective.

If you truly believe the good news, that you've been forgiven through Christ and that he will acquit and vindicate you on that day—then nothing can rattle you.

If you know that the big problem of your life is solved,
then that gives you power for facing all the lesser problems.
Here's my go to J.C. Ryle quote. I've read it many times.

(For the Christian) “the great business of life is a settled business, the great debt a paid debt, the great disease a healed disease, and the great work a finished work; and all other business, diseases, debts and works are then by comparison small. (This) makes him patient in tribulation, calm under bereavements, unmoved in sorrow, not afraid of evil tidings, in every condition content; for it gives him a fixedness of heart. It sweetens his bitter cups; it lessens the burden of his crosses; it smooths the rough places over which he travels; it lightens the valley of the shadow of death. It makes him always feel that he has something solid beneath his feet and something firm under his hands—a sure friend by the way, and a sure home at the end.”

What are the circumstances and situations in your life that are troubling you?

What are the tribulations, bereavements, sorrows, evil tidings, bitter cups, crosses and rough places that you are suffering right now?

For someone who doesn't believe the good news, those are gloomy foreshadowings of the day of judgment. They are appetizers for hell.

But for everyone who believes the Gospel—yes those things hurt—
but Jesus Christ has promised to deliver you on the day of judgment,
so those things can't do you permanent harm.

The big problem of your life—the problem of sin and judgment has been solved
by Jesus Christ. As you believe that, it gives you power to face all
the lesser problems.