

## Judgment

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Towards the end of the first century AD, a white haired man knelt down on an island called Patmos in the Mediterranean Ocean and he asked the Creator of the world to reveal to him what was going to happen when the world ended. And the mighty God who made your hair and who made your face, and who made your hands, came down in the power of his Spirit and revealed to this dear man John, who had followed Jesus, what we were going to face in the final days. And this is what he wrote and it's in Revelation 20:12.

I think it's good to fight the devil with every weapon we possess and the sword in your hand is the most powerful so it's good to look at. Under the inspiration of the Creator's Spirit, John wrote this, "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done." The judgment; I think it's an uncomfortable thought to all of us either for our own sakes or for the sake of some dear one that we love.

Now brothers and sisters, the devil is engaged in deceiving us. There is a new family springing up especially in the church world today and it's called the ostrich family. Like the ostrich, they put their heads in the sand when the lion roars, or when the sand storm blows up they pretend the danger is not there. But when the sun shines and when everything looks good, they take their heads out of the sand and many of us are doing this kind of thing with regard to the judgment.

Many of us are pretending that this terrible thing is not there and we're rarely looking into the word to see whether it is there or not. Now, no one cares about ostriches in business because the ostrich looks at the small time payment and forgets about the five years of monthly payments. He always looks at the good side of a bargain. The ostrich looks at the shining body of the car and doesn't look underneath to find it's falling to pieces in rust. He looks always at the side of the issue or the situation that he wants to look at and no one cares about that for the ostrich's judgment in business.

The ostrich looks at our apparent prosperity in America today and forgets to look at the terrorists and forgets to look at the drug addicts, and forgets to look at the riots in our cities, and the discontent among young people. He says, "America is going better than ever." The ostrich in religion does the same thing. He says, "God has given us everything for our comfort. We have used everything that he has given us to better our lives here. We have used hydroelectric power to produce electricity. We used winds to drive our windmills years ago. We used the sea to produce atomic energy. God loves us. He has given us everything to show us how much he loves us and he's given his own Son to show us that he's ready to die for us."

Now, God loves us and wants us to be with him. And to anything that is stern, or just, or righteous in God, the ostrich in the church today puts his head in the sand and pretends that it isn't there. Now I ask you just tonight not to be an ostrich. I don't ask you to accept anything that I say, but to look at God's word and don't be an ostrich. Take your head out of the sand and look plainly at what God says we're going to face and if you do that he'll work in your heart tonight in a way that will please him and will bring you in accordance with his will.

The first ostrich that I'd like you to meet, and you may find some of him inside you, thinks of

himself as a literary critic and he says to us this evening, “Now, don’t get upset by what this preacher is saying about judgment. They all do that to work up a little fear in you. If you go back to the early Christian preachers you’ll find that they were always inviting people to come and be converted but they never mentioned judgment. The New Testament is full of the preachers offering healing and offering power in Jesus’ name but they never mentioned judgment.”

Will you look at what happened in 40 AD, you can see it in Acts 10:42. These are the words that Peter preached when he went to Caesarea and just before he baptized Cornelius in the year 40 AD he preached and said this. Acts 10:42, “And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead.” A lot of us tend to say today, “We’re sophisticated in America and Britain, we don’t go for that kind of primitive preaching.”

Do you remember that Paul, eleven years later in 51 AD went to the center of culture in those days? He went to the city of Athens and began to debate with the philosophers. If he wanted to tone down this primitive message any he would have done it there in Athens. But in 51 AD he said this, “He has fixed a day on which he will judge the world by a man whom he has appointed. And of this he has given us assurance by raising him from the dead.”

In other words, both Peter and Paul, Peter the gruff honest open hearted man, and Paul the shrewd studious debater of Pharisee’s both testified that on the final day there would be a great judgment when we would face this God who made us. Now the literary critic likes to put us back so he says, “That’s Paul’s gospel, but Paul did not originate the gospel. Jesus is the very heart of the gospel and Jesus is continually saying, ‘Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.’ Jesus never mentions a thing like a judgment. He is always encouraging us to come to him and to love him.”

