LD 19; Rev. 20:11-15; II Thes. 1:5-12; Christ’s Return as Judge I. To Comfort to His People II. To Condemn His Enemies

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, most of us have seen a courtroom setting on TV or in a movie. The judge enters the courtroom and the bailiff says, all rise. The honorable judge is now presiding. Here in the West, we are familiar with the jury made up of our peers but many of the cases in the judicial system are in fact settled by the judge. The judge weighs the facts and renders a verdict himself. When the verdict is read, there are usually two responses. Joy and relief or fear and anger. Well, today we are going to consider the return of Jesus on the clouds of glory. And specifically, His return as the judge who will render His verdict. Our reading from Rev. 20 sets the stage for us. At the end of time, after the 1000-year reign of Christ from heaven is complete, the day of judgement will arrive. A great white throne will be set up and Jesus will sit on this throne. Here Jesus will render judgment on all people. Rev. 20 says, the dead, great and small, were standing before His throne. As II Tim. 4:1 repeats, Jesus will judge the living and the dead when He appears in His kingdom. In other words, everyone will be standing before Jesus on that day. Everyone will be judged by Him and no one will escape! The dead will be brought forth- the living will be caught up- and all humanity will be standing before this throne. So all humanity will be joined together- and yet a divide will be quickly made. Matthew 25 says that Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats. So after this great gathering there will also be a great division. One group will be put on Jesus right side and the other on Jesus left. So today we consider the return of Jesus Christ to judge the living and the dead. We look at this theme: Jesus Christ returns to judge all humanity justly.

**I. To Comfort to His People**

In our first point, we consider that the return of this judge will be a comforting event for His people. Remember, that the one who is coming will be a just judge. His verdict will be in keeping with righteousness and truth. His declaration will not be tainted or tarnished by injustice or fraud. The fact is, we live in a world that is filled with immoral prosecutors and crooked judges. Some have taken on the roll of activism to push an agenda instead of making fair and right decisions. Just look at what transpired this past week. There were many people calling for the condemnation of Jordan Neely even though he was only acting in a way to protect the innocent on the subway. But thankfully, the judge who is coming is not swayed by public opinion. He is the just judge. And the first group of people that He will address is His people. After making a division between the sheep and goats, He will speak to His sheep saying, come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you. So Jesus will speak to His people. But we need to be clear, who are His people? Well, these sheep are called the righteous ones later on in Matthew 25. Or as we read in II Thes. 1- to the church of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, those who are Christ’s people are those who live by faith. Those who have been justified by the blood of the lamb. Those who are loved by the Father ,died for by the Son and indwelt by the Spirit. It is to these that Jesus will say, come and enter into my rest! The declaration that Jesus will make on that day of Judgement will be this- those who have trusted in me are innocent, righteous, dearly loved and welcomed. Even more than that, the faith of these my people is now vindicated. Jesus will make it clear for all to see! These are my people, my sheep, my church, my bride! They will come from every nation and be gathered from all the ages. But they will share this identity- they are the beloved people of God- the sheep of His pasture. He will put His people on display- they were right to trust in me! Their faith was not in vain- they believed the truth and the truth has set them free! As we read in II Thes. 1:5- these will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God. These will be granted relief when Jesus is revealed as v. 7 continues.

Now this declaration of righteousness- when faith will literally be made sight- will have an immediate effect on His people. How would you respond if a judge declared that you were innocent? Well, you would be filled with relief for one. And joy! So God’s people will glorify the Son for His declaration on that day! As II Thes. 1:10 says- He will come to be glorified in His saints and to be marveled at by all who have believed! So we will glorify Him and marvel at His work! We will stand in awe as we sing His praise! Shouts of praise and songs of adoration will ring forth! Since this is the case, it is right for God’s people to long for this day! We should rightly desire to see the just judge coming on the clouds! We should say- Come, Lord Jesus! We should look forward to this time with eager expectation- because we by faith already know the verdict! You are already justified, your sins have already been pardoned! A ruling decision on your case has already been made! This verdict is sealed for now- but one day will be open for all to read! The one on the judgement seat is your older brother- He has already removed your guilt and pardoned your sons! In other words, you have already been justified! So what remains on that last day will be simply the visible affirmation of what is already true! Everyone will be able to see this reality- that the just shall live by faith! However, there are many Christians who have a little bit of anxiety about this day as well. As you will remember in Rev. 20, there are two books present. The book of life which is the list of all those who will be saved, and the book of the conscience or the book that records our deeds. If your name is written in the Book of Life, you are justified and your eternal residence in glory is secure. However, the day of judgement will also make clear what kind of life you lived. Everything that is hidden will be made clear! Your whole life will be put on display. When the book of your conscience is opened- your life put on display- a sobering truth will hit us. How great our Savior is- how many sins have been forgiven! Here John says that we will be judged according to our deeds. This does not mean that we will saved or condemned based on our works, rather the manner of reward is in view. Rom. 2 says that our conscience will bear witness, and by Jesus the secrets of the heart will be judged. So reward or loss that corresponds to our actions will be meted out on that day as well. As Mt. 10 affirms, if you give someone a cup of water in the name of Jesus, you will by no means lose your reward. So although it may cause some consternation and anxiety to know that every work and action will be put on display for all to see, the overarching theme here is the fact that God’s people will be welcomed into eternal life! It is this work of the judge that moves us to delight in the prospect of His return! As Qa 52 rightly applies, the return of Jesus as the just judge is to be a great comfort! He shall take me home- or rather- bring our home with Him! So Jesus will pardon His people and welcome them into glory! A few weeks ago, President Biden pardoned his son. Now you may not like this- but it was within his power to pardon his son Hunter. You cannot undo this pardon- you cannot stop it from happening. In a similar way, Jesus has the power as judge to pardon His people! And He will do it! Although we are guilty and sinners by nature, Jesus has pardoned us and He will make this truth known!

