



Presenting Christ-Part 4
Jesus as Judge
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I assume you all know the old adage that “in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.” You’ve heard that before—“in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.” I realize, though, pondering that principle, that it not only makes heroes out of the undeserving; inverted, it can also make villains out of the innocent. Consider, for instance, my new proverb that I came up with: “In the land of the wet noodles...” You like it so far? “In the land of the wet noodles, licorice is despised as rigid and inflexible.”

As long as I’ve mentioned candy, let me give you another one. “In the land of Sweet Tarts and Spree”—my favorite, by the way—“in the land of Sweet Tarts and Spree, the strawberries are accused of being sour.” Of course, strawberries are sweet, but in the land of Sweet Tarts and Spree, they’re accused of being sour. Of course, licorice is flexible, but in the land of wet noodles, they’re used to being rigid. See, context is everything.

When it comes to our assessments of what’s good and bad, what’s appropriate or inappropriate, what’s harsh or what’s not, we’ve always got to consider the environment from which those judgments spring. Think about that. I have to take, for instance, the way I respond—at least my smile—when I think about people saying, “Well, that Compass Bible Church, it is so deep, so biblical, so astute.” And I have to smile, of course, because I recognize that in a media-driven, sound-bite culture—which has all but abandoned biblical thinking—it doesn’t take much biblical thought to be hailed as theologically deep. In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.

There was a time, by the way, when they taught grade-school kids Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. We had to learn Hebrew so that you didn’t have to rely on a translation to read and understand the Hebrew Old Testament; Greek so we could understand the Greek New Testament and expose that and exegete that rightly; and Latin so you could understand the earliest theologians of the day. So it doesn’t take much to be considered theologically deep in our day.

On the other hand, to invert that principle, it’s a bit discouraging—I’m dismayed—when I hear people accuse our church of being harsh, austere, severe: “That church, Compass Bible, there...” You know, I understand: in a day that worships pseudo-fun and pleasure and self-indulgence, it doesn’t take too many sermons on sin or judgment or the coming wrath of God to be considered grim. I get that. I understand it. Because context is everything. You have to consider the environment from which those kinds of assessments spring.



Now, if you were to take one of our messages—pick the harshest one you can think of, maybe a sermon I preached on the gospel or sin or judgment—and you were to take that sermon and broadcast it in the average 21st-century American church, I understand that some churches would say that’s abrasive, stringent, harsh. But if you could take that very same sermon and broadcast it in an auditorium that’s filled with the apostles and prophets of the first century, my fear would be they’d say, “Oh, he’s gone soft. This guy’s super lenient, indulging. He’s afraid to shoot straight with them.” Why? Because environment is everything.

Now, you think about it: we shouldn’t be really concerned with what our changing culture thinks of our church or our gospel. That shouldn’t be a big concern of ours. We should be much more concerned with what God thinks—the God who wrote the book, the God who put on paper propositional truths codifying his message eternally for us to continually calibrate and adjust our message to it. That should be our real concern. We’ve got to see how far we’ve drifted from that.

All I do is ask simple questions like this in presenting Christ—just to get to the theme of our series here in Luke 4. If I was to ask you, when you share Christ with people, when you proclaim the gospel to your neighbors and coworkers and friends, should you spend more time in that presentation focusing on faith and trust in Christ? Or should you spend more time and emphasis speaking about sin and the judgment of God? I think you’d say, “Well, the average—if you’re going to follow the patterns of our culture—well, of course, if you can get away from talking about anything about sin or judgment, that would be good. Focus on faith. I mean, that’s the core of the gospel, right? That’s the central theme of the gospel.”

But if you’ll take the Word of God—let’s just take the most expansive, systematized presentation of the gospel that Christ has, in His providence, taken a snapshot of and set it as the standard, the canon, with which we are to judge everything else for all generations. This was not just the gospel laid out to the Romans; this was the gospel providentially, God obviously inspired, so that it might be there for all time and say, “Okay, what does that do?” Well, the first eight chapters are the systematic presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are 207 verses in the first eight chapters of Romans. One hundred twenty-four of those verses are about God’s judgment and sin. Think about that. That’s 59%, almost 60%, of the message—the focus of the longest, most detailed explanation of the gospel—that’s the focus. And the word “faith”—think about this—the word “faith” itself, or “trust,” 27 times Paul uses that word throughout the first eight chapters of Romans. He uses the word “sin” or “God’s wrath” 77 times. That’s a three-to-one ratio.

“Wow, those Romans must have really been in need of that.” Listen: this clearly was not provincial; it was not something that he just did for those folks. He knew that centuries of Christians would be studying this book as the standard by which we judge our presentation of Christ.



See, we can't afford, nor should we ever be really tempted in any great way, to adjust the message of the gospel to our day. We can't. I understand we have to explain it; we have to teach it in their language; we have to illustrate it; we have to make it clear to our neighbors what this is all about. But we can't dare distort the image of Christ that we're trying to present—any more than you want your mail carrier standing in front of your mailbox when you come home this week, with his Sharpie, marking things out of your letters and rewriting a few things and changing the numbers on your gas bill. "What are you doing?" "I just thought you'd choke on that number on your electric bill; I thought I'd lower it." Well, I don't want you changing anything because you're afraid of my reaction. You're the mail carrier—just deliver the mail. That's the responsibility of the messenger of the gospel. We are stewards of a message.

I get it: you take the emphasis of the Bible and you present it to our culture—they're going to bristle at this message. But this is our responsibility.

Now, here's the thing: I need you to come back next week, because there are two parts to what we see happening in Luke chapter 4 when Christ moves from Nazareth to Capernaum, which is what we're following. Last time we looked at Nazareth, and, for all at least human evaluations, everything went poorly there in the synagogue of Nazareth. Now he's going to move in verse 31 of Luke 4 to Capernaum. Now, all we're going to have time for today is to look at the first seven verses of that account—verses 31 through 37. That's another scene of a synagogue encounter, which is filled with some pretty tough things. By implication, we're going to have to grapple with those, and it's going to give us that sense that, "Wow, this is a serious issue." There's a lot about the concepts of sin and about judgment, and we really see Christ presented in this text as Judge. And if that's all you got, you would have an imbalanced message. So I need you to come back next week—it's not just a ploy to get you back two weeks in a row—because what we see when the scene moves out of the synagogue to the home of Simon is that you've got this scene in a home where Christ shows himself to be the merciful, forgiving Deliverer. I understand this: the portrait of Christ is Christ the Deliverer—merciful, kind, Deliverer who rescues us—but he's also our Judge, the just and Holy One. You need both pictures in your mind. And since our culture has all but forgotten and completely ignored Christ as Judge, we certainly need to spend our whole time today talking about that.

