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Blinded by the Light (The Damnation of Love)

[John 12:31-50]

Peter Hiett @ The Sanctuary Downtown

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In 1960 – the year my wife was born... so, not long ago – a federal judge ordered one little black girl to attend the William Frank Elementary school in New Orleans, Louisiana. It caused such a stir that all the white parents in the school district pulled their children out of school.

So 6-year-old Ruby Bridges attended alone. And yet every day, an angry mob of white people greeted Ruby before and after school.

[photo: protesters in New Orleans, 1960]

Do you see the cross? A mob is comprised of people who thing they choose... but they don't choose, for they've abdicated their judgment to the crowd. And so each would see Ruby, but couldn't see Ruby.

Hundreds chanted and screamed at Ruby every morning and every afternoon:

"We'll kill you, nigger."

They threatened to poison her.

One woman held up a coffin with a black doll inside.

The police and local authorities refused to protect Ruby.

So the federal judge appointed federal marshals to walk Ruby to and from school every day.

[photo: Ruby being escorted by federal marshalls]

Imagine how Ruby felt. Imagine how it affected her. The federal judge was so concerned that he assigned the renowned Harvard Psychologist Dr. Robert Coles to meet with Ruby on a regular basis.

I got to hear Dr. Coles speak several years ago. He told of how Ruby mystified him, for she seemed genuinely happy, confident, well-adjusted, and undisturbed by that crowd.

Every morning and every afternoon, she'd walk right on by without saying a word, and yet Dr. Coles reasoned that she must be repressing deep bitterness, shame, and rage.

One day, after school, Ruby's teacher told Dr. Coles that she had observed something strange from her window that morning. As usual, the four federal marshals were walking Ruby through the crowd but this morning, Ruby stopped and began talking. The federal marshals, fearing the rage in that crowd, tried to get her to move, but she wouldn't move. She just looked at the crowd and kept talking. Then suddenly, she finished and walked on into the school.

Later, her teacher and Dr. Coles questioned her about the incident. Dr. Coles sat her down and asked, "Ruby, why were you talking to those people?"

She looked at him with surprise and said, "I wasn't." Dr. Coles said, "Well, Ruby, Ms. Henry told me that she saw you this morning from her window. You stopped and she saw you talking."

Ruby thought for a moment and said, "Oh, I wasn't talking to them... I was praying." She explained, "Every morning before I start my walk, I say a prayer, and every afternoon when I get home I say the same prayer. This morning, I forgot to say my prayer. But when I saw those people, I remembered. And so I stopped and said my prayer. I pray for those people..."

Dr. Coles looked at Ruby, thinking there must be a catch. He said, "Ruby, you pray for those people?" She said, "Well, yes." He said, "You pray for the people in that angry crowd, who say such mean things about you... you pray for them?" Ruby looked up at Dr. Coles with a confused look on her face and said, "Well... don't you think they need prayin' for?"

Need prayin' for?

How about, need Judgment Day?

I mean, the way I figure it, those folks

A. Made such bad choices, they need to be held accountable and locked away

OR

B. They didn't make the choice. They're just created that way.

In which case, they need to be annihilated.

I mean, how do you change someone like that?

Around the same time that little Ruby was going to school, a woman named Mary was recovering in a burn unit. She had 2nd- and 3rd-degree burns all over her arms and face. She had undergone a series of skin grafts that had kept her in her hospital bed, in bandages, for weeks.

But in the course of that time, she met another patient who simply introduced himself as "Sarge." He had skin grafts over most of his body. His burns had been even worse than hers, and yet this man was continually at her bedside, offering a cup of coffee or juice, asking if he could be of help.

She discovered that he did this for all the patients. His kindness was infectious. So, without seeing him (for her eyes were covered in wounds and bandages), she could see that He was a very good and gracious man.

One evening he came to her bedside and shared some great news:

“After a couple more operations, the doctor says I can go home.”

Excited, he described how wonderful his children were, and how proud he was of his wife, who had just graduated from college. Mary asked the name of the college.

When Sarge told her, she was stunned.

“Sarge, that’s a black college!” she exclaimed.

“Your wife isn’t black, is she?”

Sarge was quiet for a moment, and then said,

“Yes Ma’am... what color do you think I am?”

