

Text: Romans 2:2-11. 2nd Sunday in End Time: *Last Judgment*. **November 9, 2014**

In the name of Jesus... who will come to judge the living and the dead – Amen.

Just a little something about me: **I like MUSIC** – a lot. Music of all kinds, many different styles and genres. From classical to folk to electronic to moldy oldies. I love discovering *new* music. And, for your information: I'm always up for a jam session or a rousing hymn-sing. I enjoy music so much I think it's good by itself. No need for words or the human voice.

But sometimes words can add a lot! Human language can really strengthen a song, can turn a good song into an incredibly meaningful, *awesome* song. Today I'd like to share some words with you. These are real song lyrics to a real song. So please, listen to these (song) lyrics and see what you think:

*Day of wrath, oh day of mourning!
See fulfilled the prophet's warning:
Heav'n and earth in ashes burning.*

*Death is struck and nature quaking;
All creation is awaking,
To its judge an answer making.*

*See, the book, exactly worded,
Wherein all has been recorded
Thus shall judgment be awarded.*

So? Reactions? Pretty nice, huh? These lyrics are actually the words to the first three stanzas of our closing hymn today (*Christian Worship #209 – Day of Wrath, Oh Day of Mourning!*) Wow. Ok. Tell me if I'm wrong, but I won't anticipate hearing these words later this afternoon on Lite 102.5. Unfortunately, I don't have the hymn-writer's name memorized, but my guess : it wasn't Cat Stevens or James Taylor.

Wouldn't it be nice to sing all happy pleasant songs at church, though? Where's "Peace Train" when you need it? It'd sure put a smile on my face if we all joined together in our own rendition of "How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved by You)." To that end, "Kum Ba Ya" is a good song... right?!?

I'd love to talk about music with you—all day long!—but there is a vastly more important message to discuss today. And at first this message is such a loud, harsh sound. It hurts our ears. But it is a *serious, solemn* song we must hear. Because one day all 500 of the world's best-loved melodies will no longer play. The music of mankind will suddenly stop. There's only one set of strange lyrics that really matters in the end. The entire audience will go silent as **God himself** steps forward to sing a most meaningful song. He'll sing it *a cappella* – without any accompaniment. **It will be a Judgment Song.**

And this makes us uncomfortable, doesn't it? If you're like me, the word *judge* makes you a tad uneasy. Even the mere idea of "judging someone" sets me a little bit on edge. The concept of *judgment* does not bring a sense of peace and tranquility to my mind.

★ But dear friends in Christ, my fellow judgmental ones, we all need this reminder as we see the Day—Judgment Day—approaching: **God Likes to Judge**. Let me explain: **It's only GOD WHO DOES THE JUDGING. Do not worry, it is an activity reserved for him, no matter what anyone says.** And so, perhaps a suggestion: a bit later this morning, as we encounter those nasty lyrics (above) to our closing hymn, maybe pinch yourself and be thinking: "Oh yeah! He will come to judge the *living* and *the dead!*"... just remember:

God likes to judge.

- 1) **It's His Job to judge – NOT Ours!**
- 2) **It's His Joy to judge – AND Ours!**

God likes to judge, **but so do we**, don't we? I'm sorry, but we're *always doing it*. We like to judge everyone we see – everyone *except ourselves*. I can try to give two or three out of a trillion examples:

A) Sophomore in high school says to her circle of friends: "*Yes, she actually wore that to school. Seriously, has she ever been shopping???* I heard her family has like no money. Well, I don't know, even if they are poor, I certainly don't approve. You can't dress like that. I'm just glad I have some self-respect."

B) Or just might you relate to this embattled employee... "*A few of my coworkers are just... just brutal. And they know I believe in Jesus, so they just start judging me left and right! They say, 'I'm too good for them. Or I'm uptight, some sort of holier than*

thou.' Well, I can dish it right back!!! They're filthy. They swear like sailors. They're lazy, lucky to have jobs, and they... lack conscience. I am glad that I have managed to keep things clean and pure. What are they gonna do if they don't wake up? Good luck getting into heaven – that's what I say."

