

Early Men Believed in Final Judgment!

by Ian Brown

Ian Brown's sermon emphasizes the importance of self-examination in light of the inevitable and individual nature of God's final judgment.

Duration: 29:00

Scripture: Job 14:14, Matthew 12:36, Acts 3:19, Romans 14:12, Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:14, Hebrews 9:27

Topics: "Final Judgment", "Individual Accountability"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the individual accountability we all have before God. He uses the example of the precision and advanced technology in the Gulf War to illustrate how God's judgment is intensely individual. While many may seek to make a name for themselves and stand out, when faced with standing before God, everyone will realize the importance of blending in and being part of a faceless mass. However, the preacher emphasizes that God will give each person individual attention and there will be no escaping His judgment. The purpose of the judgment is to silence every mouth and make all people guilty before God.

Transcript

Examine yourselves, advised the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians, chapter 13, into verse 5. Now, if ever a man on earth took the time to do exactly that, survey his life, search his heart, consider carefully the deeds that his hands have performed, surely that individual must have been Job. The situation, as we well recognize what it was here, his possessions were entirely gone, all of his sons and his daughters had been wiped out, his body was clothed, was covered with the most loathsome of boils, his wife was in the background, criticizing and carving at his patience that he was showing under the most intense suffering his so-called friends. They traveled a distance while I huddled around him, harassing him, pointing the finger at him, insisting that all of this trouble, that they can see only too easily, must have rolled in upon Job as a direct result of some awful, horrendous, depraved sin that he had committed.

With all of this, Job had time and plenty of it to think, and think he did. He willingly brought his entire life under the spotlight. He was saying, search me, O God, my actions cry, and let my life appear.

He conducted a thorough investigation to see that if he had erred or if he had fallen into some sin, that might have been the spark behind the catastrophe that he now found himself in. So, deeply concerned, he goes down through a long list of both public and private sins. He is careful to name each sin.

He looks inward then for any trace of that sin in his own life, and he asks a proving question all the time against each sin. Is it I? Have I done this? In the realm of uncleanness, for example, verse 1. Verses 9 to 12. The realm of deception, verse 5. The realm of covetousness, verse 7. The realm of cruelty, verses 13 to 15.

Selfishness, 16 to 23. The verse 32 as well. Materialism, have I been so caught up in the issues of life that I have given no time to my eternal state? Verses 24 and 25.

Idolatry, 26 to 28. And then, mockery or laughing at others' calamities, verses 29 to 31. So, he is anxious to know what is in my heart, what is in my life.

But why? Why examine his life so precisely? Why go through it with a fine-toothed comb to try and uncover some little tiny iniquity that is in there? Why worry about some undetected, some concealed, some secret, some undercover sins? Anyway, why fuss about iniquity at all? Simply because Job, while he lived upon the earth, had one eye, there he firmly dreamed upon the judgment that would follow his life upon the earth. And the only way that he could ensure he would not be distressed, he would not be dismayed, he would not even be damned then, was to conduct a thorough search of his life now. So, throughout this thirty-first chapter of his book, the theme of God's wrath upon sin recurs.

It was a prominent subject in the mind of Job. And that it should be in ours goes without saying. That we today, like him, should face up to the reality of the judgment, would take all necessary precautions, would make all necessary preparation for that terrible day when God pours out the vials of His wrath upon guilty, unrepentant sinners.

That we should be ready for that day is absolutely imperative. And so that we would learn to ask the question Job asks here, this side of eternity, Job 31 verse 14, What then shall I do when God riseth up? And when He visiteth, what shall I answer Him? That's why we're bringing forth this message tonight. It's an early man's question about man's end.

Job takes us way back into the days of the patriarchs. He'd have been rubbing shoulders had he been a neighbor with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He's way back then, that's how far he dates.

And so we have this early man's question about man's end. And the first thing that he notes for us here is the fact that judgment is inevitable. What then shall I do when God riseth up? And when He visiteth, what shall I answer Him? Judgment is inevitable.

Not that man considers it to be certain, of course. Man prefers to look upon the judgment today as being anything but inevitable. In actual fact, whenever the subject of this day of judgment, day of wonders, heart that trumpets awful sound arises, man avoids it.

He ignores it. He dismisses it. He effectively reaches forward with a huge gong and he puts it into the throat of that trumpet that is proclaiming to his mind the truth that this day of judgment is coming.

And that every 24 hours in his earthly experience is bringing him ever closer to that fearful, fatal day. But why does man act like this? Why does he react to the news of the coming judgment by trying to banish it out of his thoughts? Is it because he has already thought seriously about the subject and come to some conclusions that he studied through all the texts even in the Bible that refer to this judgment? That he has therefore come to the conclusion in his head that God's Word does not really contain such concrete, convincing, conclusive evidence to suggest that there is indeed a judgment? It is people misapplying,

misinterpreting Scripture. It is not really in here.

