

What God Wants From You

Ecclesiastes 12:8-14

#15 in our series from Ecclesiastes

February 19, 2017

Peter Hiatt

Prayer

Father, we pray that you would send your spirit to speak into our souls your Word of Life. Father, I thank you for the book of Ecclesiastes and I pray that you would help us this morning as we bring it to conclusion because the picture is so beautiful and I feel utterly inadequate to speak it. So, Lord God, through your Spirit would you invigorate our hearts, minds, souls, our strength. That we would love you with all that we have and that you would bring the picture together in our hearts so that we would see you and surrender to you. Lord God, I pray in Jesus' name that you would help us to preach. Amen.

Message

Ecclesiastes 12:8 "*Vanity (hebel) of vanities, says the preacher; all is vanity.*"

"hebel of hebel..." "vapor of vapor..." "breath of breath..."

That's the way the book starts.

Literally "vapor of vapors" or "breath of breath all is BREATH."

Ever since our first message I've had a picture in my mind.

It comes from the *Chronicles of Narnia* at the beginning of the *Silver Chair*.

Lucy meets Aslan the lion on top of a mountain by a stream and a cliff.

And Aslan blows her to Narnia such that she rides on his breath.

She's not striving after. She's not striving for the wind—like Solomon talked about at the start of his book; she's *riding on* the wind.

Lewis writes:

She felt frightened only for a second...Floating on the breath of the Lion was so extremely comfortable. She found she could lie on her back or on her face and twist any way she pleased, just as you can in water (if you've learned to float really well). And because she was moving at the same pace as the breath, there was no wind, and the air seemed beautifully warm.

But can you imagine if Lucy hadn't learned to trust Aslan the Lion?

What felt like heaven (and literally was heaven) would've felt like hell . . .

Each of us is . . . and all of us are Lucy.

Each of us is actually a manifestation of God's Word—we ride on His breath . . .

And if we saw that right now, in our current state of un-faith,
I imagine that we'd all just crumble in fear.
In other words, we couldn't tolerate heaven, much less enjoy it, like Lucy.

Solomon has been telling us that *ha adam*—is *hebel*.
And yet he's also told us to put away vexation, which is anxiety and fear.
Last week, we saw that the devil keeps us in lifelong bondage through the fear of death,
which is responsible for all manner of evil.

So how do you have faith and not fear?
How do you choose the good and forsake the evil?

I think we all assume that we need to take more “knowledge of good and evil,” so we can
make good judgments and be justified by God.

That's why folks come to church: “Preacher give me some more of that knowledge of
Good and evil; tell me what's faith and what's not faith, what's good and what's evil... so
I can choose the good and when it comes to evil... just stop it!”

Kinda like this: “Stop It” – Mad TV Clip

Dr. Switzer: Tell me about the problem that you wish to address.
Katherine: Oh, okay. Well, I have this fear of being buried alive in a box. I just start thinking
about being buried alive and I begin to panic.
Dr. Switzer: Has anyone ever tried to bury you alive in a box?
Katherine: No. No, but truly thinking about it does make my life horrible. I mean, I can't
go through tunnels or be in an elevator or in a house, anything boxy.
Dr. Switzer: So, what you are saying is you are claustrophobic?
Katherine: Yes, yes, that's it.
Dr. Switzer: All right. Well, let's go, Katherine. I'm going to say two words to you right now. I
want you to listen to them very, very carefully. Then I want you to take them out of the office
with you and incorporate them into your life.
Katherine: Shall I write them down?
Dr. Switzer: No. If it makes you comfortable. It's just two words. We find most people
can remember them.
Katherine: Okay.
Dr. Switzer: You ready?
Katherine: Yes.
Dr. Switzer: Okay. Here they are. Stop it!
Katherine: I'm sorry?
Dr. Switzer: Stop it!

