

# HE WILL COME TO JUDGE

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Resources for Christ-Centered Discipleship

Last Wednesday, NBC began a new TV miniseries titled *Revelations*, based very, very loosely on the biblical book of *Revelation*. It is not biblically accurate, but it is an imaginative story of what it might be like if the end of history were upon us. The first episode was a huge success. It had 15.6 million viewers among the 18-to-49-year-olds that NBC targets.

It's full of special effects and a kind of X-File-style dark drama and mystery. But at least part of the draw was the theme. Many people have always been deeply intrigued by the Bible's prophecies about the end of history and the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The Bible says a lot about the Second Coming, and that's why it's part of the Apostles' Creed. But when the Bible speaks about the return of Christ, it is not primarily concerned with the intriguing mysteries that surround the details of the end of history. It is primarily concerned with the implications of the Second Coming for the lives of people like us today.

The Apostles' Creed doesn't take a stand on one particular school of interpretation of Bible prophecy. It calls us all to a shared affirmation of faith in the central theme of the Second Coming. After affirming that Christ died for our sins, rose again on the third day, and ascended to the right hand of God in heaven, it simply says, "From there he will come to judge the living and the dead."

One thing that the creed says and is clear in the Bible is that . . .

### **Jesus Christ *Will* Come Again**

In 2 Timothy 4, the apostle Paul is encouraging Timothy, whom he has been mentoring. In verse 1 he says, "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge." Notice the interesting word Paul uses to describe the second coming of Christ. He calls it His appearing.

### **Three Greek Words Are Used in the Bible to Describe the Second Coming**

*The word used here is epiphaneia, which means "an appearing."* It stresses the idea that the Second Coming will be visible.

*A second word often used in the Bible for the second coming of Christ is apokalypsis, which means an unveiling or revealing.* This is the word from which we get the title of the book of Revelation. The idea behind the Second Coming as an unveiling, or revelation, is that the glory that belongs to Christ because of who He is and because of His dying for our sins, rising from the dead, and ascending to the right hand of God, is not apparent to the world right now, but when He appears, that will be unveiled and revealed.

*The third Greek word used in the Bible for the second coming of Christ is parousia, which simply means “coming, arrival, or presence.” It was especially used in the days of the Bible for the arrival of kings and emperors. What it tells us is that the Second Coming will be just that--the definite, personal arrival, or coming, of Christ. It will be the return of the king.*

### **All Three of These Words Are Used to Describe the Same Event**

The Scriptures talk about the Second Coming in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, saying. “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.” The lawless one is an individual human being who embodies rebellion against God. He is the one sometimes called the Antichrist, the ultimate expression of satanic opposition to everything Jesus Christ stands for, embodied in one powerful person at the end of human history as we know it.

Second Thessalonians 2:8 says the Lord Jesus will destroy him “by the splendor of his coming.” The word “splendor” is *epiphaneia*, His “appearing.” The word “coming” is *parousia*. Why do they translate *appearance* as “splendor”? Well, if they just said by the “appearance” of His coming, it wouldn't be clear that what will make the appearance of His coming so powerful is its splendor.

*The crucial truths of the second coming of Christ are clear. His coming will be an epiphaneia, a visible appearance. It will be an apokalysis, an unveiling of His power and glory. It will be a parousia--the Lord will come personally.*

The coming will be accompanied by the resurrection of the dead, and at the same time living believers will be transformed and caught up to meet Christ to return with Him as He comes in triumph from heaven.

*The Bible tells us to expect the Second Coming, but it does not say that we are to try to figure out the time or set the date. Jesus says no one knows the time, but His coming is what we who believe in Christ are to look for, hope for, and expect. Titus 2:13 reads, “We wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing [epiphaneia] of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ will come again.*

Of course, that's not all the Bible says about the subject, and it's not all that we confess in the Apostles' Creed. We also need to understand that. . .

### **When He Comes, He Will Judge the Living and the Dead**

Second Timothy 4:1 speaks of “the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead.”