Wow. It must have felt like Judgment Day for Mary.

It must have felt like a bucket of hot coals dumped on her head... coals that burned even hotter because of Sarge’s kindness. It must have, like, annihilated Mary’s mental map. It must have burned her bad judgments with a new judgment, and so she would never be the same.

Think about it. The Fire literally blinded Mary to the color of Sarge’s skin.

And she had to go blind in order to see the light ... that good and gracious man.

In John 12:31-37, to the Palm Sunday mob ... the crowd that John refers to as “The Jews,” Jesus exclaims:

“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?”

So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him.

Imagine how John felt. It was the way Paul felt.

They both express this profound disappointment and shock over the fact that so many of the Jews (their kinsmen by race) had rejected the Messiah. Paul was repeatedly rejected by synagogues of the Jews; so in Ephesus, he taught in the Hall of Tyrannous for years.

Scholars think that John lived into old age in Ephesus, and there wrote this Gospel. But imagine how he felt ... for half a century, his kinsmen ("The Jews") had largely rejected him. Some believed, but most had cooperated with Romans in having Jesus, all the other disciples, and Paul tortured and executed, while John himself had been exiled to the island of Patmos.

Some argue that John was quite "anti-Semitic," because he refers to "The Jews" as rejecting Christ. Yet John was a Jew, the disciples were Jews, Paul was a Jew, and Jesus was a Jew. Like Paul, John has "unceasing anguish" for all his kinsman (by race), and yet John no longer believes in race as a defining category... for Christ broke down the dividing wall of hostility. It was the Jews who believed in "dividing walls," and so they rejected John and rejected their own Messiah... and John found it utterly shocking.

Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

"Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

The strong arm of the Lord is "Jesus Christ and Him crucified."
The Power of Love, the Judgment of Love, and the Glory of Love.

John is quoting Isaiah 53. It goes on...

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all ... ALL.

Isaiah 53 reads like a biography of Jesus, and yet it was written hundreds of years before Christ. We even have hard copies of it in the Dead Sea Scrolls. And the Jews, the Scribes, and the Pharisees knew it.

If anyone should have chosen to believe, it should've been them. And if anyone had the right to be a bitter and resentful old man, it was John, who as a young man was nicknamed "Son of Thunder," but now as an old man, he is known as the "Apostle of Love."

You know, if I think someone just came along and chose evil, I get angry, bitter, and resentful. And if I think they were created evil, like a monster, I just want them annihilated.

Why are people evil?
And does it make you angry?
Bitter?

Well, John wasn't bitter. He was the "Apostle of Love."
He quotes Isaiah 53, noting that their unbelief was foretold.
Then writes:

Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,

“He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.”

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

Boy, I'll testify to that reality.

A few years ago, I was kicked out of my synagogue.

All sorts of folks agreed with me in private... actually, I don't know of any who really even disagreed with my exceptions (to the Westminster Confession of Faith). And yet they remained silent as I was tried and kicked out of the synagogue. I felt so betrayed and denied.

The last three years, I've been tempted to shame, rage, and bitterness.

But John isn't bitter.

In fact, he writes like all that evil really wasn't their choice.

He writes (verse 39), “They could not believe.”

Then John quotes Isaiah 6, perhaps the most quoted Old Testament chapter in the New Testament. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah sees the Lord on His throne, and the whole earth is filled with his glory. The whole earth... which is shocking, for in the earth is Sheol... Hell.

Well, Isaiah freaks out at the sight of such glory, until a Seraphim takes a burning coal from the altar and touches Isaiah's lips, atoning for sin and taking his guilt away. Then the Lord tells him to preach, so that people won't understand.

Most preachers judge their success by how many hear and understand.

Isaiah is to preach people into blindness.

The Lord tells Isaiah to preach so that, “They will **not** turn to me and be healed. Preach a Word (like a sword) that keeps them from the tree of life.”

The Lord tells him.

Now, John tells us that Isaiah “saw Jesus' glory.” And he's already told us that “no man has seen God.” So, the Lord that Isaiah saw was – and is – Jesus. And so the Lord that tells Isaiah to preach blindness is Jesus, the Light.

Jesus commanded the blindness that led to his own crucifixion.