Katherine: *Stop it?*
Dr. Switzer: *Yes. S-T-O-P, new word, I-T.*
Katherine: *So, what are you saying?*
Dr. Switzer: *You know, it's funny, I say two simple words and I cannot tell you the amount of people who say exactly the same thing you are saying. I mean, you know, this is not Yiddish, Katherine. This is English. Stop it.*
Katherine: *So I should just stop it?*
Dr. Switzer: *There you go. I mean, you don't want to go through life being scared of being buried alive in a box, do you? I mean, that sounds frightening.*
Katherine: *It is.*
Dr. Switzer: *Then stop it.*
Katherine: *I can't. I mean it's been there since childhood—*
Dr. Switzer: *No, no, no. We don't go there. Just stop it.*
Katherine: *So, I should just stop being afraid of being buried alive in a box?*
Dr. Switzer: *You got it. Good girl. Well, it's only been three minutes, so that will be three dollars.*
Katherine: *Actually, I only have five so —*
Dr. Switzer: *Well, I don't make change.*
Katherine: *Then I guess I'll take the full five minutes.*
Dr. Switzer: *Fine. All right. What other problems would you like to address?*
Katherine: *I'm bulimic. I stick my fingers down my throat.*
Dr. Switzer: *Stop it! Are you a nut of some kind? Don't do that.*
Katherine: *But I'm compelled to. My mom used to call —*
Dr. Switzer: *No, no. We don't go there.*
Katherine: *But I —*
Dr. Switzer: *No, we don't go there either.*
Katherine: *But my horoscope did say —*
Dr. Switzer: *We definitely don't go there. Just stop it. What else?*
Katherine: *Well, I have self-destructive relationships with men.*
Dr. Switzer: *Stop it! You want to be with a man, don't you?*
Katherine: *Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm, yes. DR. SWITZER: Well, then, stop it. Don't be such a big baby.*
Katherine: *I wash my hands a lot. DR. SWITZER: That's all right.*
Katherine: *It is?*
Dr. Switzer: *I wash my hands all the time. There's a lot of germs out there. Don't worry about that one.*
Katherine: *I'm afraid to drive.*
Dr. Switzer: *Well stop it.*

Sometimes church can feel a bit like that...
You know? We each will be buried in a box or burned in a crematorium.
Of course it's frightening, and how to stop the fear is profoundly frustrating.
And it's not just frustrating for you. It's frustrating for the preacher—How's the preacher gonna get you to stop?

“Stop It” – Mad TV Clip Continued:

Katherine: *I'm afraid to drive.*

Dr. Switzer: *Well stop it!! Get in a car and drive! How are you going to get around you kook?
Stop it! [Shouting]*

Katherine: *You stop it! [Shouting] Stop it!!*

Dr. Switzer: *What's the problem Katherine?*

Katherine: *I don't like this. I don't like this therapy at all. You're just telling me to stop it!*

Dr. Switzer: *And you don' like that.*

Katherine: *No, I don't*

Dr. Switzer: *So you think we're moving to fast.*

Katherine: *Yes. Yes, I do.*

Dr. Switzer: *All right. Let me give you ten words that I think will clear everything up for you. Do
you wanna get a pad and pencil for this one?*

Katherine: *All right.*

Dr. Switzer: *Are you ready? . . . Stop it or I'll bury you in a box!*

Ecclesiastes 12:8

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity. Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

“The End . . .”

See the problem?

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil (Ecclesiastes 13b-14).

Is Solomon, the wisest man in the world, saying, “Stop it OR God will bury you alive in a box.”

THAT IS “Take more knowledge of good and evil so that you can make better choices and so justify yourself OR God will judge you and bury you alive in a box—forever without end?”

- Most folks assume that Solomon is saying just that.

- Many folks argue this is no longer Solomon.
- Some even argue that these last four verses are included to contradict the whole book . . . for Solomon seemed to *not* worry about commandments and talked to much about eating and drinking and “many concubines, the delight of the sons of Adam” (2:8). So, someone corrected his work and so none of it really matters.

Well, I suspect this is still Solomon writing, and I believe it’s still the Word of God, written.

And I believe the Word, living and active, is asking us to come wrestle.
We can’t make sense of Him, but He is making sense of us.

So let’s do it! Let’s wrestle . . . and maybe He’ll bless us.

Let’s read it again.

I’ll make some observations that will raise some questions, that I’d like you to ponder . . . just ponder. . . Then lets circle back and ask the question:

Is God telling us to have faith with no fear OR He’ll bury us alive in a box?
What does God want from us?

Ecclesiastes 12:8-9

*Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.
Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge,*

That’s a fascinating statement;

It means that wisdom is not the same as knowledge.

Knowledge is *in* Wisdom... but Wisdom is *more* than knowledge that someone could just take like you might take fruit from some tree.

In our very first sermon from Ecclesiastes, we noted how Solomon took “knowledge of good and evil”) and everything died . . .

He wrote,

- “*He who increases knowledge increases sorrow*” (Ecc. 1:18).

- “*Don’t make yourself (more) wise. Why should you destroy yourself*” (7:16)?

Solomon took knowledge of good and evil and everything died.

But God gave Wisdom, and it was literally a “tree of life”—that’s what he calls Wisdom in Proverbs 3:18.

