

When Judgment Returns to Righteousness

by Carter Conlon

The sermon emphasizes the importance of embracing God's judgment in our lives to return to righteousness and to live a life that honors God.

Duration: 52:12

Scripture: Malachi 3:15-17, Malachi 4:1, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Judgment"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of cultivating a living relationship with Christ in order to navigate the challenges of the coming days. He warns that spiritual deception will become rampant in the world, but those who truly belong to Christ will not be deceived. The preacher also highlights the need for a compassionate heart towards the struggles of society as evidence of a genuine relationship with God. He references Malachi 4:1-3, which speaks of a day of judgment for the proud and wicked, but promises healing and joy for those who fear God's name and return to a right relationship with Him. The preacher contrasts this with the actions of religious leaders who oppress the vulnerable and neglect the true heart of God.

Transcript

Psalm 94, when judgment returns to righteousness. O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth, verse 1, O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, show thyself. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth, and render a reward to the proud.

Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph? How long shall they utter and speak hard things, and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy people, O Lord, and afflict thine heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. And yet they say, the Lord shall not see it, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.

Understand, ye brutish among the people, and ye fools, when will you be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? And he that formed the eye, shall he not see? And he that chastises the heathen, shall he not correct? And he that teaches man knowledge, shall he not know? The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity. Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law, that thou may give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked. For the Lord will not cast off his people, and neither will he forsake his inheritance.

But judgment shall return unto righteousness, and all the upright in heart shall follow it. Now, there is a cry in the heart of, I believe, every true Christian. We even see this in the book of Revelation, where beneath the altar there are the souls of those, as the scripture tells us, who are martyred for the name of Jesus Christ.

And they say to the Lord himself, how long will it be before you judge the shedding of our blood upon the earth? And the psalmist is crying out, he says, O Lord, how long will the wicked triumph? How long will they speak hard things against the truth and the knowledge of Almighty God, and boast themselves in their iniquity? How long, O God, will you allow even the wicked, some even in the name of Christ himself, to break in pieces the people of God? In other words, bringing in things that do not profit the kingdom of God, infusing destruction, destructive doctrine, destructive teaching and practice into the very church of Jesus Christ, infecting the very core, as it is, of God's own people in his house, and causing the heritage of the Lord to be slain, in a sense, to be removed from the very compassion and power that God intended for all people who come to him to have. He said they slay the widow and the stranger and they murder the fatherless. In other words, they bring in theology that leaves all of the vulnerable in society on the sidelines.

They speak of greatness and they speak of destiny. They speak of everything that elevates the heart of man and all of those that are to be touched with the compassion of Christ. All of those that are to be encouraged.

All of those that are to be embraced, as it is, by the very heart of God and be given the courage to believe that the ground is level, that Calvary and every man, woman and child has a calling that God himself will fulfill in their lives. But yet, there are certain theologies that virtually leave the most vulnerable marginalized and on the sidelines of the work of God. And God answers him and says, these things, yes, they may progress for a season, but there is a day the wicked are bringing judgment upon their own heads.

He says, until the pit be digged for the wicked. How long we cry, and I do believe this is the cry of every righteous child of God. You cannot get away from it.

There's a cry in the heart that says, God, how long will these things go on that mock your name around the world? How long will these injustices be allowed to exist? You know, folks, there's an appointed time of judgment. There is a day, the scripture says, that every knee will bow, every tongue will confess. The sea will give up all of the dead.

Everyone who's ever lived will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and the unrighteous dead will be judged and they'll be cast eternally into a lake of fire. There's an appointed time. But until that day, rather, the hand of God's mercy is extended to everyone who has and will be born.

It's the mercy of God that holds back the justice of God. You have to understand this. It's God's mercy.

You see, because he left the church on the earth. This is you and me. And you and I are to be an extension of this mercy in our world and to our generation.

We're not to be conformed to the things of this world. When Peter spoke and said, oh, Lord, not for you to go to the cross. And that's why Jesus so harshly rebuked him and said, get behind me.

You're an offense to me. He said, you savor not the things that be of God, but the things that be of man. Yes, there's a day of justice coming.

And there ought to be a cry in the heart of every person who's called a Christian. God, don't let people perish. Don't let the widow, the fatherless.

God, don't let the stranger who should be finding health and healing and life and direction. When they come into contact with my life because I'm now the temple of the living God. Lord, don't let them perish in their sin.