So let's examine the first seven verses of this account of Jesus in Capernaum. Capernaum, by the way, means the home or the town of Nahum—which we don't know whether or not that is the Old Testament prophet Nahum, but that's what the city was named after. It's about 20 miles from Nazareth, where we were last time when we studied Luke 4. And Nazareth, of course, you remember, is where Jesus was raised—it's the town where he was raised. Now he's going to move out, kind of by force, right? They kicked him out of town; they wanted to kill him, throw him over the edge of the cliff. He leaves and he makes his way to Capernaum.



If you've ever dusted off the maps in the back of your Bible and you look at that, you'll see Nazareth here to the south of the Sea of Galilee, and here's Capernaum up here, northeast of Nazareth, about 20 miles away—on the northwest shore of Galilee.

Let's pick up the story here, verse 31: "And he"—Christ—"went down to Capernaum." Just even that explanation that it's north of there, you'll say, "Luke must have been geographically challenged or something." But see, you think of north as up and south as down because you drive cars. If you were walking, you would really care about whether it was up or down. These people walked. This is about a 2,000-foot elevation change, and it's downhill. So it's a good thing to walk to Capernaum from Nazareth—it's a downhill walk—and he's going down to Capernaum. That's why Jerusalem, by the way—it's up on the mountain—there is always talk about "I'm going up to Jerusalem," no matter whether you're coming from the north, east, south, or west.

"So he's going down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee"—a little explanation there from Dr. Luke to remind us that this is a letter going out to a lot of non-Jewish people, because any Jewish person would know where Capernaum was, which was a city in Galilee. "And he was teaching them on the Sabbath," which is when they met for synagogue. "And they were astonished at his teaching"—here's why this is worth underlining or highlighting, because it's going to become the theme and a bit of a play on words here at the end of the narrative. It says, "for his word possessed authority." There's a word our culture doesn't like. We're already off to a bad start—his word possessed authority—so much so they were astonished at it. Wow. And this is repeated often in the Gospels—they were often amazed at the weightiness of the authority of the teaching of Christ.

Verse 33: "And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon"—that doesn't sound good—"and he cried out with a loud voice." Now the ESV translators translate it "Ha!"—like "Ha." This is a little Greek interjection, and like a lot of interjections or exclamations in our language, it doesn't carry a sense of which direction; it has to be determined by the context. So this is more of an "Ugh." He's concerned—the demon's speaking through this man. "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?" There's an interesting question. "I know who you are—the Holy One of God."

"And Jesus rebuked him," verse 35, "saying"—sounds very Shakespearean—"Be silent," but more like "Shut up. Be quiet. Come out of him." He commands him very sternly. "And when the demon had thrown him"—that is, the man—"down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm." He didn't have a broken arm or anything; he got up and fixed his disheveled hair, and he was back in the worship service.

Verse 36: "And they were all amazed and said to one another, 'What is this word?'" Okay, we've heard him teach, and he's got great authority, but now he's commanding this demon, and he



responded: “For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.”
“And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region.”

This is a passage about the real, surprising, astonishing, remarkable authority and power of Christ in his encounter with an unclean demon—that was preceded with teaching that everybody said, “Wow—authoritative!” It’s a good place for us to start—verses 31 and 32—to think about his teaching.

Now, you’ve been to a lot of sermons, and you’ve heard sermons, I’m assuming—but you haven’t heard a sermon like this, a sermon like Christ would preach, because his preaching is different. It’s unique. And that’s how it ought to be, because whether you’re a rabbi or a scribe in the first century, or a preacher in the 21st century, the job of the preacher dealing with the Word of God—even if he’s got the right book, the Word of God, the authoritative Word of God—what he’s doing is trying to relay the authority of the Word to you. He is giving that message to you, but he’s relaying it. He’s deferring to the Word of God. If there’s authoritative feeling in the sermon—which sometimes we have when we hear an authoritative sermon—it’s derived authority. It’s delegated authority. It’s authority that is about the relaying of the authoritative message.

That’s different than when Christ sits—in this case, in the synagogue, sits in the seat of Moses—to teach. His teaching is different because he has inherent authority, because he is the Holy One of God; to put it in the words of Daniel, the Son of Man who comes with the authority of the Father; to put it in our terms theologically, because he’s God incarnate. And because of that, he speaks with the kind of authority that’s very different—his authority is between him and you, not between you, the preacher, and God. He is God. And he speaks with that authority, and it arrests people’s attention.

That may be a good place for us to start, and I’d like to inject a word in this first point that may seem foreign, but it’s a great thing for us to untangle and to recognize the applicability of when we think about Christ—and we think, as people who are presenting Christ to our generation, we need to make sure that we acknowledge, and those that we speak to acknowledge—let’s put it this way:

Number one in your outline: acknowledge Christ’s jurisdiction.

There’s a good word for us—a helpful one. And what that has to do with is the combining of authority and speech—*jurisdiction*. If you like words, this is an easy one to untangle. *Juris*—we know that word, Latin root: jurisprudence; we use the word *jurist*; even the word *jury*—from the



word “law.” *Diction*—that’s filtered into a lot of English words—“to speak, to say.” *Jurisdiction* is when someone has the right to speak rules to you and to say things to you with authority.

Thursday night my wife was teaching, so I had the privilege of going to open house with my 10-year-old daughter. And you know what that’s like: you go to the elementary school, you sit in the little chairs, you look at all the stuff on the walls, you sort through all the things, and you kind of have this flashback experience of being a student again. And I’m having that experience, and I’m looking around the room. And of course, one of the things you’ll see as you sit there is the class rules, which—of course—one of the rules is always “no chewing gum.” And of course, the teacher’s there, and the rules over her shoulder. And what’s Mike doing? Chewing gum. I wanted minty-fresh breath as I went and met my daughter’s teacher, and I was going to chew gum. While I looked at the rules, I don’t care, because I can look at that teacher and say, “You’re not the boss of me.” And you’re not the boss of me. What are you going to do—kick me out? Send me to the principal’s office? I’m not in your class, and you’re not my teacher. I can disregard your rules. You have no jurisdiction over me. You have no authority to speak rules to my life. I don’t care what your gum rule is, lady. (I didn’t say that—but, I mean, I might chomp harder.) It doesn’t matter; I have immunity from your rules. No jurisdiction.

Now, if I get in my car afterwards and my daughter and I speed off, and then the lights come in my rearview mirror and the cop pulls me over and says, “Get out of the car,” I can’t look at him and say, “You’re not the boss of me,” because he will prove that he has jurisdiction. In that regard he’s got the right to tell me to get out of my car, because I have broken the rules—rules which he has the right to enforce. He doesn’t have a maple leaf on his arm; he’s not a Canadian cop; he’s not from the Federales down south. He’s an Orange County Sheriff’s deputy, and he’s told me... (This is an illustration. I didn’t get pulled over after open house on Thursday. Driving record’s okay so far.) But listen to me: here’s the deal—I am subject to what he says. I’m not in other cases.