For Solomon, Wisdom isn’t just knowledge like words in a book or law on a page.

- Wisdom is a Person, through whom all things are created (Proverbs 8:27).

- Wisdom is a lover who calls to us and romances us (Proverbs 1:20).

- Wisdom romances us to enter her house, eat her bread and drink her wine (Proverbs 9:1-2).

- Wisdom is Good, but if we take her to make ourselves good, we die and Wisdom dies,

the sky grows black, and the earth trembles.
It seems that this has already happened, and we know that each of us will die.
—Solomon has made that fact very clear.

Ecclesiastes 12:9-11

Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight [chephets—substance or matter], and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd.

The words are like “goads.”

Now if you believe that Scripture is inspired, such that the words are not simply the words of old Solomon, but in fact, given by one Shepherd . . .

If you believe Scripture is inspired, like me, you can't help but think of what Jesus to that arrogant and puffed up Pharisee named Saul on the road to Damascus.

Remember, Jesus, the Prince of Peace and Wisdom incarnate . . . Jesus appeared to Saul, whom we know as Paul, in burning glory, basically scared Paul to death, and said, “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for YOU to kick against the goads.*” (Acts 26:14)

Goads are sharp pointy things, like nails on a stick, that a shepherd would use to goad his animals forward. Saul was a Pharisee. He took words of knowledge from Scripture in order to justify himself. Later he'd write: “*knowledge puffs up.*” This knowledge puffs up, what Paul refers to as, the flesh—the old man—the ego . . .

Taking words of wisdom “puffs up” our ego, and yet these very words of wisdom are also goads in the hands of the shepherd . . . I puff myself up with knowledge of the law, and yet at the very same time, the words of that law goad me, harass me, and drive me to despair. You've all experienced this. You take knowledge to judge—and then find yourself judged.

“*The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd*” (Ecc. 12:11).

Paul wrote, “*It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me*” (Gal. 2:20).

So what happened to Paul?

Well, He tells us, “*I have been crucified with Christ...*” (Gal. 2:20).

The goads became nails and pinned him to the very tree from which he had taken the knowledge of good and evil.

In Colossians 2, He describes how the body of flesh¹ was “put off” in the circumcision of Christ—as if our puffed up flesh, which keeps us separated from intimate communion with God & with each other, was cut away and crucified on the cross in Christ Jesus.

Christ came to help us die to ourselves, that we might live to God and our neighbor—that we might love.

“This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up,” writes Paul. *“If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God”* (1 Cor. 8:1-3).

As we mentioned there are two ways of knowing:

One brings death . . .

And the other gets you pregnant.

One is something you do—a work . . .

And the other is something done to you.

If you consent it’s heaven.

If you don’t trust, it’s more like hell.²

“The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd” (Ecc. 12:11).

Read Ezekiel 34.

The Jews longed for the coming of the “One Shepherd,” the Messiah.

He is the Bridegroom and *ha adam*—humanity—is the Bride.

Ecclesiastes 12:11-12

The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

And everyone says, “Amen to that.”

Yet, two verses ago, Solomon just told us that he did much studying. And he wrote books, one of which, we are reading right now. Well, in doing so, Solomon’s flesh got “puffed up” with knowledge of good and evil. And then nailed to the very tree from which he had taken the knowledge of good and evil.

¹ Flesh was a euphemism for a man’s penis or the foreskin on a man’s penis.

² This is hard to imagine, but it’s true. Christ made the nails with which He would be pinned to the tree. God spoke the law that would be used to crucify Himself in Christ Jesus upon the cross in the garden where His body was placed in a stone box—a tomb.

He took Wisdom, as if it were fruit on a tree, and he got crucified.
But God gave Wisdom, and it was a tree of life, and Solomon rose from the dead.

When Solomon *used* Wisdom, He died. And maybe Wisdom wanted him to die.
But when Solomon surrendered to Wisdom, he said that Wisdom was life—a tree of life;
he died with Wisdom, and he rose with Wisdom. Wisdom taught his heart to fear and
then his fears relieved.

Maybe the One Shepherd is Wisdom.

As we've preached this whole series, Solomon sees Wisdom, but he sees Wisdom from
a distance and struggles to describe what he sees.

He sees a slaughtered lamb standing on an altar that's also a throne, that's called the
Mercy seat, on top of the Ark of the Covenant, containing the Law—written in stone,
behind a curtain in a sanctuary, that becomes a living temple, in a city that's a bride, in a
creation that's entirely new.

