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Sunday, November 10, 2024

2 Peter 3:3-13

Christ Will Come to Judge: Really? Really. Really!

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is coming. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

We say it together almost every week as we confess our faith. The three ancient and most basic Christian Creeds – the Apostles, Nicene and Athanasian all state this truth about our Lord Jesus Christ: ***He will come to judge the living and the dead.***

And no wonder, since this promise permeates the pages of Holy Scripture. It is even the closing promise of God's Word. In the second to last verse of the Bible, Jesus declares: **Yes, I am coming soon.** (Rev. 22:20)

Christ will come to Judge. We need to hear and review this fact of our faith, because many voices deny it. God's Word declares: **Christ will come to Judge**, and the enemies of faith reply: ***Really?***

Nearly 2,000 years ago, in the mid 60's of the first century, shortly before his death, the Apostle Peter wrote: **In the last days scoffers will come with their mocking, following their own lusts. They will say, "Where is this promised coming of his? ... all things continue as they have from the beginning of the creation."**

Way back in Peter's day unbelievers laughed at the thought Jesus would return, and their numbers have only grown. Those who embrace Satan's lie of macro-evolution deny that there is a God who created the world and so they laugh at the notion of Jesus coming to judge as old fashioned and uneducated. Some agree the world will end, but by climate change disaster or an asteroid, and not by Jesus coming to judge.

Peter tells us people have a vested interest in denying Jesus coming again, so they can **follow their own lusts.** In the conscience people know their sin is wrong and

deserves judgment, but if they can explain away and reject judgment day, then they feel better as they do whatever their sinful **heart** desire.

But we know better, right? We say it week after week: **Christ will come to judge.**

Except that, inside of us is the same sinful nature that infects the whole human race. And so deep down and sometimes not so deep down, we doubt and question God's Word – is He *really* coming back after so long?

Even when we boldly confess with our words that **Jesus will come** aren't there ways we fail to act like He could return at any moment? Do we act with the urgency that the Bible teaches so that we are ready if this is our last week or even last day in this world?

Are we always **on guard** like Jesus tells us in today's Gospel, watching and praying, repenting of that sin that we have started to get comfortable with? Do we hear, learn, and share God's saving Word like this might be our last chance to do so? Or do we sort of put spiritual matters off, thinking I'll get to that later. But understand, God has not promised us 'a later,' but has promised that Jesus will come to judge.

Do we ever try to escape thoughts of God's judgment by indulging in our own self-righteous judging others – eager to point out their sins but not confess our own unworthiness, or ready to criticize the way others use their Christian freedom in line with Bible truth, criticizing how they vote in this messy world or as though our self-chosen ways of doing things are superior, thinking that if we can judge others for a bit, we can forget for a moment that we stand beneath God's judgment. But that won't save us.

No matter how much the devil, the unbelieving world and our own sinful hearts try to sinfully deny it, the fact is, **Christ will come to judge. REALLY.**

Point by point, Peter demolishes the argument of those who deny Jesus' return: **For the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow to do what he promised, as some consider slowness.**

It seems like it has been a long time waiting for Jesus' return, from our perspective, but not from God's. **A thousand years are like a day** and vice versa. In other words, time is meaningless to God.

God it is outside of time. He created time **in the beginning** (Gen 1:1). He knows and controls and holds *all of time*. Thus, the long **slow** to us passage of time is not long to Him and no amount of centuries or millennia will stop Him from doing **what he promised**. Remember that several thousand years stood between the first promise of Jesus and the time He came into this world.

But short or long, God always does what He says. So **Christ will come to judge. Really.**

Those who deny it forget how **by the word of God...** God made the world. They also **forget** how the ancient **world perished** in the world-wide flood of Noah.

Peter says they **intentionally forget**. They should know better, first of all, because God has said so. But Peter might also be speaking about how many things we see in the world could be explained by the flood, though the Bible never tells us what and how much. There is also the fact that nearly every culture across all the continents have some ancient story of a great flood. So even without God's Word, even the heathen retained a memory of the flood, making it all the more foolish to dismiss the truth that God will judge.