Don't let them go into a Christless eternity without knowing there is great grace available to them. Lord, take out of me whatever offends your nature. Take out of me, oh God, whatever's in me that is hiding this great grace that you have given to me.

And Lord, open my heart and give me a compassionate heart. And open my mind and help me to see the way you see things that are all around me. And oh God, as Paul said, open the bowels of my compassion.

That out of every resource that you've placed within me, I may have the grace to reach out to a dark and fallen generation and be an extension of that which is in the heart of God. It is not God's will that any should perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of their salvation and everlasting life in Jesus Christ. There is an ongoing justice, folks.

The day of judgment, there's a coming day of judgment. There's a coming definitively appointed time. When the dead are going to live, the unrighteous dead will stand before God, the righteous dead also.

Will stand and be judged not for their salvation, but they'll be judged for the things they did in the name of Christ. But there is a judgment, a justice that is ongoing even now as I speak. Every time the word of God goes forth in truth and in power, you and I are making decisions.

We're either agreeing with what God is speaking when we see it in Holy Scripture, or we are denying the words that God is speaking and we are cloaking our denial in some form of religious excuse. And we are taking that thing and we're planting it in the temple. And the more we deny the word of God that comes to our hearts, the greater amount of things we begin to build in this temple that offend the very nature of Jesus Christ.

And ironically, ultimately they become so entrenched, they become part of our concept of God, they become part of our entire service to God. And the only one that can take them out is Christ himself and the power of the Holy Ghost has to come. He has to superimpose over our lives and hearts and minds his own truth, his own person.

He has to draw us into the light of his own resurrected life. And it's only when we're in that presence do we begin to see and understand if we have allowed things into our hearts that have offended the nature of Jesus Christ. Proverbs 29, 1 says, He that being often reprov'd hardens his neck shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy.

If you are in the house of God and are hearing a truth, and the truth is challenging an attitude, the truth is challenging a besetting sin, the truth is challenging a direction or a practice, and every time you hear it, you are hardening your neck, you can ultimately get to the point where you become so hard you cannot be convicted anymore. You cannot be convinced and all that awaits you now is a destruction. And there's no

remedy, he says, there's no way out.

Old time church used to call it gospel hardened. They used to say the greatest and most dangerous place you could ever be in as a backslidden compromising Christian is in a house where the word of God is coming from the very throne in truth and in purity, because God's word will always accomplish what it is sent to do. It will soften you, cause you to bend your knee and confess with your tongue that Jesus Christ is Lord or it will harden you.

And the justice of God, this ongoing work of God's justice and judgment will begin to put layers of hardness in the heart that ultimately not heaven or earth or any anointed preacher and ultimately not even the Holy Spirit himself can move you from this thing that becomes entrenched in your life. And folks, I have seen this. It's terrifying when you meet a Christian who's formerly perhaps had some form of life in God and they are now walking in absolute disobedience to God but have it completely justified with false theology in their mind.

You can open the scriptures and you can't reach them with the scriptures anymore because the door is now closed. And all that awaits them is the day to their shock that they stand before Christ perhaps even in some cases among not the righteous but the unrighteous dead. Now scripture tells us the judgment begins at the house of God.

Now we say, well, that's a day way ahead. That's a day when I'll stand before God and I'll be judged for the things that I've done in this body and everything that's like Christ will stand and everything that's unlike Christ will burn. Now that day will come to every believer.

But Peter in 1 Peter 4.17 puts it in the present tense. Now here's what he says and if you look it up in every translation, every English translation of the New Testament will say it essentially the same way. Peter says, for the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God.

And if it first begins at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? Now Peter considered that the house of God had come to a time when judgment had already begun. The world will be judged on a specific day. But for the church of Jesus Christ, judgment has already begun.

Now I'm going to explain this to you. Now there's a purpose for this. The judgment that is now in the church is not to condemn you.

The judgment in the church is to return you to righteousness. It's to make you and I more like Christ. It's to make us vessels that truly honor God.

It is a justice in a sense that God will come against everything in our hearts that tries to establish itself and is unlike Him. Now I believe that the true Christian embraces the judgment of God upon his own life. I don't think I'm unique or Pastor Neil or Pastor William or Pastor Patrick and others are specifically unique.

But we embrace the judgment of God. It's quite often in our prayers. We say, Lord, if there's anything in us, we pray it in our leaders' meetings.

