

**The Apostle's Creed:  
I Believe in Jesus Christ...  
Who Shall Come from the Right Hand  
to Judge the Quick and the Dead**

Revelation 22:12

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

As we continue to work through the Apostles' Creed, we come to that statement that "From thence He, the Lord Jesus Christ, shall come to judge the quick and the dead." This section in the Creed about the Lord Jesus Christ is the longest portion, so the core of the Creed is a witness to the past, present and future of Jesus Christ. What He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do. The coming of Christ is a central theme in the New Testament. It's called *the blessed hope*, and is mentioned over 300 times in the New Testament, so it was definitely on the minds of early Christians. It was central to their hope in this hostile world. Some may doubt the Lord Jesus' coming in our own time, but the New Testament itself ends expressing what is the proper Christian attitude and prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." And one of the great barriers to our drawing strength from this great truth is precisely our worldly-mindedness. We are caught up in the affairs of this world, even in the good things of this world, to the point that we fail to seek the better things. The good things that we enjoy here and now, the pace of our lives, squeeze out our desires for the better things, the best things, and keep us from meditating on, hoping in, and looking for the best things for God, for the coming of Christ, for fellowship with Him. But the constant refrain of the New Testament is, "Christian, don't let that be so. Be ready. Be prepared. Be alert. Live in light of His coming. He is coming again. Be ready when he comes." Over and over, Jesus in His teaching, Peter and Paul, John, Hebrews, and the other authors of the New Testament remind us that we are to live in light of the coming of Christ.'

Some have questioned the difference between *quick* and *dead*. What's the difference? *Quick* is just an old English term for something that's *living*, it's a word that comes from old Teutonic, old Frisian, old Norse, and made it's way into old English and hence into the earliest English version of the Creed. When we say He's coming to judge the quick and the dead, we are affirming that He's coming to judge those who are alive when He returns, as well as those who have already died, but will be resurrected to judgment in the day of His coming. So to say that He is coming to judge the quick and the dead is to say that He is coming to judge the living and the dead. Those who are alive when He returns as well as those who have already

passed on and will be resurrected to judgment.

Let's hear God's word in Revelation 22 beginning verse 12. This is Jesus speaking.

“Behold, I am coming quickly. And My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.”

Amen. Thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word, may He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

*Heavenly Father, help us to understand what it means that Jesus is coming again to judge the living and the dead, to believe it, and to express our active faith in it in our lives. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

This verse we have just read is not alone in the New Testament. Over and over, three facts are expressed in the New Testament. One, that Jesus is coming again. Two, that when He comes, He will not come as He came the first time in a state of humiliation, but He will come in a state of exaltation, and in that state of exaltation, He will come to judge. And thirdly, when He comes, He will judge according to our lives, according to the way we live He will render according to each man and woman. Those three things are expressed over and over in the New Testament, and in fact, the idea of God coming to judge and to render according to our deeds, is not a New Testament idea. It's an Old Testament idea, and is repeated frequently, that God will come and judge according to our lives. And the special New Testament aspect of this teaching is that it is Jesus whom God has appointed to be the man who will judge the living and the dead. First, we will look at eleven representative passages, beginning in Psalm 96 and moving forward, which teach the divine judgment, the second coming, and Jesus' judgment in the second coming. You may want to use Nave's Topical Bible or Strong's Concordance and look at the remaining 300 or so passages. It will be a wonderful spiritual exercise to look at those other passages, but this will give a taste of the general New Testament teaching on the coming of our Lord. Then, we will ask the question, “What does it mean to ‘be ready for Jesus' coming?’” Because over and over in Jesus' teaching and the apostles' teaching, disciples of Jesus Christ are exhorted to be ready for His coming. How do you do that? What does it mean to be ready for His coming?

### **I. The idea of God finally judging the world is an important Old Testament theme/the idea of Jesus judging is an important New Testament theme.**

First, in Psalm 96:13, I want to point out that the idea of God finally judging the world is not just a New Testament idea, but it's an Old Testament idea. This is the psalm from which our call to worship comes. The whole psalm is a call to worship, it's a glorious call to worship, and you ought to memorize it, especially the last three verses, “Sing for joy before the Lord, because He is coming. For He is coming to

judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and His peoples in faithfulness." This is a standard Old Testament refrain. Believers in the Old Testament experiencing a world of persecution, experiencing a world of sin, experiencing a world where not everything is right, often looked forward to the day when God would put everything right. They, like we, could look around the world and see things that were not simply a little wrong, but grossly wrong, and they could see things even within their own society that were wrong.