Now, here’s the deal: most people view your Christ that you want to present to your neighbors and friends like the teacher, and you’re showing them into your classroom, and you’re going to tell them about what Christianity is all about—“Here’s our teacher,” like my daughter would say “our teacher,” and I’m like, “I don’t care.” (I do care—I’m a data-loving Orange County father—of course I care.) “But you’re not going to tell me to spit my gum out. I’m not going to adhere.” That’s how non-Christians think: they think Christ has no jurisdiction over them.

But you see, he does. He does by virtue of who he is—whether they recognize the jurisdiction or not. Do a lot of people not get out of their car when they’re told to by the deputy sheriff? Sure. But they’re going to be in trouble for that. They don’t recognize it at the time, perhaps, in their defiance; but they have, in fact, a problem when they defy the jurisdiction of someone who rightly has authority over them.



See, your neighbors, coworkers, and friends all are truly—whether they know it or not—under the authority of Christ. They may not be living like it. They may be in rebellion to it. But you see—here’s how Jesus put it when he gave us the Great Commission to go out and make disciples. It began with this line, remember? “All”—what?—“has been given to me?” All *authority*—where?—“in heaven and on earth.” Everywhere. “I have it all.” Now that’s a big line on your business card: “I have authority over everything.” But that’s how Christ presented himself to us. Now go out and make disciples. You see how that changes things? We don’t go presenting Christ like he’s some kind of option to the world—“Hey, you should try Christ. I tried him. Hey, look at my neat classroom; it’s really cool to have this teacher. Why don’t you join our classroom too?” That’s not evangelism. That may be what people call evangelism today, but that’s not evangelism.

Evangelism is proclaiming the Lordship of Christ—which, according to Philippians 2, whether you will rebel against it or whether you adhere to it now, one day you will—as Jesus promises in his own teachings, and as the Father has made clear in Philippians 2: “Every knee will bow.” Now you want to talk about “every”—if there is an “all without distinction” or “all without exception,” in this case it’s all without exception: “of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth”—everyone. That’s a poetic way of saying all the redeemed that have died, all those living when he shows up, and all those who have died and are in judgment—all will bow. Every knee will bow—heaven, earth, under the earth—and every tongue will confess—*every*—all without exception—that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Another passage on this—Colossians chapter 1—is all we have time for. But let me drive this home: the Christ that you’re presenting to the world is not optional. He is not someone whom you’ve just happened to follow—“I found a rabbi, a life coach; why don’t you try him? It’s another option. He’s got great advice. He’s changed my life. Check him out. Try God.” That’s not evangelism. Evangelism is presenting the authoritative message of Christ—the Christ who is the king of those people, of every non-Christian—who has jurisdiction to speak truth. If he were to come to your office, your neighborhood, your cul-de-sac, and speak, everyone would be astonished at the authority that Christ brings when he speaks.

Questions: why is that? Verse 15—why is that? Because he’s not “gentle Jesus, meek and mild”—traveling itinerant rabbi. He is the image of the invisible God. Whatever it is that you can think is the most expansive, transcendent idea of the Almighty Being—that is the One I’m speaking of when I say you need to be a follower of Christ. He is the image of the invisible God. He is incarnate God. He is the firstborn—the *prototokos*—of all creation. Now, the cults like to take this in a direction it shouldn’t go, in part because we like to read it from our 21st-century vantage point, when in reality the “firstborn” meant a lot in these societies; and that is, unlike us—when we want to play fair with all of our children—the firstborn had the birthright. The firstborn was the one that inherited everything from Dad. When the old man died, everything went to the firstborn. He got everything. The Father made clear throughout the Bible he’s giving all things to the Son. He is like the heir of creation. This is not “firstborn” as in the first thing to pop out of God’s creative work when he created creation. He is the firstborn—the heir of all that God did create. That’s what this phrase is saying. He’s the firstborn—the *prototokos*—of all creation. He has it all.



He makes it clear now, verse 16: “For by him all things were created.” One of the reasons he is the heir of creation is because he was the agent of creation. “For by him all things were created”—what?—everything, all without exception—“in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible; whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him.” I know God the Father is the creative person that’s designated in the Bible; the Spirit of God has a creative touch on things in Genesis chapter 1; but it was Christ—here now we learn—is the agent of that creation. He’s involved in this. “All things were created through him”—and here’s the important thing to relate to your non-Christian friends—“and for him.” You were created *for him*. He is your boss. He is the boss of you. He has jurisdiction over your life. And if he were here to speak a message to you, you would see—like every recorded message in the Gospels—it applies to you.

Keep reading, verse 17: “He is before all things”—he’s the first thing, the priority, ultimate thing—whether you want to see that or not. Whether you acknowledge it now or not, one day you will—Philippians 2 says. “And in him all things hold together.” You want to know how intimately involved in the oversight of your life he now currently is, non-Christian friend? He’s holding together the cells in your mind. “All things consist,” as Paul said when he spoke to the secular Athenian professors at the University of Athens—what did he say? “In him you live and move and have your being.” This is the God we’re talking about.

“He is the head of the body, the church.” And that’s what they say: “Fine—he’s your class leader. He’s your teacher. He’s the church down the street. That’s fine—he can be the boss of your little club.” No, no—“He’s the beginning, the firstborn from the dead”—a universal problem that we all have. He’s the heir of all those who die—“that in everything he might be preeminent.” In *everything*. The theme here is “everything, without exception, everything.” He’s going to be preeminent—and he is preeminent—“for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” You think God is not in charge of everything? Christ—in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. He’s the boss of everything. “And through him”—speaking of evangelism, verse 20—“to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

When we start talking about the cross, forgiveness, reconciliation to God—it comes on the foundation of recognizing the preeminence—or, as I like to put it here, the jurisdiction—of Christ. He has authority; he has the right to speak the truth; and we are subject.

Now, we don’t have time to look at these passages; would it be good to juxtapose these two passages in your homework—Titus chapter 2 and Acts chapter 17. Titus chapter 2—the whole chapter—and Acts chapter 17, you can start in verse 22 and go at least through verses 30–32—those 10–11 verses. Those two things I need to show you in terms of contrast, and I’ll let you do it on your own. But here’s the thing—here’s the problem with me talking about an authoritative message:



sometimes people can become authoritarian in their preaching of Christ. That's not what I'm asking you to do.

