

Psalm 75 • For those who are frightened by judgment

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Psalm 75. Psalm 75 is a Psalm of judgment. It's not a very long Psalm. And I know that word strikes fear in some of you, but I hope that we can do something about that here tonight.

Look at verse 1. We're going to read through. It's just 10 verses long.

It says,

"¹ We give thanks to you, O God; we give thanks, for your name is near. We recount your wondrous deeds.

(And now the Lord speaks,)

² At the set time that I appoint I will judge with equity. (And of course the word, equity means fairness.)

³ When the earth totters, and all its inhabitants, it is I who keeps steady its pillars.

⁴ I say to the boastful, 'Do not boast,' and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up your horn;'" (Horn is a symbol always for strength in the Bible. In other words, don't exalt yourself or declare yourself to be strong in my presence. He says,)

⁵ do not lift up your horn on high, or speak with haughty neck. '" (ESV)

You and I don't use the term haughty neck. We would say, don't speak with your nose up in the air, or something. That's what we would say. The Jews probably wouldn't know what we meant by that. But again, it's just that, or that symbol of walking and speaking in pride.

Verse 6,

"For not from the east or from the west and not from the wilderness comes lifting up,

7 but it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.

8 For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup with foaming wine (And that's often a picture of judgment.) well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs."

In other words, he's talking about how all the wicked of the earth will drink it completely. Right?

He says in verse 9,

"But I will declare it forever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.

10 All the horns of the wicked (the strength of the wicked, he's saying,) I will cut off, but the horns of the righteous shall be lifted up."

It's a fairly short Psalm, but it's a very important one. And it sounds... When you talk about a Psalm of judgment, it seems a little strange for the Psalm to open on almost an upbeat note. Because it begins by saying, *"We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks for your name is near. We recount your wondrous deeds..."* and so forth as we begin the psalm.

And yet it's like, Wow! But this is a Psalm about judgment and you're starting with this upbeat a thing. Shouldn't we rather start a Psalm like this by going, oh, where are we going to hide? The judge is coming. The judge of all the earth rouses Himself from His place. Where can we run? Where can we hide?

And yet the people of God don't speak that way. They begin to praise Him. They begin to praise Him for judgment.

Now, that sounds a little bit strange. But if we connect this Psalm with the last one, where the psalmist was calling on God to judge the enemy who had invaded the land; the enemy who was in fact the Lord's spanking spoon. Because the Lord would use those enemies of Israel to come in and spank His favored nation. But eventually then the Lord would judge those nations.

And if you connect what is being said in this Psalm with what was said in the last Psalm, where he was calling upon the Lord to act against Israel's enemies, we see why he begins with praise. It's like, Lord, you have acted. Lord, you rouse Yourself in judgment.

Here's the deal. The subject of judgment is a very popular subject in the Bible. If you simply wanted to do a topical search in the Bible on judgment, and I'm not sure why somebody would want to do that. It's like, wow! I'm not sure that's really going to lift my spirits much. But if you did, you'd find yourself with a lot of material to go through because there's just a lot said.

And while most people probably do try to avoid the topic of judgment it's one that you and I as believers never need to be concerned about. At least not from the standpoint of eternal judgment. And the reason is because, of course, for you and I, it's taken care of. It's already been dealt with.

And it takes on a very different meaning, an application for us as believers. Right? And that is exactly why Paul wrote to the Romans. Let me put this on the screen for you and show you what he said. He said,

Romans 8:1 (ESV)

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

See that's why the topic of judgment takes on a very different flavor for you and I as believers. Because there is no condemnation now for we who are in Christ. And by the Word... By the Word.

By the way, the word that is translated, condemnation means essentially, the essence of that word means penalty. "*There is therefore now no... (penalty) for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" And of course. We know why. We know why there's no penalty.

Jesus bore our penalty. He literally took our penalty on Himself. He was judged bearing our penalty. And so we understand now that, that judgment of eternal separation from God is now passed.

Now, did you notice that I said eternal separation from God? Very important you hear me make that distinction. Because I'm not saying to you that our lives

are free from all judgment. They are free from all condemnation. Our lives are free from all condemnation.