When I was a child, for a while we went to a church in which we said the Apostles' Creed each Sunday, but we used an older version of the Creed. This part of the creed went like this: "He ascended into heaven from whence he will come to judge the quick and the dead." Like a lot of children, I imagine, I used to think this meant some people are trying to get away from Him, but He's not only going to catch the slow ones, He's going to catch the quick ones too.

What it actually means is that He will judge everyone. All who have ever lived, those who died long ago and those who are still living when Christ returns, all have to face Christ and His judgment at some point.

The idea of judgment of any kind is not popular, but it is more important than most people realize. If you go to one of the big bookstore chains, you will find books with titles such as *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. You will not often find best-selling books with titles like *The Judgment of God on Your Soul*. A lot of people would like to do away with the idea of judgment altogether.

One modern writer has a very interesting insight into the importance of faith in the judgment of God. A Croatian philosopher and theologian named Miroslav Volf, he teaches at Yale University. In a book called *Exclusion and Embrace*, he writes:

My thesis is that the practice of non-violence requires a belief in divine vengeance. . . . Violence thrives today secretly nourished by the belief that God refuses to take up the sword. It takes the quiet of a suburb for the birth of the thesis that human non-violence is the result of God who *refuses* to judge. In a scorched land soaked in the blood of the innocent that idea will invariably die like other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind. If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end of violence, that God would not be worthy of our worship.

He is saying if you want to get people who have truly suffered at the hands of others to resist the urge to take revenge and create a cycle of violence, you must have a faith that believes in the just judgment of God. People who have been the victims of gross injustice value the belief that there is a God who will judge with righteous judgment. Only in the quiet of a very sheltered society would good people see the judgment of God as a problem instead of a solution and a hope.

The judgment of God is important. The judgment of God may not be popular with our culture but it is clearly taught in the Scriptures.

### **What Do We Know About the Judgment of God?**

*Everyone will face the judgment of God.* Both believers and nonbelievers, Christians and non-Christians, will all face His judgment. The apostle Paul is writing to Christians when he says in Romans 14:10, "We will all stand before God's judgment seat."

That truth that is sobering and serious. But what a lot of us don't really think about is that if you do away with the idea of accountability to God, the logical conclusion is that life and what we do with it really do not matter much.

Arthur Miller, who recently died, was a famous playwright. In one of his plays, called *After the Fall*, a character says:

For years I looked at life like a case at law. . . . When you are young, you prove how brave you are or how smart you are and also what a good lover you are. Then later you have to prove what a good father you are, what a good husband you are. Finally you try to prove how wise you are, how powerful you are, how successful you are. . . . All I knew is I would be justified or I would be condemned for what I had done. There would be a verdict anyway. I think that my disaster really began when I looked up one day and the bench was empty, no judge in sight, and all that remained, I realized, was . . . pointless litigation of existence before an empty bench, which is of course another way of saying: despair.

Now, a lot that he says is wrong, but here's a person who rejects God, and at first he feels liberated. But one day it hits him: If there is no God and therefore no judge, then there is no one on the bench to give a verdict on anything. There is only endless litigation, an endless argument within our hearts and with each other about what is right and wrong and good and important. Those arguments are meaningless because there is no ultimate judge in the universe, so you never ever get a verdict on anything. What seems like total liberation ends up being totally meaningless. When this dawned on him, he said it was the beginning of his despair and disaster.

The modern world wants to get rid of the idea of God's judgment, but here's a modern author saying that without God's judgment you not only have no answer for human violence, but you have no meaning for life itself.

The Bible says there is a judge, justice will one day prevail, and life is incredibly meaningful. There is a judge who will one day make clear the quality of all of our decisions and the value of all our actions. Everything you do is meaningful, for everything you do, you are accountable for. Your life has been entrusted to you by God and what you do with it will one day be evaluated by God. Everybody will face His judgment.

### **The Judgment of God Will Reveal the Truth About Us**

In Luke 12:2-3 Jesus says: "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs."

A lot of us, maybe all of us to some degree, keep up an outward appearance that is different from our real selves. But God knows you totally. Romans 2:16 says that God will judge men's secrets. You might as well be honest with God, because He knows the whole, the deep truth, anyway.

God's judgment will look at what has gone on in our lives in order to demonstrate the reality of what is deep in our hearts.

