

Well, good morning again, as we turn to God's word together this morning. If you are visiting with us, let me tell you where we are. We are in the middle of a series---right in the middle of a summer series on *Heaven and Hell*. Aren't you glad you visited! As such, today and the next few weeks mark the first time that I have with particular focus preached on either the Day of Judgment, which is today, and then the next couple of weeks looking at hell in particular. If you've not heard the sermons which were preached on heaven, I encourage you to go to our website where you can find those.

So today's sermon stands not only in the middle of the series, but it serves as the gateway of where we're going over the next couple of weeks. That being said, of course I've referred to hell and to heaven many times, but I had never preached on heaven as a subject, particularly. But I will say as I've begun the reading a couple of months ago and as I've continued to read many different sermons and pastors and books, I know that I am not alone. Because if you think that pastors are not tempted to choose their words and their subjects to fit their congregations and their context---maybe not trying to avoid these subjects, but not looking for them, either---you need to pray. Because it is very easy for us as pastors to avoid such difficult subjects. And so it is with great sobriety and not with fire and brimstone preaching that I desire to go into this subject matter.

We'll begin the rest of the series by looking at the words of Jesus. We will be looking at all of the words of Jesus [on hell] in one way, shape or another over the next few weeks. Because I will tell you that the doctrine of heaven and hell has largely left the content of evangelical preaching---of whatever the stripe. But chief among those, hell is largely absent. Judgment Day has been banished to the sermons of decades ago. And the effort to rewrite the New Testament, the effort to reinterpret what Jesus was actually talking about is legion. Many books are being written that Jesus, indeed, did not talk about Judgment Day or hell or condemnation. And so I wanted to begin with Jesus's own words, as we look at his words here as the grace of warning. *The Grace of Warning*.

Hear now God's Word: John 5:19-30.

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. [That, by the way, is what worship is all about---marveling at what God has done.] For as the father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me. Father, by your Holy Spirit---as the third person of the Trinity, as the manifest presence of God in the world, not a spiritual or abstract presence, but a real presence---by your Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who call on you, Lord, I pray, give us ears to hear. Father, by your Spirit, to those who have rejected this message, who even

sit here this morning, who even may be members of this very church yet have rejected the message of Christ in their hearts---by your Spirit awaken them from their death. Father, by your Spirit, pour out your grace on us, because this word from your Son is a word of grace in the word of warning. Help us, oh Lord, and help the teacher. In Jesus' name, amen.

As I shared with you a number of weeks ago, the very first time that I would see the Pacific Ocean and smell it in my own nose and see it with my own eyes would be on our trip to Japan. As we were traveling there---if you think about, if you can imagine in your mind's eye---Tokyo is the center of the life of Japan. It's right in the middle, if you will. And to its north you have a city called Sendai. And in between Tokyo and Sendai is what many people came to know as the Tokushima nuclear power plant. But a great deal of the damage by way of the tsunami happened between Fukushima and Sendai. Robbie and I had the opportunity to travel in that area and were able to drive along roads that had been restored. We took photographs and physically climbed the wall of a brand-new, very long seawall that has been constructed. And as we were walking there and as we are taking photographs and as we were meeting with Christians, a theme came up, and that is: Isn't it amazing and wonderful that we had the grace of warning.

They have the most elaborate earthquake and tsunami warning system in the world. That tsunami warning system saved hundreds of thousands of lives. Along the coast of Japan and also what is along the Ring of Fire around the Pacific Ocean are a series of buoys. And these buoys have connected to them a 2600 kilogram anchor that is anchored to the sea floor. And from there they also have other electronic equipment that has two-way communication with these buoys, and these buoys then have communication with satellites. And from those satellites they then have two-way communication with the communication system and warning system of Japan. As soon as those buoys were able to recognize what was at that distance from the Japanese coast a very small ripple which would become a very large tsunami, they were able to give them seconds of warning. And because of the system that the Japanese government set up, an instant message was sent to cell phones; instant messages were sent across the television, scrolling across the bottom, and instantly to news programs. And people were able to run to safety, to get to higher ground. What was an incredible and heart-wrenching disaster could have been all the worse---much worse without the grace of warning.