But the word is straight in Matthew 7 and it’s spoken by Jesus himself. It’s in the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus talks about that day very plainly. He says in Matthew 7:22, “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’” I don’t think it’s necessary to point out to you that Jesus is saying there, “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord have we not marched to Alabama in your name? Have we not done many social works in your name? Have we not done many good deeds in your name?’” And I think Jesus is pointing very plainly to the fact that it is not enough to be outwardly like a Christian, or outwardly humanitarian. But he’s stating plainly that on that day he will declare, “I never knew you, you evildoers.”

I think a lot of people today try to point out that Jesus was a child of his age. They say the Jews had already accepted this idea of the judgment and he didn’t want to offend them and so he fell in with this to accommodate his mind to theirs. You can see that Jesus was the infinite God, being as like himself as he possibly could in the shape of a finite man. We do violence to God when we try to say that Jesus was accommodating himself so much to the thought of this age that he produced a dishonest revelation of God to us.

In fact, Jesus often spoke directly of the judgment in language that was not metaphorical, in language that was not picturesque or symbolic. He said, for instance, in Matthew 25:31, “When the Son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a

shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” It’s very hard to say that this is just a primitive opinion of Christianity when it’s Jesus himself that uses these words, that he will separate us as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

I think if we stop being ostriches and really look into his words and examine them, we’ll see that Jesus not only teaches that there will be a judgment, but he says that he himself will be the judge, that it is he that will judge us on that day. You remember he says, “The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son and has given him the authority to execute the judgment because he is the Son of man.” In other words, on that day we will not face God the Father but we will face Jesus the Son. The one who was despised and rejected of men, the one who is a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, he is the one that we will face as our judge on that day.

There was a padre in the First World War called G. Studdert Kennedy and he used to visit the men in the trenches over in Europe. He used to minister to them and speak to them of Jesus and he wrote poems. He wrote a poem called “Well?” and it was along this line, “When I die and go on the judgment day to face my God, I don’t fear so much facing a great white throne and a mighty fearful God looking down at me with flashy eyes but what I fear most of all is going up there with the broken bits of my life in my hands and then, looking up, and looking into the eyes of one who has holes in his hands and him looking into my eyes and saying, ‘Well? Well?’”

On that day we will face our Jesus who has repeatedly offered his life to us, and I think some of us perhaps accept all that. We believe the Bible is God’s word and we have no trouble with that kind of thing. But I think we have another kind of ostrich inside us and I’ve called him the foreign diplomat because he’s always trying to find holes in the treaties that he’s just made. I’m sure that’s unfair to the foreign diplomats, I’m sure the American ones aren’t like the Irish ones. But dear ones, I think there’s some of this ostrich in all of us when it comes to judgment. We often say, “Well, I know there’s going to be a judgment and you can’t get out of that.” Then we say to ourselves, “Now, when is this judgment going to be? Many of us have in the back of our minds that we’re going to devote the last 10 years of our life to preparing for this judgment. Or we say to ourselves, “Well, we’ll have a little time to enter fully into the victorious life, and to grow in grace, and walk in the Spirit, and then we’ll be all ready for the judgment.”

Now when is the judgment going to be? The Bible answers “now.” Now, at this very moment, the judgment is taking place. Listen to Jesus’ words in John 3:18, just two verses after the famous verse John 3:16. In John 3:18 Jesus is saying the judgment on you is taking place now, at this moment tonight, as he says, “He who believes in him is not condemned.” Is not condemned; he who believes in him now is not condemned. “He who does not believe is condemned already.” Not “will be condemned” but is condemned already “Because, he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

Dear ones, you are judged up to this moment. And that last thought you had has already been judged, and that next thought. You are already condemned, or you are already justified. This is why I’m concerned, dear brothers and sisters, who are anxious about this business of, can a Christian sin. I don’t see how long you can carry an unconfessed sin in your heart without being out of grace with God, because the moment you commit it, that moment God has judged it. It requires you, the very next moment, to appeal to the advocate.

Many of us are treating sin lightly and we’re saying again and again, “Oh well, you can commit one sin. Now, if you commit a number of sins, or if you sin habitually then naturally you’re in

trouble.” But it seems to me that God judges you immediately and that’s why some of us talk about losing fellowship. Some of us say, “You don’t fall from grace you just lose fellowship.” How do you know you’ve lost fellowship? You say, “I feel guilt in my heart.”