Here's the balance—let me start with the Titus passage. When Paul talked to Titus, he started in the first 11 verses talking about pastoral concerns, but he starts with: you are to teach things that are in accordance with, in keeping with, in alignment with sound doctrine. In other words, God has spoken an authoritative message; you align your speaking; and when you yap about things, make sure your teaching is in line with what he said. That then brings authority to your message. He starts with pastoral concerns about life in the church, and then he moves in verses 11 and 12 to the gospel and starts talking about the issues of the gospel; and then he ends with this verse in verse number 15: “Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.” That's the idea of bringing the message of the jurisdiction of Christ to our generation, both in preaching to Christians and evangelizing non-Christians.

The problem is, we're tempted to now become authoritarian, like the message and authority is coming from *us*. That's why I want to give you as a homework assignment Acts 17. Paul does a great job in that passage—as we would expect—presenting Christ with great authority, but always making it clear—as I like to say—triangulating with the audience, traveling with his receptors, those who are going to hear his message. He keeps putting himself under the authority of the message he brings; and when he gets to some of the declarative statements of the gospel, he'll even say things like—instead of just saying, as he could, first person, “Repent”—he'll say, “God is calling all people everywhere to repent.” Watch the authority that comes through the preaching of the gospel. It's not being a jerk; it's not being overpowering; it's not being brash. You can do this with gentleness and respect. But don't leave Christ on the table as an option. It's not something—“Well, try it out; return the empty bottle if you're not fully pleased.” This is not Christianity. Christianity is giving an imperative message to a world that needs to recognize the preeminence and jurisdiction of Christ—because one day, if you don't recognize that, you will recognize it after it's too late, and there will be no hope for you or your soul.

Acknowledge Christ's jurisdiction—it's important. If you had Christ here to speak to you directly, you would sense it in a way you've never ever experienced in a sermon. You'd be astonished, I'm sure, like the concerns were regarding the authority that his word possessed.

Now, the reaction gets a bit bizarre here in verses 33 and 34 because someone's sitting there in the worship service—there in Luke chapter 4 in the synagogue—breaks out with a cry that everyone identifies, and Luke now records, as a demonic encounter, which we do see in Christ's ministry. And the phenomenon, by the way, is clustered all here within the life of Christ and the apostles.



Now, there are a lot of paradigms here that we can learn from, but let's just start with thinking through what's happening here: "In the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon." Now that adjective is helpful for us—not that we need it; we understand that demons are unclean—but it's helpful in what follows, because through that man the spirit cries out with a loud voice, saying, "Ah, what have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?" Now, I'm unclean; I'm concerned you're going to destroy us. Why? Look at the elements here: "Because I know who you are—you are the Holy One of God."

See, there is a paradigm right there. There's an equation that we should recognize in this encounter: when the Holy One shows up in Capernaum—even if the people miss it—the demonic spirits get it, and that is, "I'm unclean; you're holy; my concern is your judgment of me—your destruction of me." Which, of course, is not annihilationism. By the way, as it says elsewhere—and we'll read this as we see other encounters with the demonic—they're concerned about going, as Matthew 8 says: "Are you here to torment us before the time?" There's a time we know that's coming. "Are you here earlier than we thought you would be, to torment us?" Or, as it says elsewhere—and we'll read this in Luke—"Are you going to send us into the abyss? Are we going to the place of punishment right now?"

Now, that concern is a concern that would be helpful for us to identify with if you just think of the adjective for a minute and recognize that *you* qualify. What's the adjective? What kind of demon was this? An *unclean* demon—as they all are. What has Romans spent two and a half chapters trying to prove to us as it lays the foundation for the gospel? You and I are also unclean. The problem we have is the same problem the demons have, and that is that he is holy and we're not. And because of that—though the demons seem to be more insightful than us—we need to recognize our concern should be that a holy God should destroy unholy people; that a holy God should bring judgment and his wrath to sinful people. That's something we need to come to grips with. It's a kind of intolerance we see as a defect in God, but what we need to recognize is it is perfectly holy and righteous and just.

Number two on our outline: understand Christ's holy intolerance. He is intolerant—*holy* intolerant. Now that's not a noun; that's an adjective in this sentence or this phrase. It's not "lactose intolerant"—not a noun, but an adjective. It is a kind of intolerance that is holy. It's a kind of intolerance that is pure. It's a kind of intolerance that is righteous and right—because if he weren't intolerant of sin, he wouldn't be perfectly holy.

Now turn with me to Psalm 5 to drive this home. But before you read this with me, let's think this through a little bit, based on what I used to understand *National Geographic* to be when it came on, I think, on Sunday nights—and that was, for an 11-year-old boy, a really cool time to watch animals kill each other. I don't know what's on Nat Geo now—I don't watch it—but it was kind of cool to watch when the cheetahs would chase down the gazelles and start jumping on their neck and blood spurting out (the perverse mind of a kid). And then it would go to the lions and the zebras, and the



leopards and the warthogs, and they were always attacking each other. And I think to myself, in my little mind at 11 years old, “That’s not how it was when we went to the San Diego Zoo. What’s going on?” Well, you know what’s going on at the San Diego Zoo—they don’t let the warthogs hang out with the leopards; they don’t let the gazelles into the cage with the cheetahs; and you’re never going to see zebras together with the lions unless it’s feeding time—because that’s not how it works. These are natural enemies, and one is more dominant and powerful than the other, and that means that one is going to eat the other for dinner. That’s how it works in the wild. The enmity, the hostility, the polarity, the antagonism that’s built in between these things—it is odd when they don’t eat each other. That’s why the imagery, from a perspective on our planet looking to the next life, where the imagery is that the lion lays down with the lamb—we say, “Well, I don’t know...” The lion doesn’t lay down with the lamb unless it’s already killed it and is eating it. Why? Because they’re natural enemies—they don’t hang out together; they don’t play together; that’s not how it works. Natural hostility.

And here’s the thing: you want to talk about natural hostility—polarity—you want to talk about *enmity* between two things, two species—then what you need to do is to understand the intolerance that divinity has with uncleanness; holiness has with unrighteousness. Put it this way—Psalm 5, which I’m expecting to hear...I mean, you know what psalms are: they’re the songbook of the Old Testament. I’m hoping—really—“Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee...” You know, we want stuff like that in the Psalms. And there’s a lot of that because a lot of the psalms are about deliverance. But Yahweh is not only the Deliverer; he’s also the Judge. And we’ll never really appreciate the deliverance of Yahweh—or the deliverance of Christ—until we really recognize the severity of God and the problem we have, because Christ and Yahweh are also Judge.