Jesus's words. Is God giving us a warning buoy before the coming judgment of which Jesus speaks here? We're going to look at this in three ways. I want to see the verses in context, and we will see as we hear Jesus's words that he talks about the fact that because of his relationship with the Father, the Father has given him the power to raise the dead and the power to judge, but also the glory and honor that is able to come to us because of the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father. But it is to be for us a warning.

And housed within these verses are the very reasons why Jesus was crucified. Jesus was not crucified because of what he announced about the intentions of the Father---"For God so loved the world..." That is not why Jesus was taken to the cross. Jesus was taken to the cross because of what they believed to be blasphemy. That blasphemy that he was accused of is within these verses. Because Jesus is saying that he and the Father are one, that he and the Father have a reciprocal relationship, that he and the Father share characteristics and power together. It was that word that caused those around him, particularly the leaders, the spiritual leaders of Jesus's day for the nation of Israel---why they wanted to take him to the cross. And so bound up within this word of warning is this great threat on the life of Jesus, that he would go to the extent of announcing this.

So let's look together, beginning at verse 19. And what you will see in verses 19 and 20 will then be repeated in the last verse that I read to you. So let's look together at verses 19 and 20 again. What he says here is he's saying to them these words which are repeated throughout the passage: "Truly,

truly.” That is our warning call. When Jesus says, ‘Truly, truly,’---and he says it multiple times---it’s saying listen to what I am saying to you. And he says, “The Son can do nothing of his own...” In other words, it’s not that Jesus doesn’t have his own power, it’s that Jesus does not do things according to his own prerogative. He’s come as the second Adam to obey God the Father as Adam should’ve obeyed God in the Garden. Jesus comes and he obeys. And he delights to do the will of the one who sent him. He says, “Whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”

And then he goes into what is at the crux of what he’s been called to do. Verse 20: “For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.” So he’s talking about the intimacy of the relationship between Jesus and the Father. And he says, “And greater works than these will he show him...” In other words, he’s shown Jesus, demonstrated to Jesus, as the second person of the Godhead, all that God has done, all that God is doing. And he says he is even given greater things for him as the Son to do. Verse 21: “For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.” This again is unpacking what is integral to the Gospels themselves and their testimony about the relationship between Jesus and his being sent to bring salvation and the Father’s will. We hear it most pronounced later on in John. This is so important for the gospel of John. And that is, that Jesus came to save those whom the Father gave to him. So Jesus will save whom he will, because it is the Father’s will and because the Father will give to him the sheep that he is to save.

And then he says, ‘As the Father is able to raise to life...’ In other words, as the Father is able to give life, for God is the creator of all things. He created all things from nothing. He created man from the dust. He breathed life into Adam. He breathes life into us. And we are upheld this day, believer and not-yet believer alike: those of you who love Jesus and those of you who felt dragged here against your will, those of you who honor Jesus and those of you who think he’s okay but want to hear nothing of his righteous judgment. I will tell you that this morning, every single breath and heartbeat that you have is upheld by God the Father through his Son. For, ladies and gentlemen, last year alone---just a couple of statistics for you from our own government’s statistics gathering agencies. 55.3 million people died last year. That is roughly two people per second. I know perhaps you’ve heard these before; let me repeat them to you again. There are 151,600 people who died each day in 2013. 6316 people die each hour, and 105 people die each minute. And there is absolutely nothing you can do about it.

There is one thing that I know for absolute certainty: death is coming to every single one of us. And it is God who has given life. And he says here through the mouth of his Son, that he has also given that same power to raise the dead to Jesus the Son. What is it that Jesus does? Jesus tells us here that it will be the power of Christ that is able to raise the dead, either---as he gets to in a moment---either to judgment or to everlasting life. So the Father has given to the Son the power to raise the dead. The Father raised Jesus, so the Father has now given to Jesus the power to raise us. These are not my words. These are not my reinterpreting Jesus’s words. They are plain and simple fact, according to Jesus---if we’re willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, if we’re willing to give the Bible the benefit of the doubt. And for just a moment, if you think that the writers of the New Testament just thought this up...as I’ve said in previous weeks, not all Jews even believed in resurrection. Not all Jewish spiritual leaders believed in resurrection. So for these men, who are called by Jesus to be his apostles and disciples, to write down that this is what Jesus does and that Jesus will be raised to life in the middle of history, was not them just thinking it up. It was because they were taught this by Jesus himself. And these are Jesus’s words.

