

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series: Special Messages

Text: II Thessalonians 1:6 – 10; II Peter 3:3 - 4

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Pastor/Teacher

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CHRIST THE JUDGE

Well, ol' Harold Camping is back at it. At his press conference this past week he declared triumphantly that Christ did in fact come back on May 21—huh? Camping said that Christ's coming was *spiritual*-what?! That is *not* what Camping said earlier! Oh, but you see, Camping had to cover his tracks (much like the Jehovah Witnesses did back in 1917—they too had announced in advance that Christ's return would occur then. When it didn't happen they declared that it was a *spiritual* coming). Here is what he said. "I can tell you very candidly that when May 21 came and went it was a very difficult time for me, a very difficult time." Said Mr. Camping, 89, a former civil engineer. "I was truly wondering what is going on. In my mind, I went back through all of the promises God has made, all of the proofs, all of the signs and everything was fitting perfectly, so what in the world happened? I really was praying and praying and praying, oh Lord, what happened?" Not deterred Camping went on to declare: "We're not changing a date at all; we're just learning that we have to be a little more spiritual about this," he said in a rambling 90-minute radio broadcast that was part sermon, part press conference. "But on Oct. 21, the world will be destroyed. It won't be five months of destruction. It will come at once."¹ So now Camping says that the *physical* manifestation of Christ's coming will take place five months down the road in October when Christ returns as judge. Camping fits Proverbs 26:11, *Like a dog that returns to his vomit so is a fool who repeats his folly*. The Bible does emphasize Christ returning in judgment—but Camping's foolishness is making a mockery out of this truth. Denny Burk, astutely observed: "I have been struck by the attention that this particular false prophecy has gained in the popular culture. For instance, just yesterday morning the talking heads on MSNBC's 'Morning Joe' program took a moment to scoff at the infamous prediction, and everyone around the table had a good belly laugh. Even though bible-believing Christians will likely agree with the 'Morning Joe' crew that Harold Camping is a crackpot, I think we need to be careful about feelings of solidarity. What I heard in the laughter on 'Morning Joe' was not the sober critique of the pious, but the sad ridicule of 2 Peter 3:3 - 4. In other words, one of the hallmarks of the sinful human heart is the suppression of any notion of a coming judgment. Sinners employ all kinds of strategies to make-believe that the second coming of Christ is make-believe. Thus, the mockers of 2 Peter register the same objection that modernists offer: '*Where's your Jesus? We have never seen Him or any evidence that there will be a cataclysmic reckoning at the end of the age. Your belief is as silly and irrelevant as it is unfounded. You believe in fairy tales.*' This is what I heard in the laughter on 'Morning Joe.' And this is the real tragedy of a false teacher like Camping. He gives the scoffers a reason for feeling vindicated in their scoffing. He gives aid and comfort to the judgment-suppressing human heart and thereby consigns them to their own God-ignoring delusions. This is a tragedy of eternal proportions, and it is anything but funny. If you count yourself among those who pray 'Maranatha' in earnest, you will find very little to laugh about in Harold Camping's false teaching—and even less to laugh about in a scoffer's scoffing. So let's be sober. Let's be ready for the Lord's return. And let's pray that the Lord would grant the mockers not a belly laugh, but repentance and faith in the Lord with whom they have to do (Hebrews 4:13).² The idea of divine judgment, writes Paul Helm, "is integral to the gospel. Take it away and what Christ did is essentially changed; in fact, what he did no longer makes sense."³ You would think that professing evangelicals would be united in affirming this important truth. Think again. A growing number of people who proudly claim the label "Evangelical" have completely jettisoned the whole concept of divine judgment (and have re-defined the gospel in the process).⁴ The gospel (good news) proclaims salvation by Jesus Christ. What is salvation? It is rich in meaning and significance. It means a lot of things that imply blessing and joy. One of these is *deliverance*. Salvation does imply escape from danger. It does denote release or redemption. From what? Judgment. None of us relish being judged, and since we have an aversion to the thought of judgment, we tend to give it little or no thought—or worse yet, to dismiss the concept of divine judgment as a medieval concept that we need not concern ourselves with in our more enlightened age. Think again. The Scriptures speak loud and clear on this subject (and very frequently).⁵ Judgment is said to be supremely the work of God (Matthew 18:35; II Thessalonians 1:5; Hebrews 11:6; James 4:12; I Peter 1:17, 2:23; Revelation 20:11, 12). This work is accomplished by Jesus Christ who has been appointed to this task (John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42, 17:31; Romans 14:9). We are told that Christ will *summon* all before His judgment seat and judge them in strict justice according to their works (Matthew 25:32; Romans 14:9 - 13; II Corinthians 5:10; II Timothy 4:1, 8;

I Peter 4:5; Revelation 19:11 - 21). These works are the expression and product of the heart and extend even to the very words (Matthew 12:36) and secret purposes of the heart (Romans 2:16; I Corinthians 4:5). Everything will be revealed (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18;

Matthew 10:26; Ephesians 5:11 - 14; I Timothy 5:24, 25). The norm for this judgment will be the entire Word of God in both the Law and the Gospel (Romans 2:12; Matthew 25:32; Acts 17:31; Revelation 20:12).