If there's anything we're embracing. If there's anything we're doing. If there's anything that's forming in our hearts.

God that is unlike you and is going to offend you in this house, judge it, O God. Judge it in us. Lord, bring it to the light and show it to be an evil deed.

And Lord, we will turn from it. But Lord, it's up to you to bring it to the surface. And the true Christian embraces this.

Now, Paul in First Corinthians 11 was admonishing the church because their fellowship had become unlike Christ. You know, the Corinthian church had become very class conscious. And they were fellowshiping with people that were of the same socioeconomic status in the church.

And they were marginalizing the poor and the afflicted among them. And Paul came to them and said, this is not Christ. This is not the Christ I received.

You see, you have to understand this in the context of judgment. Now, I'm not talking about judgment that casts into hell. I'm talking about judgment that sets error against truth.

And gives us ultimately a choice of which way we're going to go. And Paul said, this is not the Christ I received. The Christ I received on the last day took his, the bread, and broke it and said, take, eat.

This is my body which is given for you. And he said, after the same manner, he took the cup when he had supped. And he said, this is my blood which is shed for you.

Now, Paul was saying, this is the standard of Christ. It's a brokenness in the body and a giving one to another. That all people may be included in this life of Christ.

It is not an exclusivity. It is not something, it is not proper to come into the body. And to begin to gravitate to people of our own class or race or language or color.

Or economic status or whatever. Or profession. This is a body.

And Paul says, because many have not discerned what it means to be part of the body. Many are weak and spiritually sickly. And others are spiritually asleep because of it.

Then he goes on and he makes a statement in 1 Corinthians 11 31. I'll just read it to you. He said, if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

But he said, when we are judged, we are chastened to the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world. Now, Paul says, we're not to have the attitude of the world. We're not to do things the way the world does them.

He said, if we would allow this judgment of God to come and judge this attitude of heart, we will not be condemned with the world. I thank God for that with all of my heart. Go to John chapter 3, please, with me, if you will.

Jesus talked about a condemnation. He said in verse 17, God didn't send his son into the world to condemn the world. But that the world through him might be saved.

He that doesn't believe is condemned. But he that believes not is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten son of God. Now, here in verse 19 is the point.

And this is the condemnation that light is coming to the world and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone that does evil hates the light and neither comes to the light lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that does truth comes to the light that his deeds might be made manifest that they are wrought or that means born in God.

That's the way it is in the heart of every true Christian. There's an ongoing judgment of everything he thinks and does. It's a welcome judgment unless after he's done what has been established in him looks very, very little like Christ.

He brings it to the light. His dealings are on the table, not under the table. They're on the table.

He speaks openly of what's in his heart. There's nothing has to be hidden. He wants to walk with God.

He puts everything he does and lets God expose it to the light of Scripture. And Scripture as an x-ray machine empowered by the Holy Ghost begins to examine every motive of his heart. He's not looking within to be condemned.

He's looking within to be like Christ. He's saying, God, you look inside of me. I bring what I do to the light.

When he goes to prayer, for example, and perhaps he's in a conflict situation, he takes this conflict to the light, not trying to justify himself. And when the light begins to expose the facts of the conflict, the Holy Spirit brings Scripture up in front. You ever heard that happen to you? And sometimes one Scripture can settle a conflict.

The Lord says, contention comes only by pride. So the Holy Spirit says, somebody is proud here. And if you find yourself in the midst of an argument, it's very, really possible that pride has found a root in your heart.

It's amazing how one Scripture can put a whole month's worth of argument to death in just a moment. Proverbs 5 talks about the person who did not build on truth and didn't welcome the justice of God in his life. He says, Let strangers be filled with thy wealth, and thy labors be in the house of a stranger.

And I mourn at the last when thy flesh and body are consumed, and say how I've hated instruction and my heart despised reproof. I've not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me. I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and the assembly.

What a tragic confession some are going to have on the last day. When finally they stand before the light of the resurrected Christ and begin to understand, God, you were speaking to me, but I wouldn't hear you. You came to me, but I rejected you.

You wanted to go after these things in my life. These things that were going to bring me to a place where all my labors were going to be in the house of a stranger. I was going to be working even in your name and for your kingdom, but it's a work that is strange to you.

And at the end, because you see, if it's not the Holy Spirit that's empowering what we're doing, at the end our flesh and our body are consumed. At the end we lose our strength because our true strength comes from an empowerment of the Holy Ghost. And God will only anoint and set apart that which honors His name.