Jesus commanded the blindness that led to judgment on the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem. In other words, those people were pre-destined by God in Christ for condemnation and wrath.

The apostle Paul makes the same argument in Romans (9:15):

God says, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it does not depend on human will (that's choice) or exertion (that's works), but on God, who has mercy."

In Romans 3, he writes:

What shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? Mei Genaita! (Hell no! May it never be!)

It's like John and Paul and Jesus let those Jews off the hook, saying, "They couldn't help it... they knew not what they did."

Off the hook, and yet, like, damned to hell: burning, blindness, and cast into outer darkness.

We enlightened, modern, American Christians think that's totally absurd.

Jesus came to save His people.

Surely Jesus isn't about "casting sons of the kingdom into outer darkness where men weep and gnash their teeth?" Yet, that's Matthew 8:12.

Surely Jesus – the Light of the World – didn't manifest in this world in order to blind religious folks like the Pharisees? Read John 9:49, and Jesus says just that... and He calls it judgment.

Well, surely Jesus, who heals the blind, didn't actually blind anyone.

Did He?

Well, we do know that he actually blinded at least one Pharisee. (Acts 9)

He appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, and Saul went blind.

(singing)

"I saw the light, I saw the Light... now everything is darkness, and everything is night. Now I'm so confused, just nothing in sight... what the heck, I saw the light."

It was judgment. It would've been just like Sarge telling Mary, "Mary, I'm a negro."

It would've been just like those folks in New Orleans suddenly looking to the throne of Glory and seeing Ruby Bridges sitting on Jesus' lap as He says, "Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me."

See, the chosen profession of Saul the Pharisee was persecuting Christians, until He saw the Light and heard the Word: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? I am Jesus."

And he went blind.

Scripture says, "His eyes were opened, and he saw nothing."

All his old judgments, his mental map, his view of reality was destroyed, for he was blinded by the Light.

We now refer to Saul of Tarsus as Saint Paul.

All his life, he struggled with his eyesight, learning God's grace is sufficient.

Conversion takes a lifetime.

But you see, he did not remain in darkness. He became light.

[Next verse]

And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day."

John has taught us:

Jesus is the Judge who judges by not judging.
He doesn't judge, yet He is the Judgment.
The Light is the Judgment and Jesus is the Light.
The Word is the Judgment and Jesus is the Word.

Judgment is on the last day, and Jesus just said, "Now is the judgment, and when I be lifted up..." And if you reject my word now, it will judge you on the last day.
Now or later ... we each must face the judgment.

[Next verse]

For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment – what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.

Transliterated from the Greek, verse 50 reads like this:

"And I know that the commandment of Him is eternal life."

"Commandment" carries the definite article.

So it's not "a commandment," not "**one of** the commandments."

It's, "The commandment: eternal life."

So, just as we saw last time, the Judgment in verse 31 must include all God's judgments.

And now the commandment in verse 50 must include all God's commandments.

We saw the power of Love, the glory of Love, the judgment of Love, and this is the commandment of Love.

God's commandment is not eternal life and / or eternal death.

The commandment is eternal life.

And so all His commandments are this commandment:

"The commandment is eternal life."

So if you're one of those people (like all of us) who holds on to the unbiblical idea that you, on your own, can simply choose to obey God's commandments, this verse should forever destroy that notion.

You just try to give yourself eternal life.

You just try to break the reality of a world that's been God-damned to death.

The reality is that you cannot simply choose to live eternally, no matter what health plan you acquire.

The reality is that you have already chosen death, already chosen the lie that you are your own creator, judge, and savior.

Well, now you are in bondage to that illusion – enslaved to evil, utterly unable to choose the good, except by Grace.

The commandment is eternal life.

You can't fulfill it, but God does fulfill it.

His commandment is His Word, and His Word is Jesus.

And His Word does not return void, "For God accomplishes all things according to the council of His will."

The commandment is eternal life, the life is an eternal seed, and Jesus is that promised Seed.

"In Him was life and the life is the light of men."

Eternal life is Christ in you. It's faith implanted in you.

"We're saved by grace through faith, and this faith is not of ourselves, lest none should boast... it is the gift of God."

John 17:3 – Eternal life is knowing God through Jesus Christ.

