

*Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.*<sup>3</sup> *So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?*<sup>4</sup> *Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?*

<sup>5</sup> *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.*<sup>6</sup> *God "will give to each person according to what he has done."*<sup>7</sup> *To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.*<sup>8</sup> *But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.*<sup>9</sup> *There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile;*<sup>10</sup> *but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*<sup>11</sup> *For God does not show favoritism.*  
(Romans 2:2-11)

### **God's Judgment Is Coming**

What do you have trouble taking seriously? Most of us could mention different things. Personally, I have trouble taking reality TV seriously. I have no time for *Big Brother* or *Survivor* or *America's Top Model* or *The Biggest Loser*. I don't really believe there's much "reality" in those shows. I have trouble taking professional wrestling seriously. I just don't believe there's any real competition taking place. I could list other things on TV or in politics or in every day life. But I want to focus this morning on something spiritual. I want to ask you, do you have trouble taking Judgment Day seriously? I think many Christians do and it doesn't help that every year or two, some well publicized individual predicts the date he thinks Jesus is coming back and always, he's wrong. Now, I'm not saying we don't accept what the Bible says. But on a practical level, we dismiss it as a serious consideration for our lives. How many of us wake up in the morning and wonder if the Lord will return before we get done with work or school today? How many of us make retirement plans or pay into our pension funds but figure it's just as likely that the world will end before we ever get a dollar back? It's been 2000 years since Jesus left and promised that he was coming quickly. And it takes faith to take that promise seriously. Today, the epistle to the Romans reminds us: **God's judgment is coming.**

#### **I.**

We need to hear that message. When St. Paul wrote the book of Romans, he wasn't talking to unbelievers. He was talking to Christians like us. **God's judgment is coming. What will happen to you?** In Paul's day, when almost every adult could remember the moment they first heard about Jesus, they already had a problem with Christians becoming complacent – figuring that they had heard enough and didn't really need to think about it anymore. Worse than that, Paul makes it clear that already in his day, they had a problem with people looking down on others and condemning their sins, without every realizing that they were condemning themselves, because they did the exact same thing.

Do we have that problem today? Sure we do. Most of us think that stealing is wrong, don't we? Whether it's corporate bigwigs raiding a pension fund or thugs sticking up a gas station, we're pretty hard on thieves. But how often do we cheat on our taxes? Did you pay the sales tax on your Michigan tax form for your latest internet purchase? If you didn't, you're stealing. Most of us, at some time or another have shaken our heads at people who get themselves into financial problems because they're too lazy to take care of business. But how carefully do we examine our own lives? How much work around our house, how much work at church, how many opportunities at work have we missed because we were just too lazy?

God calls us Christians to point out sin. It is part of our responsibility to each other. When you do that, it's easy to feel hypocritical because you know that you're not perfect in that area either. Paul is talking about a different attitude, an attitude that looks down on other people and their sins but is blind to my own sins. He's talking about Christians who go to church Sundays and throw an offering – maybe even a generous offering – into the plate and so they figure that they're better than all those other people who aren't quite as dedicated as they are.

Does that sound at all familiar? This always makes me uncomfortable because I know how big my ego is and how easy it is for me to do this. It's human nature for us to be heroes in our own minds. And that

usually means that we need other people to be the villains – or at least the disappointing sinners that we can compare ourselves to. Paul says, **“So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?”** Christians who think that they’re better than other sinners are inviting God to come and examine their lives. What will he find? God says that we’re supposed to be holy just as he is holy. Jesus says that we’re supposed to be perfect just as our Father in heaven is perfect. God says that he judges not just our words and our actions, but our thoughts and our feelings as well. The sinful pride that assumes that I must be better than those sinners around me is not being holy or perfect like God is.

So what are we going to do? There is only one answer and it’s not trying harder. Trying harder is a good thing and it is a part of living our faith. But it does not get us out of hell. The only thing that does is Jesus. So the only thing we can do is repent. God deals with us in love to bring us to repent. Finally, repentance means trusting in Jesus to take all that sin and guilt away. Only Jesus can do that because of who he is. He’s the Son of God. We could never get to God on our own. So God the Son came to us. The Son of God took on a real human nature, body and soul, mind and heart, so that he could live in our place. He was perfect for us. He never sinned. So he was never complacent. He never felt sinful pride or superiority. Instead, he dealt with everyone in total love – even when he pointed out sin and called people to repent. Jesus did not do that to make us feel even worse because we can’t live that way. He lived that way so that his perfect life would count for all people who have ever lived.

