

Sermon on John 5:19-30 for the Second Sunday of End Time, Last Judgment, 7 November 2021

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Amen.

The lesson for your consideration this morning is recorded in the gospel of John 5:19-30.

Dear brothers and sisters, fellow acquitted children of God. The board game Monopoly™ has been around so long that certain aspects of this game have become part of popular culture and language. Everyone knows that if you go to jail, you don't pass "GO" and you don't collect 200 dollars, and you must pay your fine or languish there for three turns. But if you have a "Get out of jail free" card, you don't have to pay the fine, and you can continue to play. Christians have their own kind of "get out of jail free" card—it's the "stay out of hell" card that we have through faith in Jesus Christ, the promise of eternal life. The alternative is facing the judgment and wrath of God. So this second Sunday of End Times, when we look forward to the Last Judgment, ask yourself this question: what does the end of time mean to you? ***Life...or Judgment?***

Now, what about this Judgment? Friends, our God is a promise-maker, and a promise-keeper. He's made a lot of promises to his people and every one of them has been kept, fulfilled, except one: his promise to return to Earth on the Last Day. Now, that one's a doozie—it encompasses a lot of events, this promise; in fact, *all* things are covered: Jesus, the son of Man and Son of God, will come again in the clouds, just as he promised. As promised, the heavens will roll up like a scroll and the earth will disappear with a roar, the very elements consumed. That might be some sight to see, but if you live to that day, I don't think you'll be paying much attention, as you will most definitely have other things on your mind. Because in that moment, as promised, your living body will be changed to a glorious, imperishable, spiritual body—not immaterial, but holy and sinless. Even the faithful dead will receive that perfect spiritual body. As for those who are living or who died in unbelief, we don't know for certain, as to the manner and substance of their resurrection, but this fact is sure: all who have ever lived will rise to face the Judgment.

Then we will stand before our righteous judge and be separated, as harvesters separate wheat and weeds, as a shepherd separates lambs and goats. Some will be acquitted, declared "not guilty" and ushered into heaven. Others will be condemned and cast into hell. All this, too, is a promise.

Now, friends, how do we know that this promise of judgment, and all the promises that accompany it, *will* come true? Because every other promise our God has ever made to us has come true. He has given his Word, to assure us, to teach us, and in some cases, to warn us.

But the arrogant, the evil-doers spoken of by Malachi have despised God's Word. They have not believed in Jesus Christ who speaks in his Father's name, in Jesus Christ, the very Savior of mankind, who will also be the judge, seated upon his throne, to pass sentence against them. They have rejected him in favor of the misleading teachings of the devil, the numerous false gods of men, or their own fantasies. They have rejected the one who came to save them, and when the heavens

and earth pass away, it will be too late, and they will burn—forever.

For the unbeliever, the end of life, the end of the world, is just the beginning of suffering, and the Last Judgment is therefore a time to be feared. No excuses, no appeal, no last-minute reprieve, and NO exceptions—do not pass GO, do not collect 200 dollars.

This coming Judgment, what does it mean to the unbeliever? It means fear in this life, and fire in the next.

It is a common human failing to fear what we do not know. Jesus said that to know him is to know the Father. So if you know Christ, believe and trust in him, then you know, believe and trust in God. Therefore, for the unbeliever who has rejected what the Spirit teaches about Jesus, and thus does not know him, *cannot* know him, this God who is unknown is an object of fear.

And they have good reason to fear him. Jesus says "do not fear those who can destroy the body; instead, fear him who can cast body and soul into hell." He's talking about himself! We will all stand before his Judgment seat, and those who have rejected him will have to answer for every one of their deeds of evil: the evil they have done and the good they have left undone. Without Jesus standing as their advocate and substitute, they stand alone, and though he once bore their sins on the Cross, they rejected that gracious gift and now must bear all those sins by themselves. And the only thing that will be left for them will be eternal punishment: the lake of fire, the outer darkness, where their fire does not go out, and their worm does not die.