And He says at the end, oh how I hated instruction, how my heart despised reproof. I built this thing and I didn't obey the voice of those who came to instruct me in the ways of God. I did not turn my ear to those that you had established in the body to bring truth and to reprove my heart.

And because of it, I was almost in all evil. And many will not see it until the final day, will not understand that what had gotten a hold of them is not God. And folks, when that happens in your heart, your testimony is largely ineffectual to a dying generation.

There should be a people out in New York City, they ought to be asking you and I for a reason for the hope that is in us. There ought to be a light in our eye. There ought to be something different in our voices.

There ought to be clarity in our thinking and direction in our steps. There ought to be compassion in our hands. There ought to be something that looks other than this world, that looks so far apart from this world.

It makes us so otherworldly that people look and have to recognize and acknowledge that God is upon us. I think of Christ coming to His temple. We heard it so powerfully last Sunday night.

It was the message that the Holy Spirit sent to give us, introduce in effect what He was going to do through this fast we're about to undertake. Matthew 21, 23 tells us how unwelcomed He was there. The religious leaders, as Christ comes into the temple and begins to do things that only God can do, they challenge Him and say, who gave you this authority? Where do you get this power? And who are you to think you can come in here and do these things? And folks, if a religion is getting a hold of your heart, you'll get very annoyed when a man or woman of God is speaking to you under the influence of the Holy Ghost.

You'll sit in your seat and say, who does he think he is to speak to me this way? Where does he get this authority? What motivates him to do this? Why doesn't he just step in the pulpit and tell us that God loves us and everything is going to be good? There are times for that. But there's also times when the scourge has to come into the temple. I think of the fury in Matthew 21, verses 12 and 13 that erupted in the heart of Jesus over what His temple had become.

The fury that simply Jesus said, I'm not angry with the people. I'm angry with what this has become. Because the stranger comes here and cannot find direction.

The poor come here and cannot find healing. The blind come here and cannot find sight. It's in the heart of God to redeem and forgive and heal and restore.

You have to understand that. That's why He has left you and I on the earth. That's why when we received Christ, He didn't just take us home.

He left us here because we've become partakers of His heart and His nature. There's a passion in God's heart for every person ever created in His image. And He was angry going into the temple because His temple had become a place of buying and selling and thieves.

And the lame were not being healed. And the blind were not seeing. And the wounded were not receiving the freedom that Christ had for them.

And He took a scourge to it. And overthrew it. I think of His pronouncement against it.

The disciples were all enamored by this thing that had been built over the years. And Jesus said, I tell you, not one stone is going to be left upon another. And the reason being because they did not know the time of their visitation.

They did not appreciate it. They did not recognize it. They did not ultimately want it.

And He made a declaration in Matthew 23, 38 and 39 when He left His temple. He said, Behold, your house is left to you desolate. You will not see Me again until you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

You will not see Me until you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. You will not see Me until in your heart you say, Oh God, speak to me. God, thank You that You put me in a house where men and women are on their faces seeking You.

And are bringing a true word from heaven that can challenge my heart. And judge the things in me that are unlike Christ. God, thank You for this.

I think of the ministry of that day carrying on completely unaware that it had been already judged. Christ had judged it. Christ had walked away from it.

And He said, Until you want Me, you won't see Me again. I'm gone. And the ministry carries on.

The priests offer their sacrifices. The people bring in their lambs and their goats. The high priest goes into the Holy of Holies.

But Jesus said, You will not see Me. It's an amazing thing. You see, this pattern is well established in the history of Scripture.

Go with me quickly to Ezekiel chapter 44. It's well established. Because God shows us in Ezekiel how He judged the ministry when it lost the desire and ability to represent God.

To stand for truth. And to turn the people before whom they stood from their sins. That's how God blesses people.

He turns them from their iniquities. He judges their sin as it is beforehand. And seeks from them an agreement that He may forgive them and heal them and restore them.

And bring them into His own abundant life. Ezekiel chapter 44 verse 10. And the Levites that are gone away far from Me.

When Israel went astray. Which went astray away from Me after their idols. They shall bear their iniquity.

Now the Levites is a ministry. You have to understand this. These are priests.

Yet, He said, they shall be ministers in My sanctuary. Having charge at the gates of the house and ministering to the house. They shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people.