Nothing of the kind. Man does not study it. Man does not take time out to think seriously about it.

Man does not sift through the evidence concerning it. He does not want to. It is just too annoying, too morbid, too depressing to think about it.

And so because he does not want the judgment to be true, he chooses to act in the way that he does, as if it will never happen. From his mind he removes it. From his conversation he bans it.

From his philosophy he scrubs it. One preacher, J. I. Packer, who has erred in some fundamentals himself, once noted the fact is that the subject of divine wrath has become taboo in modern society. So strong is the opposition of man to any thought of the fury of God that is going to be falling upon sinners, that he is determined that he is going to forget about it, that he is going to shun it, that he is going to ignore it, that he is going to disbelieve it, like some local head chief goes out and sets up a society whose members must all subscribe to the central cause.

The city of Londonderry does not exist. And we are not just quibbling over the name of the city there. The whole entity, all the buildings, does not exist in the hope that it will immediately subside and roll over into the bottom of the foil.

A young minister of the gospel was confronted by a fairly educated skeptic in his congregation, and the minister had just arrived. They called the skeptic Bert Olney. At the close of the first meeting Olney said, You did well, but you know, I have to tell you, I do not believe in the infallibility of the Bible.

The young minister was struggling for a response, but he quoted the words of Hebrews 9.27, It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment. Ah, the skeptic says, I can prove to you there is no such a thing as a judgment after death. But men do die, the young minister declared, for it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

But that is no argument, the skeptic protested. Let's get down to business and discuss this issue in regular argument form. The minister shook his head.

He said, I am here to preach the word of God, not to argue over it. He did not want to enter into an argument with someone who seemed to know their stuff. Olney was annoyed and he turned away with a remark, I do not believe you know enough about the Bible to argue about it.

Maybe you are right, the young preacher said, but please remember that it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment. The very animals Olney heard on the way home that night seemed to sing the verse. And from the stream over which he crossed, the frogs seemed to be croaking out, judgment, judgment, judgment.

The next morning there was a knock on the door of the manse. I have come to see you about that verse of Scripture you gave me last night. I have spent a terrible night, he said, with those words there.

Burn it the way into me. I cannot get rid of them. Tell me what I must do to be saved.

I have got to get rid of this torch. And when he left he was a child of God through faith. He and Christ finished work.

Today, judgment tiredly features in a lot of preaching that is considered Christian. There was a book released in the 1970s, Embraced by the Light. It became a bestseller.

In fact, it sat on the New York Times bestseller list for more than 40 weeks, including five weeks as the number one book. Written by Betty Eadie. Embraced by the Light.

She claimed that she had had a near-death experience in November of 1973. Allegedly, she had died after undergoing routine surgery. That morning, she returned five hours later with the secrets of heaven revealed by Jesus.

Betty Eadie says that Jesus never wanted to do or say anything that would offend me while she visited heaven. Now, what is not well known is that Betty Eadie is a Mormon. There have been two editions of the book.

One published for Mormons, and the other made more palatable to appeal to a wider audience. And they go out there to people who don't know because the author never identifies herself as being a Mormon. Not even on her website today does she tell us who she is.

But it goes out to a wider audience, and the Mormon doctrines against the deity of Christ, against the Trinity, they are being filtered through the book. And you've got a lot of idiots that like to read about these near-death experiences, believing that someone has died and then come back and has a lot to tell us. But according to her, our Lord Jesus Christ is relegated to the role of a happy tour guide up in heaven.

Not the Saviour who died on the cross for the sins of men, and certainly not the Lord of men and women. He was coming as the ultimate judge that Acts 17.31 describes him as. But try as he might, man cannot ignore the reality of God's judgment forever.

And Job didn't. This chapter in this book that bears his name, chapter 31, makes it crystal clear here that Job chose to face up to the issue that most men and women spend their lives trying to dodge. He fought about the judgment.

Notice his language in verse 14. What then shall I do when God riseth up? And when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? It's quite an order to say that the furthest the people of this generation are prepared to go is to inquire, what shall I do if God riseth up? There is one thing a professed infidel said to one of his companions in sin. One thing that mars all the pleasures of my life.

This companion asked, what's that? Why, he said, I'm afraid the Bible is true. If I could certainly know that death is an eternal sleep, I would be happy. My joy would be complete.

But there is the thorn that stings me. This is the sword that pierces my very soul. If the Bible is true, I am lost forever.