But the bulk of my sermon I want to be given to this next point. That not only does Jesus have the power to raise the dead, he also has the power to judge. So let’s look at that for just one moment. As he tells us here, verse 22: “The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor

the Father who sent him.” Again, do you hear the reciprocal relationship between the Father and the Son? The Son only does that which the Father has given him to do. He does it so that the Father may receive all glory and honor. And his Father likewise reciprocates that honor and glory of the Son, and demonstrates the glory of the Son by giving him the authority to judge. He tells us that this is precisely what he came to do. In verse 24 he tells us of the first: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”

And then let me just take from a verse a little bit later when he talks about those who believe. He says in verse 28: “Do not be surprised by this, for an hour is coming when the dead will rise from the grave...” As we looked at in previous weeks, all those who are laying in their graves, believer and nonbeliever alike, will be raised from their graves and be united to their souls and will come into the final judgment. And this judgment here is first for those who believe, when it says those who come out, “those who have done good to the resurrection of life.” Now we need to be able to discern exactly what Jesus is saying here. He says on the one hand that those who believe in him and in the one who sent him will not see judgment. What does he mean? What he means is the judgment that leads to eternal judgment. What he means here is that they will not see death again. But what we know is, does that mean, therefore, that those who believe, those of you who believe here this morning---does that mean, therefore, that at the Day of Judgment that all those who believe will not have to stand account at all before the judgment seat of God? Absolutely not. All who are living and all who are dead on that day will be raised, believer and nonbeliever alike. Believers will stand before the judgment seat of the Lord. We know that. Listen to what Jesus says here. Verse 29: And they will “come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life.” I don’t know if you see it, but listen to that. “Those who have done...”---say it with me---“...good.” Who determines the good? The Lord determines the good.

There is something which the Christian must hold together as twin truths. Paul says in Romans 8:1: “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Okay? So if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his death for sin and in your place receiving the judgment of God, you will have life, and you will not be condemned. But that doesn't mean that all of our actions will not be before the judgment seat of God. For the only thing covering all of our righteous acts and all of our sin is the blood of the Son. For Jesus says you can do nothing apart from me. That includes all of our righteous acts. But who is the one who judges? It is the Lord. Now in case you’re sitting there...and yes, I can see your brows furrowing....now hold with me for just a moment. Consider the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 3, particularly verse 12. Let me give you the context. He says, “By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder...”---speaking of the gospel and the preaching of the gospel---“...and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” So he's laying out that the gospel, the work of God, is by Jesus Christ alone. That Paul's work, my work as a pastor, your work as a Christian---if you are a Christian---is all built on another's foundation, that is, Christ.

And so he continues, and he says, “If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day [that is capitalized, it's the Day of the Lord] will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved [no condemnation]. He will be saved, but only as one escaping the flames.” This also picks up on Peter's words in one of his epistles as he says it is even a hard thing for the righteous to be saved. It is repeated in the book of Revelation, chapter 2, where it talks about all of the works that we have done will fall under the eyesight of the holy God and his Son in whom he is given authority to judge, that is, Christ.

That means, believer, that all we do is sustained on the foundation of Christ, who has gone before us. All that we do in everyday life is upheld and infused and empowered by the grace of God and his Spirit. But all that we do will stand before the Father. It doesn't mean there won't be salvation. Absolutely, for those who believe. There is no condemnation, but it does mean that our works matter. It is not a cheap grace, that it doesn't matter how we live. For if the grace of God has come to us in Jesus Christ, if he has given salvation, and he has given the ability to be covered through the blood of Christ on the cross for our sins, and he's given us his Spirit---that means he's given us his Spirit to do that which pleases the Father. It is, as Jonathan Edwards said three hundred years ago---right?...almost?---that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a holy God. We are all sinners in the hands of an angry God. I know some of you probably want to rush for the exit. But if we think that the cross of Jesus Christ was nothing other than the absolute, pure fire of God's wrath on sin, on his own Son who was completely innocent, we will have misinterpreted the cross. For God sent his Son to---to do what? To satisfy the wrath of God, so that what? So that all those whom Jesus gives life to, can have life eternally. And if he has come and if his grace has come into us, it changes us from the inside out and our lives matter.