They shall stand before them to minister unto them. Now, you have to understand. This is a ministry that's under the judgment of God.

This is a type of the ministry that says. We love the position. We love the power.

We love the accolades of men. We love the employment. We love the sense of security.

But we don't. And we love the people. And we love the people especially to love us.

We don't have the courage to stand before the people here from heaven. And challenge the idolatry. That always tries to find a lodging place in every man and woman's heart.

And this is a ministry. Who will stand and minister to the people in their idols. They will stand and give them comfort.

They will say to the unrighteous, it is well with you. Even though it is not. They will be prophets of the deception of their own hearts.

They will talk of victory when there is no victory. They will not turn the people away from their sins. There is no reflective presence of a holy God in anything they are or anything they say.

The sinner will be very, very comfortable in their presence. Because, he says in verse 12, they ministered unto them before their idols. And caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity.

Therefore, he says, I have lifted up my hand against them, says the Lord God. And they shall bear their iniquity. Now this is a ministry under judgment.

Now folks, I want to show you something when we read this. There is a lot of ministry under judgment today. We turn on the television and say, God, how long are you going to let this kind of thing go on? This misrepresentation of who you are.

This fleecing and robbing of the people. This murdering of the fatherless and the widows. This absolute, utter thievery in the name of Jesus Christ.

God, how long before you judge it? But the Lord says, no. You see, you have to understand something. It is already under judgment.

There is a day of judgment coming. But the judgment began. Because judgment begins and has begun in the house of God.

Now in verse 12, he says, I have lifted up my hand against them. Now here is the judgment. Here it is folks, verse 13.

And they shall not come near to me. To do the opposite of a priest unto me. Nor to come near to any of my holy things.

In other words, they will not come near to me. They will not know who I am. I will be just a far off, mystical, foggy God to them.

They will not have an interpersonal relationship with me. They will not know my heart. They will not come near to anything that is holy.

They will not have any revelation of truth. They will have nothing that can bring life to those that they speak to. In the most holy place, halfway through verse 13.

But they shall bear their shame and their abominations which they have committed. I'll make them keepers of the charge of the house. For all the service thereof.

And for all that shall be done therein. I'll make them housekeepers, God says. That will be their judgment.

They will just be in the house. And their whole focus will be on just keeping the whole thing together. Their whole focus will be on the color of the carpet.

The number of people that attended. There will be no revelation. And this is the judgment of God.

For those who stand and minister to the people before their idols. But he says in verse 15. The priests, the Levites, the sons of Zadok.

They kept the charge of my sanctuary. When the children of Israel went astray from me. In other words, no matter what happened.

No matter how deeply backslidden the people became. There is a ministry that stands for God. In the midst of an unpopular time.

They continue to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Even though it's an unpopular season. They shall come near to me to minister to me.

The Lord says, they're going to say, God. They're going to just mention my name and I'm going to say, here I am. And they're going to come into the holy place.

And they're going to know me. And they're going to have a sweetness and an intimacy with me. And they shall stand before me to offer me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord God.

In other words, they shall understand the sacrifice. They will be able to come and they will appreciate their salvation. There will be a glory and a joy upon their heart.

They will understand who Christ is. Why Christ died. Where Christ sits.

The ministry of Christ. Everything about the sacrifice of Calvary. And the power of his not only death but resurrection will be made known to them.

The joy of the Lord will be their strength. Remember in Nehemiah's day. When the people wept when they heard the words of the law.

And Nehemiah sent them home and said, no. He said, go home and eat the fat and drink the sweet. The joy of the Lord is your strength.

In other words, it is God's joy to restore. It's God's joy to forgive. It's God's joy to empower.

It's God's joy to give life. It's God's joy to bring freedom. It's God's joy to expand the borders of your tent.

It's God's joy to give spiritual authority. It's God's joy to open prison doors. It's God's joy to give words of knowledge and comfort.

It is the joy of God to take those that are weak and make them strong. And those that are confused and give them sound minds. It is the joy of God.

They will grow from image to image and glory to glory. Not by human effort. But by an understanding, a deep heartfelt understanding of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary.

They will stand and the glory of the Lord will be upon them. Their words will have authority and power and not like the religious. Those that are hopeless and condemned will find life under the preaching of God's word in their lives and ministry.

They shall enter into my sanctuary, verse 16. And they shall come near to my table to minister to me. And they shall keep my charge.

