
When the World Was Judged

*"Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out"
(John 12:31).*

As Jesus anticipated His crucifixion, He envisioned it not only as a time of redemption (John 3:16), but also as a time of judgment. He looked at the cross ahead of Him and said, "Now judgment is upon this world" (John 12:31a). He had said earlier that He did not come into the world to condemn it (John 3:17). Nevertheless, since He was the Truth, the Light of God, His coming would automatically judge those who rejected Him. In a rather full explanation of what would happen through His coming, Jesus said,

For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil (John 3:17–19).

Every part of Jesus' earthly life and ministry formed a judgment situation for the world. The coming of John, the forerunner of Jesus' preaching and teaching, had been pictured in prophecy as bringing a period of restoration and cleansing. About four hundred years earlier, Malachi had written,

Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse (Malachi 4:5, 6).

When John fulfilled this prophecy, he said to the impenitent ones who heard him, "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10). His preaching brought repentance to good hearts and the axe of judgment to bad hearts.

Even more vividly, John described Jesus' ministry as a judgment day for those who heard Him: "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12). Malachi also prophesied concerning Jesus,

"Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me," says the LORD of hosts (Malachi 3:5).

Jesus will separate the nations on the final judgment day, putting the saved on the right side and the lost on the left side (Matthew 25:34–46); but a judging of people through the cross was to precede the final judgment. Let us ask, therefore, "In what way did the death of Jesus judge the world?"

Obviously, His death brought judgment against our sinfulness. The cross, in its deepest meaning, would provide a divine sin offering for the redemption of those who would believe.

Jesus died to be the propitiation for all sin. John wrote, "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

Jesus told His apostles shortly before He left that He was sending the Holy Spirit, who would convict the world. How would He do it? He would convict the world by putting before the world the message of the cross. Jesus said,

And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged (John 16:8-11).

One who understands the cross must get on one side of the cross or the other. He must see it as the means of salvation or as immaterial to salvation. Paul said, "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). When we see the cross, we see ourselves as the great sinners that we are. We are faced with a choice: We can acknowledge what we are and what Jesus did to save us, or we can refuse to see ourselves as lost souls in need of His saving blood. On the one hand, the cross will justify us through Jesus' blood; or, on the other hand, it will judge us as unworthy of eternal life.

In addition, the cross judged our relationship with God. Those who walked in purity with God would find that the coming of Christ was the end of the law of Moses and the beginning of the new covenant. Paul said, "Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24).

The religious leaders heard Christ's messages about the coming kingdom and saw His confirmatory miracles, yet they turned against Him and crucified Him. Their relationship with God was judged to be insincere by what they did with Jesus. Jesus rightly said of some of the Pharisees and scribes, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me" (John 8:42). He also said, "He who is of

God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God" (John 8:47).

Hearers of the gospel may not totally understand every aspect of the cross, but they will accept it because God has declared it to be the way that He will give salvation to those who believe. Our belief in God compels us to accept what God has done and what He has willed.

Further, the cross judged our appreciation of the truth. Jesus came as God's "way," "truth," and "life" (John 14:6), but only those with hearts for the truth would receive Jesus, the epitome of divine truth. Jesus said to those who were rejecting His words, "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word" (John 8:43).

Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection confronted the world with a paramount question: "Do you really want the truth?" In many cases, hearts were laid bare by the words of Christ, and they were shown to be seeking something other than the genuineness of God. Jesus said to one group,

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me (John 8:44, 45).

To another group, He said,

For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God (John 3:20, 21).

We are all headed toward the final day of judgment, but we must pass through many other judgments before that final day when we will receive our eternal reward. Surely, the highest and most graphic moment of truth that must precede the final day of judgment is our confrontation with the cross of Jesus. When we see it in its bright, searching light, we are compelled to decide one way or another regarding Him. No wonder Jesus said, "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not

believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

Eddie Cloer



"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight,

behold, He is coming,' says the LORD of hosts. 'But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years'" (Malachi 3:1-4).