Every prospect is gone and I am lost forever. Just before the death of actor W.C. Fields, a friend visited his hospital room and was surprised to see Fields thumbing through a Bible. And he asked him, what are you doing with a Bible? Fields replied, I'm looking for loopholes.

But this was not Job's line of thought. There was no if here. There is no share of uncertainty here.

There is no shadow of a doubt. In his query he said, what shall I do when God riseth up? As far as he was concerned, the judgment of God was not an issue of if, but of when. It was a foregone conclusion.

It was inevitable. Pay careful attention to the picture God's servant paints in this circumstance. He portrays the judgment of the Lord Almighty as Him rising up and visiting people.

What then shall I do when God riseth up? And when He visiteth, what shall I answer Him? It is very suggestive wording. And of course, the idea behind God rising up is that God has been sitting down. That God has been resting.

That God has been holding back from the exercise of judgment. But now He is seen to be rising up from that place of rest and entering into the realm of punishment once again. The same thought comes across in God's visiting persons in judgment.

He had suspended His visitation program for a while. Now He has started to go round and knock on the doors of guilty men and women again. So both of these words, riseth up and visiteth, suggest to us that judgment of God is slow in coming.

It is. Did the psalmist not say in Psalm 103 verse 8, The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to wonder, and plenteous in mercy. And the reason for this? So that we are given ample opportunity to hear the gospel, repent of our sins, become ready for the judgment.

Peter emphasized this fact in 2 Peter 3 and 9. He said, The Lord is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But as with every other good and perfect gift from God, wicked man twists the meaning behind this suspension of judgment. The fact that God delays, He says, Ah, it means there is not going to be a judgment.

That is why there is this impasse at the moment. That is why God is not acting. Because He does not intend ever to act.

And so whenever a preacher or missionary or a true servant of the cross passes on gracious words of warning about the wrath of God upon sinners, the cry, the mocking, derisory cry, will go out. You silly Christians have been saying that for years and nothing has happened yet. It is a foolish thing to scoff at God's longsuffering.

A terrible thing to poke Him in the eye and mock Him for His mercy and His restraining grace. A tragic thing to believe that just because God delays judgment on an evil work for a day or two, a week or two, a month or two, a year or two, there will never be an accounting day. The Bible repeatedly urges men and women not to fall foul of this colossal blunder.

And in Nahum 1 verse 3 we have the issue settled. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, but will not at all acquit the wicked. They will not be let off.

Well, did Andrew Fuller say, God's justice on offenders goes not always in the same path nor the same pace, and He is not pardoned for the fault. He is for a while reprieved from the punishment. Thomas Godfrey talked about the storm ruling the loudest, which has been the longest gathering.

So God's reckoning day with sinners by being long coming will be the more terrible when it comes. Judgment is definitely coming. Do not be judging by the signs.

It may be you feel there are no signs that indicate it at all, but the Bible declares it is appointed unto men once to die, as that young preacher pointed out. And after this, the judgment. And these words tell us

judgment is inevitable, but also it is individual.

The wording of Job's question makes it plain that God's judgment does not fall like a cluster bomb and just takes out an area. It is precise. Used to with some degree of amusement, though it is not an amusing thing at all.

But listen in to the first Gulf War. Back in 1990, whenever they were showing the technology in bombing, how improved and advanced it was, and to watch the footage and then listen to the description, you would nearly think that America at that time had the technology that would have allowed them from a warship away out in the Persian Gulf to launch a missile. They would go down, not that it is done this way around Baghdad, but it would have been in Cincinnati and all the American cities, up 4th Street, take a right, go along 7th Street, take a left, go along 12th Street, in through the window of the 36th House on 12th Street, and get a guy who was two floors down smoking a cigarette.

And just to show that we are really adept at this, don't hit him, just knock the cigarette out of his mouth. You would have thought it was that precise to listen to. Well, God's judgment is intensely individual.

Job says, verse 14 here, What shall I do when God rises up and when He visiteth, what shall I answer Him? He recognized he would have to give an account to God personally. And so must we all, and this is the chilling, terrifying aspect in this. For every one of our sins, sins of the heart or of the head, sins of the feelings or of the feet, sins of the desire or sins of deed, all have been written down unerringly in the book of God, and these entries constitute a damning record against us.

I read in Revelation 20, verses 11 and 12, And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was fine no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works.

Not one of those dead or resurrected was called to an account for the works of their neighbor. There wasn't a mistake. There wasn't a switch.

There certainly wasn't a case of mistaken identity here. They are judged according to their works. People today love to be individuals, and they talk about what it is to be an individual who stands out from the crowd.