Several weeks ago Derek referred to a stirring speech given by Lieutenant Colonel Tim Collins, an Ulsterman who led his soldiers into Iraq. As he led his troops into Basra, there was a young woman waving at these British troops, but they had to withdraw that night and come back the next day. The next day when they returned, this woman, who had been waving in welcome to these men, had been hung by her own people from her window. Simply for waving at the British troops for coming in. This officer was shocked and outraged at the wickedness of that act. He was right to be shocked and outraged, and to feel that one day God will put things right. He will render to those according to their deeds. This is an Old Testament hope.

We see it as well in Isaiah 11:4, "But with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth, and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked." This is the expression of Isaiah's hope, that one day God will set things right. Those who are poor and afflicted, those who are overlooked by the world today, those who are mistreated by the world today, God will settle accounts and He will do that which is right towards those who are wicked. It is a grand hope of the Old Testament. One of our desires, as our forces go into Iraq, is that a free and just society would be established, but let me say, friends, that will be easier said than done, and it may be the desires of our hearts and it may not happen. Winning the peace will be much harder than winning the war. This country has experienced turmoil for more than a century, and has not experienced justice and liberty. For the Christian, looking at the world around him and recognizes that there are some things that are never put right in this life, the hope is that in the last day God will put all things right. That's an Old Testament hope. That may be the only hope in some of the hard circumstances of our lives that we ever have. It may never be put right in this life, but it is the hope of every believer in the living God, the God of the Scriptures, that in the end, no matter what has happened in this life, He will put all things right.

In the New Testament, that hope for God putting all things right, is now firmly settled and centered in Jesus Christ. In Matthew 19:28, Jesus Himself says to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel." Do you realize what Jesus is saying to His disciples? First, He's saying to them, "I'm going to be the judge of the world," and two, "You're going to sit in judgment with Me."

In Matthew 25:31, Jesus continues, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne." Not just to reign, but to judge. This reference to the Son of Man sitting on the throne is a reference to Him assuming the position of the final and ultimate judge, to judge the world.

In Acts 10:42, Peter says, "He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as the judge of the living and dead." You see here the language of the Creed. Jesus is who? He's the judge of the living and the dead. He's been appointed by God as the Judge, so the New Testament focuses on God's final judgment in the person of Jesus Christ, and He is the one who renders that judgment on the living and the dead.

In Acts 17:31, Paul while in Athens says, "that He has fixed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness." That part is Old Testament. The rest of the sentence is a specifically New Testament hope. "He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness, through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." God will judge the world through a Man He has appointed, and the way you know the Man He has appointed to do that, is that He has raised Him from the dead, and His name is Jesus Christ and He's going to judge the world at the appointment of God.

In Romans 2:16, Paul continues to meditate on this truth, "On the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus." So the Apostle Paul says that even the secrets of men will be discovered, uncovered, unveiled and judged by Jesus Christ. As our forces go into Iraq, we are uncovering grisly things in the dark corners, buried where it was thought that no man would ever find them, atrocities of astounding proportion are being discovered. On the last day, not only such atrocities, but also the secret things of our hearts will be uncovered in the judgment of Jesus Christ.

In I Corinthians 4:5, Paul goes even further, stating, "Wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts." It's not only that God will uncover things hidden in the darkness, but also He will uncover even the motives of our hearts. This reminds us that when we truly meditate biblically on the theme of the second coming and judgment of Christ, that repentance, personal repentance, is always at least one of the appropriate responses. The thought that my heart and its motivations are going to be uncovered, is an unsettling thought apart from the grace of God, and it provokes me to repentance.

In 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul says that "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Notice, Paul the preacher of grace, Paul the preacher of salvation by grace, says that the final judgment will be done in accordance with our lives, with our works, with our deeds, it will correspond to our

lives, our works and our deeds. That's not a contradiction of the doctrine of grace, it's an elucidation of it as it applies to the final judgment.

In 2 Timothy 4:1, Paul says to timothy, that "I solemnly charge you in the presence of god and Christ Jesus, who is the judge of the living and the dead, and by His appearance and by His kingdom." So the charge comes in the name of Jesus Christ, the judge of the living and the dead, and we see again the language that is found in the Apostles' Creed, that He's coming again to judge the living and the dead.

Then in 2 Timothy 4:8, seven verses farther, Paul continues "That in the future there is laid up of me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but to all who have loved His appearing."

And finally, James 5:9, "Don't complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged, behold, the judge is standing right at the door." That's only nine passages out of 300 or more in the New Testament that illustrate for us these truths over and over. God will judge the world in the end, Jesus is the one whom He has appointed to do that judgment, Jesus will judge in accordance with our lives. And biblical thoughts on the final judgment will lead us to two things: first, it will lead us to hope, and then it will lead us to repentance. It leads us to hope because believers in this world often experience the injustice and the sin of this world. Yes, we sin ourselves, and yes, we ourselves often have to taste the consequences of our own sin. But we also, as God's people, sometimes walk with integrity in this world and still experience the injustice of other's sin against us. In that context, the second coming is not something that we look forward to with dread, but with hope as the day of our visitation, when God will vindicate us, when God will set accounts right, and God will declare "Not guilty" those who are not guilty, and punish those who are the wicked. That's something of the Christian hope.

