

THE HOUR OF JUDGMENT

MATT. 27:45,46 - *"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"*

St. John tells us in his first letter, "God is love." All of us have known and experienced this love of God. But love is not the only attribute of God. In Scripture we are also told that God is just. Justice is that attribute of God by which he demands of rational creatures that which is just and right. God's divine will wants all things to conform to His eternal law. Because God is just, He keeps His word and fulfills all His promises made to man. He rewards good and punishes the wicked.

God's love cannot nullify His justice, nor can His justice do away with His love. These two attributes stand side-by-side with all other attributes of God. God is a God of love and a God of justice. Thoughtless people often say that God would not damn anyone because He is a God of love, and not to damn someone does not agree with His love. Many people cannot seem to reconcile these two attributes of God. It is true that according to His justice He must damn those who reject Jesus Christ, as our Savior is the only one who satisfies the demands of God's justice. It was God's love which sent His own Son into the world to fulfill the requirements and demands of God's justice.

It was God's judgment and justice which caused Jesus to cry out in our text, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In order to get the full import and understanding of these words, and to better understand the hour of judgment, we are not only going to study the words themselves, but we are also going to look back into history and ahead into the future to see what bearing each has on these words of Jesus, let us therefore consider:

The Hour of Judgment

1. The Past Judgment

God made man in His own image; that is man was created holy and righteous like God. Upon this holy man God showered many gifts. The whole universe was created to serve man and to make him happy. God gave man the beautiful Garden of Eden, and eventually He intended to take man into glory with Himself in heaven. This was the wonderful plan of love which God arranged for man in this world.

In the Garden of Eden the Lord God gave one little test to Adam and Eve. They were not to take of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God was merely trying their obedience and trust in Him. Their faith in love and trust in Him would be put to the test many times daily in various ways. But for the time being, the special command of God was to refrain from eating of one tree. In easier prohibition than this is hardly conceivable. "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat," the Lord had said. Man could have everything; just one tree was forbidden. Let none blame God as the source of sin just because He tested man. Let none think to himself, "Why did God give this commandment to Adam and Eve if he knew they would disobey Him and fall into sin?" God is not the source of the sin.

What really happened in the Garden of Eden? Man disobeyed God! Man dared to eat of the tree! Just think about that for a moment. Man defied God and ate of the tree. And this sin was not committed by weak people or poor sinners, but by holy and righteous people of God. The third chapter of Genesis is not only one of the darkest hours in the history of the world, but it is also one of the most shocking.

Could God simply overlook this brazen act of man? Could God so loved demand that He forgive, forget, and overlook this sinful crime? Of course not; God is also a just God. The justice of the Lord added these words to the prohibition, "For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." God meant these words, and His sense of justice demands this judgment upon man -- narrow temporal death, and after that eternal death -- to satisfy His righteous indignation over man's sin.

This is what is meant by the "past judgment" referred to earlier in this sermon. This is what St. Paul had in mind when he wrote, "wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12). A little further on in the same chapter he states, "By the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation." Long ago, then, God's judgment was passed upon the whole human race because of sin. His past judgment was this: all men must suffer the torments of eternal death.

Now God's love comes to the forefront. Not that His justice or judgment could be altered or nullified, but His love still formed a plan to save man and also to satisfy His justice. Let us hear about that as we now look at "The Present Judgment." When we do, bear in mind that it was God's past judgment upon man which caused His present judgment upon His Son. We are now ready to consider:

II. The Present Judgment

God's love triumphed over all difficulties and found a way to save man, while at the same time satisfying the exacting demands of His justice. He came to a conclusion which is almost beyond belief. God decided to send His own Son into the world to become a man, to be a substitute for the whole human race, to bear the sins of the world.

God's justice demands things of man; first, that man must be holy; secondly, that man must pay for his sins. He Jesus Christ became our Savior in just that way. The first, His Holiness is our Holiness; secondly, Jesus paid for the sins of the world upon the cross in the hour of judgment.

Our text says, "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour." An unnatural darkness settled over the earth for three hours. It was as if God were shutting out from the eyes of men what His Son endured to pay for the sins of the world. No human eye should see the awfulness of the sufferings of our Lord. Out of this unnatural darkness came forth some of the darkest words ever spoken, the words of our text. There was a dark silence on Calvary. Then suddenly Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The words are plain and clear enough. Jesus was simply stating that he has been forsaken by His God. Remember, He would not have spoken these words if they were not true. God's Son was actually forsaken by His Father on the cross! We are faced with one of the deepest of mysteries.