This is the difference. Those who preach the gospel, God says, you come near to me. You're willing to hear my heart.

And I will give my heart to you. You will know my love. You will know the thoughts that I'm thinking.

You will know the concerns that I have about those that are called by my name. Verse 17 says, it's come to pass when they enter into the gates of the inner court. They shall be clothed with linen garments and no wool shall come upon them.

While they minister in the gates of the inner court and within. They shall have linen bonnets on their heads and shall have linen breeches upon their loins. They shall not gird themselves with anything that causes sweat.

This is an amazing. I preached this one time before. This will be called a no sweat ministry.

The Lord says, I will carry them. I will sustain them. I will give them life.

I will take them from one place to another. There will be no amount of human effort necessary. Oh, think of the difference between this and those who are just keepers of the house.

You ever seen a keeper of the house? They just run and sweat. That's all they know how to do is run and sweat. All they can do is be taskmasters to the people of God.

The only evidence that God is among them is they have to create new tasks for the people to do. And they feed them straw and send them out to build monuments to their names as some kind of a testimony that God has been among them. But in contrast to this, he said, I will have a ministry.

And I will carry this ministry. And there will be an understanding that life comes from God. And strength comes from God.

And joy comes from God. And change comes from God. There will be no sweat in their ministry.

Hallelujah. They'll be carried and sustained by the hand of almighty God himself. And when they go forth into the other court, and that's when they come out of the holy place where they have fellowship with me, even to the other court of the people, they'll put off these garments where they ministered and lay them in the holy chambers.

And they shall put on other garments. And they shall not sanctify the people with their garments. In other words, there will be no sanctification by association.

Now, let me explain this. When they're in the presence of the Lord, there's a glow that will come upon them. But you see, their ministry will not be, well, you just get close to me and you'll be saved.

No, it's not about me. It's about Jesus Christ. Every man, every woman has to make their own choice.

Every person has to make an individual decision to live for God, to receive him as Savior, and to begin to follow him in spirit and in truth. Neither will they shave their heads or suffer their locks to grow long, and they shall only pull their heads. In other words, there will be nothing odd about them.

Ministry that's under judgment begins to look odd. I've said it quite often. Those that are religious wear their mother's lace instead of their father's righteousness.

It's exactly what happens. You look at religious men and you'll find them dressed in lace instead of their father's righteousness. You'll find the ministry today that's cut off from God.

The more cut off they get, the more odd they begin to look. They don't relate to anybody in the church or in their society. Neither shall they take for their wives a widow or her that is put away, or maidens of the seat of the house, or a widow that has had a priest before.

In other words, they will be morally clean. And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. There will be something upon them.

There will be a knowledge in their heart that causes them to stand and show my people the difference between that which is clean and that which is unclean. And in controversy they shall stand in judgment. And they shall judge it according to my judgments and keep my laws and my statutes in all my assemblies.

And they shall hallow my Sabbaths. In other words, they will have discernment. And they will know what is right.

And they will know what is wrong. And they will be able to adjudicate when difficulties arise and decisions have to be made in the kingdom of God. Now, we rejoice that false ministry is judged.

And we agree together that ministry should represent God. But do you and I know that as New Testament Christians that God has appointed us to be kings and priests to himself. We are the ministry.

It's fine and dandy to look at pulpits and preachers and television and radio and denominations and to point a finger and say, You don't represent God. But that's only part of the ministry. You are a priest or a priestess.

You are set apart. Revelation chapter one, verses five and six says, Jesus Christ has made us kings and priests unto our God. Now, Malachi chapter three, if you go there, we'll close with the scripture.

Malachi chapter three, last book in the Old Testament. Now, it speaks of a people who in the last days will discern who is serving God and who is not serving him. A people of discernment.

If ever we needed discernment, it's now. We need to know. There seems to be such confusion in the New Testament church of Jesus Christ.

But the word of God says there will be a people who discern. They know the difference. They know what is God.

They know what is not God. Chapter three, verse 15, it says, and now think of our day. Think of a lot of our theology.

Now we call the proud happy. And they that work wickedness are set up. And they that tempt God are even delivered.

But then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another. And the Lord hearkened and heard it. And a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and thought upon his name.

A people, as it is, who began to say, Jesus, who are you in me? And what are you doing in my life? And what do you desire me to be? What is your purpose for me? How is my life honoring you? And the desires of your heart, are they being realized in me and through me? Verse 17 says, they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serves him. Then shall you return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serves God and him that serves him not.