Take a look at this—verse 4. Let’s jump into the middle of the psalm: “For you”—the psalmist says, David says—“are not a God who delights in wickedness.” Okay, I get that: just like Grandpa doesn’t like it when little grandson Junior disobeys—“Don’t be naughty; I don’t delight in your naughtiness.” No, no, no—not what we’re talking about. Read the rest of the verse: “Evil may not dwell with you.” Now, that’s a little different. When Grandpa—your dad—calls and says, “Don’t bring those kids over anymore; they’re evil,” that’s a little different than Grandpa on his rocking chair going, “Oh, little grandson Johnny, you shouldn’t do that; I don’t take delight in your behavior right now.” That’s not it. Grandpa’s not going to have anything to do with Johnny—because Johnny is evil. That’s the kind of problem we have—the polarity we have, the antagonism and hostility there is between God and sinful people.

Verse 5: “The boastful shall not stand before your eyes.” Now, the psalmist picks here a God-Spirit word that’s very helpful because, as James says, it’s a universal problem: you and I are boastful. It is the simplest expression of our sinful hearts through our sinful mouths to promote ourselves. We were born doing it—from the time that we could talk we were self-promoting and boasting with our mouth. It’s sinful; it is a reflection of the archetypal sin of Satan himself. And the Bible says—you want to talk about evil not dwelling with God: “The boastful shall not stand before your eyes.” “You hate all evildoers.”

Now, what do two and a half chapters of Romans try to establish as it speaks about the gospel to us? That we're all evildoers. As the Jews looked down on the Gentiles, saying, "Well, we're not as sinful as those guys; we're righteous," Paul's whole point by the Spirit of God was to prove: you're all sinful. You've all fallen short of the glory of God. "You hate all evildoers."

Verse 6: "You destroy those who speak lies." And if it's easy for our mouths to boast, it's also easy for our mouths to not—what?—fudge on the truth, to twist the truth, to lie, the Bible calls it. "You destroy" them. It's like the warthogs and the leopards, the zebras and the lions, and the gazelles and the cheetahs—that's how it works: "You destroy them." "The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty"—"Well, I'm not killing anybody, God." No—and let's just bring it back, trying to build a spectrum here—"the bloodthirsty *and deceitful man*."

For those that say, "Well, that sounds so negative"—and it is; it's tough; it's hard news to swallow—the gospel, though, which we even see a taste of in verse 7, is the contrasting conjunction "But": "But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house." How does that work? Well, it was only symbolized in the Old Testament through the sacrificial system—that the lamb innocently dies for the guilty sinner—and Jesus became the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Think about this: that picture of "I can still somehow have fellowship with God though I am sinful—though he hates evildoers, though he destroys those who speak lies, though his heart abhors deceitful man." The good news is he can deliver us.

Now, that is the gospel—and I told you, we can't get to that part of it today. But come back next time, because that's what we're going to be talking about. That's the gospel. And note what I'm saying when I say "gospel," Sunday school graduates: what does the word *gospel* mean? "Good news." Why is it good news? Because we are saved—there's another biblical word, *salvation*. What are we saved *from*? The wrath of God. If you don't connect that chain, the good news is not good news. Salvation becomes something hollow, something vapid—something against the backdrop of nothingness. What's the problem we have? The problem's right there: "Evil may not dwell with you. The boastful aren't going to stand before your eyes. You hate evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies. You abhor bloodthirsty and deceitful man." *But* even so, "I'm going to go worship in your presence." How does that work? Because you love. "I thought you just said you hated evildoers." Well, yes—that's how the problem gets fixed: through some kind of redemptive work that changes my status before that God. More on that next week.

For today, though, can we understand the holy intolerance that God has for sin? We should. It's one of the reasons I got rid of that whole bridge illustration in my evangelism. I used it for years, and many times in my evangelism I would—some of you know what I'm talking about—the bridge, where you draw the thing: on one side God, and here you are over here; and Christ's cross makes the bridge; and, "Hey, it's over here—over here we're great, man—come on over to the islands; the

weather's terrific. You're over there—unfortunately, that's no good—but Christ can get you over here. Come on, join our classroom.” “No, I don't want to.” That's the response I got many, many, many times—'til I started bringing the emphasis of the Bible back to it. I started to lean a little bit more on what the Bible would say, and I recognized, “You know, that's not even a good illustration.” That's why, by the way, if you've been through our discipleship program here, I wrote a different one that tried to bring the emphasis and urgency of the problem. If it's good news because we're saved—and we're saved from God's coming wrath—I need something that's going to say, “Well, it may be good in the islands, but you don't understand—on the other side of the bridge there's an anvil coming down.” You know, I needed something to give you a sense of the coming judgment of God. So I created that “umbrella” illustration. (Smile at me—at least with your eyes—if you know what I'm talking about.) And I'm not saying that's the end-all, but all I'm saying is: be careful how you present Christ. If he becomes some, “Yeah, like, you're on his team—oh, come on, please, it's really cool on his team,” that's not evangelism. Evangelism has an urgency because God is intolerant of sin.

Now, sidebar: what we're seeing here in this passage in verses 33 and 34—I called it a phenomenon—and it's a phenomenon not because it's foreign to what's happening in our day. As a matter of fact, when I read the Old Testament, a lot of you say, “Well, I didn't like that passage—but that's Old Testament. Everybody was uptight in the Old Testament—God was upset, and the prophets were mad, and they didn't have air conditioning or something; their diet was poor; they were all uptight.” Let me turn you to one more New Testament passage that may tie in the phenomenon of demonization that's going on here in our passage and the concern that we have about understanding why the Holy One would want to destroy unclean spirits—which we all qualify for, though we're in a different class of being than the angels—we have to understand we have the same diagnosis and the same problem. Ephesians chapter 2—look at verse number 1, just starting to get the entirety of this idea: “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.” Remember the passage in Psalm 5—the problem is... You know my illustration for Grandpa saying, “Don't bring that kid over here; he's evil”—that idea of *dead*. I mean, we even use the phrase today (hopefully you don't use it very often), “You're dead to me.” The idea: there's no contact. That was our relationship with God.

Because—now here's the reason, to kind of bridge into what's happening in Luke 4—“following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air”—now, no one felt demonized as a non-Christian; I would say most people didn't. But the Bible says you were kind of floating along in that path—“the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” It may be phenomenal to have a demon speak through your body—I get that—and we have a few examples that are all clustered in the time of Christ and the apostles. But the Bible says this is an ongoing problem that all people experience, because within people is this spirit that's at work—the spirit of disobedience that's at work in the sons of disobedience—“among whom we all”—there it is again, all without exception, everyone—“we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.” I don't care if you were a church brat—this was the reality for you—following the impulses, the things that were within the realm of what you thought was acceptable and appropriate and what you could get away with—you did it. “And were by nature children of wrath”—there's your National Geographic again—“the object of God's judgment, like the rest of mankind.” Who's included in this? Everybody.