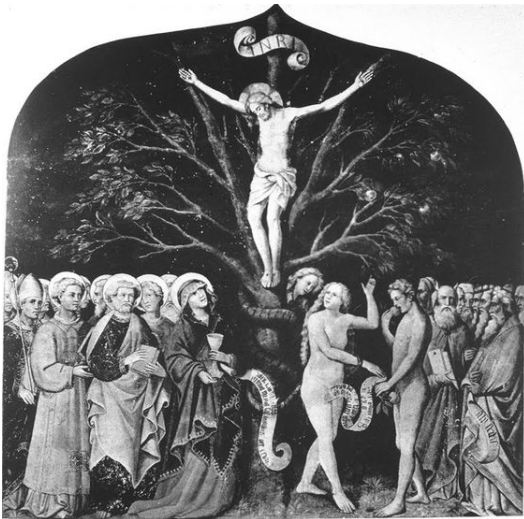


Figure 1 Image credit: Giovanni da Modena. Fresco from the Church of St. Petronio (Bologna, 1420)

He sees a tree in the middle of a garden.

- Genesis describes two trees in one spot—in the middle of the Garden.
- In the Revelation, there is one tree, “the tree of life” in the middle of the Garden.
- In the Gospels Jesus is crucified on the tree in the middle of a garden,
And then placed in a stone box in the very same garden.

Paul tells us: Jesus Messiah is “*the Wisdom of God*” (1 Cor. 1:24).

Solomon tells us: “*The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom*” (Proverbs 9:10)

John tells us: “*There is no fear in love. Perfect Love casts our fear*” (1 John 4:18).

Are you pondering?

Now let's read the two verses that sum up all of Ecclesiastes and have given us so much trouble.

Ecclesiastes 12:13

The end [conclusion] of the matter [dabar: speech, book, word]; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty [supplied by translator] of man [ha adam].

Actually, "duty" isn't in the text at all...

It's inserted by confused translators trying to make sense of Ecclesiastes.

Literally, translated it reads something like this:

"Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of the Adam."

Solomon writes as if "the Adam" wasn't complete and isn't complete . . .

But will be complete *when* he keeps the commandments.

So, we need to ask, "What are the commandments?"

Well, they're recorded in the Bible.

So, let's list them right now:

1. *"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth..."*

How do you do that? That's a fascinating question that we can't explore now...

But Saint Paul writes that it refers to Christ and His Church, which is His Bride, who is a temple made with living stones and the new Jerusalem coming down.

Next, God speaks a commandment that can be taken as a command or simply a statement of fact:

2. *"You will surely eat of every tree in the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you will not eat, for in the day you eat of it you will surely die."*

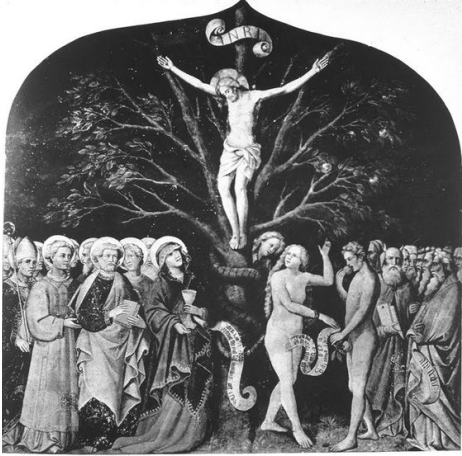
It's such a bizarre statement: "You will not eat" and then, "They *do* eat."

Even more bizarre: How would the Adam know that the command of God, which is the Word of God, was good, . . . if he doesn't have the knowledge of the good?

And even more bizarre still is this picture of the Good, hanging on a tree like fruit.

Jesus said, *"God alone in Good... and God is Spirit..."*

So, God in flesh, hanging on a tree in a garden, would have to look something like this:



If the Adam *takes* the life of the Good on the tree—the *adam* will know evil & die.
If the Adam *receives* the life of the Good on the tree—he will know God & live . . . make sense?

Hey! Here's a tree. And here's the Good: body broken and blood shed.
At communion, we confess our evil and we receive God's Good.
Maybe . . . that's not a coincidence . . .³

Well, the Adam took the fruit, hid from God, and lost the garden.
Soon we read about so many commandments . . .
That we could just choke on all the commandments and die.
We just get nailed by all the commandments.
We wanted the knowledge of good and evil . . .and we got the Law.

It includes the Big Ten: that's #3.
3. The Ten Commandments ("moral law")

Quoting Moses, Jesus says that they are all summed up in this:

"You will... (not "should," but "will") "You will love the Lord your God with all your heart mind soul and strength, and you will love your neighbor as yourself" (Deut. 30:6).