A discerning people. But you see, before we discern, we have to return. And that really is the key.

I've often wondered about this scripture, but the Lord just made it very real to me. Then shall you return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serves God and him that serves him not. The word for return in the Hebrew means turn around.

It means come back. It means moving back to a point of departure. It means there will be a people who just say in their hearts, God, what have I allowed in my life? That has taken me away from what you desire your life's testimony in me to be.

What have I done? Lord, I ask you to judge it in me. I ask you, Lord, to bring my deeds, my thoughts to the light. That I may know that what I'm doing is either born of you or it's been born in the flesh and it needs to be put away.

There will be no discerning without returning. Many, many people are running around today looking for the, as they see it, the gift of discernment. But they themselves have not returned from the point of their departure.

And this so-called discernment is just a deeper level of confusion. A returning. You see, I will know who's living for God and who isn't when I am.

That's really the bottom line. When I'm living for God, I will know. When I'm serving him with all my heart, it'll be obvious who is and who is not.

When everything in me is literally on the altar and God is free to judge it. And he's free to take away what offends and he's free to leave and cause to grow what is of him. And when these things are in order, then I will know.

It's very, very clear. I will understand who is serving God and who is not serving him. That's why we cry so hard from this pulpit to put away ungodly entertainment.

Close your eyes to things that are evil. Close your ears to scorning. Which is seems to be permeating the airwaves in our society today.

That's why we cry so hard that you and I need to be in this book. We need to have a deep relationship with God, perhaps more so than ever before. We need to love him with all our heart, soul and mind and strength.

They'll turn around. They will come back today. There are people listening to the sound of my voice.

You need to turn around and come back. You departed from something. You've lost this intimacy that you had with Jesus Christ.

And religion is overtaking it. It's becoming rote even to go to the house of God. Your heart does not have within it a compassion for the struggling of society.

That should be a warning sign that something is missing in your relationship with God. Chapter 4 says, The day comes, verse 1, that shall burn as an oven. All the proud and all do wickedly shall be stubble.

The day that comes shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, and leave them neither root nor branch. But to you that fear my name shall the son of righteousness arise with healing in his wings, and you shall go forth and grow up as calves at the stall. Those that return and come back to right relationship with God, the scripture makes it very clear they will be healed and the joy of the Lord will be their strength.

He says, I will heal you. If you have moved in a direction that is not of my will, I will heal you. And the joy that only God can give will begin to emanate from the very inward parts of your being.

And they shall tread down to wicked. There shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I do this, saith the Lord of hosts. These returning ones will have spiritual authority.

You will be healed. The joy of the Lord will become your strength. You'll be carried, no more sweat necessary.

God will carry you. You'll have spiritual authority. Your words will pierce the hearts of those that you speak to.

You won't have to say much, but there will be an authority in your voice. It will be undeniable. The voice of God will begin to speak because the Holy Spirit knows the hearts of all the people that were ever created.

And you'll be standing before a person who perhaps is giving a vicious argument against truth. God will give you a word to speak. You speak that word and you'll see the whole wall of Jericho that the enemy has built around them come crumbling down.

You'll see them virtually smitten in the sight of God. Spiritual authority is given to those whose lives are in order with God. And he finishes by saying, remember the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded him.

Behold, I'll send you Elijah the prophet before the coming great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. And really what this says, you'll have right priorities and you will have the heart of God.

I'll give you the heart of God for the next generation. I'll give you the heart of God for your own house and your own family. I'll give you the mind of God.

I'll give you the healing of God. I'll give you the joy of God. I'll give you the authority of God.

You'll have the power, the passion, the compassion of God. You will stand a people who glorified Christ in the last hour of time. You will not be found among the confused.

You will stand and men and women will be able to come to you. They'll grab hold of the hem of your garment in the last days and say, tell us who your God is. Where do you get the stability and strength? How come you seem to have such sureness in an hour of such confusion? How come you're not filled with fear like everyone else around? When all society is even killing their own children for their convenience.

How come your heart is turning in the opposite direction? And you speak about life. You talk about life. You want to give life.

You're a person of life. You return. You discern.

Because you've allowed the justice of God to touch your heart. The justice. The justice of God has touched your heart.

I prayed to God for a sensitive spirit to his voice. And even now, when I preach, the Holy Spirit will be speaking. Don't say that.

