

SERMON FOR SUN. NOV. 21, 2021

Last Sunday B 2021 Daniel 7:9-10, “The Hanging Judge”

Dear fellow redeemed of, by and for Christ, today’s O.T. reading gives us a peek at the Final Judgment.

As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire.

A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

That is a courtroom scene that most of us are not familiar with. A scene of awe and justice. Standing before the One whose Word does whatever it says. Always.

Sinners standing before the One who is so holy, and to whom we are accountable. Accountable for how you have lived this life. For how you have treated others. Whether you’ve feared, loved, and trusted this One more than all else, or not?

You are accountable for your stewardship of all that God has entrusted to you – your possessions and income, your family and friends, your talents and abilities, His Word, and faith.

What have you done? What will you say? What will you say to this Judge, the Ancient of Days, who already knows all things?

This Judge whose clothing is as white as snow, with no hint of injustice or stain? This Judge who is a consuming fire?

This is a Judge that most of us are not familiar with. This isn’t Judge Judy or Judge Wapner. “Entertainment judges” you could call them. God isn’t a judge slick lawyers can manipulate.

In Daniel’s depiction of God’s courtroom there is no jury. There is no entertaining. There is only an impartial judge who will pronounce a final judgment one day, based on objective evidence of the transgression of objective laws.

And the message at the end of the Church Year is: ***it’s time to take that day seriously, for it WILL happen.***

When you are measured against this Judge’s objective Law, what will the verdict be for you? That answer, dear friends, is not a tough one to figure out. Guilty as charged, guilty as sin.

Now, we shouldn’t be surprised if the world doesn’t take this Judge seriously. It’s probably safe to say that our view of earthly judges colors our view of the heavenly judge.

And so, in our TV nation, we shouldn’t be surprised if the world doesn’t take this Judge or His Judgment seriously.

But we ***should be surprised – and dismayed!*** – when a Church refuses to. We should be appalled when the seriousness of sin is downplayed and de-emphasized.

We should be angry when Law and Gospel proclamation is sacrificed for sermons of self-affirmation or how to live a better life. If that's what you're looking for, find a life coach, not a pastor.

So if you pastor portrays God as a Mr. Nice Guy who winks at our sins and indiscretions, find another church.

Nor should pastors lend an ear when they hear that the problem with the Church is its portrayal of God as too stern and unyielding, and that we need to lighten up!

Actually, quite the opposite is true. Our problem today isn't of a God **too stern**, but a God who is **too soft!**

Far too many people today view God who whose wrath can be averted by what we do, by our good works, our devotion and dedication. In short, a God who can be bought off.

How many today think that? How many today are counting on a jury of our peers to vouch for us?

How many think our sin is not so bad, particularly in comparison to my no-account neighbor?

But sin, Scripture tells us, is a capital offense against God. **And the wages of sin is death.**

For its not just that sin has caused a rift between creature and Creator – it has, but it is far worse than that.

Sin is an offense against God because it is claiming that our good and gracious God is not good and compassionate; sin accuses an all-knowing God of not knowing what is best for us; sin makes idols of my will, my wants, my feelings, my desires, my wisdom, and says: “**God, this throne's not big enough for the two of us; one of us has got to go.**”

And we all know who gets pushed off then.

Do we think God doesn't mind that so much? Do we believe we can throw Him a few bones of good behavior and He'll forget about all the damnable things we've done?

When we come before that throne, that awesome Judge, what do we think the verdict will be?

Perhaps, then, if our view of earthly judges colors our view of the heavenly judge, we should see God as an old-fashioned, no-nonsense “hanging judge.”

Should you fear such a God? Should you fear this hanging judge? **Well, yes . . . and no!**

Yes, because sin is deadly serious. But no because the Scriptures not only reveal to us the **perfect justice** of this hanging judge, but also the fact that this judge, was literally a hanging judge, who in mercy once **hung on a cross.**

The Judge who does not overlook our sin or wink at them, but took our capital punishment upon Himself.

Jesus' sacrificial act, hanging on a cross, atoned for all our sins so that he was judged instead of us.

Our Judge hung on a cross so that we need never worry about our sins or God's verdict again. We need not fear that God might change His mind or that there might be some sins that might come back to haunt us. *No!*

For when the Son of God, our Savior Jesus Christ, uttered those final words from the cross: "**It is finished**" – it was!

All atonement for the sins of all people of all times was complete.

On the cross Jesus was the Victor overthrowing Satan's reign, rule, and power over us.

And **Jesus was the Redeemer** – on the cross taking our judgment in our place, so that His blood would wash away our sins and reconcile us to the Father.

Jesus did all that so that when ***the books are opened***, there will be nothing left to condemn us. For Jesus' sake, our accuser is silenced, and He will acknowledge us before the Judge.

The good news for us this morning is that He is Risen! Christ, the "hanging judge" hangs no more! He hangs no more because He is ***risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity!***

And He lives and reigns **for you**. Not sitting idly in Heaven, but praying for you, forgiving you, and strengthening you.

Jesus is not sitting idly by in Heaven, but protects you from Satan's temptations, and the false gods of this world.

He's not sitting idly in Heaven, but is at work in your life, to fix your eyes on Him, on His cross, on His life. **For He is not only the Author, but the Perfecter of your faith.**

Jesus is the One who claimed you and will keep you.

Jesus wants you to run to Him, not *from* Him. And so He meets you where He has promised to be for you – in His Word, His Absolution, His Supper – knowing that He is here for you not in judgment, but with his gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

For Jesus' sake, the Father no longer counts your sins against us but regards us as the sons and daughters He has made us in Holy Baptism.

And yes, God rejoices over us, for He wants us to be with Him. Not only in eternity but also here and now.

And when we know such a God – as Father, as Savior, as *merciful* Judge – **then the cross becomes for us one more thing**. Not just our victory and our redemption, but also our **example**.

Jesus shows us how sons of God use their freedom – to lay down their lives for others. ***Not because we have to, but because we can!***

Given the fact that we've been set free from the tyranny of Satan, and set free from the guilt and condemnation of our sin, and given the promise of eternal life, **how do we then live now?**

In confidence, yes. In joy, yes. But also in service to our neighbor and in prayer for all.

As our epistle text said, **laying aside every weight, and the sin which clings so closely**, we fix our eyes on Jesus, who has done such great things for us.

Jesus has set us completely and absolutely free, that as we have freely received, so we may freely give.

In response we are to speak the truth in love to all people. That they may know their sin and its seriousness, yes, but also that they may know their Savior, who in love for them hung and died for them on the cross.

Tell your neighbors that there is no other way to salvation and no other way to stand before the final judgment seat and live.

Tell them so that when our Lord *does* return, on that last day, and **the sun is darkened and the moon stops giving its light** – that it be not a *frightening* darkening, but a *glorious* darkening!

A glorious darkening as the light of the glory of Christ overwhelms the lights of this world and makes them look dark!

And we see then with our eyes what we see now only by faith – the glory of His perfection, the glory of His righteousness, the glory of His holiness.

And we will not be afraid. For **while we all must stand before the judgment seat of this glorious One**, this One coming in glory is not only our Judge but our brother, our Savior.

As a Michael Card song said, “When you look into your Judge’s eyes, you’ll see our Savior there.

Jesus, our savior, our “hanging judge” who hung for us. Our risen Lord who rose for us. Our living Lord who lives for us. And He is coming to take us home. AMEN.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.