The guilt is the other side of the penny of God’s condemnation. In other words, it’s vital for us to be right up to date tonight with our confession and right up to date tonight with our forgiveness in Jesus’ name. We can’t go on keeping these things in our hearts. He who does not believe, and remember, “believe” in Anglo-Saxon “in accordance with”. If you believe, you live in accordance with. And if you believe that your sarcasm killed Jesus through the scribes and through the priests, and if you believe that your deception killed Jesus, and if you believe that your fear of reputation killed Jesus through Pilot, then you put away those things and you live in accordance with your beliefs, otherwise you don’t believe and the Bible says, “You’re condemned already.”

There’s another place where Jesus says this. He’s speaking to the Jews and he says, “Truly, truly I say to you he who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal light now at this moment. He does not come into judgment but has already passed from death to life.” And so many of us here are dead and many of us are alive. Many of us have the begotten life of Jesus coursing through our own lives and body and we have the marks of that begotten life in our lives because they’re filled with the beauty of Jesus, while others of us are filled with death and have the marks of the death life upon us. We still have a lie that we have not made restitution for, we still have a little bit of deception that we have never really confessed but we’re going to get around to it. But at the moment we’re dead and we have the marks of death upon us.

Dear ones, the judgment is taking place now at this moment. We are all already ready at this moment. If Jesus came at this very moment everything is up to date. All the books are ready and God knows you thoroughly as you are at this moment, that’s why the Bible says, “Today is the day of salvation.” There is no tomorrow, tomorrow never comes. It’s no use saying, “I’ll make the decision on the final night of the conference.” There’s no use saying, “I’ll make it tomorrow.” The death already has a greater grip on you. The cancer patient doesn’t say, “I’ll go and have the operation tomorrow.” He says, “I want rid of it now, immediately, because I see the symptoms.”

So if you see one symptom in your life tonight, will you remember that that symptom has been judged and has been set against you? At this very moment be up to date. Some people say, “Didn’t Paul preach that it is appointed for me to die once and then comes the judgment?” I think the meaning of that verse is that the judgment is sealed and ceases at death. It is appointed for men to die once and then come to judgment.

In other words, after the moment of death there is no purgatory, there is no chance to add to or subtract from the number of good deeds that you plant before God or the amount of faith or trust or obedience in Jesus that you present before. Judgment ceases at death. And then I think it’s true in the light of the verse that we quoted, that he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world. There will come a day when there would be a great public day of judgment. When the judgment that has ceased at death and that took place during a lifetime will be proclaimed before all people and we will all be gathered before the great white throne and our judgment will be proclaimed to all.

And in that sense I think the judgment will take place in those three ways, but do you see that it is being executed at this moment with you? God knows where you stand now, at this moment, and he’s gracious; he witnesses to you where you stand, and I trust you to react to it.

Some of us may accept that, and yet we like to try to prove that the judgment will not take place because it is impossible for it to take place fairly. I think the mind gives the devil a great deal of scope in all of us and I think he loves to titillate our minds and we love to try to prove to each other, or prove to him, or prove to ourselves that the judgment won't take place because it's impossible for it to take place fairly. Some of us argue this way, "God can see Sirhan Sirhan shooting (Robert) Kennedy and he deserves to die because the Bible says, 'Thou shalt not kill,' and he has killed. But I have many, many half second thoughts that I know do not glorify Jesus and they pass through my mind in a moment, in half a second. Now the judgment isn't going to be fair because God doesn't know that kind of thing, he knows the big things that we're doing. He knows the lie that I tell, maybe, but he doesn't know the feeling that I have that I want to tell a lie. He doesn't know the slightest inclination of my heart, so how is this judgment going to be fair? He's going to condemn all those who sin openly, what about those of us who sin secretly?"

Jesus spoke to the Pharisees on this when he said, "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the house tops." My God sees me. God sees your every thought tonight. God sees it as if it's projected on a great screen in an outdoor theater. God sees all our hearts tonight, he knows you inside out dear one, and he can see all. The judgment will be fair.

I think some of us still say, "Well now, it won't be fair. Look at the opportunities some of us have had. Look at the opportunities those of us have had who have listened to this word tonight and look at the people in Africa, or the people in China and they have not heard. Now that judgment won't be fair, the Bible can't be presenting a true record of the judgment. I can't see how you can have a fair judgment when we've all had different kinds of opportunities."

Maybe we should take the milder side of Jesus' words to us and talk about his words, "You will be judged by the light that is given you." And maybe we should see that each man and woman will be judged by the light that has been revealed to them. You can quote what Jesus said in the parable of the two servants. In Luke 12:47 he said, "And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating. Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required."

