

Jeremiah 49:23-27 The Rise and Fall of Anxiety Falls Ch. AM 6/25/2023

Who do you think should be judged by God? Terrorists? Active shooters? Scammers? Those who hurt children and the elderly? Which nations? Only those that advance on smaller nations with military force? Which cities? Only sin city?

As we study this chapter about God's judgment, we realize 2 things

- 1) every nation and every person (you!) will give account to God.
- 2) God holds out hope to all in Christ Jesus, and reconciliation by His cross.

What does not seem to be understood by most people is that Jesus Christ is appointed both as the Savior of the World, and as The Judge of the World.

Listen to the Apostle Paul making it clear when Paul spoke to a group of ancient professors in ancient Athens, Greece, recorded for us by Luke in Acts 17:30-31, "*The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now [God] commands all people everywhere to repent, because [God] has fixed a day on which [God] will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.*"

So, today we studying the judgment of God, and the anxiety it causes!

SI - early American pioneers were making their way across one of the central states to a distant place that had been opened up for homesteading. They traveled in covered wagons drawn by oxen, and progress was necessarily slow. One day they were horrified to look up and see the sky filling with smoke ahead of them in the West, stretching for miles across the prairie. Soon it was evident that the dried grass was burning fiercely and coming toward them very rapidly. They had crossed a river the day before but it would be impossible to go back to that river before the flames would be upon them. Their leader understood what needed to be done. He set their own fire in the grass behind them. Once a space of grass was burned over and the small fire had gone out, the whole group moved back upon the burned out area. As the big flames roared on toward them from the west, a little girl cried out in fear, "Are you sure we will not all be burned up?" The leader replied, "The flames cannot reach us here, for we are standing where the fire has already been!"

What a picture of the believer, who is safe in Christ! The fires of God's judgment have already burned themselves out on Christ on the cross. All who are in Christ are safe forever. We are now standing where the fire has been.

The judgment of God causes anxiety and panic, unless we trust and remember the cross of Christ that satisfied God's covenant wrath, and reconciled us to God.

1. The judgment of God troubles every nation and every person. (v.23-24)

So today we study Damascus, here in verse 23. The kingdom of Syria had been destroyed, but the city of Damascus was left. The city of Damascus was famous for being breathtakingly beautiful, and is one of the oldest continuously

inhabited cities in the world. Tensions between Damascus and the people of God go back centuries. Two neighboring cities, Hamath and Arpad, heard about the nearby city of Damascus coming under attack.

The concerns and uneasiness of these people in these 3 cities was great, and so their anxiety was compared to the churning ocean. If you stand at the ocean and look out, you hear the waves, which continue to churn and churn. That is what anxiety is like!

Listen to the anxiety taking hold of these 3 ancient cities, as I read verses 23-24, *“Concerning Damascus: ‘Hamath and Arpad are confounded, for they have heard bad news; they melt in fear, they are troubled like the sea that cannot be quiet. Damascus has become feeble, she turned to flee, and panic seized her; anguish and sorrows have taken hold of her, as of a woman in labor.’”* Vs. 23-24.

Why were these 3 cities so anxious? Because they were wicked, and God was coming in judgment! They were anxious, because they refused to turn to God.

The judgment of God troubles every nation and every person. The question is, who will turn to God? This is why God sends prophets and missionaries to all nations as ambassadors offering grace. Listen to Paul explain in 2 Corinthians 5:19-20, *“...in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”*

God is saying to all nations and all persons, Be reconciled to Me in my Son Christ Jesus, whom I sent to save and will send to judge. The judgment of God troubles every nation and every person, but the salvation of God should comfort every nation and every person. Come to Me, says Jesus!

2. The judgment of God even impacts the most famous, strong and powerful. (v.25-26)

Verses 25 and 26 show that there is no one exempt from God’s judgment. Savage attackers had left the city standing. Why? Because it was celebrated for its beauty! They did not destroy the beautiful city of Damascus. So, citizens of Damascus seemed to believe that some sort of Geneva convention applied to their city, even under the final judgment of God. It was so very gorgeous that no one ought to actually destroy it! Not even God! But what does God say about that?