## **II. The Bible truth of Jesus' second coming to judgment is designed to lead us to faith and faithfulness.**

But it also moves us to repentance. Think of the uncovering of our own hearts on the last day. Jesus knows even our motivations that we credit one another as noble and glorious, will one day be revealed, and that makes us say, "Lord God, cover us with Your forgiveness and grace, because apart from you, we would be undone in this judgment." The doctrine of the coming of Christ in judgment moves us to both hope and repentance, but how do you get ready for this coming? Turn to Matthew 24 and 25 read the stories that Jesus gave to His disciples: the story of the two servants, Matthew 24:42-51; the story of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13; the story of the talents, Matthew 25:14-30; and Jesus' teaching to His disciples about His judgment in Matthew 25:31-46. In these great passages, over and over, and in the parallel in Mark 13, which theologians call His eschatological discourse, His sermons on the

end times, His sermons on the last things, Jesus exhorts His disciples to be ready.

In other words, He exhorts them to live in light of the reality of His coming, for His coming to make a difference in the way we are living. Our troops around Baghdad are wearing chemical weapons proof clothing, anti biological warfare clothing. Why? Because of the possibility of a chemical or biological attack against them. Jesus is saying, just as those troops are prepared for such and such a possibility, you be prepared for the certainty of My coming. But the question immediately comes to mind, "How is it that we get ready for Jesus' coming?" Some people have gotten ready for Jesus' coming by trying to calculate it. "He's coming in October, 1994." Oops, it's come and gone. "No, He's coming in 2000." Oops, it's come and gone. Jesus Himself says, "Don't try and calculate the day of My coming. Be ready for it." So, the godly believer, the Bible-believing believer says, "O.K., Lord, you don't want me to calculate it, You don't me to be sign watching, what do You want me to do?" Here's what God says. In each of these stories, this is what He says. In the story of the ten virgins, He says, "Be ready, because you don't know when I'm coming. You don't know the day or the hour when the bridegroom is going to show up, so have your oil ready, and have the wicks of your lamps trimmed. You be ready for My coming, because you don't know the day or the hour."

Then, in the story of the two servants, He tells you how to be ready, by being a faithful servant of the Lord, by being obedient to the commands of Christ, the biblical rationale for faithfulness and engagement in kingdom service is: Jesus is coming again, and He wants to find us busy in the work of His kingdom when He comes.

In the story of the talents, we learn that the Son of Man is coming to judge, and when He comes He will judge according to our obedience. The rewards that He gives will be in accordance to our obedience and to our disobedience. So, the Christian's motto is to be the Boy Scouts' motto, "Be Prepared." And to be prepared specifically by living in faithfulness to the Lord's commands. As Thomas Ken said, "We are to live each day as if it is our last." But interestingly, if we are living that way, if we are living expectantly, we will not be in crisis mode, we will not be storing up canned goods in the mountains, we will be living faithfully where God has put us in this life. Someone once said to John Wesley, "Mr. Wesley, if Christ were to come back tomorrow, what would you do today." And his response was, "I'd do just what I'd planned." Because he was already about kingdom service, his life was being lived completely in accordance with the principles of god, and therefore, what he wanted to be found doing when Christ came, was precisely what he had set out to be doing for Christ in his daily life. So, being expectant for Christ is not living in crisis mode, but it is faithfully and steadily going about living every square inch and every minute of life for the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus being ready.

### **III. What Jesus taught about His second coming and judgment.**

Now Jesus, especially in Matthew 25:31-46, teaches that one of the key ways that you live expectantly is living in a way of love towards other believers. Isn't that interesting that Jesus says one of the ways He is going to judge our deeds, judge our works, judge our lives, is in the way we treat other Christians, especially the least of them.

Now that may sound surprising. You say, "That's not that hard, to love other Christians, to treat them well." Oh yes it is. Christians are sinners. Christians will let you down. Christians will hurt you. Christians will talk behind your back. Christians will disappoint you. It's hard to love Christians sometimes, and there are some Christians that are really different from us, they come from different social or racial or economic backgrounds and have different traditions. Sometimes it's hard for us to love them. They're really different from us. The Lord Jesus says, 'If you have a heart for Me, you'll have a heart for My people, and that heart for My people will show itself in the way that you care for My people in their time of need. Therefore, I will judge in accordance.'