"You will." And of course, the story of the whole Old Testament is that we *don't*.
"None is righteous, no not one," writes Paul. We all get nailed by the commandments.

Theologians refer to the Big Ten as the moral law—it's written on stone and placed in a box, behind the veil in the front of the temple . . .

³ On the sixth day, the *adam* dies, and since the *adam* is still dying, or maybe coming to terms with the idea that he is in fact already dead... It must still be the sixth day... and of course, it is.

“The moral law,” is contained in what theologians call “the ceremonial law.”

That’s #4.

4. Ritual Commandments (“Ceremonial Law”)

If you’ve read the Old Testament, you know it’s full of regulations about the Ark, the Tabernacle, the sacrifices, priests, ceremonies, and the temple that Solomon built—the “house of mourning” that would turn into “the house of mirth.”

Modern American Christians tend to think the whole thing is barbaric and absurd, and don’t get the point.

You see the temple was like a theater and the rituals were a drama . . .
But not an impersonal drama, but an existential drama in which you participated,
For every worshipper was to identify with the sacrifice, which would be surrendered to
the Judgment of God and consumed by Holy Fire.

As Simeon taught us at Christmas, the sacrifices weren’t only a way of cleansing what was wrong; they were a way of doing what was right. The temple was like a giant heart circulating blood through one body.

And as we said last week, the temple was like a womb . . .

And the curtain behind the altar was a door leading out of the womb . . .

And the altar and curtain was a door leading out of the womb and into an entire new creation.

Hey look: Here’s an altar [Peter points to the communion table] and this tree is clearly a door [Peter points to the cross].

Jesus said, “*Don’t think I came to abolish the Law of the Prophets* (both ceremonial and moral), *I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them*” (Matt. 5:17). And as we already said, He summed up the law with one word.

That’s #5.

5. Love... John writes, “*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his son to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins*” (1 John 4:10).

And #6.

6. Faith... Paul tells us that faith is reckoned as righteousness. That means that “faith” completes *ha adam*, faith makes us right. That is faith in God who is Love.

Faith means Trust... but how do you command trust?
Do you say, “Trust that I love you! Or I will not love you.”

And, check this out: This is also a commandment . . . #7 According to Richard Wurmbrand, it shows up 366 times in the Bible, one for every day of the year including an extra day for the leap year.

7. "Do not Fear." But it's a strange one, even on the lips of Jesus.

In Matt. 10:28 Jesus says, "*Fear him who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna.*"— God the Father. And then, two verses later, he issues the commandment, "*Therefore, fear not.*"

#8 (which in the Hebrew mind is an endless #7).

8. John 12:50 Jesus says, "*I know that the Father's commandment is eternal life.*"

So, the Commandment of God is, Fearless, Faithful Love that is Eternal Life.

Wow! The commandment is Good... really, really good.

What should be the punishment for breaking a commandment like that?

If I command my son to take out the trash and he doesn't take out the trash,

What should be his punishment?

Shouldn't the punishment be taking out the trash? *A lot?*

If you reject Eternal Life, wouldn't the punishment be Eternal Life? *A lot?*

At first that punishment might burn,

Until you saw that the commandment is good.

But it makes no sense to punish a hatred of faith, love, and life . . .

With an endless absence of faith, love and life in a place you call Hell.

- The place you hide from the punishment, might feel like Hell . . . like a dark box in which you hid.
- And being forced from that place might also feel like Hell, but it would be the burning edge of Heaven.

Well, the Commandment of God is,

FEARLESS, FAITHFUL, LOVE THAT IS ETERNAL LIFE.

So verse 13, Solomon writes:

"*Fear God and keep his commandments,*" which means

"Fear God and... Do not fear God. You must have eternal life."

Well, *Dang!* That's impossible for me!

I can't "do that!" Doesn't Solomon know that?

YES! ...He's already told us that for twelve chapters.

- All we do is vanity.
- And all that's actually done, is done by God who "does everything" (Ecc. 11:5).
- All our deeds are vanity and all His deeds are eternal and incorruptible.
- This knowledge is what Solomon gained, and what "we all gain from all of our toil under the sun" (Ecc. 1:3).

I gain knowledge that God's commandment is Good. I *gain*, but I can't "do" God's commandment. God's commandment is "...eternal life," said Jesus. And He said, "I am the life." He is Wisdom. He is the Shepherd. And He is the Commandment. Solomon wrote, "*Keep the commandments.*" But I can't *do* the commandment. The Commandment must "do" me.

So, in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, Solomon writes,

Fear God and keep his commandments. This is the completion of the Adam. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Well *dang!* "... every deed into judgment!"

