

SERMON

by

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"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books." (Revelation 20:11,12)

Brethren, there is a day approaching in which God will judge the world in righteousness. It will be a day in which an assembled universe shall stand before his bar and receive a final and irrevocable sentence according to their respective works, a sentence consigning the wicked over to everlasting perdition and admitting the righteous to everlasting happiness.

Since the era of the creation, many awful and important events have taken place. Empires have risen and fallen according to the sovereign determination of him whose kingdom rules over all. But in comparison with the great and important event of the general judgment, of the final decisions which God, as the supreme governor of the world, will make upon the eternal states of all his rational creatures, they shrink into matters of trivial consequence. The general judgment will be an event of infinite importance to every individual within these walls. We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and everyone of us must give an account of himself to God.

Judgment was announced by Enoch (the seventh from Adam) at a very early period of the world: "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14,15). This was confirmed by almost all the inspired heralds who lived under the Old Testament. In particular, the Psalmist cries out, "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad . . . For he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth" (Ps. 96:11-13).

It was expressly foretold by Christ himself (Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21). It is ranked in Hebrews (6:1,2) among the fundamental articles of Christianity. And accordingly we find it most magnificently described in vision by the apostle John near the close of the inspired canon. Nay, the last verse but one is a solemn asseveration by him who is to be the judge concerning the certainty of the event: "Surely, I am coming quickly" (Rev. 22:20).

From all this, brethren, appears the necessity and propriety of bringing this subject frequently into our contemplation. And, O, that we may be enabled to contemplate it in such a manner as to triumph in prospect of it, saying, "Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus." Remember, that though many may be unconcerned hearers, yet there will be no unconcerned spectators of the awful scenes which open in our text. Every individual in the

countless assembly who shall stand before the bar will feel himself deeply interested in all the transactions of that tremendous day. The deepest solicitude will heave in every breast and reign conspicuous in every face. Even angels shall feel anxiety for the outcome of that day: "The powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Mat. 24:29).

The vision which we have in the passage before us is accommodated to our view of judicial process among men. We have the throne or judgment seat, the judge, the objects of judicial process, the rule of it, the evidence of the facts to be tried, and the final sentence. The approach of this day of judgment will be announced by some awful and magnificent signals that will strike the world with terror and dismay. Some writers have given us an account of a series of wonders which shall appear for some days previous to the judgment. Respecting these, we are not qualified to say anything either for or against them. However, we are authorized from Scripture to assert the following:

1. There will be the sign of the Son of man: "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven" (Matt 24:30). Some think this will be the personal appearance of the Judge himself. But it appears harsh and absurd to call the appearance of Christ the sign of his appearance. The sign of his coming and the personal act of coming are distinguished by Christ himself. The sign of the Son of man shall appear, in consequence of which it is observed that all the tribes of the earth shall mourn under the awful apprehensions of the coming of their Judge. And then it is observed that "they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," that is, their apprehensions are realized. Whether it will be the appearance of some luminous body in heaven or some most magnificent ensign or standard displayed to announce the approach of the King of glory with all his hosts, or whether it may be some emblematical representation of the judgment or of the Judge, it is impossible for us to determine.

However, it is evident that it will be visible and glorious, as becomes the magnificent scenery and transactions which are to follow. Unspeakable horror and astonishment will seize the guilty minds of those who shall see this awful phenomenon. How will they reel and stagger, their knees smite, and their hearts become feeble as water under prospect of the awful perdition which awaits them! On the other hand, what joy will it inspire in the righteous when they see their redemption drawing nigh! What sublime joy, what grateful astonishment will the revelation of this sign excite in the minds of those who shall then be waiting for the coming of the Lord.

2. These sensations will be followed by the awful clangor of the last trumpet bursting through the heavens, the voice of the archangel summoning the parties to appear before the decisive tribunal: "Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment." This voice, accompanied with divine energy, shall be heard by the generations of the dead, who shall immediately burst from the confinement of the grave. Hence, says Christ, when speaking of this omnipotent call to the dead, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28,29).

Then those bodies that enjoyed perfect repose amid all the convulsions of earthquakes, thunders, and war, shall shake off the sleep of death and spring into animated existence to

advance towards the bar of justice. What commotion will be excited in the morgue, the cemetery, and other repositories of the dead by this terrifying trumpet call. How the living will be surprised to feel the ground heaving beneath them as countless numbers rise up from their graves and advance in awful procession to the great white throne to be heirs of immortality.