If I were to ask you this question, "If you were to stand before God on judgment day, and He were to ask you, 'Why should I let you into My heaven,' or 'Why should you be given the privilege of fellowshiping with Me for ever,' 'On what basis have you been made right with Me,' my guess is that everybody in this room would have something like a right answer to that question. Now, there are many reasons why you might have a right answer to that question. But, what if the Lord were to say to you, "What evidence is there that you really trusted in Christ for salvation? What evidence is there that you are really My child? What is the evidence that you are really a Christian? What is the evidence of real gospel grace in your heart?" What would you say? That's what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 24 and 25, and the evidence is a life of faithfulness that flows from faith that flows from God's grace. A life of faithfulness characterizes those who truly trust in Christ. So, be ready, Christian. How? Through faithfulness to your master, being about His work, longing for union with Him, so that we can say in the end, when it comes time for His coming, that we prefer it to the sweetest enjoyments of this life, and that we have preferred Him and His people to everything in this life. Let us pray.

*Our Lord and our God, we ask that you would grant us to be able to pray with faith and reality the prayer of Revelation, Come Lord Jesus, come quickly. We ask this in Jesus ' name, Amen.*

## **A Guide to the Morning Service**

### **The Worship of God**

"Worship is the human response to the self-revelation of the triune God, which involves: (1) divine initiation in which God graciously reveals himself, his purposes,

and will; (2) a spiritual and personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ enabled by the ministry of the Holy Spirit; and (3) a response by the worshiper of joyful adoration, reverence, humility, submission and obedience.” (David Nelson)

### **The Reading of Scripture**

Paul told Timothy “give attention to the public reading of Scripture” (1 Timothy 4:13) and so, at virtually every morning service, a minister reads a substantial section of Scripture. The public reading of the Bible has been at the heart of the worship of God since Old Testament times. In the reading of God's word, He speaks most directly to His people. We generally read consecutively through Bible books. We continue reading through the Book of Acts today.

### **The Sermon**

Today's message is part of an 18-sermon series on the Apostles' Creed. Tapes are available from the Church Library and Tape Ministry, either individually or in sets, for check-out or for purchase. Would you like to hear today's message again or maybe even share it with a friend? It is possible to listen to and even download from the internet many of the sermons preached in this church. Go to <http://resources.christianity.com/fpcjackson/> or just click on the Life Audio link from the library page of the church's web site. If you have any difficulty please email Jonathan Stuckert at [jstuckert@fpcjackson.org](mailto:jstuckert@fpcjackson.org)

### **The Psalm and Hymns**

#### **All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above**

We open our worship this morning with a hymn and tune that are fairly new to us, but old to much of the rest of Christendom. This great Lutheran song of praise provided the title for Paul Settle's book on the history of the PCA “To God all praise and glory” – expressing the reformational sentiment of *solī Deo gloria*. The hymn's German lyrics were translated by the Englishwoman Frances Elizabeth Cox of Oxford, England. The tune comes from an old hymnal of the Bohemian Brethren. Martin Luther himself wrote an alternative tune to this text. The hymn moves, phrase by phrase, supplying the Christian with reasons to praise God. Contemplate them as you sing this exuberant tune, and give God all praise and glory!

#### **The Mighty God, the Lord (Psalm 50:1-6)**

The text of this psalm is based on the *Scottish Psalter* of 1650. It speaks of the awesome sovereignty and judgment of God, and indeed points to the final judgment, upon which we are reflecting today in the message. The tune to which we are singing it is “Diadem” – if you're not one to memorize hymn tune titles(!), you'll



recognize it as “Crown Him with Many Crowns.”

### **Rejoice, All Ye Believers**

This seventeenth-century text reflects upon the second coming and judgment of Jesus Christ. It calls upon believers to rejoice at the very thought of the coming of the Lord, and to be ready for it – in the vein of the parables of the ten virgins and the talents (Matthew 25). It also calls on us to put our sorrows and trials in the perspective of the coming of the Lord “when sorrow is no more.”

### **Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending**

Wesley's and Cennick's hymn contemplates the great day of the Lord and the second coming of Christ and the final judgment, in a way that few hymns do. The first stanza catches the majesty of Christ's coming with thousands of angels attending him. The second stanza asks us to think about how unbelievers will experience the dread coming of Messiah unveiled. The third stanza pictures the very created order fleeing from him in fear and the angelic trumpets blasting the call “Come to judgment, come to judgment, come to judgment, come away!” The fourth stanza contemplates the exaltation of world-despised saints in being caught up in the air with Christ. The fifth stanza expresses the final hope and prayer of the Bible (see Revelation 22:20).

This guide to worship is written by the minister and provided to the congregation and our visitors in order (1) to assist them in their worship by explaining why we do what we do in worship and (2) to provide them background on the various elements of the service.

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