Now, spirit in this guy—unclean demon speaking through the man—that is unique. Let me step back; I said this was a sidebar. Demons—just so we’re honest (this is old news for you, I’m sorry)—but demons, you need to know, are not like the spirits of dead people. Demons are a completely different class of individuals. Let’s put it this way: three big categories—God: he’s the ultimate tri-unity of Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—intellect, emotion, will—they all have. He creates a spirit class like him; they’re the most like him. They don’t have corporeal bodies; they’re not material beings; they’re spirit beings—intellect, emotion, will. They can think, they can reason; they feel (not “feel” in an essential way, but feel in an emotional way); and they are volitional—they make decisions and choices and they do things; they’re directed. Then he creates human-class people that are spirit encased in flesh. (I call it an experiment; of course it wasn’t an experiment.) But he creates people that are even less like him, but like him in his image—intellect, emotion, and will.

Well, the first class—God—eternal set: he is who he is—the triune fellowship, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The second class gets bifurcated into two when one angel—one spirit being—rebels; we learn about that in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 (and it’s all kind of cryptic, but it’s clear): we’ve got one angelic being that rebels; then we have, as the Bible says elsewhere, a third of the class of angelic beings—they rebel with him. He becomes the first tempter to that class of beings, and they rebel. Now that second class is split into what the New Testament calls the “elect angels” and the evil angels—calls them “angels,” “the devil’s angels” (Matthew 25:41), that we call demons. And the Bible calls them “demons” as well—another name for them. They’re just angels; they’ve always existed as angels; there was one point of temptation; a third of them fell.

We now, of course, are bifurcated into two groups as well—those who have been redeemed by God (we’re also called “the elect”) and the fallen. We’re all born fallen, but some are plucked out from that fallenness, if you will, and redeemed; and so we have people that are God’s children (human beings—spirits encased in flesh), and there are two bifurcated groups within the second class of angelic beings. Now, the angelic demons, if you will—the devil’s angels, if you will—are just carrying out the agenda of the tempter; and the tempter is all about, to put it in the words of Christ (John 10:10), “They’ve come to kill, steal, and destroy.” They’re all about undoing the good that God does—whether in common grace and life and beauty and whatever—or in the redemptive work of God, in trying to lead us to truth and to righteousness and to trust in Christ and all that. They’re working against that. They’re all out against it.

They’re like—when you see the car chases here in Southern California, which we’re known for—do they come to full stops at the stop sign when they’re running from the cops? Why? Because they know they’re going to jail. But they don’t care. That’s the demons—they don’t care; they’re done. They know they’re judged. There’s no redemption for them. As Hebrews says, God has not sent Christ to redeem the angelic beings; he’s chosen to redeem us. So they’re on a free-for-all crime spree, if you will; and they’re doing their best to pull us in the direction of what we know by conscience, by creation, and by preaching of the truth we shouldn’t be doing. And he gets a lot of

success—the demons get a lot of success in the average rank and file. You want to talk about, “Well, we don’t see these phenomenal, extreme examples”—and in some cases, yeah, that’s a generalization, and it’s generally true. But you want to talk about even just to “kill, steal, and destroy”—to kill, to destruct, *self-destruction*—I mean, I could talk about suicide, but that’s so final. Let’s talk about just self-injurious behavior.

Do you know that in America—just in America—it is a conservative estimate that over 2 million people are involved in habitual, continual, habitual self-injurious behavior, which makes no sense—no logical, righteous, godly sense at all? In Britain, they did a study with 14- and 15-year-old girls, and the stats on that were—13% of every Brit 13- and 14-year-old girl is involved in some form of self-injury on a regular basis. And, of course, the chosen self-injurious behavior is cutting these days. And an American study not long ago: 13- to 17-year-old girls in the United States, they say now, is one out of every 200 teenage girls is involved in cutting—just that one aspect of self-injurious behavior. Now think about that. I mean, when I think about the demons’ activity in our world, you don’t have to have heads spinning around on *The Exorcist* to recognize that Satan is alive and well and at work on our planet. Not to mention that, while that’s bad, it’s a temporary bad—the more eternal bad is to blind eyes from the truth of the gospel and coming to faith in Christ and repentance—and that kind of work is going on all the time.

This is not a good illustration—it’s never good to start an illustration by saying, “This is not a good choice.” If you’re learning to preach, do not follow my example. But for all the weaknesses of this illustration, there is something very helpful, I think, about understanding demonization in the Bible: demonization is a lot like a marriage. (See, I knew it wasn’t going to come out sounding right.) But it is—follow me on this. Don’t clap at that. Follow me on this. Demonization is a lot like a marriage—at least in 99 times out of 100, the examples in the Bible. There are a few exceptions, I get that; but the idea is generally, much like marriage in our culture in our day, there has to be some willingness on both sides. I mean, there’s no forced marriage; there’s no real shotgun marriage in our day. The idea, though, is a kind of wooing and encouragement and drawing to where there’s a kind of connection. And when there’s a marriage, there’s a kind of connectedness there between demon and person. And it’s always, you know—unclean spirit and person; an unclean spirit, a demon, getting into a relationship. Now, it’s sometimes described in spatial terms—“in them” and “coming out of them”—and I get that; but the marriage is the kind of connection between the two. And here are some other words we’re going to run into in Luke and Acts: Luke talks about “harassed” and “oppressed” and “troubled by demons.” There is a kind of wooing and a kind of connectedness.

Now, when that connectedness works—weaker spirit versus stronger spirit—stronger spirit dominates and has his way. And if you have ever watched this—where a gal (let’s just picture the gal) getting wooed into a marriage by a terrible man—you recognize that once that connection takes place and the wooing takes place and there’s that kind of spell in that relationship, then you see—you often watch—that person (that gal, in this illustration) continue to deteriorate under the domination of that evil man. That’s kind of the picture. It’s not that you’re not culpable; it’s just that the openness to the connection, which doesn’t come like, “Yeah, I’m going to connect with

demons”—it’s what the demons are all about, and they’re all about uncleanness. And whatever the uncleanness may be—the sin, the compromise, or whatever it is—there’s that openness to it, the courting of it, and then the connection together.