How glorious and magnificent will the visible agency of angels appear in that awful moment, for it is said he will send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet to gather his elect from every quarter of the globe. See them darting in eager flight, in joyful competition to execute the last kind offices to those who enjoyed their ministrations during life; to assist them in their resurrection, tearing asunder the vaults of mortality and collecting the scattered members of their body. Their previous dust is now to be arranged into forms of immortality, and angels will bear them on their wings to meet the Lord in the air.

What surprise will it excite in the minds of the wicked on earth to see their neighbors undergo such a sudden change! What shrieks of horror will it produce when they find themselves left behind on earth to be dragged as reluctant criminals to the judgment seat, while their neighbors are wafted up under angelic convoy to sit at Christ's right hand! What awful distinction will be made among the living at that day. Hence our Lord tells us, "Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left" (Luke 17:35).

3. Next will be the appearance of the Judge: "Behold, he is coming with clouds, and every eye will see him" (Rev. 1:7). He bursts through the visible heavens with his banners waving majestically and his shining courtiers and countless hosts filling the skies. Now the powers of heaven are shaken, the orbs of light turned into darkness by the superior glory of his countenance. The apostle represents the heaven and earth flying from the face of him who sits upon the throne. How justly does Paul represent it as the glorious appearing of the great God (Titus 2:13).

It is Christ who is to be Judge. All power in heaven is given to him as God-man, Mediator. It is true that God the Father is sometimes represented as being Judge. But there is no real inconsistency in this representation, as it is by the Son that the Father judges the world. Hence, says the apostle, "He has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained" (Acts 17:31). The Father judges no man personally, but only by delegating that supreme judiciary power which is vested in the Godhead to Christ.

Hence we are told that the Father "has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man" (John 5:27). It was necessary as a reward for his voluntary humiliation (Phil. 2:8-10). It was fit that he who was judged and condemned in human nature should in the same nature judge the world in righteousness. It was necessary that he who had stood before the tribunal of men should in due time call men to stand before his tribunal.

Besides the possession of those divine perfections (knowledge, wisdom, justice, and power) which enable him to pass a just and righteous sentence and put it into execution, he is

qualified in this character to execute his office in such a way as will not only affect the moral perception but even the senses of mankind. He will appear to the eye of an assembled universe as sitting upon a glorious throne. They will be brought before a visible bar and will hear the sentence audibly pronounced upon them. This will be equally ecstatic to the righteous and terrible to the wicked, to those who had rejected and despised him. What terror will it arouse in the minds of his enemies, especially those who maltreated, persecuted, insulted, and crucified him in his human nature. How will they be troubled and confounded at his presence!

4. Next turn your eye to the countless millions who will move in awful procession to the decisive bar. What a vast assembly! How diversified by age, sex, and condition. Every individual of the human race--from Adam to his youngest son, high and low, rich and poor, bond and free, young and old--must appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

Many in this world are too great to be brought to an account for their conduct, and some are too lowly to be thought worthy of judicial notice. But no degree of rank or condition will then be taken notice of. All civil distinction will be abolished. The prince and the beggar will stand on a level field. Those who made the earth to tremble by their authority will be equally responsible with the lowest of their vassals. No elevation of rank, no species of power possessed in this world will in the least degree alleviate, much less protect, from the terrors of that awful day. Those who swayed a lordly scepter over millions of their fellowmen will now bow to Him whose kingdom rules over all. Those who would not bow before a throne of grace must now bow before a throne of judgment.

In a word, all the crimes of the ungodly and all the abominations of the heart, whether known or unknown to the world, will be announced to an assembled world. This will convince them of the omniscience of Deity. How they will tremble at the disclosure, how pale will they become under conviction of guilt. If only they could shrink into impenetrable darkness from the face of the Lamb. But they will have to stand forth before the view of all until they receive their sentence and sink into the blackness of darkness forever.

As to the disclosure and publication of the sins of the righteous on that great day, there is a variety of opinions. That they will not come into judgment of condemnation is incontestably evident. Yet many think that their evil as well as their good works will be published on that day. And there are some scriptures which favor the opinion: "For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Ecc. 12:14). But then this passage may be taken distributively and not collectively, meaning every good work of the saints and every evil work of sinners.

