

“He Will Come with Glory to Judge the Living and the Dead”

February 6, 2022

Psalm 94

Psalm 110

2 Thessalonians 1

What does the Bible teach about vengeance?

“Vengeance is mine, I will repay” – says the LORD.

I think sometimes we hear that as “vengeance is bad!”

But if vengeance belongs to the LORD – then vengeance is not bad!

Rather, *we* are *very bad* at vengeance!

The story is told of a monk in the Egyptian desert

who was furious at how he had been treated.

He visited an older monk and explained that he had been wronged

and could not rest until he had vengeance.

So the older monk said to him, “My brother, let us pray.”

Raising up his hands, he prayed,

“God, we don’t need you. We can avenge ourselves.”

The younger man fell on his face and begged forgiveness,

realizing that “vengeance presupposes a godless world.” (Harmless, 236)

Psalm 94 understands this.

If the young monk had said, “abba, will you sing Psalm 94 with me”

he would have said, “gladly!”

Because Psalm 94 asks *God* to bring vengeance!

It’s not right that the wicked kill the widow and the sojourner.

It’s not right that people do wicked things –

it’s not okay!

“And he will come, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead.”

When you ask *God* to take care of vengeance –

you may be certain that he will do it *properly!*

Our problem is that when *we take vengeance* we overdo it.

And sometimes we get it wrong.

Sometimes we convict the innocent.

And sometimes we let the guilty get away with murder.

That’s why we *need* Jesus to come with glory to judge both the living and the dead!

Certainly we should do justice as far as we can in this life.

After all, Psalm 94 condemns wicked rulers for their failure to do justice!!

But Psalm 94 recognizes that only the God of vengeance is able to make right all wrongs!

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 110 –

Another psalm that speaks of God making right the wrongs of this age.

But Psalm 110 makes clear that the Son of David will be the one  
who does what only God can do!

Sing Psalm 110A

Read 2 Thessalonians 1

Today we are concluding our overview of the way in which the Apostles' Creed  
sets forth the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

More than half of the Creed is focused on Christ,  
because Jesus Christ is the center of our faith.

The Creed starts by identifying Jesus as the only-begotten Son of God.

We confess Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as one God in three persons.

In other words, we begin our confession of Jesus Christ

by confessing who he is – as the eternal Son of God –

God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God.

He is of the same substance with the Father with regards to his deity –  
and of the same substance with us as to his humanity.

Because he was

*conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary*

and then we confess his suffering and passion:

*suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell*

and we declare his exaltation and glory:

*on the third day he arose from the dead.*

*He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty;*

*from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

Last time we looked at the ascension,

and how the ascension shows us that Christ is indeed

“our Advocate in heaven before His Father.”

And also that in him, “we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, our Head,

will also take us, His members, up to Himself.”

And finally that the ascension reminds us that he has sent

“His Spirit as a counter-pledge,

by whose power we seek the things that are above,

where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God,

and not the things that are on earth.”

The Apostles’ Creed puts it this way:

“and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;  
from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.”

The Nicene Creed modifies this slightly:

“and sits on the right hand of the Father;  
and he shall come again, *with glory*, to judge the living and the dead;  
*whose kingdom shall have no end.*”

Jesus has not merely ascended up there somewhere.

He has ascended to a very particular place:  
the right hand of God.

### **1. “And Sits at the Right Hand of God the Father Almighty”**

#### **a. Jesus, the Head of the Church (Psalm 110/Ephesians 1:20)**

What do we mean by the right hand of God?

Throughout scripture, the right hand is the hand of power – the hand of judgment.

In Psalm 80 we hear that God planted Israel with his right hand,  
and prays that God would place his hand upon “the man of your right hand.”  
Jesus Christ is God’s “right hand man” – you might say.

Psalm 110 is pre-eminently the Psalm of Christ being seated at God’s right hand.

*The LORD says to my Lord:*

*Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.*

When the Son of David sits at the right hand of God,  
what happens?

Psalm 110:2 says,

*The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter.  
Rule in the midst of your enemies!*

When God seats the Son of David at his right hand,  
that means that the Son of David rules in the midst of his enemies.

Or, as the Heidelberg Catechism puts it:

### **50. Q. Why is it added, And sits at the right hand of God?**

A. Christ ascended into heaven to manifest Himself there as Head of His church, through whom the Father governs all things.

Jesus has been seated at the right hand of the Father

so that he might rule as head of the church, but also as king of kings and lord of lords.

As Paul says in Ephesians 1:20, as he is praying that we might know

*what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe,  
according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ  
when he raised him from the dead  
and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,  
far above all rule and authority and power and dominion,  
and above every name that is named,  
not only in this age but also in the one to come.  
And he put all things under his feet [there is the echo of Psalm 110]  
and gave him as head over all things to the church,  
which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

Paul prays that you might know the greatness of God's power toward us.  
And he says that this power is revealed in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead,  
*and* in the seating of Jesus at his right hand.

