

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Person of Christ: Jesus the Judge

How often we hear people say that a God of love would not cast people into an eternal hell! All too often. Why do they ask such a thing? Because, sadly, they do not know the living God. In His nature He is both love and light. As He is love, then we know that He will do everything in His power to bless us. This gives us hope. However, as He is light, then He must always act in a righteously. This should give us assurance.

God's love was active in sending His only begotten Son into this world in order that we might be saved from the power, guilt and judgement of sin. God's light demanded that His Son should die in order to achieve this end. During three hours of darkness on Golgotha's tree, Christ endured the judgement of God against sin. Only when this was exhausted did He freely give up His life physically.

In our talk today, we will take a solemn look at Jesus as Judge under the following five headings:

1. Christ as God, the judge of all the earth.
2. Christ as judge of the responsible churches - The Lampstands.
3. Christ as judge of the saints - the Judgement Seat of Christ.
4. Christ as judge of the nations - the Sheep and Goats.
5. Christ as judge of the wicked dead - the Great White Throne.

1. Christ as God, the judge of all the earth.

Our first consideration is of Christ as Judge of all the Earth. The reference to this is found in Genesis 18:25 where Abraham has been pleading with Jehovah on behalf of any who were righteous in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He says: "...Be (it) far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" We can have full confidence that the Lord will only do what is right at all times. You may well say to me, "What has this to do with Christ? Isn't this Scripture speaking of the Jehovah of the Old Testament?" Yes, it is. But the Lord Jesus Christ is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. He is God! We only have to compare the name of the Jehovah of hosts given to the king in Isaiah 6:5 to the statement in John's Gospel 12:41 to see this. Link these Scriptures with John 1:1-3 and verse 14 where we find Christ as the Word and we find that He already existed before the very first beginning; was face to face with God as a distinct Person; was, nonetheless, God; and, as such, the Maker of all things. Further studies in Philippians 2, Hebrews 1 and Colossians 1 verify the fact that the One we know as the Lord Jesus Christ is indeed God the Son who became man - Immanuel! Therefore, we can see that Christ was active in judgement as the Son of God in Old Testament times.

The main purpose of judgement is to glorify God by showing forth His righteousness (Exodus 9:14-16). God's judgement, however, has three main arrows which include: prevention of wrong actions; promotion of right actions; and, punishment for committed sin.

His judgement is seen to punish evil in Exodus 20:5; instructs in 2 Samuel 7:14-15; corrects in Habakkuk 1:12; and, warns others in Luke 13:3-5. In Hebrews 12, we find God's chastening judgement upon His own sons (Christians) even to scourging them when necessary - something to be remembered by those who would outlaw corporal punishment in society today. This judgement is both instructive and corrective and is executed because of the love of God for His own.

2. Christ as judge of the responsible churches - The Lampstands.

This leads us to consider our second aspect of Christ as Judge, namely, the judge of the responsible churches here on earth. This role is found in Revelation chapters 1 to 3 inclusive. Chapter 1 gives a symbolic picture of Christ in the role of the judge. In John's Gospel 5:22-23 we read: "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgement unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which sent him." Here we see that the father demands equal honours for Himself and His Son. Therefore, all judgement has been committed to the Son - and that in His manhood. So here we see

the professing churches being judged by Him; but men who refuse the Son of God at this time, here on earth, will one day have to kneel before Him as their judge at the Great White Throne when this earth has passed away.

Let us examine this description of the Judge. The long garment which He wears reminds us of two things. First, the long garment was a sign of the Father's love for Him (as pictured in the long garment given by Jacob to Joseph because he loved him so much). Second, it was fitting for the honourable office of a magistrate in that day. There is then the golden girdle about the paps or female breasts. These are symbolic of consolations in Isaiah 66:11. The fact that these are girded by a golden girdle shows that such consolations were restrained so that any judgements would be made in righteousness to the glory of God.

His head and His hairs were white like wool, white as snow. This shows us that the Son of man, Christ Jesus, possesses the same characteristics as the all-wise Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9.

His eyes were as a flame of fire. The eyes speak of discernment. The flame of fire speaks of God's testing judgement. Together every action and motive is examined. He it is who searches the heart.

His feet are compared to fine brass as if they burned in a furnace. Throughout Scripture, fine brass indicates that which withstands the fire - the testing judgement of God. It reminds us that there is no sin in this Judge. He loves righteousness and hates iniquity.

His voice being as the sound of many waters tells us that His word is powerful. None can resist His authority.

In His right hand were seven stars. The latter are symbolic of subordinate authority. They are found in His right hand, the place of divine favour, security and power. In verse 20, we are told that the stars are the angels (or messengers) of the churches. They are people with subordinate authority in the churches.

The sharp, two-edged sword is a weapon of judgement. It does not spare any. Nonetheless, it shows that the sentences that He pronounces are based on a full examination of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12-13).

The fact that His countenance was as the sun shining in its strength shows that His authority is absolute.