Why does God judge us?

Solomon has already told us that all our deeds are evil.

And all of God's deeds are good.

- Even more, all of our evil reveals God's good.
- All of our unrighteousness reveals God's righteousness...
- All our lies reveal God's Truth...
- All of our unfaithfulness reveals God's faithfulness.

So . . .

Why does God judge us? What does He want from us?

Why does God judge us? Have you ever asked that question? Paul did.

In Romans 3:3-6—speaking of the Jews that rejected Jesus he writes:

Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though everyone were a liar, as it is written, "That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged." But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world?

Did you get that?

Paul is saying that the Jews were faithless, all men are liars, and we are unrighteous . . . so that, God could judge the world. He writes as if God's Judgment is axiomatic, and foundational to all reality.

Last time we said, "God's Judgment is creation." Now Paul is saying, all creation was created to reveal God's Judgment.

And that means we were consigned to disobedience . . .

So we could witness our own judgment.

In other words, God does not judge us because we sinned.
But, we sinned so that God can judge us.

In other words, it was no accident that God put the Adam in a garden,
With an evil talking snake speaking evil lies,
And a tree in the middle of that garden that would kill the Adam if he ate it...
And not only kill the first Adam, but also the last Adam, Jesus the Messiah—
The Wisdom of God and the Judgment of God.

In other words, Romans 11:32
“*God consigned all to disobedience that He might have mercy on all.*”
That’s God’s Judgment: Jesus Christ and Him Crucified.

And that Judgment is the foundation of all creation.
And that Judgment is still creating something.
And what is it creating???

Look at what Paul quotes, the words of David in Psalm 51:4 “*That YOU may be justified in YOUR words (talking about God) and prevail when YOU (God) are judged.*”

There’s a new thought for you: God is getting judged!
And who’s judging Him? We are judging Him!
And maybe we’ve already judged Him.

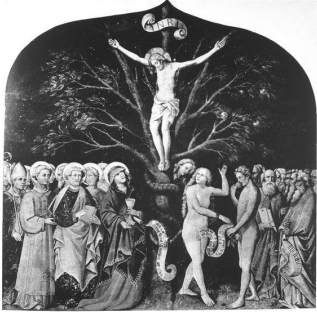
Admit it!
None of you trust Him completely, or you’d do everything He said without question.
None of you trusts Him completely, and many of us think He’s a big jerk, much of the time or most of the time. We try to hide it. But God knows it: we don’t trust Him.

We don’t trust Him. And the Adam didn’t trust Him on the sixth day of creation.
He couldn’t trust that God was Good because he didn’t yet know *what* the Good was . . .
and therefore he didn’t know *who* the Good is. He couldn’t yet judge God’s Judgment.

And you can’t trust God until you see that His Judgment is Good.
You can *try* to trust, and you can *fake* trust, but you can’t *make* yourself trust.

We all know this and we say, “Trust must be earned by the one who wants to be trusted.”

What does God want? He wants you to trust Him.
What is God doing in this literally goddamned world?
In this world, He is earning your trust.
And He is doing so, by revealing His Judgment.
He wants you to see His Judgment.



He reveals His Judgment on a tree in a garden.

When you truly see His Judgment, you will judge that His Judgment is Good,
You justify God, and in this way, you yourself are justified,
But it's not your work, it's God's work in you—it's faith.

It's not something you can *take* from the tree. It must be *given* from the tree.

God reveals His Judgment on a tree in a garden . . . And He is revealing it all the time.
"That you may be justified in your words...and prevail when you are judged," writes David.

Those are the words of David in Psalm 51 as he confesses his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah.

David writes, *"Against you and you alone have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that YOU may be justified in YOUR words and blameless in YOUR judgment."*

Do you remember God's judgment on David's sin?

2 Samuel 12—The son of David and Bathsheba died as David lay before the altar in the house of God. Then David got up, went into Bathsheba, she got pregnant, and this son of David lived. His name was Solomon. Solomon was the great-great-great-(plus a whole lot more greats)-grandfather of Jesus—The Prince of Peace.

Jesus, the Wisdom of God and Judgment of God, was born out of David's sin.

But which is first? Which is the foundation . . . David's sin, or Jesus?

David sinned that God might be "justified in his judgment."

. . . by David, and you, and all humanity.

God's Judgment was that a Son of David would bear David's sin to destruction and a Son of David would be the righteous fruit born out of David's sin. God's Judgment is Mercy that destroys evil (and we all want it destroyed—that's why we have such a hard time forgiving). We want the evil destroyed. God's Judgment is Mercy that destroys evil—by filling it with the good.

