

## September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025 Sermon

### Scripture Intro:

Judgement day.

Just two words, but I'll bet they brought up some thoughts and feelings for you. Maybe what flashed across your mind was the very well-rated sequel to the original Terminator movie, but maybe it was a feeling of fear. Or anxiety. Or anger. Maybe you don't believe in that kind of thing anyway, because you don't know if there is a God, or the God that you believe in wouldn't judge people.

Judgement and death aren't things that we like to talk about a whole lot. They're taboo. And the few people who do talk about them seem to like talking about them way too much.

We might not like to think about it, but every day each one of us will come to the end of our time here on earth. Strangely, the only experience that we all share in life, is death. So why don't we talk about it?

I was chatting with the director of a nursing home this week and we were reflecting on how often we speak to families who have never discussed death and dying. Part of it is awkwardness. No one expects you to answer "what are you up to this week" with "reflecting on the inevitability of death and its implications."

Part of it is also fear. We all want to believe that what waits for us on the other side of death is happiness, but most of us don't really believe it. Anyone looking forward to death in our culture does so because they are struggling with life, not because they're celebrating what is to come. We worry that there is an angry God waiting for us on the other side of death's curtain, or else eternal boredom.

But what if judgement day isn't something to be feared, but to be looked forward to? That might sound crazy, but let's look at what Paul shares with the church in Corinth. Remember, this is a man who spent his early life persecuting and killing anyone who followed Jesus. When he talks about the transforming power of Jesus, he knows what he's talking about.

### Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:10-21

<sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

<sup>11</sup> Therefore, since we know the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade people. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your consciences. <sup>12</sup> We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to be proud of us, so that you may have a reply for those who take pride in outward appearance rather than in the heart. <sup>13</sup> For

if we are out of our mind, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. <sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ compels us, since we have reached this conclusion, that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised.

<sup>16</sup> From now on, then, we do not know anyone from a worldly perspective. Even if we have known Christ from a worldly perspective, yet now we no longer know him in this way.

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! <sup>18</sup> Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. <sup>19</sup> That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us.

<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God." <sup>21</sup> He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

### **Sermon:**

How does God feel about you? Is he angry? Disappointed? Distant?

Maybe you feel God doesn't like you that much. Or that he's disappointed and waiting for you to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. Maybe even when you go to pray the main thing you feel is guilt; like God's wagging his finger disappointed.

Many people walk around believing that God is their enemy. And if that's the God that we imagine, then it's no wonder judgement day sounds like bad news. But Paul wants us to look deeper and see who Jesus really is, by looking at what he has done, and what he will do.

Our reading began by reminding us that there will come a day when we stand before Jesus. He will look at all that we have done on this earth and he will repay us the fruit of our labours. I don't know about you, but for me, that's intimidating. Thinking back over our lives, most of us feel some apprehension at the idea that Jesus will look over all that we've done, and downright anxious that Jesus might give us what we deserve.

Part of that is a healthy fear. The same kind of fear that comes from standing on the shore during a storm, and being reminded of just how vast and powerful the ocean is. It's not a fear of punishment, but an all-consuming awe that we are dealing with something much bigger than we are. We are speaking about the God who creates galaxies with a word. Every once in a while, that should knock the wind out of us. Not with dread, but with amazement.

It is right that we think about that moment with awe. God has handed over all authority to judge to Jesus, and one day, we will stand before him on the day of judgement. When we see

the evil around us in the world, it is good news that God is not standing by indifferently. God cares deeply about justice, and he will make sure that every evil and cruel action will be answered for. There is no question of if God will bring about justice, only when.

But Jesus did not come to earth to scare the daylights out of us. He did not come to tell us that God hates us and that we are his enemies. He came with a very different message.

Jesus came with good news. News that God is not our enemy. News that although we owe God a debt that we can never repay, Jesus is not a divine repo-man come to take what is his. God wants to settle the debt, but the terms of payment are something that we never could have expected. The debt has been paid, but it is Jesus—not us—that took on the cost. 1 John 4 describes it like this:

God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. In this, love is made complete with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears is not complete in love.

Sometimes we hold on to our feelings of guilt, or shame, or fear because we believe we should still suffer for what we have done. We don't truly believe that what Jesus has done is enough, because it feels like we have done too much. But Jesus does not want us to live in fear of judgement day. He wants us to live in the powerful confidence of what he has done through the power of his love: the kind of love that drives out every last bit of fear.

And that changes everything. What counts isn't what we look like on the outside. It isn't the failures, or addictions, or mistakes that God sees, because Jesus is serious about our sin. When he came and took our failures, the person that we used to be died. The old version of us who made God our enemy is gone. "Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old has passed away, and see, the new has come!"

Paul doesn't say, "anyone who is in Christ has a chance to prove themselves", or "anyone who is in Christ might change someday." Jesus does not see who we used to be, he sees a new creation: not an enemy, but a friend.

That's what reconciliation does. It takes enemies, and makes friends. I spoke a couple weeks ago about a friend who had reached out after some distance, and the weight that fell off. The conversation is still ongoing, and one of the main things I am trying to keep at the center is that my hope is not to change them, but for them to know and experience the love of God, because that is what brings real life and reconciliation. That process has been a taste of what Jesus does for us, taking relationships that were broken, and bridging the gap with grace.

But God doesn't stop there. He doesn't just save us from something; he saves us for something. God gave the ministry of reconciliation to Jesus, and then Jesus gave it to us. Reconciliation is our reality, and it is also our ministry.