I. THE APPEARANCE OF THE JUDGE

The contrast between Christ's first and second coming is stated in terms of "weakness" and "power." His first appearance was, in the words of William Bate: "to be the mediator between the righteous God and sinful man, by patiently suffering the most afflictive evils; to propitiate the incensed justice of heaven against us; to restore us by humility who fell by pride; to illustrate his signal love to us, to recommend by the efficacy of his example, the meek suffering all the transient evils of the world: but the second will be to perform the last act of his regal office, to determine the eternal states of angels and men, and suitably in the glory of his Deity. The divine oracles were never less obscure than in describing the first and second coming of the Messiah; the eclipse of the Sun of Righteousness, and his future glory: and the most clear accomplishment of them in his humiliation, is a convincing visible argument they shall be fulfilled in his exaltation."⁶

II. THE MANNER OF HIS APPEARANCE

His personal appearance will be *glorious*. He will be attended with *holy angels*, and He will sit upon a visible throne of glory. The glory is the glory of His Father (Matthew 16:27).

III. THE PURPOSE OF HIS APPEARANCE

He will bring salvation (Hebrews 9:28) and execute judgment (Matthew 16:27; II Timothy 4:1). This day of God's judgment is described as majestic (II Thessalonians 1:9; Jude 14). "It is clear," says Leon Morris, "that the Judge is understood as a regal personage, as One whose appearance is awe-ful beyond description, as dispensing final justice with a royal hand. This great day is everywhere assumed throughout the New Testament. There are preliminary judgments of God throughout history. But at the end there will be the climax, that which proceeds out of the preliminary and partial judgments, and which perfectly fulfils all that they foreshadow."⁷

CONCLUSION: The Bible declares that those outside of Christ (in unbelief) are the *enemies* of Christ (Romans 5:10; 11:28; Philippians 3:18; Colossians 1:21; Hebrews 10:13). In Psalm 2 we read of the Son's anger and wrath and in Revelation 6:16 we read of "the wrath of the Lamb." Some people have a difficult time reconciling this startling image with that of the sweet and lovely Jesus they have grown so accustomed to hearing about. Jesus did come to seek and to save sinners (those deserving wrath). He came in the form of a servant and in humiliation to accomplish redemption (Philippians 2:5 - 11). Listen to John Calvin: "He appeared thus, then, to be made obedient in our name, as was necessary to satisfy for our sins. But now He will come to be Judge. He has been judged and condemned so that we might be delivered before the judgment seat of God, and that we might be absolved of all our sins. It will no longer be a matter of coming in such humility. He will come then with the Angels of His glory. That is what St. Paul meant by saying that the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ will be dreadful."⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/hear-harold-campings-new-prediction-world-will-really-r...>

² <http://www.dennyburk.com/not-sitting-in-the-seat-of-scoffers/>

³ Paul Helm, *The Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), p. 59.

⁴ This attitude was blatantly demonstrated by one of the leading spokesmen for "New-model" Evangelicals. Robert Brow in his article "Evangelical Megashift: Why You May Not Have Heard About Wrath, Sin and Hell Recently," *Christianity Today* (Feb. 19, 1990), p. 12 - 14. He concludes by saying that "no one would deny that it is easier to relate to a God perceived as kindly and loving." In other words, since the concept of divine judgment is unpleasant, we need to adjust our view of God and make Him more likeable. Despite the fact that distinctively Christian terms are used to describe this kinder, gentler, user-friendly gospel, it is not the true Gospel. Many years ago C.H. Spurgeon warned the church about such false claims. "It is mere cant to cry, 'We are evangelical; we are all evangelical,' and yet decline to say what evangelical means... You may believe anything, everything, or nothing and yet be enrolled in the 'Evangelical' army—so they say. Cf. John MacArthur, Jr., *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World* (Crossway, 1993), p. 194.

⁵ Noted New Testament scholar, Joachim Jeremias, wrote: "The message of Jesus is not only the proclamation of salvation, but also the announcement of judgement, a cry of warning, and a call to repentance in view of the terrible urgency of the crisis. The number of parables in this category is nothing less than awe-inspiring." *The Parables of Jesus* (MacMillan, 1972), p. 120.

⁶ *The Complete Works of William Bates IV* (rpt. Sprinkle, 1990), p. 395.

⁷ Leon Morris, *The Biblical Doctrine of Judgment* (Eerdmans, 1960), p. 60.

⁸ John Calvin, *Sermons on the Saving Work of Christ* (Baker, 1950), p. 298.