I read this week that the 7 billionth person was born on Monday. Right now, there are that many people alive on earth. Jesus was perfect in place of all of them and of all those who died before this week began and of all those who will be born between today and Judgment Day. He died for all of them. He died you and for me. He died and he paid for our pride and our sin. He paid for all the times we padded our egos by condemning others and then going out and committing the exact same sin. He died for the sin in our hearts that figures we’re good and we’re going to heaven so we don’t have to try that hard anymore. Jesus died and he paid for all that sin and then he rose and declared that it is all gone forever. God has wiped it all away.

Repentance means that we cling to that payment that Jesus made for us when we see the sinners that we really are. We trust in him to keep us safe on Judgment Day because faith in Christ is our get out jail free card. When Christ returns, he will not send us to hell. He will not find us guilty. He will not even replay our sins. Instead, he will call us righteous and holy and perfect and he will take us to live with him forever. That’s what’s going to happen to you.

## II.

We tend to have a scary image of Judgment Day in our minds. Sometimes the Bible does describe that day as terrible – when God is talking to people who don’t repent. Today, God balances the scary and the comforting because Paul puts what’s going to happen to us into the context of what’s going to happen to all people. **God’s judgment is coming. What will happen to the world?**

Paul calls Judgment Day **“the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.”** Right now, that righteous judgment is hidden. Sadly, most people live like they think it’s never going to come – even most people who admit that God may be out there and he may settle accounts some day. It’s easy to think that way in this world. For every Khaddify that finally gets his comeuppance, there’re multiple dictators who die in their own beds. For every Bernie Madoff who goes to jail, there are dozens of swindlers who never get caught. In this life, lots of people get away with lots of sins. The wrath of God – his anger and punishment of sin – is truly hidden. You can’t prove it’s coming from what we actually experience here.

But when that day comes, God’s wrath will be revealed. Jesus himself will appear, not in a manger, but in glory. He will appear in the sky at the head of the army of angels and all people on earth will see him. Paul quotes the Old Testament and says, **“God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’”** Judgment Day is for everybody. Those who die before Christ comes will rise. Their bodies will be restored, even if those bodies were eaten by sharks or turned to dust. And he will gather all those revived dead and all those billions of living people together and he will judge them all.

Paul says, **“To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.”** This would be a very easy passage to misunderstand. Some might argue that it means that good people – no matter what religion they are – will go to heaven but evil people will go to hell. But that’s not

what Paul means. In this same book of Romans, Paul says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So doing good won't give us "glory, honor and immortality." But he goes on to say that we are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. We are declared not guilty in God's courtroom because God sent Jesus to pay for our sins.

So what does all that have to do with persistence in doing good? A Christian always tries to live his faith. We put our faith in practice by praying for our congregation, for our brothers and sisters here and throughout the world and for those who don't yet know Christ but need his healing and his love. We put our faith in practice by reflecting the love of Christ. We don't think about what other people deserve, we think about what is best for them. We help them. We serve them. We share our lives and our faith with them. We do all that because God made us different when he gave us faith. That is seeking God's glory by doing good.

Paul tells us that the opposite is to be self-seeking. Sinful pride worships me. The opposite is to reject the truth – the gospel with all its promises – and to follow evil. Without faith in Christ, what keeps me from living a life of sin and selfishness? Nothing. Even those unbelievers who seem to be good are acting from selfishness. They need to pat themselves on the back. They try to silence their consciences by their good works. They're convinced they're better than other people. No one without faith in Christ will reach eternal life.

But Jesus will declare that all those who trusted in him will have persisted in doing good. Even though we might feel ashamed of how little good we've actually done, Jesus will say that we sought his glory and honor and immortality, because he will give us credit for all that he did during his life on this earth. He will give us glory and honor and peace for all eternity. But for all those who failed to trust in him, there will be only trouble and distress. They will be condemned to spend eternity in hell. Paul says that there is no difference. God will treat Jews and Gentiles the same. The only question that matters is faith. Do we trust in Jesus? If we do, we will be declared to be righteous. If we don't, we will have to pay for our sins in hell forever. When the Judgment is done, Jesus will remake the heavens and the earth. And he will settle us in paradise. We will live without sin in our hearts, without fear or sadness, without physical hurt or illness or old age. We will see our Savior every day and rejoice in his love in a new world forever.

That's the promise of Judgment Day. That promise is real. Don't let two thousand years of waiting fool you. That day can only come once. But when it comes, everything will change. And Jesus did say that he was coming soon. God wants us to have a sense of urgency about Judgment Day. He wants us to live as though we could see it come, because we could. We may not. So we do have to plan for tomorrow and the next day and our retirement, if we should live so long. But we can never get engrossed in those things. We need to live every day knowing that Christ is coming back soon. And I may well live to see it. And if I do, I will live to see the fulfillment of all God's promises. If I die first, I will rise on that day of fulfillment. But either way, that day is the beginning of eternity. Amen.