Listen to the plea of Damascus to be considered an exception, followed by God’s reply in verses 25-26, *“How is the famous city not forsaken (or left out of the attack zone), the city of my joy? Therefore her young men shall fall in her squares, and all her soldiers shall be destroyed in that day, declares the LORD of hosts.”*

God says that there is no exception. And those who think that they are so beautiful, so famous, so strong, so powerful, so clever, or so valuable, that they

ought to be above the law, above the rules, and exempt from God's judgment, are judged also! Yet all are invited to come to God through Christ!

3. The judgment of God kindles a fire that destroys all defenses. (v.27)

In verse 27 God was promising to His people to protect them from their enemies in Damascus. The troubling neighbors of old would be rendered harmless and helpless by God's fire, so that they cannot do any harm in the future.

Listen to the words of verse 27, where God prophesies, *"And I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-Hadad."*

Ben means son and Hadad referred to both their false god as well as to the series of kings. Rome had many different kings who went by the titles of Ceasars and Herods. Egypt had many Pharoahs. And Syria had a dynasty of Ben-Hadads. God would burn them all, unless they bowed to God's Son, King Jesus. Does that sound more harsh than the God that you think you came to worship today? They refused to repent and turn to God for salvation! They remained enemies.

It is perfectly just for God to destroy His enemies. When God punishes sin, He is not revealing a flaw in His moral character. Quite the opposite. A king who allows himself to be mocked loses all respect. A true king defends Himself and His kingdom, and that is what God does. God protects His people. God does not allow evil men to take His land, enslave His people, or insult His royal dignity. Anyone who tries, will eventually face the fires of judgment kindled by God Himself.

Beside the cross of Jesus were two more crosses, on which were enemies of Christ. In Matthew 27:44, we read, *"...the robbers who were crucified with Him also reviled Him..."* Both of the men on the other two crosses hurled insults at Christ. They were headed for destruction. Yet one of those two men received the grace of God unto salvation. The first man Jesus is our Savior on the main Cross. The second man was being punished for his own sins. The third man on the third cross, being faced with the judgment of God, was suddenly convicted of his sin. So the third man said to the second man, in Luke 23:41, *"Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong. And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into Your kingdom."* And Jesus gave the man the grace for which he had prayed, and his sins were transferred from the shoulders of the man on the third cross, the shoulders of the man on the main cross. Rather than the third man going to the kindled fires of God's judgment, instead Jesus His Savior underwent the power of death for that repentant and believing criminal.

Why would the citizens of Damascus not turn?...or the citizens of Miami, San Francisco or Atlantic City? Why would you not turn to Christ crucified/risen?

Conclusion:

1. Take anxiety more seriously. SI - for years a Christian woman had been having trouble getting to sleep at night because she feared burglars. One night her husband heard a noise in the house, so he went downstairs to investigate. When he got there, he did find a burglar! "Good evening," said the man of the house to the burglar. "I am pleased to see you. Come upstairs and meet my wife. She has been waiting 10 years to meet you."

We think that anxiety is silly. We think anxiety is unhealthy. But in a passage about judgment, we are urged to remember that anxiety is a serious sin.

Your sin of anxiety, when placed on Jesus on the cross, required His death in order to cleanse you of its guilt! Anxiety is an indicator of something very wrong in our spiritual walk. And anxiety is a corrosive and destructive sin. We need to take anxiety more seriously. Anxiety can gain a long-term hold on us, and so we need rescue, and the proper action is to repent of it! We are to turn away from anxious thoughts back to the cross where Jesus cleanses, forgives, and restores us to new obedience, in which we cease to be anxious! Anxiety is sinful because it reflects a thought process of unbelief in the gracious promises of our Heavenly Father. God commands us not to have an anxious mind or heart. Clearly there is such a thing as godly concern and legitimate attention being given to matters at hand, too often our minds show a lack of trust in God, in God's providential care of us so far, and God's fulfillment of His promises to us today and tomorrow. Thinking back on the fulfilled covenant promises of God provides us with peace. Since this is true with regard to anxiety over the final judgment of God, this is true with regard to anxiety over anything else. *Philippians 4:6-7, "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

