

Christ Came because of Judgement

1 Peter 1:17-22

You could turn to 1 Peter. We will eventually look carefully at 1 Peter 1. It says in Hebrews 9 that people are destined to die once, and after that the judgment. Without Christ, this is very bad for us, that we must die and that we must face judgement. Christ came to rescue us from both.

We are still all destined to die, and after that face judgment. That is all still in place. But Christ came to take the sting out of both. He came to conquer death, we saw that last week, and he came so that we do not need to fear the final judgement, either.

I know these are not happy topics, people. These are only for the first two Sunday² of Advent. The third and fourth Sundays will be much more cheerful, even though there is also a lot of good news in what the Bible tells us about death and about judgment.

Also, we want to have a feel-good Christmas. That has become a priority. But Jesus did not come to earth so we could have a feel-good Christmas. Jesus came to earth because death and judgement were desperate human problems, and we had no escape. That's why he came.

I will read you a page of Scriptures about judgment. Coming judgement is at the center of why Christ came. We will all face God the Judge, and it looked very bad for us, so God sent his Son.

Paul on Judgment

2 Cor 5:9-10 - We make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Rom 14:10,12 - For we will all stand before God's judgment seat... Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

Revelation

Rev 20:11-13, 15 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done.... Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Jesus on Judgement in Matthew

Mt 5:29-30 - *If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.*

Mt 7:13 - *Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.*

Mt 13:40-43 - *As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.*

Mt 18:32-35 - *Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."*

Mt 25:31-34, 40, 46 - *When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.... "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.... "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*

Jesus often talks about judgement, especially in Matthew. I just read you five of them. By my count Jesus speaks of judgement twenty-five times in Matthew.

This is why there is Christmas, and this is why God sent his Son. This stuff scares us, it makes us anxious, and that's too bad. I want to make as clear as I can that words like this did not frighten people in NT churches. I don't know why it scares us now. I cannot answer that. But I can tell you that it was good news to them. These judgement words were part of the good news for them.

Good News: Evil People will be Brought to Justice

In the OT and in Romans and in Revelation, God tells his people that he will bring justice to the earth, and that is good news for his people. There are some very evil people on this earth, there are people who have done terrible things to others.

Paul tells us, “leave room for the wrath of God.” And then Paul quotes God’s own words: “‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.” That’s the OT God and the NT God.

There is debate these days on Hell, if it is eternal conscious torment, or if it is the annihilation of the soul. Some verses sound like one, and some the other. Some things I need to solve, but what to do with the wicked for eternity is not my job. That’s up to God. The church has always assumed ongoing punishment, that would be my leaning, but I don’t care much about the debate.

But one thing is clear. There are people who have suffered terribly at the hands of others, or they have helplessly watched their loved ones and friends suffer. And God promises those people, “when you see what I do to the wicked, you will be completely satisfied that justice has been done.” Scripture leaves no doubt about that. For God’s people, final judgement is good news, because justice will finally be done. When God is satisfied is another matter.

Good News: People Turned to Jesus to be Saved from the Wrath of God

In 1 Thess 1 Paul tells those believers, “*you turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, Jesus, who saves us from the coming wrath.*”

People who feared the wrath of God put their trust in Christ. They decided to live in God’s ways, and they confessed that Jesus was Lord of heaven and earth, and they were baptized. That way they had nothing to fear from the wrath of God. Why that does not work any more for Christians, I cannot say. But in biblical times, Christians did not fear the wrath of God.

When believers get sloppy about living in the Lord’s ways, God reminds us that we will give an account of our lives. *We make it our goal to please the Lord. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

Don’t fear the wrath of God unless you have left the Lord behind. We will go now to 1 Peter, and that’s what he has in mind as well. It is one of the many ways the Scripture reminds and motivates us that how we live matters.

Our Father Judges Each Person’s Work Impartially – 1 Peter 1:17

Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

This is pretty simple: Our heavenly Father will also be our Judge, and he's not biased. He will talk to us about what we did. We're foreigners here on earth, don't get too much at home. Rather, let's live reverently before our Father in heaven.