This vision of Christ in His official role and glory as judge caused the apostle John to fall at His feet as dead. A remarkable effect considering that while here on earth, John had previously reposed his head upon the Lord's bosom.

The Lord Jesus Christ is active among the candlesticks which represented the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. It must be emphasised that these are churches which obviously contained not only true believers, but people who merely paid lip-service to Christ. It is the same in the churches of today. We use the term "Christendom" to describe this overall mixture of the genuine and counterfeit Christians.

These seven churches not only represent the scope of strengths and weaknesses found in the churches of that day, but also serve to highlight the same range of difficulties today. Furthermore, all seven churches do give a predicted history of the responsible church and its characteristics down through the last 2,000 years. In this talk, we will concentrate on how the Judge presents Himself to the churches, and outline some of these strengths and weaknesses found in them.

Ephesus

Christ is presented to Ephesus as the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks amidst the candlesticks. He is taking a deep and active interest in His people and the activities of the churches which were supposed to be His lightbearers in a dark world. Unfortunately, all too often, the churches of today seem to be excusing the dark side of the world rather than bringing the truth of God to bear upon it.

Ephesus means "desired". It reminds us of the Bride's words in the Song of Songs: "I am my beloved's and His desire is towards me". Real Christians belong to Christ. His desire is towards us.

The Judge's main criticism of the church was that it had left its first love. The love which should have made Christ its foremost object had lapsed. The measure of such love is obedience. Therefore, obedience to the truth was in decline already. The church, though commended for being active for His name in some aspects, was admonished for lacking faith when doing His work; lacking love when labouring for Him; and, losing sight of the hope of His coming which sustains endurance in Christian things. Christ orders the whole assembly to remember and repent otherwise He would remove it from its place. The reward for those who obeyed was to eat of the tree of life in the paradise of God.

In Eden, the paradise of mankind, there was a tree of responsibility and one of life. Man tasted the first and sinned. Hence, His privilege of life was lost. In God's paradise, this privilege is restored.

Smyrna

Christ presents Himself to Smyrna as the First and the Last. This is a title used of God in Isaiah chapters 41, 44 and 48. It shows that Christ is God the Son who has revealed to men the very nature of God. What a way to describe Himself to a severely persecuted church – One against whom nothing and no-one can prevail. The name Smyrna means “myrrh” which has a bitter taste; but a sweet fragrance. The bitterness expresses this church's suffering. The fragrance the joy that God gained from its faithfulness. Hence, even though this church was to pass through ten periods of persecution, its faithful knew that they could never be hurt by the second death, and those martyred were promised a crown of life.

Pergamos

The name Pergamos means “firm union” or “marriage”. It shows that the church became married to the world. Christ was being displaced by influential politics which were a ploy of Satan. Therefore, the Judge presents Himself as the one with the sharp, two-edged sword who would, by His word used in judgement, oppose them if necessary. Although the church in general, held fast to the name and faith of Christ, it was infiltrated by pretend believers (the Nicolaitanes) who taught that God's grace gave them license to sin. These were supported by others who promoted idolatry as well as immorality. However, the faithful were promised:

1. To eat of the hidden manna – to spiritually feed on Christ in glory;
2. Receive a white stone – a symbol of the Christ's approval; and,
3. A new name – expressive of all that Christ appreciates in that believer.

Thyatira

To Thyatira, Christ presents Himself as the Son of God with eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burning brass. The use of the words Son of God reminds us that the true church of God is built upon that statement of faith for which the Lord commended Peter, namely, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”. Only those who believe this can be called Christians. It is upon the Son of God that the true church is built. It is not built, as some suggest, upon the stone called Peter. The name Thyatira means “incense”. The Lord commends the church for its works, love, service, and patience. Nevertheless, they tolerated teaching of the ilk of Jezebel. The result was the rise and rule of a power similar to the Jezebel's of old. It was a power that tried to rule Christendom; but which persecuted true saints, and attempted to seduce them into adopting wicked idolatry and encouraged gross immorality. Nevertheless, the Lord gave this system time to repent even though He knew she would not respond. So this false, Satanic system was to be judged. The kings and merchantmen under her sway were to be destroyed, as were her converts.

There are, however, those who remain faithful to the Lord, obeying His word and doing the works that please the Father. They receive two rewards. First, they will reign over the nations in a time to come. Second, they are given the morning star. Christ Himself is described as the bright and morning star. As such, He heralds the day when the Sun of righteousness will rise with healing in His wings. Then the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. It therefore refers to the hope of His coming for those who love Him.

