

“Our Righteous King Is the Just Judge” – Revelation Part 17
Revelation 20:11-15

Once, there was a man who purchased a case of rare cigars and insured them against ... fire [P]. Before he had made a single payment on the policy, he smoked every last one of those 24 cigars, and then he filed a claim with the insurance company stating that he had lost the cigars in "a series of small fires." The insurance company denied the claim, citing the obvious reason that the man had consumed the cigars in a normal fashion. So the man sued the insurance company – and won! The judge ruled that, since the man held a policy from the company in which it had warranted that the cigars were insurable, and also guaranteed that it would insure the cigars against fire, without defining what it considered to be "unacceptable fire," it was obligated to compensate the insured for his loss. Rather than endure a lengthy appeal process, the insurance company paid the man \$15,000 for the cigars. But after the man cashed the check, the insurance company had him arrested ... for 24 counts of arson!

By the way, that's not a true story. It's an urban legend tracing back to the 1960's; even Brad Paisley did a country song memorializing it. But it's popularity says something about poetic justice. Someone tries to dupe others out of 1000's of dollars, but ultimately pays the price for his arrogance, deception and greed.

There's something inside of all of us that says that there must be a day of judgment. A day when the corrupt, those who abuse power, who prey on the weak, who oppress the poor, who diminish or destroy everyone they touch ... must be brought to justice.

And the Word of God assures us that, yes, there is going to be a day of judgment: Hebrews 9:27 – We *“are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”* 2 Cor. 5:10 – *“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”*

As our passage shows us, everyone who has ever lived and died will stand before the throne of Christ the King. John describes the scene: *“I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it ... And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the*

throne, and books were opened ... The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books." (vs. 11-12)

This revelation of the reigning Jesus is clear: One day, you and I will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Now, plenty of people are content to know about this day of judgement, while at the same time thinking that they themselves are NOT going to have to face it.

Years ago, US News & World Report took a survey and found that approx. 87% of those interviewed believed they were going to heaven. But many of the same people didn't believe that they'd have to face judgment. That's because, in the minds of so very many, judgment is for evil people (and they were of course excluded from this).

They are like the boy who was doing poorly in school. One day, he approached his teacher's desk and said, "I don't want to alarm you, but my daddy says if I don't get better grades, somebody is going to get a spanking." [P] Now, who did that boy think was going to get a spanking? (The teacher) Why? Because the boy didn't think he deserved punishment ... but he was pretty sure the teacher did.

When it comes to the final judgment, there are those who believe they'll get a pass. Atheists presume there won't be a judgment; since there is no righteous creator or king to whom they are accountable, they will simply cease to be. [P]

Some eastern religions believe in reincarnation – that they'll come back again & again until reaching nirvana, the ultimate state when one is released from repeated rebirth.

Then there's the vast number of people who admit that they've done some bad things, like everybody else, but that does not make them bad people deserving of judgement.

Now, why would people believe that? What would make them conclude that they are basically good? [P] Because they compare themselves with those around them. And when people compare themselves with others – those they don't like or who have done that which is inexcusable in their eyes – they usually come out looking pretty good.

As one person observed: *"Rare is the person who can weigh the faults of others without putting his thumb on the scale."* (Byron J. Langnefield)

Or, as Paul tells us in 2 Cor. 10:12, *“When [people] measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.”*

Why not? Why aren't they wise? Because they're using the wrong set of standards. When we declare ourselves good by comparing ourselves to someone else, we're using a faulty set of scales. [P] On the last day, when we come into the presence of Christ the King, we're not going to be able to compare ourselves with somebody else. There will be multitudes of people all around, but all you'll see is Him. And the righteousness of the One who reigns will be overpowering.

When Isaiah was in the temple, he said: *“I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple ... The seraphim were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook ... “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty!” (6:1-5)*

When Isaiah saw the King of Glory, he didn't think about comparing himself with his neighbor. He didn't compare himself with those in the news. All Isaiah could see was the holiness of God. And that holiness shook him to the core. Why? Because the King, the Lord Almighty, is righteous; but he was not.

Ps. 130:3 – *“If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand?”* At the final judgment, before the great white throne, we will behold the righteous Ruler of all. For us to come into His presence depending on our own righteousness would be pure folly.

Isaiah 64:6 says, *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”* Job rightly asks the question: *“How, then, can a man be righteous before God?” (25:4)*

In the Gospels, we read about a rich man who came to Jesus and asked: *“What good things must I do to get eternal life?”* Jesus responds, *“Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only One who is good.” (Matt. 19:16-17)*

The rich man came to Jesus believing he could be good enough to get into heaven. He lived by the theology that if he did enough good things, that when judgment came, he

could tip his hat to God and walk right on in. He believed his own righteousness would get him in the gate.

But the Bible repeatedly teaches: All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. [P] Many are feeling the pressure of that judgment even now.