Again, this isn’t a great illustration, as I confessed up front (which I shouldn’t have done), but by the way you responded when I said it, it helps us understand words like “demoniac,” or “demon-possessed,” which—unfortunately—ESV translates. “Demoniac” is more helpful, because in our language we use words like “kleptomaniac,” “insomniac,” (I don’t know—“Brainiac”—I use that; I don’t think it’s in the dictionary). When we use the *-iac* word, it helps us recognize what we’re talking about here—and that is the relational reflection and character. When I say, “That guy’s a brainiac—what a brain that person has,” again, that’s metaphorical; but the point is they’re reflecting what I’m talking about here—the character. The kleptomaniac—they’re always stealing; they’re known by that. A demoniac is someone that is reflecting and mirroring that behavior, and the sin of that demon—and the demon is all about sin. Like the chase on the freeway: “We don’t care—we know we’re going to jail.” That’s the idea. So “demoniac” gets even more—in terms of domination—when the words are used. And here’s the Greek word—*daimonizomai*—which is sometimes translated “demon possession,” which is not in the sense of “they own you,” because the old Latin word “possess” was the word for “control,” not the word for “possession.” Possession—or possessing—the concept of domination.

Daimonizomai can be understood this way—*daimon*, which is the word we transliterate “demon” (that’s the noun); *-iz*—the causative stem in a Greek word—and *-omai*, which is the passive ending on a word—*daimonizomai*—demon-caused passivity. When a person, because of the demon, caused by a demon, is more and more passive. And I guess in the illustration (which I think is getting better as I keep working on it in my head), sometimes you see a gal in a really bad marriage with a dominant guy who’s just a jerk, reflecting more and more passivity and going along with more and more stuff. That’s the idea—*daimonizomai*—demon-caused passivity. And there’s that sense in which (and we’ll see—this is our first encounter with demonization in the Gospel of Luke) we’ll see more of it and touch on more of it. And if you’ve got to have more of it, this week I put three sermons on the back that I did—it’s an hour and 15 minutes (no, three hours and 45 minutes) of lectures—on the back, on demonization. You can catch just part of a series I did on it that is there for free; you can download and all that.

With all that said, the parallel for us is simply this: that in our lives—whatever the extent of it, and certainly in the lives of the non-Christians that we speak to—the uncleanness of disregarding the leadership of God, the law of God, the truth of God, the righteousness of God, puts me in a position of danger. God is a holy God; my only real expectation is the destruction of God. And that’s not annihilationism—that’s the punishment of God in just, meted-out justice. That’s the concern. Understand God’s holy intolerance.

With a long sidebar there—verses 35 and 36 and 37, last three verses in Luke 4—what does he do? He rebukes him—the demon—saying, “Be silent and come out of him.” And when the demon had thrown him down (the demon threw the guy down) in their midst, he came out of him, having done the man no harm. Now, think about that—and I guess this will continue to work. If you think about the relationship here—a dominant, overbearing person in relationship with someone—let’s not call it, in this case, a marriage; let’s call it your 17-year-old daughter in a steady relationship with a jerky boy. (This may bring up really bad parts of your life at this point, but let’s just picture that.) So, in that relationship, they’re in your front room; you hate this guy; you think he’s totally bad for your daughter. So here’s what you do—you go in and you rebuke the guy, and you say, “Get out of my daughter’s life,” and you tell your daughter, “Break up with him.” How’s that go? Experienced dads of teenage daughters? Not so well. Doesn’t go well. Why? Because even though you think you have jurisdiction over your daughter, the reality of how it works is you don’t—she acts like you have no jurisdiction over the separation of what has come together in that kind of wooing and connection and camaraderie and even commitment (and “covenant,” if you will, in the larger illustration I started with). To say, “Done with each other; you leave”—and see that guy just step and walk out, and your daughter, “Goodbye, see ya”—it’s like, “Wow.” If your wife saw that happen, she’d be astonished at the thought: “What is this word? What authority and power does my husband have to command this unclean boyfriend to leave? Wow.” That would be astonishing. But you don’t have that. You don’t have that power.

You can say all you want—like a lot of the people who get into demonology—they like commanding spirits left and right. They can’t make their daughter clean her room, but they’re commanding evil spirits out of Satan. You know, like—“You have no power.” You have no power. Even Michael the archangel, in the book of Jude, he’s not going to rebuke Satan—he has to defer to God: “The Lord rebuke you.” And the point is this: God has all the power to speak and do what he wants in exercising authority over people.

To put it this way: all the demons are on a leash—a very long leash, albeit a long leash—and at any time, he can reel that leash in; he can yank on that leash. That’s exactly what’s happening here. That demon and that guy in that service—and that guy is culpable because there was some openness to whatever the uncleanness was that connected these two beings together—and so there they were. Jesus yanks the chain on that demon: “Pop—done—out of here. Now go.” Now, he’s concerned that he’s going to be destroyed. Was he destroyed? He was not destroyed; he was just told to take a hike. It’s like you knowing you could send that kid to jail (let’s say you had that kind of power and he was a criminal and a crook and a drug dealer or whatever, dating your daughter—this is a terribly uncomfortable illustration), but you don’t send him to jail, you don’t call the cops—you just say, “Get out of here; never talk to my daughter again,” and he does it. That’s what’s happening here.

Christ could have exercised all of his authority and sent him to the abyss—which, according to Matthew 8, the demons are concerned about: “Have you come to torment us before the time?” He doesn’t do that. Demons have a job to do. Christ recognizes that—as Revelation says—“the wicked continue to be wicked,” and part of that is the knee for demons in this world; and off he goes. But



he proved, in this little foretaste, that with a word he can exercise his power, and he can lead people to judgment or direct people to stop doing what they're doing. He has the authority and jurisdiction over them. "What power and authority he has to command things"—in this case the unclean spirit—"to come out." And everybody was astonished, amazed.

Number three in your outline: be prepared for the exercise of Christ's power. Part of the message of the gospel in presenting the portrait of Christ is this: this is the Christ who has not only jurisdiction to speak the rules (like he did in the "pulpit," if you will, of the synagogue—in the seat of Moses), but he has the right to send you to judgment at any moment of time. He can demand your life today—as Jesus says later (we'll read it in Luke): "Tonight he demands your soul." He could do that. He's at one point going to do that. And to every non-Christian you share with, he will one day demand their life to end. And for all the autonomy of human beings, the amazing thing is: no one lives forever. I mean, you say to your non-Christian friend, "Why don't you live to be 200? Just go do that." You can't. At one point God will demand your life; and at that point, as the Scripture says, "It is appointed unto man once to die, and then the judgment." You're going to face that judgment. And you know what? Here's the thing—there's no handcuffs needed; there are no sheriffs or bailiffs needed at judgment time. When he says, "Depart from me; I never knew you," everyone will obey. Why? Because they are all subject to the overarching authority of God.

You need to come to grips with that as an evangelist, and you need to get the people that you speak to to prepare for the coming exercise of the power of Christ.