Jesus bears David's sin on the tree.

And Jesus is the righteous fruit of David's sin given to all humanity on the same tree.

God subjected the world to futility and consigned all to disobedience,
That you would sin and He could reveal His Judgment of mercy,
That seeing His mercy, you would have faith that your Father is Good.

That's what every father wants.
I want my kids to justify me, by trusting my judgment.

So when they were little, I'd take 'em to scary movies and camping in the woods,
So they'd snuggle close to me, stop trusting their judgments and trust mine...
So they'd stop justifying themselves, and justify me with faith.
So they could enjoy me, like I enjoy them.

In the *Chronicles of Narnia*, Lucy only rides on the breath after she has a terrifying encounter with Aslan by a stream. She realizes that Aslan could eat her, but she knows she'll die if she doesn't drink from his stream. And on top of that she's done something for which she feels deeply guilty. Aslan knows. Aslan judges. Aslan forgives and so Lucy trusts Aslan, and then, she rides his breath all the way to Narnia—and it's not Hell but Heaven.

I've actually become grateful for my kids failures . . . and even their sins,
For it's in those places and at those times that they'll call, "Dad, help me . . . save me."
It's in those places and at those times that I can pay for their failures and I can forgive.
It's in those places, at those times that I can reveal my judgment & create their faith. So they can enjoy me, like I enjoy them.

God wants you to justify Him. So, God has arranged all things to reveal His Judgment and create your faith. Right now, God is earning your trust . . . And now I know what some of you are thinking. You're thinking, "Well is that so? 'Cause He's doing a pretty bad job of it . . . 'Cause right now, all hell is breaking loose and I'm getting buried alive in a box!

Well, you know . . . you or your body will be buried in a box or burned in a crematorium. We know that already...It's not "if," but "when." But have you considered that may only be the *beginning* of God's Judgment? . . . Not the end?

Solomon wrote: "*Fear is the beginning of Wisdom...*"
"*Perfect Love casts our fear,*" wrote John the beloved.
That means fear is the beginning of wisdom, but Wisdom is the end of fear.

Every time you suffer, it's a bit like being buried alive in a box.

- The devil wants to keep your heart in that box.
- But God wants to show you something in the box.

I actually have a few friends that have been buried alive in a box...
Each of them was ritually abused.

Each got out—or I should I say, their hearts got out—when they realized:
Jesus was in the same box.

I was with two of them in prayer on separate occasions when God revealed the Truth.
In visions, they opened their eyes in absolute terror . . . to see Jesus in the box.
I honestly think those two experiences may be the most dramatic experiences of my life.

One friend screamed in joy, “My blood is on His robe!” And she couldn’t help but worship.
Fear had been transformed into Faith.

[Image of caterpillar on one side and butterfly on the other]

Susan and I both prayed for another friend, after travelling with her to the city where she
had lived as a girl, all in an effort to remember her childhood. As we flew home, my
friend kept remembering a large box. She couldn’t get it out of her mind. In the car, in the
parking lot at the airport we prayed, and then she remembered.

It’s her story and yet it’s also my story, for I was holding her as she remembered. I felt
the fear in her body and the fear leaving her body.

The story is too terrifying and too wonderful to recount in detail.
But suffice it to say, she was placed in the box with another body already in the box.

It took hours and hours, but she finally opened her eyes in her memory of that box as we
revisited that place in prayer. I said, “Jesus must be here...for he said that he’d never
leave you nor forsake you.” She cried, “No, He can’t be. He can’t be.” I could feel the
little girl panicking in my arms, and then I thought a theological thought; I said, “Look at
the body. Look at the body... whose body is it?”

She struggled, then grew very still, for a long time...

And then she whispered, “I don’t understand, but... it’s Jesus’ body.”

I said, “Yes! Jesus showed you. He gave this person His life and He descended into
her body

of death. He’s here in body broken and blood shed.”

Now ask Him, ask Him,

‘Jesus, why are you here?’”

She did, and then she heard Him say, “To be with you.”

That is His Judgment and He is the Judgment of God.

Jesus revealed His love in her place of fear and profound shame.

He revealed His presence in body broken and blood shed, with her, in the same box...

He revealed Himself, The Judgment of God and Wisdom of God...

He then showed her that He had taken her out of the box and made all things new.

Perfect Love cast out fear, and we couldn’t help but worship. We justified God.

Do you see? This earth is a box. Your flesh will be buried in that box or burned in a fire.