It doesn't necessarily mean they're free from all judgment. Although the Bible usually prefers not to call it judgment, rather discipline when it comes into our lives. It is referred by a different name. But eternal judgment, that's off the table for you and I. Because Jesus bore that. And He bore it perfectly on the cross. It's a done deal. All right.

For believers, when does our judgment take place? It takes place now. Our discipline. And again, we'll call it discipline for the sake of maybe eliminating the confusion. It is sometimes Biblically even referred to as judgment. But it happens now in this life. This is now the time when we are judged. We will not be judged eternally later. We are judged now.

Let me show you how Peter put this in 1 Peter 4:17. He said,

1 Peter 4:17 (ESV)

...it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what's going to be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

...it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, (he's, 'Oh boy!') what's going to be the outcome for those who (are enemies of the Lord. Right?) and do not obey the gospel of God?

If God is willing to begin judgment here, now, with the house of God, with the people of God... And that is going on. Right? It goes, and God's people need to know, that it's going on right now!

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church because they had some people who are just doing wacky things in the church. Doing, I mean, sinfully, immoral, wacky things. And Paul, what did he say to them? He said, what business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? We're to judge those inside. (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). Not saying that we're supposed to be this judgment party, but we are to deal with issues.

Why? Because God is dealing with issues. And there are times we need to cooperate with His disciplinary action. The Lord's disciplinary action. It's not ours. It's not... We are cooperating with Him. Why? Because now is the time of judgment. It's now, it's right here. Okay.

The Lord is doing this disciplinary work going on in the lives of believers. And we know why He's doing it. He's doing it for our good. We're told that in the Scriptures. God disciplines us for our good. And the writer of Hebrews says, I know, it doesn't feel good, but it is. And later on, it produces a harvest of righteousness for those who've been trained by it.

It doesn't mean everybody gets trained by it. Sometimes God has to bring you past a particular disciplinary milepost several times before we finally learn from it. And He'll keep doing that. He'll keep going around the track and showing us the same disciplinary sort of a scenario until we finally go, okay, I think I got it. Thank you, Lord. And then we can move on. And praise God, that He's willing to do that. But He disciplines us for our good.

Now, but remember this psalm that we're looking at here today isn't about discipline. That's what happens. I'm just explaining why believers have a different attitude toward judgment. This psalm is about the judgment of unbelievers. Okay, and we see in Scriptures that this judgment, the judgment of unbelievers is something that is long awaited and is highly anticipated in heaven.

In fact, when John, the apostle, is lifted up and shown a vision of this coming judgment, it's a big deal in the Book of Revelation. And let me show you one passage from chapter 14. John writes,

Revelation 14:6-7 (ESV)

Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead...and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come..."

Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead...and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come..."

All right? Well, this is a big deal in the Book of Revelation, because that's what it's all about. But what was the hour of God's judgment as we read about it in the Book of Revelation? Well, in the context of this particular passage, it's the wrath of God being poured out upon people of the earth. And upon the institutions of worldly immorality that are - have been perpetuating themselves since creation. And we see in the Book of Revelation, that God poured out His wrath and that was part of God's judgment. Okay, the wrath of God being poured out.

But then later in the Book of Revelation, we are revisited with the idea of judgment when we come to what is referred to as the final judgment. Which is, we refer to as the, white throne judgment because of the description of it in Revelation chapter 20. Check this out on the screen.

Revelation 20:11-12 (ESV)

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

Then I saw a great white throne (That's why we call it that.) and him who was seated on it. From his presence (look at this) earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. (You can't run from the presence of God.) And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

Here we see the final judgment. Right?

Now, once again, you need to understand what your place is related to this final judgment. I want to remind you, for those of us who are resting in the finished work of Jesus on the cross, our judgment is over from the standpoint of eternal separation from God. And please don't let go of that.

Can I show you a passage from John chapter 3? Look at this. This is so encouraging.

John 3:18 (ESV)

Whoever believes in him is not condemned.

Whoever believes in him (and that's Jesus) is not condemned.

Judgment is about condemnation. And that's why I prefer, discipline as a word to describe what God does for believers. Because there is no condemnation for you and I. But there... This passage reminds us that, as we put our faith in Jesus and rest in what He did on the cross, condemnation is off the table.