2. Remember that Christ has already rescued us from our anxieties.

SI – in order to act out the principle of turning anxieties over to God, a family by the name of the Mackenzie family took a paper bag, wrote "God" on it, and taped it up high on the back of their kitchen door. As they prayed about matters such as career, role as a father, mother or student, ability to do well in school or in a job, they would write down each concern on a small piece of paper. Then those pieces of paper would go in the paper bag. The rule was that if you start worrying about a matter that you've turned over to God, you had to climb up on a chair and get that scrap of paper out of the bag and carry it with you all day. Mr. Mackenzie said "I don't want to admit how much time I spent sifting through those scraps of paper."

One of the best discoveries we can make is to realize that we cannot solve our problems. We need to admit openly that we God to help us through. There are

days when we don't seem to have the physical or emotional energy to go on. Catherine Marshall, wife of the U.S. Senate chaplain in 1949, revealed that she had a fear of open spaces, such as the grocery store, a fear which is called agoraphobia. For Mrs. Marshall, it was so intense that she would panic and break out into a sweat. She was afraid that she would have a breakdown in front of other people, and she even feared that she would die. Sometimes, she would stop shopping, shove her shopping cart to the side, and run home. As soon as she was home, she had the sudden relief of being safe and secure again. She thought that she was the only person who felt like that. She had a breakdown and then studied the situation. She learned that many people struggle with various phobias, fears of things that pose little real danger. One of the common characteristics was a need to control. The need to control life, circumstances, people, and unwittingly, an attempt to control God. Why? Because we feel afraid of what might happen. We convince ourselves that if we can control things and make things happen a certain way, that we will be less afraid. All of us know what it is to be uneasy. Maybe you lie awake thinking about a family member. Maybe you worry about a job situation or health of a loved one. Worry can cause a headache or pounding heart or shortness of breath. Anxiety stands behind a lot of overeating, overspending, and overusing anything that lessens the pain. Christians are not an exception. In fact, our faith can put extra pressures on us, because we don't want to let other people down. We want others to see us trusting in the goodness of God during our difficulties. We are designed in the image of God with an imagination, so we can imagine the bad possibilities. We are designed with the capacity to care about what happens to ourselves and others. Our challenge is to learn what God has provided to help us deal with our broken world.

How has Christ already rescued us our sin of anxiety?

a) Christ now uses our anxieties to drive us to Himself. Admit you need rescue. We rely on God alone for the biggest questions, such as the coming judgment day.

John 5:24, *“Truly, Truly, I say to you, whoever hears My Word and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”* And we rely on God alone for the smaller questions, such as this coming week.

b) Christ now uses our anxieties to drive us to the Words of Jesus. We read and re-read the paragraph from Jesus Christ in Matthew 6 about not being anxious, and looking at the birds and flowers who are care-free because God cares for them.

c) Christ now uses our anxieties to drive us to prayer. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer...let your requests be made known to God.” God help me! Is prayer. Pray about your anxiety! Put your feelings into God's care. Entrust your emotions to the Son of God who died and rose again for you. Stop

trying to fix everything on your own. Let your anxiety drive you to God in prayers of honest weakness and real need.

d) Christ now uses our anxieties to drive us to better choices. Better choices such as accepting the circumstances into which God has placed us. After all, we cannot dictate our lives, and we ought not to demand a different life situation. Better choices such as putting our situation into God's hands, and putting our worry into God's hands. We are learning to accept as much or as little as God gives us in this present moment. Christ is using our anxieties to drive us to better choices, such as looking into the summer fields and the birds flying around all care-free and fun, for reminders of God's greater care for us. Matthew 6:30, "...*Consider the birds of the air, consider the lilies of the field....If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith.*" Christ uses the whole world, in His special providence, to help us conquer our anxieties, and to be comforted in His care for us.