And there's a lot of merit in it. And thank God He has made us this way. But they've been fed on the extended notion that if they're ever going to make a success of it down here, they must develop a wholesome self-image.

They must think only good and positive thoughts about themselves. They must feel really good inside themselves, about themselves. They must go out into the world, assert themselves aggressively.

No problem. You can be an individual. Just live out who you are.

You don't want to be a faceless person in a faceless crowd. Establish yourself. Make a name for yourself.

Stand out from the crowd. That's the reasoning of many. But when it comes to the time of standing before Almighty God, everybody will lose this relish for individualism.

They'll be quite content then to huddle in close and blend in to a faceless mass on such a dreadful day. But they will not be able. God is going to give each one of us individual personal attention.

No blending in. No being lost in the crowd. No slipping past the gears of God without detection.

The judgment, let me say it reverently and yet pointedly, it is no security check where maybe only one in five or one in three will be stopped and intimately checked. The rest, we have gone through. We will all be granted our precious individualism when we stand before God.

Paul puts it quite sharply when in Romans 14 and 12 he says, So then, every one of us shall give account of himself to God. And just a few books before that in the New Testament, no less an authority than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself says in Matthew 12 and verse 36, But I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. What a dreadful time that will be.

How horrendous. When our sins stare at us. When our sentence is read out to us.

When the Lord condemns us, dispatches us from His presence down, down, down into those fiery flames. When those eyes that refuse to fix their gaze upon Christ for salvation, those ears that refuse to hear and heed the repeated warnings of the Word of God, that heart that refused to love Christ with all of its being, those feet that refused to flee from the scene of wrath that has now come upon them, and those lips that spoke harsh words against the Lamb of God, those hands that refused to do service for Jesus the King, shall all be enveloped in the torment, cracklings, streams, and everlasting burnings of hell. John Newton said at his call, The dead awaken.

Rise to life from earth and sea. All the powers of nature shaken by his looks prepare to flee. Tear the sinner.

What will then become of thee? Horrors past imagination will surprise your trembling heart when you hear your condemnation. Hence, accursed wretch, depart. Thou with Satan and his angels have thy part.

Terrible words. Awful sentence. Dreadful reality.

And on that way down to a Christless hell, you will not be turning around and objecting and saying, I am being assigned to the wrong place here. You have made a dreadful mistake here. It is not me.

But you will be saying, All of this is totally deserved. I heard about it. I was warned about it.

Because you know the purpose of the judgment is that every mouth may be stopped. And all the world may become guilty before God. Romans 2 and 10.

The judge of all the earth, you will know, is doing right. And so Job asked, What shall I do when God riseth up and when He visits? What shall I answer to Him? Judgment is inevitable. Judgment is individual.

Finally, judgment is influential. Job was careful to live his life in the light of the coming judgment. And the Bible tells us that if we are going to be wise, then we will do the same.

2 Peter 3, verses 10 and 11. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up, seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved.

What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness? In the Old Testament, admittedly in a different context, the prophet Amos advised, Amos 4 and 12, Prepare to meet thy judges. How can we prepare for that judgment? Some people are inclined to believe that, well, if we are going to be judged according to our works, then the clever course for us to follow is to do as many good works as possible in time. In the time that remains to us now, before we die, let's get them all packed in.

Keep the scales in our favor, so that these good works will outweigh all the not-so-good ones that we have already done. If you think that, think again. Nowhere in the Bible are we encouraged to place our faith for eternity in good works.

Nowhere in the Bible do we read that good works are the golden keys that open to us the gates of glory. You can check it out in Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9, in Titus 3 and 14, and other texts. But you will find nowhere in the Bible are good works set up as a passport to glory.

Why then do we prepare to avoid this judgment? By repentance of our sins, by reliance on what Christ the Savior from sin has done. And that is why in Acts 3, verse 19, Pentecost is still in full orb'd flow at this time. And the apostles are preaching.

What are they saying? Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. That is the only remedy. Repentance and faith in Christ so that sins are blotted out.

It is to look to the cross of Calvary and see there how the Son of God died, bearing our penalty, Jehovah, be it His sword awake. O Christ, it woke against Thee. Thy blood, the flaming blade, must break.

Thy heart, its sheath, must beat. All for my sake, my peace to make. Nigh sleeps that sword for me.

The only way to prepare for the judgment is to have the coming judge as your present Savior. Call upon Him for mercy. Come in your sin to Him and have it cleansed.

Experience His forgiveness as you rely upon the merit of His sacrifice. And do not be putting it off. Do it tonight by the grace and strength that God gives you.

Do it tonight. And find, as Romans 8 and 1 assures us, there is therefore nigh no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.

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