But not only does Jesus have the power and authority to judge those who believe, he's also been given the authority to judge those who do not, those who reject the Lord. And so he says, verse 29: Those who will come out of their tombs will hear his voice, "those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." Now, in the next couple of weeks we're going to look more in detail at eternal judgment. But here I want to focus particularly on what Jesus is telling us about the Day of Judgment. And here it is clear that all actions, all evil, will come into the presence of the living God, and it will be judged. We don't like hearing that. We, as human beings, our instinct because of our nature, our pre-cognitive, free conscious action---when it comes to that which we know, which we know is wrong...

Let's look at it. You might be thinking of evil and wrong. I don't know what you're putting there. Let's talk about something we can all understand: cheating. This last month there was written in the *New Yorker* a story about a very sad case in the school district of Atlanta during the 'No Child Left Behind' policy and era in that city. The lengths to which good and well-meaning teachers---and it began with one principal and one teacher who systematically took photographs of administrators' offices, so they could put everything back as it should be. They snuck into those offices with razor blades heated up so they could slice open the cellophane to get the answer keys to the test that their students would have to take. So they would get in and take a heated razor blade and fold it back over to melt the cellophane, so no one would be able to notice they had been opened. So that those tests could be prepared for, so that the schools could pass. It was well-intentioned, but what it shows you is, that even while they were doing it they have said, 'I knew what I was doing was wrong.' And when we do wrong, what do we want to do? We want to hide it. Our sinful nature knows---I know, I know....and I remember what it was like not to believe. I did not honor God, did not believe in God, but I knew when I was doing something wrong. And the first thing I wanted to do was to do it in secret.

So let's think about that for just amount. Herman Bavinck, a great Dutch theologian who should be much more widely read than he is, says this regarding this natural tendency of the human heart. He says when you wish to do something evil, you retire from the public into your house where no enemy can see you. From those places of your house, which are open and visible to the eyes of men, you remove yourself into your room. Even in your room you fear some witness from another quarter. You retire into your heart. There you meditate. But the Lord is more inward than your heart. Wherever, therefore, you shall have fled, there he is. From yourself, whither shall you flee? Will you not follow yourself wherever you shall flee? But since there is one more inward even than yourself, there is no place where you may flee from God angry, but to God reconciled. There is no place that all whither you may flee, that you would flee from him. And he says, flee unto him.

Every single thought, every single motivation, every single attitude, every single act in all of human history will come into final judgment. If you believe that sin is action or inaction, you will have missed the biblical definition of sin. What actions come from, what inaction comes from, is from our very natures. By those natures we have said to God, no thank you. And Jesus says by way of warning, if you do not hear my voice and believe in me, you will come into judgment. And when you do, you will never be able to escape. Satan will not reign in hell. Satan and his demons will be cast themselves into the lake of fire. Who, then, reigns? God reigns, not only in heaven---God also reigns in hell and judgment. The Bible demonstrates over and over again, God is everywhere present. And though the Lord says those who do not believe will have to leave and be thrown out from my presence, please understand what he means there is not proximity to God, but out of the presence of his joyous grace. Judgment is being in the presence, in the terrible presence of a God of perfect holy, righteous judgment forever.

We will look at this in greater detail in the weeks to come, and I know you can't wait for that. But let me say to you, it is of the greatest importance. Satan has been lying about the character of God from the beginning. He has lied about the place of God from the beginning. He has lied about God's intentions from the beginning. But with C.S. Lewis I say to you, one of Satan's greatest powers is not what he put into our minds, it's what he's able to distract us from thinking about. Perhaps you have been so distracted and so avoided this truth. I say to you this morning with great humility and great sobriety, heed the warning.

And here I end with glory and honor. If you would look together with me again at these verses, particularly verse 30. He says, "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me." That is precisely where Jesus began in the explanation. And what I was trying to say at the beginning, here I want to conclude, of the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son. I say this because I'm so convinced by the great preacher, teacher, professor and scholar D.A. Carson as he understands these verses. That these verses tell us of the reciprocal glory and honor that the Father gives to the Son and the Son gives to the Father.