One last passage on this—because we're out of time—2 Peter 3. Please turn to this, if you would. And as you're turning there, I guess I should sidebar this real quick—letter A, number one, on this: when it comes to God's judgment—his justice—now remember that I have sermons (I don't even know—I'm sure I put one on the back; I would think I would; go look it up on Focal Point if you need a whole sermon on the coming judgment). I've done those. I think the one that's going to come closest is 0778, "Sorting Out the End Times"—yeah, that will deal with it. The first half of that message was on the lake of fire—though the title inverts the order—it will deal with it. But let me say this: though I didn't put it this way, I can summarize it this way—three things that may help you with the judgment of God (not that any of it's pleasant).

But number one, you need to know this: it's measured. It's measured. Revelation 20 says repeatedly (and elsewhere), "They were judged according to their deeds." Now that's important. This is not a capricious God who kicks the dog and just lights everything on fire and, you know, shock and awe. That's not God. When it comes to judgment, everyone gets punished for what they have done. God's justice is measured.

Number two: God's justice is fair. I don't often talk about fairness when it comes to salvation, because there's not much that's fair about it. But when it comes to judgment, it *is* fair. And Jesus told us, and the apostles kept telling us, that when it comes to the culpability of people in judgment, they will be judged for what they know. "Where there is no law," Romans 2, "there's no imputation of judgment"—there's no accountability for that. And you say, "Well, that's great, because my friends claim they know nothing about God's rules." But they do. That's what Romans 1 and 2 is about—conscience and creation keep speaking to them, so that when they're judged, they're all without excuse. What's the point though? You're not going to be judged for stuff that you don't know. We know a lot more than we're willing to admit—and all your non-Christian friends know a lot more than they're willing to admit, as they sit there at night in the dark, staring at the ceiling of their bedroom. There's a lot more that is intuitively known by them. But the point is: God's justice is not only measured; it is also fair.

Thirdly—which I think is something I never heard anybody preach or observe in Scripture—but the few times we see someone dealing with judgment after this life (like in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus), God's judgment is *always accepted*. It's accepted. And what I mean by that is: there's no fist-shaking on the other side. You see a lot of fist-shaking at God in this life, but in the next life, the times we see glimpses into it, people aren't shaking their fist. The reaction of the rich man in that parable is not, "Father Abraham, get me out of here—I don't deserve to be here." That's not what he says. He says, as long as the window of grace is still open for my brothers, "Can you send someone so they won't come to this place of torment?" What's the point? I mean, the assumption is—it's an argument from silence, but I'll prove it elsewhere—there is that sense of the deserving appropriateness and acceptance of judgment. One example would be Revelation 16—when the angels pour out their judgment on the earth, there is a sense of everyone going, "Right. It's proper; it's appropriate—what people deserve." And there's no fist-shaking. There's no need for bailiffs; there's no need for God's word to direct the judgment—and that judgment is accepted as appropriate. No one's going to go, "Well, this ain't right." No, it *is* right. It's measured; it's fair; it's appropriate; and people will accept it. Now, you don't want to go there. That's the whole point of evangelism—we'd like to avoid it if we can. But we need to fear it, in the sense that we recognize this is an urgent threat that can be averted—more on that next week.

Second Peter 3—second Peter chapter 3. I just want to focus as we close here on the word—just a sense that... And I guess this is reminiscent when I read (and you should read, if you haven't) Jonathan Edwards' sermon. I know everybody thinks it's so dour and severe and stern; but like I said at the beginning of the message, in light of what the Bible says, it's not at all. But he talks a lot about that little word—*with a word*—and he illustrates it with, like, the spider's web—that thread, that little...that's all the difference between you and plunging into the judgment that you deserve. And with a word, it's going to end for everyone—either we'll go to blessing and a place where we hear "Enter into the kingdom," or we'll hear, "Depart from me, you accursed."

Verse 4—let's look at this: people are going to say, they're going to mock, "Where is the promise of his coming?" Second Peter 3:4—"Ever since the fathers fell asleep"—all the ancient people from church history died—or *history* in that case—"all things continue on as they were from the



beginning of creation.” “But they deliberately”—deliberately—“overlook this fact”—there’s a sense of culpability there—“that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water” (that’s how Genesis talks about it) “and through water by the word of God.” Regardless of your view of creation, I mean, the biblical assertion is: *with a word*, God creates.

Verse 6: “And that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.” *With a word* he destroyed everybody on planet earth except for those eight people—think about that. *With a word* he creates; *with a word* he destroys.

Now, he’s let things go on for a long time, verse 7: “But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment”—and it’s not just demons that should worry about this—“and destruction of the ungodly.”

There needs to be an urgency that would lead people to prepare for the day when Christ exercises that power with one word—where every demon will reach their end and every unclean human spirit will reach their judgment and end. Martin Luther put it well in his old and most famous hymn from 1529, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” Remember that verse? I think it’s the third verse: “And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us. The Prince of Darkness grim—we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure—one little word shall fell him.” One word is going to topple him; one word is going to overcome—just one little word. And the next verse starts: “That Word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth.” Think about that—*one little word*.

Will that word be uttered this afternoon? Tomorrow? Next month? Next week? Our job is to represent the truth of the Christ who is Judge for those for whom he is not the Deliverer. Our job as evangelists is to see Christ become the Deliverer for more people, so that he wouldn’t be the Judge who assigns them to punishment—because the world and the universe is only one word away from that dreadful reality.

Would you stand with me? Let’s pray together.

God, sobering truths that are difficult for us as sinful people to sit around and think of—particularly when we think about your natural aversion and hostility toward sin. But as David wrote in Psalm 5 (and we’ll get to this next week), even so—“But”—as the conjunction expresses—because of your lovingkindness, we’ll enter into your house. Or as Paul went on to say, as we didn’t finish reading there in Ephesians chapter 2, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us...” There was redemption; there was forgiveness.



God, I wish that forgiveness were universal, and a lot of people—a lot of heretics—want to posit that it is. But it's not. That's why we have to be evangelists; we have to share the message of the gospel with people. But we're grateful that there is availability of grace, forgiveness, and deliverance.

So, God, as we ponder the unpleasant thought of Christ as Judge for this week, may you prepare us as we filter that through our thinking and allow that to motivate us in our evangelism. May we come back next time we gather together to study your Word to revel in and celebrate the great mercy that you bring to us. And though we deserve to die—though we deserve to be punished—you offer to us forgiveness. And, God, for Christians—even though we are a week out from that message—something we can't help but celebrate and rejoice in every day. So make us thankful people.

And for those that aren't sure (as I said there in the third point, that really needs to be translated and related to our non-Christian friends), may it be something we ponder here in this room. If we're not sure, may we prepare for that exercise of Christ's power—as it's put in the book of Revelation, when he "takes his great power and begins to reign." God, let us be ready for that day.

Thanks for this crew and for their willingness to study from week to week, and to think thoughts after you, and to get into your Word and be good Bereans of your Word. God, encourage them and bless them, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.