And then later in chapter 5; check this out. This is great. Jesus speaking here,

John 5:24 (ESV)

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. (And then look at this last sentence.) He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

What did Jesus say? What did Jesus say? This is His promise. It's not mine. Okay. What did Jesus say here in that last sentence? The one who... Well, you have to take the whole thing. Whoever believes in Him, and that means who's resting in His finished work on the cross does not come into judgment.

You understand, right? When we read passages about judgment, when we read about the white throne judgment, we read about the wrath of God. We're not talking about a judgment of condemnation for believers. I've said this from this pulpit, and I'll say it again.

If at any of those judgments, God were to bring up even one sin that you have committed, then what Jesus did on the cross was not enough. If He brings up even one thing. Jesus died for all your sins, not just some of them. And what He did was complete. Finished, over. Okay. Understand here why believers have a different understanding, a different application to this issue of judgment from the Word of God.

But even though that's true, and even though judgment is over for you and I, from the standpoint of any eternal condemnation, separation from God... And we know because we're trusting in Jesus, the subject still comes up and gets sticky, doesn't it? It comes up sometimes in conversation. And I have learned in my years in the ministry, that it still concerns believers a lot. A lot.

In some cases it, concerns believers because they still struggle with the idea of themselves being under judgment. And that's a faith issue. It also concerns believers because they are concerned for other people. They're grieved for family members, or loved ones, friends who have just resisted the gospel message. And so when they hear about judgment, when they hear about wrath, when they hear about separation from God, they're just instantly like, It just, it stings a little bit. It stings on behalf of my heart for other people. I don't want to, I don't really want to hear about it. I don't want to think about it.

In fact, it bothers some people so much, or it has bothered some people so much over the years, we've come up with alternative beliefs. All kinds of alternative beliefs that aren't Biblical. One of them is Universalism. You familiar with that doctrine? Universalism is the teaching that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the entire world. And so everybody is saved, carte blanche. Just regardless of whether they put their faith in Jesus, whether they even care. Doesn't matter. They're saved. Because Jesus died for everybody. That's called Universalism.

And don't think it isn't a popular doctrine. I would love to believe it. I mean, what a great doctrine. And think about it from the standpoint of feeling bad for people. This is a natural conclusion that somebody's probably going to come to because, hey, if I can convince myself Universalism is true, we're all good. It's a slam dunk. I don't even have to go out and share Jesus with people. And that I don't have to get into that awkward conversation anymore because it doesn't matter. I don't have to talk to somebody on an airplane, or in the grocery store, or whatever, about Jesus, because they're all going to go to heaven. Right?

Oh, Universalism just sews the whole problem right up in one little neat, convenient package. There's only one problem. It's not Biblical. But it's things people come up with because judgment makes them uncomfortable. And you know what? It ought to. It ought to make us uncomfortable. There's nothing comfortable about judgment. There's nothing nice about it.

Another doctrine that has begun to really grow in popularity related to eternal judgment is the idea, well there's a few of them. But one is that believers do not, excuse me, unbelievers do not suffer eternally, but after a period of suffering they enter into oblivion. And they have no memory. They basically cease to exist. And again, people are coming up with these doctrines because they just are struggling to reconcile in their heart, a loving God.

There's also doctrine, the doctrines that is... Another one that's growing in popularity is and there are several, I can't get into them all tonight. But another one is the second chance doctrine. In fact, this one came up in a Q&A session that I was doing with a couple other pastors at a pastor's conference that I was speaking at. And one of the guys asked, what do you guys think about this second chance doctrine? Where basically after God pours out His wrath and judgment, people are given a second opportunity. And same, same. It's right up there with universalism and ultimate oblivion.

It's just trying to reconcile this whole idea of people being separated from God. And I don't like it any more than you do. But I can tell that people are really

distressed by the number of emails I get. And questions that I get from people. I think they're really distressed by the finality of it all.

But constantly, regularly get emails from people who want, who have all kinds of questions that relate to judgment. How does God judge the mentally ill? Does God judge children who die before they reach their adult years? How is taking one's life judged by God? Does God judge us for the sins of our parents? And on, and on, and on, and on it goes.

And here's the deal. Some of the questions have ready answers. And I can go to a chapter and verse and I can say, well, check this out. But there's a great many of those questions that don't. They don't have a proof text that you can turn to quickly and say, here's the answer to your question. What do you do? What do you do when you have questions and you're not coming up with any answers?