The only right response to what Jesus has done for us is to live for him. But how do we do that? Listen to Paul's words again, but with our response highlighted:

"Therefore, since we know the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade people... for the love of Christ compels us... those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised... everything is from God, who... has given us the ministry of reconciliation... and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ."

If Jesus died for us, then we should live for him. God has made us new, and he calls us to showing and sharing the good news that we are not his enemies, we are the people he has chosen to speak reconciliation into the lives of our friends, neighbours, and coworkers. So many people walking around us feel like God is their enemy, or that they are God's enemy. So many feel like they can never measure up, and that no matter what they do, all that God sees is their failures and faults.

The work is already done. Jesus has already reconciled us, but so many of us don't know it. We are going to family get-togethers, and jobsites, and book clubs, and moms groups where people are living under the weight of believing God is against them, and we have the news that Jesus has lifted that burden. Our ministry is not to save people. It is not to force anything. Our ministry is to let people know that God is not just sitting around waiting for us to come to him, he has already come to us. We need to go to people so that they know God cares about them enough to send someone. God doesn't just put a notice up on the board, he gives personal invitations.

Maybe it's a coworker who is struggling with the guilt of an addiction that they can't break who needs to know that God is for them, and longs to work in their lives and give them hope. Maybe it's a child who has been dragged down by life and needs to know that God loves them not because of their accomplishments, but because they are his children. Maybe it's an elderly relative who feels like the purpose they once had is gone who needs to be reminded that God is still close, and powerfully at work in their lives.

Our hope is not that we can become good enough for God to love us. It is not even that God will give us the boost we need to we can earn our way into heaven. God is not helping us to accomplish our mission; we are joining with God to accomplish his.

Our hope is rooted totally and completely in what Jesus Christ has already done. Many of us feel like all God wants to do is take from us, and it is true that Jesus comes to take something from us, but what he takes is our mistakes. Our failures. Our missed opportunities.

But Jesus doesn't just come to take our sins away, we needed more than that. He took away all of our evil, and traded us his goodness, so that when we stand before him on the day of judgement, he is not counting the evil that we had done before—that old self is dead and gone. What Jesus will count is his own goodness that he has given to us.

God is not our enemy. And God is not the enemy of the people that you hate either. Jesus will not judge you or me, as worthy of eternal life because of our successes, or our mistakes. The shocking, and offensive, and wonderful, good news is that our eternal destiny is not based on what we have accomplished, but on what Jesus has accomplished.

We have nothing to do with earning our salvation, but we have a lot to do with how we respond to that gift. God will judge our actions, and reward us for them, but what hangs in the balance is not God's love for us, but how pleased he is.

My love for my wife and my children has not wavered, and I pray that it never will. But the things they do still bring me joy or pain. There is nothing they can do to lose my love, but that doesn't mean that I don't care what they do. In fact, it makes me care even more, because I long for them to experience the goodness of living in God's will.

God has given each of us a ministry, and we carry it out in different ways, but we all share the same ministry of reconciliation. Our ministry to each and every person, whether we love them or hate them, is to show them the love of God. Our hope for every person is that they have experienced the grace and forgiveness of God, and will enjoy eternity with him. It is not for us to judge whether someone was worthy or unworthy. When we do that, we take Jesus' seat, and it is much too large for us to fill.

What Jesus has done is shocking, and wonderful, and offensive. The world doesn't understand it, and quite frankly, most of us who follow Jesus don't really understand it. God will not judge you based on whether you have done enough good things to make it into the good place. As long as we still trust in ourselves, we have not understood the good news.

Jesus will judge for every one of us whether we trusted in our own goodness, or in his. The pharisees in Jesus' day were shocked when he told them that the churchgoing, truth telling, tithing, clean religious leaders who trusted in their goodness were far away from him, and the dirty, lying, cheating, addicted, foreigners who put their trust in him saved. And it still shocks us today.

And until we understand just how completely Jesus means it when he says that we are hopeless by ourselves, and have every hope when we put our trust in him, the message that we are sharing with the world will not be reconciliation because of what Jesus has done, it will be rewards for our hard work or a bribe to a God who is our enemy. And Jesus never wanted us to believe a message like that, and he certainly doesn't ask us to share a message like that.

That's the old worldly perspective trying to creep back in. But Jesus gives us a new perspective. God makes a choice not to hold our failures against us, no one forces him to do it. People often speak about how love must be freely given if it really is love, but sometimes we forget that God is also free. He loves us, not because we have earned it, but because he loves us freely.

Jesus, who reaches out to you and to me and says, "I came to make things right. I paid the price that you owe. I died the death that you should have died. It's done." That's why Jesus said, "it is finished" as he died on the cross.

Because of what Jesus has done, God is not your enemy. God is for you, not against you. This is not softening the gospel, or making it palatable. This is the cutting edge of the sword of truth that slices away our pride and says, "Jesus had every reason to call me his enemy, but he has freely chosen to call me his beloved child." It is not my goodness or my choice that has earned a place, it is the goodness of God, and the work of Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you once more, "what does God think about you?" And as you think about it, consider this: Jesus considered a relationship with you worth dying for. On the days when you feel like giving up, and wonder if you have failed too far, allow that love to encourage you. And on the days when you feel like you have it all together, let God's love and sacrifice remind you who is to thank.

When we stand before Jesus on that day, we can be confident in what he has done. We are forgiven and chosen to live for him and to share the good news that we have been made right with God. You and I are not God's enemies, we are his ambassadors.