## **Faith in Jesus Christ Enables You to Face the Judgment of God**

### **Without Fear of Condemnation**

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). If you believe in Christ, if you have received Him as your Lord and Savior, then any and all condemnation that your sins deserve has already been experienced by Christ on the cross. When Jesus died, He suffered to pay the penalty for our sins. As far as the issue of condemnation is concerned, Christ experienced our judgment for us.

Sometimes we sing the old hymn "Hallelujah, What a Savior." One verse in that hymn says: "In my place condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood. Hallelujah, what a Savior." Romans 8:1 says, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Now, the fact that Christians don't have to fear condemnation does not mean that we will not face judgment of any kind. Romans 14:12 tells us that as believers each of us will give an account of himself to God.

It is easy for Christians to get drawn into the same values that dominate the world, to react to life emotionally, impulsively, and selfishly instead of spiritually, believably, and Christianly. One day all of us who are believers are going to stand before our Lord and Savior and with Him will look back on our lives. *We will all be accountable for what we have done for Him with our lives in light of the grace He has given us.* The Bible clearly tells us that there will be degrees of rewards, there will be loss of rewards, and there will be accountability for our actions and choices.

A popular advertising campaign for Las Vegas as a vacation destination says, "What happens here stays here." What are they saying? You can go to Vegas and do whatever you want while you are there, and no one will report it or hold you accountable for it. The Bible says what you do in Vegas and in Daytona and anywhere else on earth is recorded and remembered, and you will have to stand before Christ and give account of it. We do not receive salvation on the basis of our works, but redeemed people will be accountable for the way they have lived their lives as Christians.

That's why, in 2 Timothy 4:1-8, Paul makes two important points in light of the coming of Christ to judge the living and the dead.

*Be faithful to Christ.* Verses 1-5: "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry." No matter what happens in the culture, Paul says, keep your head and be faithful to your calling.

*Keep longing for His appearing.* Verses 6-8: "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

The phrase *those who have longed for his appearing* is literally "those who have loved his appearing." To love His appearing is for your heart to be focused not on this world but on Christ and His kingdom. Those who love Christ and His kingdom and therefore long for His appearing will receive His reward when he returns.

If you want to know how heaven can be heaven if you are going to be held accountable for your life, you will have to ask Christ when you face Him. But don't let the uncertainty of what God has *not* clearly revealed keep you from facing the certainty of what He *has* clearly revealed.

Faith in Jesus Christ enables one to face the judgment of God without fear of condemnation but without exemption from accountability. On the other hand . . .

### **If Christ Is Not Your Savior, God's Judgment Will Be Devastating**

Throughout his ministry, in His parables and prophetic teachings, Jesus pictured dramatic moments of divine judgment in which He separated the sheep from the goats, the believers from nonbelievers, the righteous from the unrighteous, the saved from the lost. He said to those who received salvation things such as, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world, and enter into eternal life." But to those who did not believe in or belong to Him, He said, "Go away into eternal punishment, and depart from me. I never knew you. "

Romans 2:5 speaks directly to those who do not receive Christ, saying: "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed."

Notice that God's judgment will be a revelation of *righteous judgment*. God will take into account every aspect of each individual's life. What people knew and did not know. How they responded to the light they were given. Just as there are degrees of reward in heaven, there will be degrees of punishment in hell.

The judgment that all human beings will face will not reveal to God anything that He does not already know. What it will do is demonstrate clearly and undeniably that He has been so just and holy and righteous--and not only that but also loving and merciful and gracious--that there is nothing credible to say against Him or His judgment. Romans 3:19 reads: "That every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God."

There is a powerful scene at the end of the book of Revelation (19:1-2), in which God judges Babylon, a city that represents worldly, sensual, materialistic, rebellion against God and His kingdom. When His judgment falls on Babylon and all that it represents, the apostle John writes, "After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. "

Jesus Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead. There is nothing more important than to live in light of that reality, to know that He is your Savior now, to draw strength, and hope, and love daily from the reality of His presence in your life, to face the future without fear of condemnation, and to live in the present as one who will one day stand before Him and give an account for how you lived your life.