C) Or have you found yourself thinking... "His life is in shambles. Especially his marriage. Can't blame anybody but himself for bad choices. And hasn't he been divorced already? You know, I am so glad that I LOVE my wife. I've kept my wedding vows – I've been faithful – and I'm just thankful that I made great choices in life! ☺"

Congratulations – you've done *mostly* what God has asked you to do. (Not everyone does that, I know.) Maybe it's true: you've been a pretty good and decent husband, wife, father, mother, child, brother, sister, pastor, teacher, achiever, employee. Altogether... you've been a pretty solid Christian! And furthermore, if we would just take a step back for admiration ... and hold up a sample of this Christian life in comparison with the unbeliever's... then I suppose things are looking pretty nice!

You know, maybe this is the sort of thing Martin Luther did before the Reformation happened. Maybe this was his way of thinking: "I'll be a monk. I'll be a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ. I'll strive to avoid sin. I'll pray more and sin less and try my very best. Transform me into something strong, Lord, anyone, anyTHING except like one of those pagans."

Good for Martin Luther, and good for every one of US, whenever we try to do GOOD! Good for us whenever we try hard to *amend our sinful lives!* God himself rejoices! But sometimes the first pitfall after saying "no" to sin is to shift into high gear of judging everyone else nearby. You see, this is a natural knee-jerk reaction that feels right because it's so much easier to judge than to keep on saying "no" to sin. In truth, whenever we should look around us and say, "At least I'm better than _____ (insert name here)..." we are actually holding ourselves to a **WRONG STANDARD**. In truth, we're comparing ourselves to other sinners, and instead, we need to compare ourselves to GOD. And it was the Son of God who said: "**Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.**"

If you think you might be perfect, then read Romans. Read just the first chapter and you will already discover the same truth that the former monk Martin Luther did. Read Romans enough and soon you'll feel so small – utterly dwarfed by GOD's RIGHTEOUSNESS. An absolutely almighty and unapproachable Creator, who made all things. Then you will come to know that **God's judgment** is *all-inclusive*. You'll realize that, although you may be able to escape your own judgment, you cannot escape God's. Because: "**There is no one righteous, not even one... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**"

You and I may like to judge, but what's to like about incriminating ourselves before God? What's to like about judging others and in the process turning many others off to Christianity? What's to like about living an honestly-quite-moral lifestyle but becoming a selfish hypocrite at the same time? And there is something worse. Worse than being an awful representative of Jesus. Worse than preaching a salvation-by-works theology through our good behavior. Whenever we wrongly judge others in God's place, we are only snowballing our own sin, stockpiling it against ourselves. And finally, if left untouched by God's love and forgiveness, **we are saving up our sin for Judgment Day**. In essence, our own stubbornness would have separated us from God's sheep pen. We would have become our own obstacles on the grace-filled path to heaven. What's to like about rejecting the beautiful opportunity to repent and forfeiting God's grace? What's to like about storing up God's wrath by being judgmental?

My friends, what are we storing up right now? It matters. Are we storing up good deeds done simply out of humble service and faith in Jesus? Or are we storing up good deeds, meanwhile hiding inside our hearts some selfish expectation of reward?

You know, the word for "storing up" is related to our English word **thesaurus**. Not a dinosaur, but that big book of words, 'n so? Better yet, a "treasury" or "storehouse" of big words and phrases to summon at a moment's notice. You use a thesaurus to find a word and all its similar meanings. Each one of us has a **thesaurus**. I have one, and so do you – they're rather similar. As for me, I tend to jam my **thesaurus** full of all sorts of stock phrases. And they begin to sound the same after a while: *I deserve it; I earned this; it's MINE; I have rights; at least I'm less judgmental than you*. Our thesaurus is just chock-full of fancy words designed to talk our way out of the ultimate test – the grand finale, the Day of God's righteous judgment. The day that really matters.