In Christ's account of the process of the general judgment, there is no mention made of the publication of their sins but only of their good works as an evidence of their justification. And as their sins are taken away and covered by an act of judicial absolution in this life, it is not at all likely that they will be brought into judgment. Has God declared that he will remember the iniquities of his people no more, and will he after this revive them in this most public manner? However, it is abundantly evident that the good works of the righteous as the evidence of their justification, and the evil works of the wicked as the evidence and ground of their condemnation, will be published in the most explicit manner:

"And the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life" (Rev. 20:12) It is by these records that the outcome of the process is to be regulated, rewards conferred, and punishment inflicted.

Though the omniscient God stands in no need of such evidence of the character or state of men, yet it will be necessary in order to convict all beholders concerning the equity of the sentence which shall be passed. It is the opinion of some that the wicked, though convinced of the truth of the charges against them, will try to deny them, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?" (Matt. 25:44). In such a case it will be necessary to produce evidence of the facts for the satisfaction of those who are present and to silence the wicked for eternity.

The last book that shall be opened is the Book of Life, in which are registered all the names of those who were given to Christ to be redeemed. This will be necessary to show that Christ has given eternal life to as many as God has given him, that he has lost none of them. It will be necessary to silence all objections to the sovereignty of divine grace. With what ravished ears will the righteous hear their names proclaimed before an assembled universe as the objects of eternal love. What looks of grateful adoration will they raise to their incarnate Saviour. How their hearts will burn with love!

On the other hand, how will the wicked sink under impressions of despair when they find their names passed over. What awful distinction will now be made. What distressful separation will now take place. Husband and wife who have spent a lifetime in mutual fondness, parents and children who had such mutual delight in one another, ministers and people who had kept a lifetime of solemn holy days, and brothers and sisters who lay in the same womb may now be separated for eternity.

What bitter reflections may we suppose the wicked will now pour upon one another. How will companions of sin, who have been the mutual promoters of each other's ruin, curse one another from the heart. How will children curse their parents for being unfaithful to their souls, for neglecting to give them religious instruction, for failing to urge upon them the practice of piety and holiness. How it will sting the hearts of ungodly parents to see a numerous offspring pressing around them lamenting the unnatural indulgence of their parents, their cruelty in neglecting to administer seasonable instruction and reproof.

But what joyful congratulations will prevail among among the righteous as they advance to the right hand. What joy and gratitude will many express for the seasonable instruction and reproof they got from their parents, religious neighbors and acquaintances.

5. Now the judge rises to pronounce the sentence, first upon those who are on his right hand: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!" (Matt. 25:34). This sentence will no doubt be pronounced with an audible voice by the man Christ Jesus, with a voice full of majesty and power. What shouts of praise will burst forth from the ransomed of the Lord. But behold the throbbing hearts, the despairing looks and trembling joints of those on the left hand who await their sentence. How will they bear the thunder of his voice, accompanied with a flash of vengeance, pronouncing their doom? "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the

devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). What shrieks of horror and roar of desperation will now burst from this countless assembly as they descend into the regions of damnation. There is no way of escape. Those who eluded the threatenings of God's word in the day of their merciful visitation will now find them to be inevitable.

Oh, unbelievers, tremble in prospect of that day when your doom is to be determined, when you will be publicly arraigned, tried, and condemned by Christ for your contempt and rejection of his kind offers of mercy and salvation. Jesus pleads with you now from his mercy seat for you to be reconciled to him. Know for a certainty that although you are sleeping in security now, your damnation sleeps not. It is hastening on, and every day brings you a step nearer to a judgment day. Be wise and consider your latter end.

"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:17,18).

Believing brethren, let me exhort you to make due preparation for this awful day. It is Christ's own advice: "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matt. 24:44). The certainty of the judgment with the uncertainty of the time should engage us to watch and pray and be ever ready for the coming of the Lord, to make our calling and election sure that we may be found of Christ without spot and blameless. If that day which comes as a thief in the night should come in our own day, are we ready for it? Let us prepare by professing the doctrines of Christianity and practicing its duties, and holding forth the mystery of faith with a pure conscience.

Sermon by Rev. Thomas Hamilton in *Biographical Sketches and Sermons of some of the First Ministers of the Associate Church in America* (Albany: Hoffman & White, 1839). **Note:** Liberty has been taken for some condensation and light editing. Punctuation has been modernized, long paragraphs have been divided, and the NKJV has been used.