But the resurrection of Jesus,  
without his ascension and being seated at the right hand of God,  
would not have done anything for us.

What makes the resurrection of Jesus so powerful  
is that this Jesus ascended into heaven,  
and that he came to the very throne of God,  
where no man had *ever* dared to come;  
and when Jesus came to the very throne of the Most High,  
he did not do as Isaiah had done when he saw the glory of God,  
and when Isaiah had heard the angels crying,  
"holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty"  
when Isaiah fell on his face and cried out, "woe is me!"  
No, Revelation 5 tells us that when Jesus came into the presence of the Father,  
and when he beheld the angels crying,  
"holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,"  
he went and without the slightest hesitation  
*he took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne*

And when the four living creatures and the 24 elders –  
the ones who devote themselves at all times to the worship of the one, true God,  
when they beheld the Lord Jesus Christ,  
they fell down before him and worshiped him!

The God of all the universe has so set his love upon you,  
that he has joined our flesh to himself so that we might share in his life.

The common idolatry of the human race  
is that man seeks to become God.  
The marvelous grace of God is seen

in that God has become man.

In Jesus Christ God has become all that we are by nature,  
so that we might become all that he is by grace.

Peter tells us that through his great and precious promises  
we have come to be partakers in the divine nature,  
because we have been united to Christ by faith.  
If his life has become yours,  
then you have become united to the very life of God.

In order to understand what this means, we should then ask:

### **b. The Gift of the Holy Spirit from the Ascended King (Acts 2)**

#### **51. Q. How does the glory of Christ, our Head, benefit us?**

In two ways:

*First, by His Holy Spirit He pours out heavenly gifts upon us, His members.*

As Peter told us on the day of Pentecost,  
because Jesus has received the promised Spirit from the Father,  
therefore now he pours out his Spirit upon his church.

And in the gift of the Spirit, we now have received heavenly gifts,  
as we partake of the glory of our Savior.  
In the Old Testament the Spirit was given only in part.  
But now that Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
the Spirit has been poured out upon all flesh.

God has not given you the Spirit to make you happy.  
God has not given you the Spirit to make your life easier.

God has given you his Spirit so that you might testify to the gospel of Christ—  
so that the message of the kingdom of God might go forth to the ends of the earth.

*Second, by His power He defends and preserves us against all enemies.*

I often think that we forget this part.  
It is one of the central themes of the book of Revelation.  
Jesus sits at the right hand of God.  
Therefore what are you afraid of?

Jesus spoke of this in John 10:27-30:  
*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.  
I give them eternal life and they will never perish,*

*and no one will snatch them out of my hand.  
My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all,  
and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.  
I and the Father are one.*

Jesus is the good shepherd.  
And a shepherd not only leads and feeds his sheep.  
He also protects and defends us against our enemies.

Do not be afraid.  
Jesus has never yet lost one of his sheep.  
No lion or bear has ever yet snatched one of Christ's sheep from his hand.

And they never will.

**2. "And He Shall Come Again, with Glory, to Judge the Living and the Dead"  
a. Your Suffering and Affliction in This Age (2 Thess 1:5)**

So the Heidelberg Catechism asks:

**52. Q. What comfort is it to you that Christ will come to judge the living and the dead?**

Not just "what does it mean?"  
But "what *comfort* is it?"

The coming judgment of God might not seem at first like a comforting topic –  
but for the one who is in Christ,  
you have no fear of the coming judgment –  
because you have already been set free from the guilt and the power of sin.

Therefore,

*A. In all my sorrow and persecution I lift up my head and eagerly await as judge from heaven the very same person who before has submitted Himself to the judgment of God for my sake, and has removed all the curse from me. He will cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but He will take me and all His chosen ones to Himself into heavenly joy and glory.*

Jesus has already endured  
the "final judgment" that I deserved.  
The judgment of God has fallen on Jesus.  
Jesus has taken upon himself the wrath and curse of God.

Therefore all who believe in him – all his chosen ones –  
will share with him his heavenly joy and glory.

But those who do not believe – all of his and my enemies –

have no protection from the wrath and curse of God.  
Therefore they will be cast into everlasting condemnation.

Paul talks about this in 2 Thessalonians 1.

*This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God,  
that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God,  
for which you are also suffering—  
since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,  
and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us,  
when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels  
in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God  
and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.  
They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord  
and from the glory of his might,  
when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints,  
and to be marveled at among all who have believed,  
because our testimony to you was believed.*

And Paul says that we should look to that day with hope --  
because that is the day of our relief.