Redeemed out of an Empty Way of Life – 1 Peter 1:18-21

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

We were redeemed out of an empty way of life by the precious blood of Christ. Redeemed out of a way of life. This is not how we usually talk about being redeemed. We were slaves to an empty way of life. We were on a life path, and there was no way to get off that empty path.

God paid for us with the most valuable thing he had, the blood of his Son, the death of his Son. By paying that price, God could come and pick us up out of that empty life path and put us down in a different life path, so that we could live in God's ways, a rich and full life path.

God did not just *forgive* our sins, he saved us from the *power* of sin, and give us the Spirit, and he *aimed us* in a new direction. Paul says the same in Ephesians 2. *We are saved by grace, not by works, so no one can boast.* We like that part, saved by grace not works.

The next line in Eph 2 says, *We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* We are a new creation, created in order to do good works. We were redeemed from an empty way of life by the blood of Christ.

Somewhere in here, some of us will still be anxious. We are thinking about the ways in which we are still the poor in spirit, and the ways in which we still do the wrong thing. Folks, it has never been any different. The people Peter wrote to, the ones Paul wrote to, were no different, no better than we are. It is easy to tell that from the Letters.

So relax, because the gospel has changed your lives. You do good things you would not do if you did not have Christ, and you avoid evil you would not avoid if you did not have Christ. That's because you were redeemed out of an empty way of life by the blood of Christ.

Our Father will judge the work of each believer, but only after giving us a huge head start in living in his ways, as well as his ongoing help. And if any of us are stubbornly hanging on to some hardness, some refusal to submit to God, then Peter would encourage us to become less attached to this world, and make sure we're living in reverent fear of God.

Love One Another 1 Peter 1:22

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth. The truth, the gospel, requires obedience. 1, We repent, that means we decide to live in God's ways. 2, We confess that Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth. And 3, we are baptized in Jesus' name for the forgiveness of our sins. That's obeying the truth: repent, confess Jesus as Lord, and be baptized in his name.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other. When we obey the truth, we purify ourselves. We are forgiven and we are new creatures, we are born again.

And the immediate result is what? So that you have sincere love for each other. As far as Peter is concerned, obeying the truth, repenting and confessing and baptism, purifies us and gives us sincere love for each other. We were redeemed out of an empty way of life. What kind of life were we redeemed into? A pure life of sincere love for each other.

That's what happens to us when we obey the truth. Now let's read the whole verse 22: *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.*

The first thing we did was obey the truth. This purified us and it also gave us sincere love for each other. What's the next thing we are supposed to do? *Love one another deeply, from the heart.* This is the way of life that is not empty, this is the pure way of life.

We tend to think of purity as something private, some kind of personal righteousness. Peter corrects us. Purity is to have sincere love for each other, to love one another deeply, from the heart. Impurity is the rest.

Now let's go back to v17: *Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.* When the Father judges each person's work impartially, what kind of work is he interested in? If we live out our time as foreigners here in reverent fear, how will that look?

Since your faith brought you sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. Let's not get sidetracked. We've been told what the impartial Judge looks for.

Jesus Takes the Sting out of Judgement

People are destined once to die, and after that the judgment. The judgment will be impartial, and everyone will be judged. Jesus came to conquer death, and Jesus came to take the sting out of judgement. Jesus did not change judgement, he changed us.

We were saved by grace not by works, so that no one can boast. It is the gift of God. But the grace that saved us also changed us. We were redeemed out of an empty way of life, we were born again, we became a new creation. The grace that saved us, and changes us, also helps us every day, so that at the End, God will welcome us into his kingdom.

If we think, “I had a conversion experience long ago so I have a free pass into glory no matter how I live,” we’re in big trouble. On the other hand, if we love the Lord and aim ourselves in his ways, as I know you do, there is no reason to fear.

God the Judge is also our Father, and he is completely determined that everyone who trusts in his Son Jesus and calls Jesus “Lord” has nothing to fear from final judgement. God is completely resolved that at the final judgment, our lives will show that we are his loyal people.

So his grace saves us, and his grace also changes us, and his grace helps us every day. This is why Christ came. The sting of death is gone, and the sting of judgement is also gone. Amen.

PRAYER: O God, to You who are able to keep us from falling, and to present us before Your glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to You, the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the Lord make our love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else. May he strengthen our hearts so that we will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. Amen. Go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.