So I would remind you that Jesus says you'll be judged by the light that is given you. In other words, it assumes that some light will be given and one must be very straight, and one must really face the challenge that God gives us to the mission field by seeing that the Bible says, "You're dead in your sins and you remain dead unless you receive the begotten life of Jesus." And one has to face the fact that it's very hard to see how the dear ones in China or Russia or Africa or Brazil or South America are going to receive that begotten life of Jesus unless someone tells him of Jesus. And it's very hard to see how they are going to be raised on the last day unless they have the begotten life of Jesus within them. At this moment they are dead in their sins.

And it seems that the Bible puts the emphasis strongly on the responsibility that all of us have to transmit the life of Jesus to every creature. In other words, we're arguing, with the exception of a few inferences from a few verses in Romans, we're arguing very much from silence in this hope that we have that people who have not heard of Jesus will enter into heaven. We're really arguing from silence, and even the liberal theologian is reluctant to argue from that point, so we should face our responsibilities there.

I think some of us are content about those things but maybe the non-Christian comes up and says “You said it’s going to be fair and some of you are going to be judged by faith and some of us are going to be judged by our works. Well, that’s not fair. I would rather go up to Jesus on the final judgment day and say, ‘Lord Jesus, I believe in you, I have faith in you’ and him to accept that rather than for him to go through my whole life and look into all the works and the words that I have done and said. Now that’s not a fair judgment if some of us are going to be judged by faith and some of us by works.”

Dear Christians, would you listen to these words carefully, they’re words in our Bible in James 2:24 and we need to allow God’s sword to cut into our hearts. James 2:24, “You see that man is justified by works and not by faith alone.” A man is justified by works and not by faith alone. Some of us say, “I know I’m right with God. I know I have faith in Jesus.” But the Bible tells you how you can know. Not because “I feel I feel a feeling that I felt I felt before.” That’s not how you know. But the Bible says, “Hereby know that we are the children of God by the spirit of obedience that he has given us.”

In other words, we know we have faith because we have works. They are the works that are produced by faith as opposed to the works that are produced from fear of God, but they are works that show that we have faith. And on that final day when we say we have faith in Jesus, Jesus will say to us, “Let me see your works and when I see your works I will judge whether you have faith in me.” Can you explain this: when we meet God on the final day, and we’re asked if we have Jesus in our hearts and we say, “Yes.” and then God says, “Well, you were angry with your brother yesterday. You were sarcastic with your dear one at home two weeks ago. You have felt envy in your heart. Now my Son is not like that. My Son Jesus does not feel those things. If he were in you, you would not feel those things.”

Do you see that God cannot be bluffed; that a man is justified by his works and those are the things that prove the faith within him. It’s the obedience in our lives. “If a man loves me he will keep my words.” There’s no question of it. “Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin.” “The Spirit of God witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God” and the witness of our own spirit is the witness of a clean conscience; knowing that we have not committed sin and that if we have it was under the blood and we have turned from it. But a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Paul says it at greater length in Romans 2:6-10, “For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth,” not believe the truth but, “obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.”

We’ll need to show our lives to prove that Jesus lives within. It applies to our words, Jesus said, “I tell you that on that day man will render account for every careless word he has uttered.” Now I don’t want to burden the point but cynicism and sarcasm are words that will have to be rendered account for on that day. And the white lie will have to be rendered account for on that day, and the critical conversation will have to be given account for on that day.

Some of us may face some of that and yet we think, “Well surely in this complex world, God will draw

us all to himself at the end. Surely God loves us more than anything else. Surely it will be a failure in his own purpose if he does not draw us all to himself at the end.” It would be an admission of defeat. Now, you can see that I can love my wife, but unless she loves me there is no true marriage. And God can love us so much that he gave his own Son for us, but unless we love him back, there is no fellowship between us.

It doesn't matter how much God loves us; if we don't respond to that love, we will not be in heaven. Some people feel, “Our God will keep up this bombardment of love and he will just destroy us, and beat us because he keeps on longer than we can resist.” No, it isn't so. That's a mockery of God's love. God loves us but unless we love him back there will be no place for us in heaven. God cannot draw to himself those who do not want to come; otherwise he'd have prisoners in heaven that would make heaven hell by their own presence.