#### **b. The Vengeance of Jesus Against Those Who Afflict You (2 Thess 1:6-10)**

We can trust Jesus to make things right.

This is why we leave vengeance to the LORD!

Paul says in Romans 12:14, 19

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them....  
Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written,  
‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’  
To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink;  
for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.  
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Our personal response to those who afflict us must be to “overcome evil with good.”

But we do this *not* because we are indifferent to justice –  
far from it!

We do good to those who have wronged us  
because we know that if they do not repent,  
God is going to destroy them!

It is just for him to repay them for what they have done – AND HE WILL!

And when we consider how God has been so merciful to us –

not treating us as *our* sins deserve –  
but sending his Son to die for our sins –  
that should make us a little more merciful to others.

But notice this!

Mercy does *not* say, “You can get away with whatever you want!”  
The mercy of God says, “You deserve death for what you have done –  
and because I am just, I must punish sin.  
That is why I sent my only-begotten Son  
so that the power of his Divine life  
might bear the awful weight of my wrath and curse due to sin,  
for all those who believe the good news of Jesus.”

And that is where Paul turns in verse 7

*7 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels*

We have already received the forgiveness of sins – by faith, in this life.

Already, in Jesus, we have assurance of God’s love,  
peace of conscience,  
joy in the Holy Spirit,  
increase of grace,  
and perseverance therein until the end.

But we do not yet have relief from our afflictions.

The miseries of life – and the sufferings of the cross –  
continue to afflict us day after day.

And so we still await that Coming Day –

when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.

We still await *relief* from our afflictions.

Yes, we may catch glimpses of it in this life.

There are moments in which we experience peace and joy –  
even in the midst of affliction.

One of the joys of working on the Breckinridge biography is reading the letters  
of so many faithful Christians whose experience shines light on these things!

Sally McDowell was R. J. Breckinridge’s niece.

Her father was the governor of Virginia.

She married the governor of Maryland.

What could she know of suffering and affliction?!



Well, she married Governor Thomas against her father's wishes –  
because Governor Thomas – her husband – suffered from paranoid delusions.  
Nowadays we would call him “emotionally abusive” – to an extreme degree!  
Only a few weeks into their marriage  
he manipulated her into various false confessions (including one of adultery).  
When she miscarried, he falsely accused her of having an abortion  
in order to hide the offspring of her supposed lover.  
He escalated his obsessive controlling behavior  
until, at the request of her father (the governor of Virginia)  
her Uncle R. J. Breckinridge came to the governor's mansion in Annapolis  
and brought her back to his house in Baltimore,  
where the two governors met in his parlor to try to resolve the situation.

Governor Thomas wound up publishing a lengthy pamphlet  
detailing his accusations against his wife.

The result was a lengthy slander trial – followed by a suit for divorce  
(which in those days in Virginia required a special act of the legislature!).

Imagine then, if you will, poor Sally McDowell!  
She was 20 years old when she married a man nearly twice her age.  
Her marriage lasted for eight months –  
and ended with a five-year legal battle that left her reputation in shatters.

Eight years after the divorce, at the age of 33, she wrote to a friend:

“You know not what it is to live, with the spring of life broken; to live on and on  
amid the scattered debris of all that you valued in life; to have existence, but to spend it  
'among the tombs' of every thing that made it a blessing.

You know not what it is to have your pure name spoken by polluted lips; to have  
your high and cherished honor assailed by mouths whose very breath was infamy; - and  
to have your grief, that sacred thing, - so deep as to be powerless even to throb out an  
appeal for mercy, denied the last poor privilege of decent privacy.

This – all of this, has been the bitter experience I have garnered up in the very  
Spring-time of my life.

But these are not the only lessons of the past. This seed time of tears has brought  
forth some precious fruit.

When borne down by a sorrow too deep for the reach of human aid however truly  
& affectionately rendered, my poor heart turned to listen to the tones of One who  
commended himself to me as being 'acquainted with grief,' and by his gentle  
ministrations I was gradually soothed into calmness & peace. A new light burst in upon  
my darkened heart; a new motive-power was applied to it.... I learned to cast the burden  
that was heavier than I could bear, upon Him who offered to bear it for me; and at last  
gathered courage and strength to take up, I hope uncomplainingly, my cross and bear it.”  
(Sally McDowell to John Miller, October 13, 1854, Buckley, p15-16)

In those days, divorce was rare – and remarriage unheard of (especially among the elite) –  
and particularly when the Governor of Maryland  
had published a scurrilous pamphlet against you!

But Sally found comfort in the midst of her afflictions  
through the gospel –  
through the good news that Jesus had come to bear her grief.

Oh, and the friend she was writing to was a Presbyterian pastor, John Miller –  
whom she married two years later!  
(and from all we know, they had a very good marriage).