Jesus will bear your flesh to destruction. But even now, He gives you Himself and He is Life.

Paul writes that Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth that he might fill all things... and that includes the darkest corners of the sanctuary that is your heart.

His Judgment was revealed on a tree in the middle of the garden.
And His Judgment is revealed in the sanctuary of your heart.
When you see it, you will stop justifying *yourself* and you will start to justify *God*.

Jesus then revealed to my friend that he had taken her out of the box.
She watched him, wash her and dress her all in white.
Then she watched the fire fall and make everything new.
And when we saw it and heard it—what Jesus bore on her behalf and what he gave that could not be taken away—we could not help but worship.
We Justified God and began to trust.

I hesitate to tell that story, for fear you'll get hung up on that particular story.
And yet, you know the story, even though you're tempted to deny it...
It happened to six million Jews in Auschwitz...
It's happening to Syrians in the Middle East even as we speak...
In some form it will happen to you, we will all die...

We have all sinned and we will all die... and yet, it's all according to plan:
That God might reveal His Judgment...
That *"He has born our grief and carried our sorrows and the Lord has placed on Him the iniquity of us all..."*
That He chooses to die in our place, and give us His Life...
That all of us might trust our Creator, rest in His Breath, and enjoy Him forever...

One day, if you won't look at God's Judgment, I think you might stay in the box—for a time—*but* if you have come to trust God's Judgment you won't stay in the box, for you will open your eyes and see Jesus in the box. Your box will become His box, like that tomb in the garden, and you will rise from the box and never die again. He's already in the box waiting for you to open your eyes.

The fear is temporal, and the Faith is eternal.
It completes *ha adam*—the Adam in the image of God.

So how do you get over your fear of being buried alive in a box?
You open the eyes of your heart and see Jesus in the same box.

How do you conquer fear, and grow faith?
Well, you use the faith you've already got to expose yourself to the Judgment of God.

- You watch it here in the Sanctuary.
- You read about it in your Bible.
- You stand before it as you pray.

- You even feel it, when you love the last and least of these.

I often find it very difficult to trust God and almost impossible to worship . . . but then I remember Jesus in the box, body broken and blood shed. I remember that night when I saw Jesus in the box with my friend and I can't help but worship. I begin to trust; I justify God. So do not fear death. Do not fear the Republicans. Do not fear the Democrats. Do not fear global warming. Do not fear the people that want to take your guns or whatever you might be fearing. Fear God!

Your Father says, "Don't fear any of those things. Fear only me so you will only see and hear my Judgment!"

This is God's Judgment . . . [Peter points to the communion table.]

Communion

On the night He was betrayed He took bread and He broke it saying this is my body given to you; take and eat and do this in remembrance of me. And in the same way, He took the cup and He said, "This cup is the covenant in my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sin."

[Pointing to the communion wine and bread.]

This is the Judgment of God. Come to the table, tear off a piece of bread, dip it in the cup and place it in your box. This is the Judgment of God. This is the Commandment of God: No more fear—only Faith, Love, and Eternal Life! This is the Judgment of God.

So, what does God want from you?

He wants you to see it . . . *everywhere* . . . for it is the foundation of *everything!*

Your Father wants to give you Himself and all things with Him, but to receive Him—and all things with Him—you must *trust* His Judgment.

His blood shed for you is the Judgment of God, and that's Wisdom—not a dead law, but a living Lover reigning on the throne in the sanctuary of your heart.
Please pray with me.

Prayer

Judgment of God, Decision of God, Commandment of God, Prince of Peace, Wisdom of God, Word of Love, Love come and take your place on the throne, in the sanctuary of my heart.

Benediction

When my children were little, I remember that I was almost thankful for their fear because their fears seemed to send them to me. And then I'd find a way to say, "Don't fear...Fear only me. Now, listen to my judgment. I love you, and I will spend the rest of my life trying to prove that to you. I love you. Now go and play."

Do you know? That's why we come here every week. You're out in the world and you obtain all these fears. Then you come to this place. I'm the preacher and you're the *ekklesia*. My job isn't to give you good parenting tips or tell you who to vote for. That all may be part of the discussion but my job is to remind you of the Father's Judgment. [Peter points to communion and the cross.] The Father says, "I am Love, and I love you. I will not stop being who I am and my Judgment is eternal. Everything else changes, but I do not change and my Judgment does not change. Believe my Love. I will spend the rest of your life proving it to you.

That's called the Gospel. I'll say it again: "Believe it." I know you don't always believe it, but He'll spend the rest of your life proving it to you. And you *will* believe it. That's, even more, Gospel! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.