We all understand the words themselves, for they are plain and clear. One could almost ask, "Was the Trinity split?" "What happened in the Godhead?" "How could God forsake His Son?" We shall never find the answer, nor should we seek it. This is too solemn an hour. Only the damned in hell really understand what it means to be forsaken by God. In Gethsemane our Lord struggled with temporal death, but here on Calvary He was struggling with eternal death; He was suffering the tortures of the damned. Why it is awful mystery? "The day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Jesus was taking our place on the cross, accepting our judgment upon Himself, passing through temporal and eternal death in our stead, being judged by God's justice.

The solemn hours of Lent! Nothing can be more solemn than this hour of judgment. Jesus cried, "My God!" And not "My Father!" That does not mean that He lost His trust in God, for He said "My God!" God was still His but as the Substitute for the whole race, He reached the state of His lowest humiliation, the darkest depths of woe. Even in Gethsemane Jesus found some help; He was not entirely forsaken by His Father, for an angel came from heaven to strengthen Him. But here on the cross there is no help-- forsaken by God! This is God's present judgment upon Jesus, because of God's past judgment upon man.

How can people say there is no hell when Jesus paid such a terrible price to save us? Or, how can people say that God will not damn because He is a God of love? This is God's love, that he gave his only begotten Son to save us from a place of everlasting torments.

No one but Jesus could save us. He had to be man to be our Substitute, and He had to be God to make His offering of infinite value. How could one man, suffering six hours on the cross, pay for the sins of the world? How could one man in six hours balance the scale of God's justice over against billions of humans suffering forever in hell? The answer is this: it is God's suffering for the creature, God enduring the tortures of the damned in our stead. When God suffers, that is of infinite value and can satisfy all the demands of God's justice. That is why Jesus alone is the only Savior from sin.

When Jesus cried on the cross, "It is finished," He was, in effect, saying that His offering has tipped the scales of God's justice in man's favor and all the sins of the world are paid for. It matters not how much longer the world stands -- Jesus paid for all unborn people, no matter how many more are coming. It matters not how many believed in Jesus now -- His offering will not be, so to speak, used up eventually. Jesus paid for the human race as a whole. All who lived before Him are paid for, all those living in His day are redeemed, and all who will ever live are bought with His holy blood.

No one can anything to let Jesus has done, nor did He leave anything undone. That is why the way to heaven is by grace alone and alone by faith in our Savior.

This is the strangest story ever told -- God reconciled a world unto Himself by judging His Son in our place. Let the Holy Spirit open our hearts to believe this strange and wonderful fact. It was God's "past judgment" upon man that caused the "present judgment" of God upon His only begotten Son. The "present judgment" of God upon His only begotten Son will now affect the "future judgment." We want to learn about that before we leave the cross on Calvary tonight.

III. The Future Judgment

When Jesus stood before the high priest, He told him, "You shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." With these words Jesus pointed to another and final judgment to come. The Son of God will be the Judge on that day. In Eden the human race was judged by God; on Calvary the Son was judged by God and our stead; on the last day the Son will be the Judge of the human race. Before the throne of Christ will be gathered every human being who ever lived. All who have accepted by faith the sacrifice which Jesus made for them will be saved and will hear these comforting and joyous words, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Those who have rejected what Jesus did for them and refused to believe it, will hear these terrifying words, "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

What Jesus did on the cross and our text will affect the eternal destiny of every human being who ever lived. Accept His sacrifice, and you are saved; reject it, and you are surely lost.

This judgment can come now or at any time because it all the signs and warnings have been fulfilled. Jesus wants us to watch and pray that we may be ready when He comes on the Last Day. Standing on the right hand of our dear Savior on Judgment Day we shall all say to Him:

"Nothing in my hand I bring,

Simply to Thy cross I cling."

Oh wonderful Savior, please accept our humble thanks for all that Thou hast done for us, especially for being judged in our stead in this hour of judgment. Give us thy Holy Spirit that we may show our thanks to thee by walking in Thy holy footsteps here on earth. Let Thy loves to us kindle on new and brighter love in us toward one another.

Thou was forsaken of Thy Father, O blessed Redeemer, so that we might never be forsaken. "Thousand and, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus unto Thee." Amen.

The Prayer

O blessed Redeemer, Thou wast brought not only before the judgment seat of man and condemned to die a disgraceful death; but was placed before the judgment throne of the Father in our stead, and was condemned to be forsaken of Him. We cannot begin to comprehend what Thou didst suffer for us in the hour of judgment. We can only stand before Thy cross in awe and amazement at Thine infinite love towards us. In these holy hours of Lent we ought to shudder at the thought of sin, especially since we see the price Thou didst pay for us all.

When our time comes to be judge, O Lord, may we be found acceptable in Thine eyes, washed in Thy blood, Lord Jesus. Awaken in us by Thy Holy Spirit, a greater watchfulness for the Great Day. May the fruits of faith be seen in our daily lives that we may constantly please Thee in all we do and say. Hear us, oh Jesus, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Ghost forever and ever. Amen.