And that's frankly where people seem to struggle the most. Because you see silence from the Word of God just promotes fear. Because the unknown has always been a fearful thing for us. And even unknown things related to God are fearful. And when they're met with silence from the Word of God related to their questions, they immediately are met with a greater sense of fear.

But I've learned something. And that is that even when the Word of God is silent on a particular question related to judgment, that doesn't mean that we can't find answers. And that doesn't mean that those answers aren't satisfying. Because I have learned that there are answers even for the questions that don't have a proof text. It just means you have to look in a different place.

Because you're not going to find it as, again, you're not going to find it in chapter and verse. You have to look elsewhere. And you say, well, pastor Paul, where else can you look at... Good grief! Oh, do we have another book other than the Bible? You starting a new religion here? No, you have to look at the heart of God. You have to look to God Himself. When the text doesn't give you the answer. Remember that the Word of God is living and active.

In fact, the Word of God is a person. John reminds us of that. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* (John 1:1) We start looking at the Word, the Word, the Word we think it's... and we think it's this. We think it's limited to this. And Jesus would say to you and I, just like He would say to Martha, when He said to her, *"I am the resurrection,"* (John 11:25) He would say to you and I, I am the Word. Right.

And here's the thing. He can be known. His heart can be known. His heart is revealed to us, is revealed to us, both in the Word and through the Holy Spirit. And He can be known like any other person. God can be known. We can know His heart. And we can gain an understanding from knowing Him as a person, rather than just knowing the facts.

Because see that's what, when people ask me questions about judgment, they want to know the facts. Pastor Paul, give me the facts. And just the facts, please.

Right. I want to know about judgment as it relates to (Pastor Paul points to a specific direction) this right here. Give me the facts. And I say, well, I don't have a Bible verse for you. Well, okay. I guess there's no answer.

Well, now wait a minute, rather than knowing a fact, I believe there's an answer for your question in the knowing of a person. Oh, I don't know. I'm not really looking for that. I'm looking for facts.

It's truly... And somebody might not articulate that. They might not actually verbalize that. But it's what's going on. Give me a chapter and verse. No, no, no. How about if you get to know the person of Jesus Christ?

I want to show you what I mean. But in order to do that, I need you to follow me over to Genesis chapter 18. Grab your Bible again and open it up to Genesis chapter 18.

We're going to read a particular account here in the life of Abraham when the Lord met Him with some rather troubling news about judgment that was impending. And we're going to see how Abraham dealt with it because Abraham was troubled. Just like you and I are troubled by judgment, he was troubled. He was like, I don't really want to hear this. He started peppering God with questions. Here's how it goes.

Verse 1,

“And the LORD appeared to him (that's Abraham) by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth ³ and said, “O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, ⁵ while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may

refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.””

Man, I tell you, Middle Eastern hospitality, nothing like it. And he says a morsel of bread, and after this he tells his wife to go kill a goat, and he puts on a feast. But anyway, skip down to verse 16. There's a portion there that isn't really germane to what we're looking at. Verse 16 and following. It says,

“Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. ¹⁷ The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, ¹⁸ seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”

Notice what God says about Abraham. I've raised him up so that he might be a righteous and just man. That's very, very key. Because we're about to enter into a discussion about judgment, where God, where Abraham is going to bring it all back on God. He says, you want me to be a man of righteousness and justice? I need to ask you some questions now about Your own righteousness and justice. Okay. You with me? All right.

"Then the LORD said, (verse 20) "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, ²¹ I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know.

²² So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. ²³ Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death (and) with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be (it) that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do (right, or do) what is just?” (As it says in the ESV.) ²⁶ And the LORD said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

Verse 27,

"Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes." ²⁸ Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." ²⁹ Again he spoke to him and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." ³⁰ Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." (who are righteous and) He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." ³¹ He said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." (And) He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." ³² Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." (And) He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." ³³ And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

This is an incredible and very enlightening conversation going on between the Lord and Abraham. And I want to focus on it because I want you to really pay special attention to one of the verses here and that is verse 25. Look again with me in verse 25.