**II. To Condemn His Enemies**

But not everyone will be pardoned on that day. Going back to our parable of the sheep and goats, those who are one the left side of Jesus will hear a different declaration. Those whose names are not written in the Book of Life will be cast out. As QA 52 says, Christ will cast out all His enemies and mine. Now then, who are Christ’s enemies? The enemies of Christ are known by their rejection of Christ. Those who in Psalm 2 refuse to bow the knee and kiss the Son. Like Satan himself, those who wage war against the truth and seek to decimate the church. But specifically in II Thes 2: 8, the enemies of Christ are those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of Jesus. Now in our system of law, if a judge or lawyer is too close to the situation, they must recuse themselves. Human beings find it very hard to remain impartial if they are the ones who have been offended. But not here- there is no recusing, and Jesus will not step down from his throne! The fact is, the judge who gives the ruling is the very same one that his enemies hate and have rejected! For Jesus, it is personal! Jesus will be the one who gives His ruling to these enemies who have offended Him! It will be His right to condemn! So what will Jesus the judge say to these wicked rebels who hate God, hate the truth, and refuse to obey His Word? Well, He will say to them- away from me! Go into the punishment of eternal destruction- II Thes. 2:9. Or as Mt. 25 puts it, depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. He will repay them with affliction- doing to them what they had tried to do His people! He will give them what they deserve! They will be removed from His presence- all that is good will be taken away. They will suffer forever in the lake of fire. It is for this reason that the unjust and wicked do not want to think about this day! We live in an age that denies the coming judgement. Where is this judgement that Christians speak of? They asked the same thing in II Peter 3. Our world mocks- ridicules the idea of Jesus coming back to judge all mankind! They think that life will go on without interruption. That everything will remain the same. But on that day, there will be no denying this fact! Jesus will come to judge! On that day, their response will be one of fear and dread. They will say- woe is me! They will try to hide! Let’s read Rev. 6:12-17. Wanting to hide from Jesus, these will find no escape! The day of salvation will have passed- the time to repent will be over- the book of life closed and their doom sealed! Nothing will remain for them but to suffer the consequence of their sinful rebellion and rejection of Jesus and His word! Their lives will make it clear- they are the wicked goats. Their lack of good fruit will tell the story- they are wicked trees. Twice dead! Here again, we know that this judgement will be just. Jesus will give to each wicked rebel what they deserve- he will smash them to pieces like breaking a clay pot. This truth is a warning that the wicked men of this world need to hear; but it is also a comfort and consolation to God’s people. We can leave room for the vengeance of God- knowing that He will repay! It is right for God’s people to pray for the destruction of the enemy. Either soften the heart of the enemy by your Spirit- or destroy your enemy in your wrath. This is how we apply the imprecatory psalms. For example, Psalm 35 reads, contend with those who contend with me. Fight those who fight again me! Let them be put to shame who seek my life. Rouse yourself for my vindication. This is the prayer of God’s people- that those who make themselves an enemy of Christ and His church would be destroyed. We note that we do not take matters into our own hands- rather we seek to do good to our enemies and give a cup of cold water to our foes. But at the same time we can rest assured that Jesus will do what is right- and all His enemies and ours will one day be judged by Jesus Christ!

To conclude, humans have an innate sense of right and wrong. Even the thief will object to his own possessions being plundered. The image of lady justice with scales in her hand and a blindfold over her eyes brings this idea to light. But in this world, the wicked do somethings get away with it- and the innocent are wrongly condemned from time to time. But praise God, the judge of all the earth will do what is right! Jesus the righteous judge will return to judge the living and the dead! The final declaration will be just, clear and binding. No one can change or appeal this ruling. To the wicked, the application is clear- repent for the day of judgement approaches! But to the righteous, the sight of His return will be a joy to behold!