

## ***Confident on Judgment Day • 1 John 4:17, 5:12-13***

Several years ago a China Airlines Boeing 747 came close to disaster on its transpacific flight to California. For some unknown reason the Number 4 engine went out and the other three quickly followed. The huge aircraft lurched to the right, throwing passengers across the cabin. In two frightening minutes that aircraft dropped six miles, from 41,000 feet to 9,000 feet. It fell 16,000 feet a minute, pulling out of the crash course only a few seconds before impact. When the plane landed in California there were the inevitable interviews of passengers. One of the passengers was quoted as saying, “I knew we were going to die.”

We all know we’re going to die. The issue is not “if”, but “when”. And the Bible tells us very plainly in Hebrews 9:27 that we are “destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”

We may not think very much now about that day of judgment. But on the day we stand before God it will be the most important day we have ever experienced . . . more important than any birthday or graduation day or wedding day or anniversary or even the day of our death. That will be the all-important day for us.

It’s not something we talk very much about. Seldom is it a topic of conversation. Never is there a newspaper article about it in the Sunday paper. We almost wince at the stereotype of the “hellfire and brimstone” preacher who screams about judgment to come and hell to follow. Yet, we all think about it. Even the ideological atheist can’t help but wonder “what if” he is wrong and there is a God whom he one day will stand before in eternal judgment.

As reluctant as some of us may be to talk about it, we must—because it is really more important than anything else. And all begins with the sobering realization that judgment is coming. And it is coming after one of two inevitable events.

Billy Graham was preparing for a rally in South Florida and asked someone what issue he should preach on that would be particularly of interest for people that live in that Miami-Fort Lauderdale sun and beach and retirement area. The answer was a simple one, death.

I suppose that was a play on the fact that there are so many people who retire there, people whose age makes them think more than most about dying. But actually it’s a pressing topic for all kinds of people everywhere because we all must die.

I Corinthians 15:26 calls death “the last enemy”. What a fitting description! Death is the enemy that robs us of our savings, ends our marriages, separates us from our children, terminates our employment, bars us from our homes, steals all our happy moments and shatters our dreams.

It is the great equalizer. No exemptions are given because we are young, old, rich, poor, important, needed or loved. Whether we are commoners or kings, men or women, children or parents—we all face the last enemy called “death”.

And then comes the judgment! It may not be clear whether judgment will come in the next moment or in the next millenium after death or some time in between. The fact is that the judgment of God will come and it is as sure as death itself.

If death is not our door to judgment, then Jesus’ return will be. Luke 21:25-27 predicts the climax of the world that we now know:

There will be signs in sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power

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and great glory.

The promise of Jesus' return was made at his departure in Acts 1. It is as sure as any other promise that Jesus made. He predicted that cataclysmic end times would come upon our world and that he would then return to earth as king and judge.

It will be quite an event! There will be advance warnings—upheavals in nature and politics (floods, famines, revolutions), but the actual event will be sudden and the time is unpredictable. Many at that time will be unprepared and will be taken by surprise according to Matthew 24:36-44:

No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

In today's language we would say that when Jesus Christ returns two people will be riding in a car; one will be taken and one will be left. Two people will be sitting together in a church service; one will be taken and one will be left. A husband and wife will be sleeping in bed; one will be taken and the other one will be left. Two

students or co-workers will be walking down a hallway; one will be taken, one will be left.

What is particularly stunning about all this is that it could happen at any time. We have all our plans made for this week. They may include a business meeting, the sale or purchase of a new home, a trip across the country, an appointment to have a car fixed or a visit to the dentist or doctor. We all recognize that there is a possibility that it all could end with unexpected death for any of us, but it all could also end with the return of Jesus Christ to earth!

And then comes judgment!

When Jesus Christ returns he will return not as the sweet and lowly Jesus in a manger in Bethlehem. He will come as a ruling monarch and as a judge according to Matthew 25:31-32:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 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.

All of this is quite sobering to say the least! But it need not be the least bit frightening. In Luke 21:28 we read, "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

For some the prospect of either death or Jesus' return is good rather than bad. Paul wrote the following in Philippians 1:21-24:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

He's not scared about death, Jesus' return or judgment. In fact, they are all so wonderful that it's hard to choose between them and this present life. That is confidence for Judgment Day. It is confidence Paul had, but it is also confidence we can have. Judgment is coming for sure, but God

gives confidence. This confidence means we no longer need to worry about what will happen to us when we die, when Christ returns or when Judgment Day comes because we are absolutely sure we are safe!