Notice what Abraham says, *"Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare (or end up, if you will,) as the wicked."* And then he says again, *"Far be (it) from you!"* And then this statement, if this isn't underlined in your Bible or highlighted, I would encourage you to do *"Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?"* which means what is correct, and fair, and right. *"Shall not the..."*

Now when Abraham asks that, that's rhetorical. You understand that? It's a rhetorical question. It's not meant to get an answer. It's simply making a statement in question form. *"Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?"* It's an obvious, it's a slam dunk answer. Of course! Of course He shall.

Abraham is saying in that verse, or I should say, perhaps he's expressing his belief in the fact that, God's character was such that He was incapable of acting in an improper manner. He was literally incapable of being unjust. Abraham was convinced of it. It can't happen. This, far be it from You, this can't happen for You to be unfair. He was totally convinced in God's character.

But can I tell you that most of the people who write me questions about judgment are not so convinced. And that's why they're writing questions, because it bothers us. We're bothered. I'm bothered by judgment. I'm bothered about wrath. I'm bothered about these very difficult topics and subjects because

I don't like it. But we struggle with judgments because we have not looked at the heart of the Judge. We have not spent time getting to know the heart of the Judge. And therefore, we struggle with judgment. The more we know Him, the more we know His heart, the more our struggle begins to fade away. Because we begin to learn who He is at the heart level.

He is good. He is merciful. His love endures forever. Yes, He is just, but He's also compassionate. He's also long suffering. And He is not willing that any should be lost but that all might come to repentance, Peter tells us. (2 Peter 3:9) It's understanding His heart.

When people don't understand His heart, they're going to come up with one of two conclusions concerning God. And they're going to act these out. They're either going to become very fearful, as I've already explained, about God's judgment. They're going to live in fear because they don't know His heart. And they're going to be constantly doubting whether they are going to be under God's judgment. Or, and this is an interesting thing about humanity, they're going to be angry people at other people.

I don't know how this happens in people's hearts. But I've seen it where, rather than knowing the heart of God, they become like a Pharisee. They think they're okay, but everybody else is condemned. And they literally go around telling people. And they wag their finger in people's faces because they have a picture of them self, which is like, I got God's stamp of approval, but man, you got a long way to go. And they start talking judgmentally about other people.

And every time you make a little mistake, they draw blood. Because, hey, God is the Judge. And they're, and they think that way. And they have an attitude where that's what they feel that they actually feel like that's what they're supposed to do. Lord help us from such people.

The struggle with judgments it's many times because we know the Judge so little. And we need to get to know Him. We need to grow in our relationship with Him. Can I end with one final passage from 1 John chapter 4? I love this passage.

1 John 4:16-18 (ESV)

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this Love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also we are in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected yet in love.

So (he writes) we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (And) By this Love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence (When?) for the day of judgment, because as he is so also we are in this world. (Here's what he says,) There is no fear in love, but perfect love (actually) casts out fear. (Because see) fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected yet in love.

Because they don't yet know the heart. And they don't yet know the depth of what has been accomplished for them on the cross. And then you do embrace the full message of the gospel so that they begin to just let out the breath that just says, it's done. It's finished. The price has been paid. I'm safe. I'm safe in His arms and I'm going to rest in His love. Right? No fear of judgment, no fear of condemnation.

We talk about fear, I'm not concerned from the standpoint that I'm going to be caught off guard and God's going to bring up some way wacky thing that is back in some closet somewhere that I forgot to confess. Pastor Paul, that's another one I get. What if I haven't confessed all my sins?

There's actually a belief that if I don't do that, if I don't recite them by name, that somehow God's going to withhold forgiveness. And He's going to bring it up at the judgment and say, well, you were doing good, but you forgot five of them. Happened back in the seventies. I know you were probably doing drugs back then and you forgot you even did it. But you know what? I remember they're in My book. You're dead. Sorry, would have been a good run but you messed up, Charlie.

People, that's not going to happen. You come to the Lord and you just simply confess, I have been a sinner from birth. Like David said, I was a sinner from the time I was conceived. And I've been in rebellion against You up until the point I met You and fell at your feet and crowned You to be Lord of my life. And I confess to You that I don't deserve Your love, Your goodness, Your mercy. But I accept it nonetheless. Not because I'm good, because You're good. And I know that judgment is past.