The very fact so many people today deny Creation is more evidence that God's Word is true and **Christ will come!** Peter wrote these words 17 centuries before Rationalism and 18 centuries before Darwin's theories led to so many people to **mock** God's Word. Yet another prophecy of Scripture fulfilled in our own day!

And so, this **really will happen: The day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will pass away with a roar, the elements will be dissolved as they burn with great heat, and the earth and what was done on it will be burned up.**

If a **thief** is going to steal from you tonight, they will not give you a phone call this afternoon to tell you that they'll be breaking into your house about 11:30 tonight. No! Thieves come unexpectedly. Thieves come unannounced.

So, **Christ will come to judge** at an unannounced and unexpected time. He has told us to be ready because it could be anytime. It could be centuries away and it could be this afternoon. Since we don't know let us live our lives so that we would be ready if it were today.

It is too late when the thief has already stolen. It was too late for people in Noah's day to turn back to God when their lungs filled with floodwater. It will be too late to attend to spiritual matters when at Jesus' Word this world is **dissolved** by supernatural **fire**. It will be too late to **repent** of our sin when the Lord who requires **pure hands and hearts** (Ps 24) **will judge people's secrets** (Ro 2:16).

But Peter does more than tell us the judgment will come. He also points us to the only way of rescue. (The Lord) **is patient for your sakes, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance.**

The world has not yet ended, because in amazing mercy God wants more people to be saved! God's rescuing mercy for sinners is the whole reason Christ came into the world the first time to save the world, to live, die and rise to win peace and forgiveness for all people.

Since only those who believe this message will enjoy that peace and life, Jesus sends His Church with His Word into the world **proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name** (Luke 24).

And so, this very day, God's saving word calls **you** and me to **repentance.**

Repentance is worked by God's Word that tells us we are sinners, there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. After all, if man's great achievements: Pyramids and space shuttles, nuclear missiles and skyscrapers will all be burned up, that means no human effort can ever save us.

So **Repent!** Take God seriously. Admit your sins, both known and unknown, the secret and the obvious and look to Him for mercy!

Repentance is also worked by God's Word that says what we could not do, Jesus has done for us! The Son of God came in **patience** and **love** to live a life free from sin, a life the Father judged as perfect, a life He now counts to all who trust in Jesus.

To pay for our darkest sins and our folly of not taking His every word seriously, Jesus let God's burning judgment for all sin be poured out on Himself on the cross.

Repentance means trusting that promise God gives in Romans 8: **There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

So **Repent**, clinging to Christ alone to save you. And then bring forth fruits of repentance, living as His forgiven people, using, sharing and enjoying His gifts of this life, but not getting caught up in them, because they will come to an end. Daily battle against sin and follow His commands because Jesus' gift of mercy and forgiveness gives you the power to do so.

And then trust what God's Word tells us here, that since we are in Christ, we can actually **look forward** to the day of His return and what He will do for us then. **Christ will come to judge. Really!!**

According to his promise we look forward to new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

We often speak of dying and our souls going to heaven as the goal of our Christian faith. It is not. The goal the Bible points us to is the day when Jesus returns and raises the dead and puts our souls and bodies together again! God made us body and soul and has saved us body and soul and will raise us body and soul to life everlasting just as Jesus rose victorious on Easter!

The new heavens (that is new sky, atmosphere) **and new earth** is what the Bible calls the place where we will live with Jesus in endless joy and bliss after the resurrection with glorified bodies.

Do you have questions? I do. I wish I knew more details what that new world will be like. I think maybe if God gave us all the details, we wouldn't understand it anyway because we are so used to the misery of a sinful world. But what we need to know, God tells us: it is the home where **righteousness dwells**. That is it will be perfect in every way.

That means there will be no temptations and attacks, no one mocking your faith. There will be no guilt or shame, no death or pain. All that brings us frustrations – the car

that won't start, the political ads, pollution and fear will all be gone, burned up and replaced with life and joy with Jesus forever!

Oh what good news then it is to hear: **Christ will come to judge. Really!!!** Amen.

The one who testifies about these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen!

*We confess that **Christ will come again to judge** using the Nicene Creed on page 8 of the worship folder.*