Two things that verse tells us. First, that Jesus longs to reveal the Father. We learned that early on in verse 19. He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing on his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing." What that tells us is everything which we see Jesus doing in his ministry, in his life, in his death, in his resurrection, and in his glory---everything tells us that what Jesus is doing is he's narrating in flesh and blood the character of the living God. Every act of grace and mercy and kindness and power and forgiveness and self-giving love, Jesus is doing not of his own accord, of his own prerogative, but he's doing it to reveal the glory of the Father. Which is why John would say for God so loved the world---God so loved the world, because he first loved the Son. And he wants to honor the glory of the Son by showing us, in his flesh and blood, how beautiful and how innocent and how glorious is his son, Jesus Christ.

Likewise, Jesus wants us to see how glorious, how beautiful, how loving is the Father by being clothed in flesh and dying on a cross. It's because he wants to reveal the Father in all of his glory and honor.

But there is another, another reason for the glory and honor. It's not just revealing the Father, but it is also that every single bit of Jesus's mercy and forgiving and work and ministry and power---all of it has been for one thing---to glorify the Father. It's not that Jesus didn't love you or love me. It's not that Jesus didn't come to make the compassion of God known to all. But you need to know the Godhead's desire is for humanity to see the glory and honor of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And what motivates the Lord is to demonstrate to those whom he has created just how glorious and beautiful he is.

And just how beautiful is he? Some of you who've been to my office will have seen a poor replication of a poster on a poster board of Rembrandt's "The Return of the Prodigal Son." If you're not familiar with it, go on Google and search Rembrandt's "The Return of the Prodigal Son." You'll see a painting, and what you see there is the son on his knees, the prodigal son on his knees, and the father wrapping his coat in his hands on the back of his son. What I want to tell you this morning is what Jesus came to do is to demonstrate to human beings just how vulnerable the father was willing to be. There is no more vulnerable position before an enemy than an embrace, because when you open up your arms to embrace another, you are giving full open season on your heart, your neck, your gut. And isn't it amazing and beautiful and glorious and worthy of honor and praise that God would demonstrate his self-giving love and give us the vulnerability of his son in the embrace of salvation through the cross of Christ.

So I say to you, what evil have we not done in either act or thought or motivation? No one is on different planes, either the one in prison or the one sitting in the second row of a church. None of us can claim anything before a holy God. But God, in all of his grace and mercy and forgiveness and forbearance looks on all of human depravity, all human evil, and sent forth his Son in the most vulnerable position he could. And he died for us and he was raised to life for us and he has gone into heaven before us and he will come again. And as he is coming again, I say to you two things. First, heed the warning that today is the day of salvation. Today is the day of grace. The Lord invites you.

But secondly, if God is a God of judgment, and he will bring all things into judgment, that releases you and me from vengeance. If God will judge all evil, that releases us, because of Christ, to learn how to forgive one another, to learn how to reconcile, to learn how to be patient. Because God in his self-giving love didn't just come to make us his own children, to be forgiven, but he meant to make us ambassadors of that reconciliation. I no longer have to take up vengeance towards my enemy, my neighbor, but rather I can take up the self-giving love of Christ and give forgiveness and give love, because it has first been given to me. Do you see? We can heed the call and come to Christ, but we can also be the hands and feet of Christ to bring healing through forgiveness. It's both-and.

Do not leave here without asking the question: What do you believe? For the Lord is coming again, and today he longs for you to know him. And if you do know him, you can rest secure in Christ alone, knowing that your life matters, and he gives you grace to live it. But if you do not know him, today must be the day.

Let's pray. Father, I thank you for the patience of my hearers. This is a hard word, but it is your word. It is the full counsel of God, and it is to be the grace of warning. Lord, may you, by your Holy Spirit, call us in humble reliance upon the grace of God in Jesus Christ, who is our Savior, who is our Lord, who is our righteousness, in whom we can stand before the throne, at rest and secure in that grace. So Lord, help us to believe. Forgive us in our unbelief. But Lord, we thank you for the invitation to your grace, for today is all that we know that we have. Tomorrow has enough troubles of its own. Lord, may we seize the moment to receive the invitation you have extended. In Jesus' name. Amen.