We really ought keep our lousy **thesaurus** closed, even throw it away! But God's **thesaurus** is so much *different!* Open it up, and basically... see on the page just one word. That word is **GRACE**. Like it always has been. Grace in *the past*. Grace *now*. Grace on that Last Day of judgment even until *the rest of time*. And God will *smile* as he opens his Book of Life, which contains our names and the names of everyone who seeks eternal life through Christ. The time of judging is coming soon, and it will be a joyful & happy, awesome & exciting event. God likes to judge, not only because it's his *job*, but also his *joy*.

Even though you and I will leave the absolute and final judgment to our heavenly Father, we will most certainly **share** in the Father's joy when he judges all people, nations, tribes, and races. And the last judgment will be a joyful thing! For just as all have sinned and fall short... so also **all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus**. Yes, God likes to judge. He also likes to declare quite a surprising verdict. He likes to declare his verdict of victory in Christ. He likes to dole out eternal life FOR FREE! God likes to judge and *will judge* countless Christians as **NOT GUILTY**, as **SAVED BY GRACE**, as **BLOOD-BOUGHT CHILDREN OF GOD**.

This is the Gospel joy that pierces the silence, the Gospel joy that obscures the solemn separation of sheep from goats. This is the joy that dominates our confession: *He will come again to judge the living and dead*. The joy that confronts all our fears and insecurities about the end of time: ***for the wages of sin is death, BUT the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

We have this joy! This is the joy that all God's people have... joy to comprehend those nasty song lyrics! Joy to take today's closing hymn head-on... and if you thought those three stanzas at the beginning were the whole song, I have some more lyrics for you.

*King of majesty tremendous,
Who does free salvation send us,
Fount of pity, then befriend us.*

*Think, good Jesus my salvation
Caused your wondrous incarnation,
Made you suffer my damnation!*

*On the cross your dying spared **me**;
Just and righteous you declared me;
I await the joy prepared me.*

God likes to judge, but leave that up to him. Instead, join with Him and experience the joy that he has given us in Jesus. It will be a beautiful final song – lyrics courtesy of Christ, words that will let us into heaven. Someday soon this will happen – don't forget it – *Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead*. Then we will be with him *forever*.

Questions to consider:

1. *He will come to judge the living and the dead*. What do these words do for you?
2. What type of music do *you* like? (This is a real question 😊)
3. What sort of “song” will play at the end of the world? Who will “sing” this song?
4. Who likes to judge?
5. If God's judgment is based on truth, who will escape it?
6. When we judge others, who gets the worst of it?
7. What is in your “thesaurus?” What is in God's?
8. “I am sure. I am sure. I am sure.” Why is it a joyful thing that Jesus will come to judge?

For further thought/discussion in Vine and Branches or at home:

1. Look at the previous chapter—especially Romans 1:18-32. See: a LONG LIST OF SINS. Are we guilty of this stuff?
2. What are you “storing up” in your heart? If not specific sins... specific judgment on others? God forgives these moralistic judgments.

3. What is God “storing up in his heart?” Contrast his *kindness*, *tolerance*, and *patience* with ours (or our lack thereof).
4. Finally, what music does God prefer? Country twang? Bach cantata? What makes music good? ★ What makes worship music good? (Warning: this is a bigger discussion than one might like!)

Prayer of the Church

Father in heaven, stir up the hearts of your believers on earth. Have us encourage each other with your Word – and all the more – as we see the Day approaching! No one will escape your righteous judgment when it comes. We ask you to forgive us when we have continually judged everyone except ourselves. Stop us short of this self-condemning sin. Instead, direct all our thoughts, words, and actions toward you. Help us lay aside pride and stubbornness and take up humility and repentance. And whenever we suddenly get caught up in this troublesome life, remind us again: You are the Ancient of Days, the Righteous Judge, and all the while, the God of free and faithful love. In the end, we are joyful and at peace to know – you have given us according to what He has done. In the name of your Son, Jesus – Amen.