Jesus told a parable, he said, “Then the householder, when he has risen up and shut the door, you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us.’ He will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’” And it seems that Jesus made it very plain to us that there will come a day when the door will be no longer open to us.

What is hell like? The Bible likens it to a lake of fire. I think we admit that if it's physical fire then we have known something maybe worse than physical fire. Nevertheless, the Bible finds it so difficult to describe hell to us in sufficient terrible and tragic figures that it likens it to a lake of fire where we'll burn forever in our own lusts against one another. It's a place where you'll have great groups of people who are bound by their own selfishness, bound by their own hatred and their sarcasm and their cynicism; bound by their own desire to consume one another and pull one another apart. Hell will be a place where those spirits burn in their own lusts against one another.

The Bible likens it to an outer darkness where there is no light. To a second death which is worse than the physical death we will endure at the end. To a second death which will continue forever, and ever, and ever. And perhaps the worst thing about hell is spoken by Paul in Thessalonians when he says, “They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his mind.”

The sunshine is made by God, and smiles are made by God, and understanding, and love, and gentleness are made by God and wherever God is those things exist and wherever God is absent, those things are not known. When we will be excluded from the presence of the Lord, we will be excluded from anyone who understands us. No one will understand us. Everyone will detest each other. They will destroy each other continually forever.

What is heaven like? The Bible finds equal difficulty in describing heaven. The Bible likens it to a great marriage feast where people are rejoicing, and likens it to a great supper, or to a beautiful garden where there is peace and calmness and beauty. But perhaps the greatest thing about it is said by Paul again. He says, “We shall always be with the Lord, and Jesus will walk in and out among us as it was planned he should walk in the Garden of Eden in Creation.” And the Bible says, “We shall know him and we shall be like him for we will reflect his glory.” Jesus will see dear ones who reflect his own beauty back into his eyes.

Perhaps the best description of it is given by John who says this, “There shall no more be anything accursed but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it and his servants shall worship him.

They shall see his face and his name shall be on their forehead and light shall be no more. They need no light of lamp, nor sun, for the Lord God will be their light and they shall reign forever and ever.” And you can know you’re going there tonight -- you can know that this very night. On that day, Jesus will look for his own reflection in your life. Does he find it tonight? If he doesn’t find it tonight, how is he ever going to find it on that day?

Dear ones, is Jesus reflecting himself in your life? Is your life free from dishonesty? Is your life free from lying and deception? Is your life free from envy and anger? Is your life free from irritability and jealousy? Is your life free from selfishness and covetousness? Is your life free from impurity and unclean thoughts? Is your life filled with a great burden for souls as Jesus’ own heart is? Is your heart filled with a great desire to love God and to do his will in every way you can? If your life is, then you possess the begotten life of God within you and on that day Jesus will look at you and say, “Come you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

And if your life is not free from those things and not filled with the begotten life of Jesus, and you’re still arguing about sin then Jesus will say to you, “Go to my left hand and depart to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” Will you examine your own heart tonight, and here’s what I’d ask you to do; stop arguing with God tonight. Stop trying to prove that you’re right when you’re wrong. That’s what confession means, agree with God. Stop arguing over anger, would you? Would you stop arguing that anger is right? Would you stop arguing that envy is alright if it’s just a flash? Would you stop arguing that a little bit of criticism is good because you have to judge people a little? Would you stop arguing with God and admit, “Father, I have not your begotten life in me because I have the symptoms of the old created death life in me and I am not prepared to face you tonight should you ask me.”

Simply admit that and then look to Jesus and Jesus is ready tonight to give you the begotten life of God. The begotten life that will produce a reflection of himself in you so on that day he will reach down his hand and immediately he sees in your face he will say, “John, Gene, Peter, it’s good to receive you. We’ve known each other for years and you’ve obeyed me for years, and you’ve loved me with all your heart. Come, you’re already mine.” Dear ones, do you know you’re his tonight? Do you? If you don’t will you come and receive him? Come and receive him. It doesn’t matter if you’ve been a Christian for forty years, if there’s anger or envy in your life; you need the begotten life of Jesus. You need to be able to face him with a fresh breeze blowing through your conscience and an assurance that you’re clean and that you’re ready to be judged this very night.

I pray that God will give you grace and that you’ll do just what he tells you tonight so that glory will be brought to him. Let us pray.