You shouldn't have said that. Don't go there. Because I don't want to do anything but honor him for the rest of my life.

And I believe that I have the privilege of being one of the pastors of a church of people who feel the same way. If you are backslidden. Folks, here's a sign that something is wrong.

Here's a sign. Now, hear me clearly on this. And I think this is what the altar call is going to be today.

I don't have any preplanned altar call. If you can turn on a television program, a Christian one, or a tape, or a radio program, and you don't know. You don't know if what you're hearing is God or not.

That's a warning sign. Because if you are in right relationship with God, you immediately know. You know what is God.

And if you don't know. If you're among the multitudes that are running around in this church world, completely confused. Led about by winds and waves of doctrine.

If you really don't know. The Lord says to you today, you can know. It's an indication that there's an area in your heart, in the temple, that you have not allowed the word of God to touch.

And it's only these areas that produce this kind of spiritual confusion. Where you don't know the voice of God. You don't know what is God's voice coming to you.

And folks, if that's your heart today. Then I want to invite you to return. I want to invite you to let the Holy Spirit touch this area that is bringing about the spiritual deafness.

And the spiritual blindness. And move you back to that point of departure. This thing that you will not put down.

That you've been often reprov'd. But you will not put it away. You've hardened your neck against truth.

Even in this house. I think of some that have probably heard Brother Dave speak on certain things. And others in this platform.

You've heard it for years. But you will not put it down. You've justified leaving it in the temple.

And it is producing a measure of blindness in your heart. And today you know what it is. This is the day.

That's why the scripture says if you can hear his voice today, don't harden your heart. But put it away. Put it away.

The practice, the relationship, the attitude of heart. The things that you're watching, you're doing, put it away. Cultivate by the power of God a living relationship with Christ.

Because nothing else is going to get you through the coming days. Nothing else will give you a testimony. The spiritual deception will become so great in this world.

That only those who truly are Christ's will not be deceived. Father, I know that I've delivered your heart for this day. And I'm asking you that you give great grace today.

To those who have heard to be able to respond. Forgive me if I've offended you in anything I've spoken, Lord. It's my heart.

God. To be a blessing to your people. To stand and speak.

From your throne. I ask you, Lord, that you make Times Square Church the discerning church. Every person.

The discernment must not just come from the pulpit. Every person must be discerning now. And know the difference between those who serve God and those who don't.

And I'm asking you, Lord God. To take out everything. Of our hearts that would offend us.

We thank you for it. In Jesus name. Remember the opening scripture that we read said the judgment will return to righteousness.

If we let God. Judge these things. He will bring us back to righteousness.

Now every person hearing the sound of my voice. If you are backslidden unsaved. If the Holy Spirit is drawing you.

If you're among those that say God please just come. And prove my heart. Prove my ways.

Prove what I'm doing. Prove my direction. Prove what I'm thinking.

If this is what's in your heart. As we stand in the balcony you can go to either exit. In the main sanctuary you can come down these aisles and meet me here at this altar if you will.

In the annex you can stand between the screens. And we're going to pray together. Let's stand together please.

The Holy Spirit speaking to you. Come. And we'll pray together.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus. You've spoken to my heart.

And I choose this day. Not to harden. My neck.

Against you. Jesus. Son of God.

I invite you. To overthrow. In my life.

Everything. That offends. Your life.

And your purposes. And your person. Within me.

Oh Jesus. Help me. To return.

To everything. That you have desired. That my life.

Should be. Now you have promised me. That if this is my heart.

You will heal me. You will give me joy. You will draw me.

I will have fellowship. With you. Face to face.

I will know your heart. I will know your ministry. I will know your life.

I will know who serves you. I will know who doesn't. You will use my life.

For your purposes. And for your glory. I invite.

The justice of God. To touch everything. Every thought.

Every attitude. Every practice. Everything.

That offends. The life. Of Jesus Christ.

Oh God. Let the glory. Of the Lord.

Be upon me. Change me. From image to image.

And glory to glory. By the spirit of almighty God. May my life.

Bring honor. And glory. To your name.

All of my days. And when I stand. Before your judgment seat.

May you look at me. And say. Well done.

Good. And faithful servant. Enter thou.

Into the joy. Of the Lord. God I believe this.

You are going to answer my prayer. I rest in it. And I give thanks for it.

In Jesus name. Hallelujah.

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