

Romans 2:1-11
Last Judgment Sunday
Lord, Keep Us...
Mindful of the Judgement

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
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You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. ²Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. ³So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

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

The last words of Jesus which we have recorded for us in Scripture, the second to last verse of the Bible in Revelation 22, are these: **I am coming soon** (Revelation 22:20). What does that mean for us? What kind of mindset do we want to have as we look forward to Jesus' return? The past two weeks as we've celebrated the Reformation, we've had the theme *Lord, Keep Us Faithful to Your Word*. And we do that in two ways: first we show faithfulness to God's Word as we continue to study it, learning and reviewing the commands and promises He has for us there. We also show faithfulness to God's Word when we share it with others as we carry out the mission He has given us to go and make disciples of all nations.

Today, as we look forward to that Last Day on which our Lord will return we pray, *Lord, Keep Us Mindful of the Judgment*. What does that mean? In our Gospel lesson a few minutes ago we heard the description Jesus gives of that Last Day. He said, **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.... 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'** (Matthew 25).

So that's Judgment Day, but what kind of mindset are we supposed to have about it? I mean, other than knowing without a doubt that it *is* coming and looking forward to hearing those words, **'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance,** and so on, what importance is there really that we be *Mindful of the Judgment*?

Have you ever considered that Judgment Day and all that the Bible teaches us about it, is really something that is more important for unbelievers than it is for believers? At the end of the day—or at the End of Days—we're good, aren't we? We know Jesus and we trust in the salvation He's won for us.

The people who really need to hear these words, the people who truly need to be more *Mindful of the Judgment* are the unrepentant, the unbelievers. Between the sheep and the goats, the ones who really need to hear this message are the goats, right?

That kind of thinking is where we can easily run into danger. It isn't all that difficult to slip from the sure hope we have in the righteousness that is ours through faith in Jesus, into the false security of self-righteousness. So the Apostle Paul has some words for us this morning to help keep us in the proper frame of mind as we look forward to and consider Judgment Day.

He starts off by telling us that we have absolutely no excuse to judge other people. "If you think you're better than any of the vile, filthy sinners you see out there in the world, then think again," he says. It's easy for us to look at the society around us and start labeling people as the "goats" or the ones who deserve God's judgment. They're the ones whose lives are driven entirely by greed at the expense of everyone around them. They're the ones who commit acts of terrorism or crimes of hate robbing innocent people of the precious gift of life. They're the people who take God's gifts of marriage and sex and pervert them in every imaginable way. Those people deserve God's wrath and displeasure. Thank God I'm not like those people.

It's true. Those people do deserve God's wrath, but reminds us that we are not so different from them as we might like to believe. **We know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?** "But I don't do those things," we want to protest. And then we look into the mirror of God's law. We're about halfway through the Ten Commandments right now in Catechism Class, and what we've been discovering is that while we may not have broken the commandments in the same way as others, we have still broken them.

I have never shot and killed someone in cold blood, but I am certainly guilty of harming even those closest to me with my actions and putting them down with my words. On even more occasions I have failed to show my respect for the sanctity of someone's life by passing up on opportunities to help them or stand up for them. We may not be guilty of all of the sexual sins we hear about in the news or see carried out around us in society, but who among us have not entertained sinful thoughts in our minds? How many of us have shown disregard for the sanctity of God's gifts of marriage and sex with the language we speak, the jokes we tell, the songs, and tv shows, and movies that we select for entertainment? You may not openly worship pagan gods, but how often has the idolatry of your heart revealed itself when the choices you make are based not on God and His will but on what seems best to you?

Yet, even as we look into the mirror of God's law where we're faced with the reality of our sins, our sinful nature keeps on fighting. "Yes, okay, I admit that I've done those things, but it's alright, I'm good, because Jesus forgives me. He forgives me for those sins I've already committed, and He'll forgive me for the sins I commit tomorrow and the day after, so at the end of the day, I'm good, it's okay.

Paul has a question for us when we start thinking like that too, He asks, **do you show contempt for the riches of [God's] kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that [they are] intended to lead you to repentance?** If we show contempt for God's love and start treating it like garbage—like some "get out of jail free" card that gives us an excuse to go on living our lives as we see fit—is that true repentance? And if we aren't truly repentant, then what hope do we have as we look forward to the day of God's final judgement?

I think we as Lutherans get a bit squirmy as we hear Jesus's words from the Gospel where He turns to the sheep and commends them for their works, or when we hear the words Paul shares with us here in Romans 2, that **God "will repay each person according to what they have done." 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.**

Isn't God's Word sufficiently clear that we are saved, not by our works, but by the grace of God through faith that trusts in the saving work of Jesus? So what is all of this talk about God repaying each person according to that they have done or Jesus commending those on His right for the good works they have done?

It comes back to that word "repentance." **God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance.** And remember, repentance is not simply saying you are sorry; it isn't a mere confession that what you have done is wrong or even a concession that because of the wrong you have done you deserve God's wrath. Repentance is the response of the heart both to the message of God's law and to His gospel. It is both confessing our sin before God and trusting in the salvation which He has provided us from that sin in Jesus. I've spoken of it before as a 180° turn. Turning from that sin to Jesus means deciding to fight that sin, rather than accepting it, or excusing it, or willingly continuing to live in it.

Being *Mindful of the Judgment* means asking yourself what kind of a Savior Jesus is. Is He a Savior who simply makes your sin okay, or is He a Savior who has rescued you from that sin to give you a new life full of purpose?

Our Old Testament lesson from Daniel ended with some rather foreboding words, **A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.**

One of those books contains a record of our lives, a record of all that we have ever done held up to the standard of God's perfect glory and righteousness. That book holds no hope for you or me or anyone who has ever lived from Adam and Eve on down. **For all of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God** (Romans 3:23). But second book is the Book of Life. That book contains the names of those who belong to Jesus. That book tells the story of our Savior who took the punishment of your sins on Himself, the Savior who said give me death and give them life. Your name is written in that book. So, when your turn comes on the Last Day to stand before the judgment throne of God, it will not be your sins that God points to, because your sins have been forgiven, washed away by the blood of the Lamb. No, what God will talk about, what He will rejoice in and commend you for as you stand before the throne, will be the way that you...

That's the question, isn't it? That's what Daniel, and Paul, and Jesus Himself want us to consider. As I look into the mirror of the law and see the wickedness of my sin, and then turn to the beauty of the gospel and see the guilt of my sins washed away, what will I do with that new-found freedom? As you stay *Mindful of the Judgment* what fruits of faith can you display to give evidence to the joy you have in the free salvation, the forgiveness from sin, and the new life that Jesus has graciously given you?

Amen.