Sardis

In Sardis, a section of the professing church placed itself under the protection and rule of the world. Yet the name itself suggests that there is a “remnant”. The Judge presents Himself as the One who had the seven spirits of God speaking of the fullness of the Spirit being at His disposal (see Isaiah 11) and the seven stars mentioned before. The Lord rebukes Sardis for putting up a lively front while being internally lifeless spiritually. The church is warned to be watchful and remember or He would come to them in judgement. No doubt they were to make sure that false teachers and the world did not make further inroads into the church and were to remember the truth of the faith once delivered to the saints. Those who overcame would one day walk with Him in white. What an honour. Furthermore, their names would remain in the Book of Life. (Those who are pretend Christians will have their names blotted out of this book). Moreover, as the genuine had confessed His name before men, so Christ would confess their names before His Father, and His angels.

Philadelphia

Philadelphia means “brotherly love”. Christ reveals Himself to this church as the holy and true. The One who had the royal authority to govern this world. Indeed, the government shall be upon His shoulder. Although this church had little strength, yet it met the Lord's approval by keeping His word and standing up for truth concerning His Person. As a result, He expresses His love for them and supports them by providing an open door. The latter seems to speak of

liberty - liberty both to worship and witness. He promises to keep them out from the Great Tribulation period and will make the overcomer a pillar in the temple of His God. This spiritual house is being formed today. Furthermore, the pillar is inscribed with the name of His God, the name of His God's city and Christ's own new name. There can be no greater honour than to bear these names in glory.

Laodicea

The last church is that of Laodicea which means "the peoples' judgement". This implies that the church is no longer under the rule of God, but under a kind of democratic rule of men. The Lord Jesus Christ is, in fact, found outside the door of this church. He knocks at the door in the hope that someone will open up to Him that they may have some fellowship together. Christ presents Himself to this church as: "The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." As the Amen all the promises of God are fulfilled in Him. As the faithful and true witness, He was ever loyal to the Father who sent Him, no matter what the cost to Himself. He is the beginning of the creation of God. Those who are in Christ are new creation! Hence, this creation is composed of all those who do the Father's will and bring glory to His name in a world which seeks only to belittle that name.

The church is marked by lukewarmness to Christ. It delights in its material blessings, but is lacking in spiritual ones. As a result, it will be spewed from His mouth. Yet, the Judge says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" Those individuals who do so will reign with Christ in a future millennial period until this purified earth will be handed back to God by His Son. I wonder how Christ views your local church. I wonder how He views me?

3. Christ as judge of the saints - the Judgement Seat of Christ.

Christ is also found as judge at the "Bema" or "Judgement Seat". This tribunal will be set up when Christ has received His church following His coming. In Romans 14 this is called the "judgement seat of God." Whereas, verses in Corinthians reveal that the judge is Christ Himself. Here the quality of the work of His servants is judged and rewarded. It is not a judgement of sin. It is a judgement of the service of believers whether it is in building up the local assembly (1 Corinthians 3) or of our service in general (2 Corinthians 5:10). If the work passes the test, then it is judged as being good and a reward shall be given. If the work is burned then it is judged as bad and the servant loses any reward, but he himself is saved. How wise it is for Christians to serve the Lord with all their might, and with love as their motive, while here upon earth. In this way, everything is cleared for eternity and, God can then be glorified in us.

4. Christ as judge of the nations - the Sheep and Goats.

Next, we see the Lord Jesus as the Judge of the nations. This judgement is found in Matthew 25:31-46. Once the church is taken by the Lord, there follows a period of great trial upon this earth. This is centred around Israel and involves a revived Roman empire, Egypt and what was known as Assyria. Unfortunately, God's chosen race, the Jews will again suffer greatly during this time. However, after about seven years, the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, will appear to deal with Israel's enemies. It is then that this judgement of the nations takes place. The Judge acts like a shepherd king who separates the sheep from the goats. Those classed as sheep are those who have helped and supported the Jews during that time of Jacob's trouble. They are called "righteous". The goats are the enemies of the Jews. These are cursed and cast into everlasting fire. The righteous nations will be blessed in the kingdom that Christ will set up. Thus, the prophecy concerning Abraham's seed shall be fulfilled (Genesis 12:1-3).

5. Christ as judge of the wicked dead - the Great White Throne.

Throughout this kingdom period when Christ reigns over this world for a thousand years, the devil is held in chains. Although the environment is conducive to health and long life and Christ's rule is perfect, there will be those born who will only sham faith in Christ. At the end of the period, the devil is loosed and gathering these sinful individuals make a final assault upon the Lord and His anointed. This is the fulfilment of Psalm 2. Solemn words are found there, namely, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh." These wicked people are wiped out, and Satan is cast into the fire that was prepared for him and his angels. The earth and the heavens then flee away. Simultaneously, a Great White Throne is set up (Revelation 20:9-15). All the resurrected unbelievers are brought to stand before it. They are righteously judged by the Lord Jesus Christ, as God, according to their works. They are then cast into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone. They share in the eternal judgement of the evil one and his hosts. Oh, Christian, let's thank God that Christ took this punishment for us on the cross of Golgotha. The Judge is our Saviour. Praise His name! If you happen to be an unbeliever, turn from going your own way and go God's way by handing your life over to the Lord Jesus Christ. Heaven, not Hell will then be your destiny.

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