Now, it might seem to you that these unbelievers nowadays don't really fear God—they either don't believe that he even exists, or they don't think he would punish them. Don't believe it, friends. The natural knowledge that there is a God to whom we must give an account of ourselves is written into the heart of every single human being, and, no matter how hard they try to repress or ignore it, it cannot be erased. Why else do unbelievers surround and fill themselves with games, entertainment, sex, money, drugs and more? Why do they, even the atheists among them, turn to some "system of belief" in order to assuage the guilt they feel? Because they are afraid.

Do you immerse yourself in such things, dear Christian? Are you ever swayed or moved by the teachings of men? What are you afraid of?

When, in fact, there is nothing for believers to fear. Yes, God has promised Judgment, condemnation and everlasting fire to those who do evil, and we have done evil. But he has also promised eternal life to all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. How is that possible? Because Jesus lived the perfect life God demanded of us, and God the Father gives that perfect life to us. Also, because Jesus bore all our sins, all of *your* sins, dear Christian, when he hung on the Cross and died—and God the Father gave that death to you, accepted that death in place of yours. Your debt is paid, my friends, so you can stand before that Judgment seat without fear, for you have been washed clean by the blood of Jesus, and you wear the righteous life of Jesus like a pure, white robe.

And with that promise of forgiveness and acquittal comes the promise of eternal life in heaven. We cannot begin to imagine the joyful existence that awaits those who are saved. Unbelievers try to

tell themselves that heaven would be boring, but really, can you imagine anything more exciting than being in the presence of God, seeing his face, hearing his voice, singing his praises with the whole company of heaven, millions, even billions of voices raised in an unending song of indescribable beauty, forever? Now, while you're holding on to that glorious vision, consider how short your imagination falls in comparison with the reality that will be!

Death and judgment? For us, doorways to eternal life! Pass "GO," collect 200 dollars, AND...inherit the kingdom of God.

Unbelievers think that they have it made here on earth, but in reality, it is Christians who "have it made." Because you don't have to wait to get to heaven to enjoy the blessings of living in God's kingdom. First of all, because of the faith that you have been given, you have hope. You look forward to being in heaven, so nothing, and I mean *nothing*, friends, need cause you any fear or worry. Yes, we are still "only" human, and we must live daily with things that shock us, things that trouble us, things that horrify us...things that make us feel fear. But what are they compared to the glorious future that awaits us? Nothing.

What's more: you know the truth. Isn't it a load off your mind not to have to wonder and worry about what's coming after this life? Isn't it nice to have an answer for every situation? Not "What Would Jesus Do?" but "What Will Jesus Do as he lives in me?" Knowing the truth means knowing what to do, and knowing what is right and good, and being able to do it.

And having life here on earth means you can share that life with others. Whatever your age, dear friends, our Lord has many good works for you to do in his name. Pray for the unbelievers, that they set aside their arrogant denials. Let your life of faith and good works be a beacon, a witness for them, opening doors and hearts for witnessing the truth. And finally, witness, witness, witness. Tell others about the hope you have, and about the truth you know. Don't let fear of rejection and persecution stop your tongue, because your confession of faith, empowered by the Spirit, may be the one that finally gets into that heart of stone, so that this person, whom you loved enough to tell about Jesus, whatever the objection, may have that hope, that truth, that promise of eternal joy in heaven, that you have.

We probably should not think of faith as a "stay out of hell" card, but as a "go directly to heaven" card, because that's really what it is. It's a card we can't play until we die or Christ comes again, because there is still much good left for us to do. But for those who hold that card, the people of faith, the Last Judgment is not a day we fear; in fact, we hope and pray that it might come soon, that we may be taken into heaven. Until that day, which will come in God's good time, we live in the knowledge of what awaits us there, living with hope in our hearts, living without fear—ready for our Lord's return.

Amen.

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence

without fault, and with great joy, to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.