Years ago, I was having a conversation with someone who was not a Christian. We were talking about anger and bitterness and the damage it can do to people. As I often do, I was illustrating my point with Scripture, when all of a sudden he got very angry: “Quit telling me your God-stories!” Then he made a bizarre comment: “My mother was a righteous person. My father was a righteous person. And I’m a righteous person.” But I hadn’t said anything about his parents. I hadn’t said anything about his personal righteousness. I was a little puzzled that he was upset with my “God-stories” (I am a preacher after all). But later it occurred to me that, in the scriptures and stories I shared with him, he sensed a threat to his own belief in his “rightness.” The righteousness of God was convicting him, and he wasn’t comfortable with it. [P]

Revelation 20 tells us that *everybody* is going to be there at the judgment. It says the books will be opened and “the dead will be judged according to what they have done.”

Now, that’s kind of scary! I’m not sure I want everybody to hear about all the things I’ve done/thought/said. Our lives, our past, our failures being an open book would *not* bring feelings of security to most people, I’d imagine. If *this* was the final word for us, then yes, it would be something we would NOT look forward to. It would be something to dread, something to flee, even though we’d know such attempts would be short-lived

But thanks be to God, this is not the final word for all. Look again at Revelation 20:12 – “*And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life.*”

Book of life? What’s this book of life? Outside of Revelation, the “book of life” is mentioned just a couple times; but as we will see, it is a VERY important book.

In Revelation 13:8, we’re told: “*The inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was*

slain from the creation of the world.” The book of life belongs to the Lamb who was slain. The book of life belongs to Christ Jesus the King.

In Psalm 69:28, David speaks of the wicked: *“May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.”* Only those God counts as “righteous” will be listed in this book of life. But we have already established that there is no one righteous but God. That’s right. But God’s Word to us does not end there.

Paul tells the church at Philippi *“Help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life”* (4:3). In other words, everyone who belongs to Jesus is in that book.

To the one who believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Lamb who bore the sin of the world, the Living One who conquered the grave; the Righteous One who rules in heaven – your name is in his book. To the one who turns from sin’s deadly power, who trusts in Christ’s redeeming work, who surrenders to his supremacy – your name is in his book.

Rom 4:7-8 – *“Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”* If you are listed in the Lamb’s book of life; it is not your name that is blotted out, it is your sins! God will never count them against us ever again. [Pause]

God’s Word is clear. A day is coming when everyone who has ever lived will come before the throne of the Just Judge, the Eternal King. There will be many who will be “judged according to what they have done as recorded in the books” – those who have chosen the *righteousness of self*, rather than receive the *righteousness of Christ*.

But for those who belong to the Lamb – the Bride, who He has made radiant at the cost of his very life – ours is a different story. As Galatians 3:27 says, *“All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”* You and I won’t stand before the Lord Almighty with the old rags of our past sins. We will stand before Him robed in garments of righteousness – the righteousness of the One *slain*, the righteousness of the One *risen*, the righteousness of the One *reigning* now and forever.

A man told of a dream he had: "I was sitting on a bench in the waiting room of what appeared to be a courthouse. The doors opened and I was instructed to have a seat at the defense table. I looked to my left and there sat my Defender, a kind-looking man whose appearance seemed familiar.

The corner door opened and there appeared the judge in full flowing robes. He commanded an awesome presence. He took his seat and said, "Let us begin."

The prosecutor rose and proceeded to reveal the lies that I told; the times that I cheated others; the horrible things that were once in my life. The more he spoke, the further down in my seat I sank. He finished with a fury: "This man belongs in hell, he is guilty of all that I have charged and there is not a person who can prove otherwise."

Then my Defender rose. And as he rose, I became aware of his power and majesty. I suddenly realized why he was so familiar. This was Jesus defending me, my Lord, my Deliverer. He addressed the court: "The one who accuses is correct; this man has sinned. The wages of sin is death, and this man deserves the sentence."

But then he added, "However, I died so that this man might live. He has surrendered to me as Lord; he has embraced my redeeming work; he has rejoiced in my perfect love. He is mine. His name is written in the Lamb's book of life. I took his judgement, that he could receive my grace."

As my Defender stood next to me, he concluded, "There is nothing else that needs to be done. I've done it all." [P] The Just Judge declared: "The penalty for this man has already been paid in full. He is free."

I asked my Defender, "Have you ever lost a case?" Jesus just smiled and said, "Everyone that has come to me and asked me to represent them has received the same verdict as you: Paid in Full."

Dorothy Sayers observed: "*If men will not understand the meaning of judgment, they will never come to understand the meaning of grace.*" Do you understand the meaning of judgment? Do you understand the meaning of grace?

This morning, we invite you to receive the grace of the Great Deliverer, the Strong Defender, the Righteous King. He has conquered sin and death. He is risen and reigning. He is coming again. Do not trust in your righteousness any longer. Trust in the righteousness of Christ alone. It is in Jesus that we find freedom, that we find forgiveness, that we find eternal life. Put your trust in the Lord Almighty. Put your trust in the Lamb.