I use the example of Sally McDowell  
because she sets up well how we should think about verses 7-8:

*<sup>7</sup> and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed  
from heaven with his mighty angels <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not  
know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

Sally had every reason – and in some ways, every right –  
to wish that her ex-husband would burn in hell forever!

After what he had done to her – he deserved it!  
Maybe you know people like that as well.

Paul says that it's okay to admit that.  
The Lord Jesus is going to bring justice.  
He will make all things right.  
And that includes “inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God  
and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” –  
  
which certainly includes those who do heinous things to the innocent!

We are not going to obtain perfect justice in this life –  
so we can leave vengeance to the Lord –  
but the Lord Jesus *will* bring justice in the end.

He will come from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire –  
bringing final judgment to the earth.

But so then, in verse 9 – we see the punishment for those who afflict you –  
those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus:

*<sup>9</sup> They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and*

*from the glory of his might,*

The punishment is “eternal destruction.”

Paul often speaks of “eternal life” as God’s free gift to those who believe in Jesus. He now uses a parallel construction to talk about the judgment – the punishment – that will come to those who remain in rebellion against God.

Their rebellion is against God.

They do not know him – they do not obey his gospel.

And so their punishment fits the crime.

They do not want to be near God.

They want to be far away from him!

And so he gives them exactly what they want – exactly what they deserve.

*They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.*

What does he mean by “eternal destruction”?

It’s the opposite of eternal life.

In John 17:3, Jesus tells us,

“This is eternal life,  
that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

If eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ whom he sent,

then eternal destruction is *not* knowing God –

eternal destruction is isolation from God –

being *away* from the presence of the Lord.

Think about that word:

*Eternal destruction.*

The phrase is used elsewhere in the Bible in the same way it is used here.

Some people have tried to make it mean “annihilation” –

as though the wicked will simply cease to exist –

but that it is not what the phrase means in Greek.

Eternal destruction is the opposite of eternal life.

It refers to perpetual ruin (Witherington, 196).

Even in English, you can see what I mean.

If a wrecking ball slams into a house, we say that the house has been “destroyed.”

But that doesn’t mean that the house ceased to exist.

All the wood, bricks, and glass are still there –

lying in twisted ruins on the ground.

In the same way, eternal destruction refers to the eternal disintegration of the person.

It's not that the damned cease to exist –  
it's that they are eternally falling apart.

We were created to be *whole* – to be well-integrated  
living in harmony with God, with others, with ourself, and with all creation.

But because of sin, we experience alienation – disintegration –  
we experience brokenness in our relationship with God –  
in our relationships with others, with all of creation –  
and even with our self.

All of us have experienced this – at least in some small way.  
Where your self becomes alienated from yourself.

It happens bodily in auto-immune diseases – where your body is literally fighting itself.  
It happens in cancer – where your cells are running amok.

But it also happens spiritually and emotionally.  
Have you ever had the feeling that you were doing something  
contrary to your own will?  
“I don't want to be doing this”  
“Why am I doing this?”  
“I feel like I'm not in control of myself!”

All these miseries of body and soul are a taste of *hell*.

God gives them to us as a warning – as a reminder of what is coming  
unless we bow the knee before Jesus, who entered our miserable world,  
endured the miseries of this life, death itself, and the pains of hell –  
so that we might live forever.

But for the Christian all these sufferings and afflictions take on a new character.  
The disintegration of the self is a reminder of what we *were* –  
apart from Christ.  
You see this perhaps most painfully in the process of dying.  
Some people linger for a long time –  
some people – toward the end of their lives –  
are *very fragmented* – with very little that is left holding them together.  
But for those who are in Christ,  
their body and their soul *both* still belong to Jesus!  
In life – and in death.

*He* is our integrity.  
*He* is our wholeness.

Even when we are falling apart – body and soul –  
    Jesus holds us together.  
Even when our body and soul are rent apart by death –  
    Jesus holds us together!

There is no eternal life apart from him!

Again, as Jesus said in John 17:3  
“This is eternal life,  
    that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

Because that is our hope – as Paul says here in verse 10:

*<sup>10</sup> when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.*

Jesus is coming on that day – the Day of the LORD –  
    the Day when he will make all things right.

We say in the Creed that Jesus “shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead.”  
    Because he is coming with glory –  
        *both* the glory when he “revealed from heaven with his mighty angels” –  
        *and* the glory that will be revealed *in his saints*.

And let me add here that there is still time!  
    If you realize that you do not know God –  
        all you have to do is repent and believe the gospel!  
    (That’s what it means to *obey* the gospel –  
        because the gospel calls you to repent of your sins –  
        and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners!)

    And then Jesus calls you to live a life of repentance and faith –  
        continuing to obey the gospel day by day,  
        growing in faith, hope, and love.