Often I have heard people, even very religious people, when asked if they will go to heaven when they die, answer quite tentatively, "I certainly hope so." God wants us to be able to say with great certainty, "I know so!" But how do we get that kind of confidence? Let's look at three concepts that help us build that kind of confidence.

First, is the concept of love. In I John 4:9-10 we are told:

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

God took the initiative. We didn't love God and then he loved us back. He loved us first and any love we have for God is a response to his initiative. We didn't seek salvation and escape from the judgment of God. God first sought to save us from judgment. That's a huge difference.

God the Judge first loved us and took action to save us. God paid the penalty!

The picture here is of a criminal, a victim and a judge in a courtroom. It is frightening enough when we realize that we are the criminals and that we are clearly guilty beyond any reasonable doubt. We are sinners and we know it!

More frightening is the realization that God is the victim . . . and the Judge! (How would you like to go on trial for beating up and robbing a man only to discover that the man you beat up and robbed is the judge who is going to determine the verdict and pass the sentence? That's the way it is with God and us!

But God the Judge lovingly offers a dramatic solution! I John 4:10 says, "He sent his one and

only Son into the world that we might live through him." God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and crimes. The Judge then declared himself "satisfied"—penalty fully paid! That is absolutely fantastic love! I can't even begin to understand it. But it's true!

Such a dramatic loving action requires a response. It requires it because love always requires a response, especially such great sacrificial love. But, it also requires a legal response to the Judge. I John 4:14-15 tells us that "we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God."

In other words, each of us has to accept or reject God's deal. Those who accept God's offer are set free. Those who reject God's offer must then stand trial and suffer the consequences of their guilt. Today that choice may not seem all that important, but on Judgment Day it is going to be very important.

Can you imagine standing before God who sacrificed his own Son for our salvation and saying, "I was too busy!" or "I didn't feel like it!" or "I just thought I would wait"? How much better to respond "Yes" now!

Let me tell you plainly—if you have not accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, do it today! Pray right now to God and tell him "Yes" before death

unexpectedly occurs or Jesus Christ unexpectedly returns. Now is the time to prepare for judgment before it's too late.

Some people make that commitment to God and accept Christ as their Savior but they still don't have confidence. They worry about whether or not they're really Christians. They lack assurance of their salvation.

I have good news. You can be sure! I John 4:17 tells us, "In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him."

*Now is the time to prepare for judgment before it's too late.*

In other words, we, right now (“in this world”), are as set with God as Jesus is right now (“we are like him”). We are as safe for Judgment Day as God’s Son is. We are as secure in our relationship to God as is Jesus Christ. That’s as superlative as you can get! We’re eternally saved so there’s no reason to ever be afraid again.

Look at I John 5:12. It tells us, “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” That’s a powerful verse. If you have accepted Jesus Christ as Savior, you’ve got him. And, if you’ve got him you’ve got eternal life!

But, if you are still not completely sure, let’s look at the next verse, I John 5:13, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Not think. Not doubt. Not hope. Know! God the Judge has written it down. His word is sacred and sure. God says that if you believe and accept Jesus you are saved. You can know for sure! (After all, if you can’t believe God, who can you believe?)

So, if you have accepted Jesus . . . quit worrying. Quit doubting. Relax. God says it; you can know it. You can have absolute assurance. Complete confidence. You can come to Judgment Day a thousand years from now or later today relaxed and confident because you know that God loves you and that you have said “Yes” to his love. You can be confident on Judgment Day.

Now there may be any one of three responses to these verses we have just looked at. Response number 1, I just don’t believe it. If that is your response, tell that to God. Tell him you don’t believe, you don’t accept, you don’t commit and you’ll take your chances on Judgment Day. Actually, you don’t have to tell him because no response is the same as rejection. (But, I sincerely hope and pray you won’t choose Response number 1.)

Response number 2 is to accept Jesus as your Savior today. Tell him that you want your sins eternally forgiven. Tell him you are going to count on his salvation through Jesus Christ alone for you on Judgment Day.

And, Response number 3 is for those who have lacked confidence and assurance. Tell him you have already prayed before to become a Christian but you have never really had assurance or confidence and that you want it today. Tell God you will take him at his word. You will quit doubting and worrying and being scared. You want to settle this whole thing once and for all.

What it comes to then is this:

Response number 1:

Rejection of salvation.

Response number 2:

Acceptance of salvation.

Response number 3:

Assurance of salvation.

What is your decision today?

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