Eternal life is seeing Jesus and believing Jesus.

Eternal life is seeing the Light and hearing the Word, who is Jesus.

So eternal life is receiving God's judgment and sacrificing your own.

Eternal life is living in the light and loving the light.

Eternal life is the commandment... **THE** commandment.

So if Jesus commands Pharisees to go blind, it must be so that they can see, so that they can ultimately see... Him.

Check out Isaiah 6. The Lord tells Isaiah:

"Go, and say to this people:

'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'

Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes;

Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears,

And understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

Then I said, "How long, O Lord?"

And He said:

"Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people,

And the land is a desolate waste,

*And the Lord removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.
And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again.*

See? All get burned.

*It will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak,
whose stump remains when it is felled."
The holy seed is its stump.*

"Isaiah, preach the Word until it burns 'em, and blinds 'em right down to the stump."
And what's the stump?
The Holy seed, eternal life... its Jesus.

And it happened: God burned Israel down to a remnant of One... One who was faithful for all to see, and His name is Jesus.

Karl Barth wrote, "God burns each of us right down to faith."
Faith is that seed in us.

With His judgment, God burns away all our judgments, until we can only see His judgment. He burns away all our judgments – our knowledge of good and evil – with which we create ourselves: our flesh, our own prisons ... with which we judge ourselves, judge others, and judge God.
He burns away our judgments until all we can see is His Judgment – Jesus... hanging on the ancient tree, in a garden, "Body broken and blood shed," fruit, seed, life, and light.

Maybe Jesus blinds Pharisees so they can see the Light.
And maybe we're all Pharisees, all born into the same lie.
Maybe God sets us up for unrighteousness, so that we can see His righteousness.

Let's read more of Romans 3:

*But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say?
That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? I speak in a human way. By no means!
For then how could God judge the world?*

Why all the sin, pain, and sorrow in this world?
So God can judge the world.

That's totally confusing to us, because Paul talks as if God's judgment is more important than all of space and time... as if God's judgment is before all space and time.
Paul talks as if God's judgment is not a response to our bad choices in this world, but as if our bad choices in this world are necessary to reveal God's Judgment.

Well, that's exactly what Paul says in Romans 11:32:

God consigned all to disobedience that He may have mercy on all.
He chose to have mercy on all.

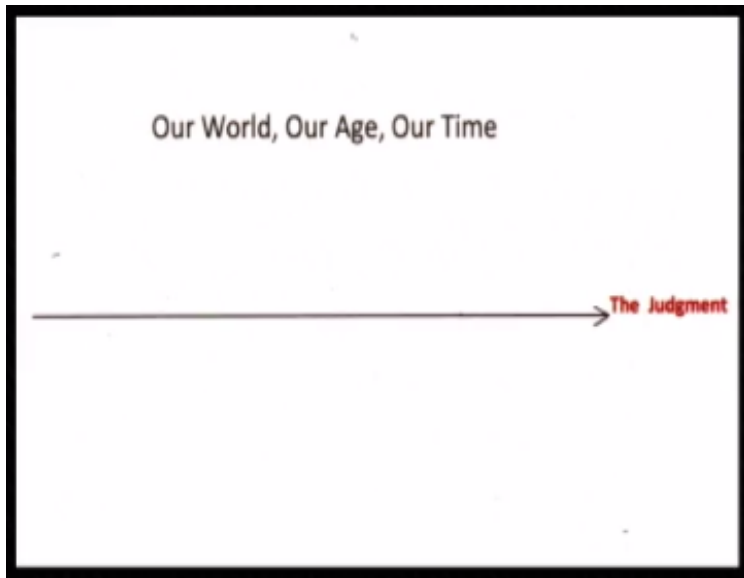
So God's judgment is Mercy, the judgment is Jesus.
God consigned all to bad choices that He might have Jesus on all... Mercy on all...
His Judgment on all... eternal life on all.

God consigned us to sin so we might know Grace... Himself.
God consigned us to darkness so we might see the Light and choose the Light... for the light
shines in the darkness.
The Messiah only gets crucified in a dark and fallen world.
It's where He shines and where He shines is where God creates His greatest miracle: Faith,
Hope, and Love... a good free choice – eternal life... eternal seed in us.
He creates us with His judgment.

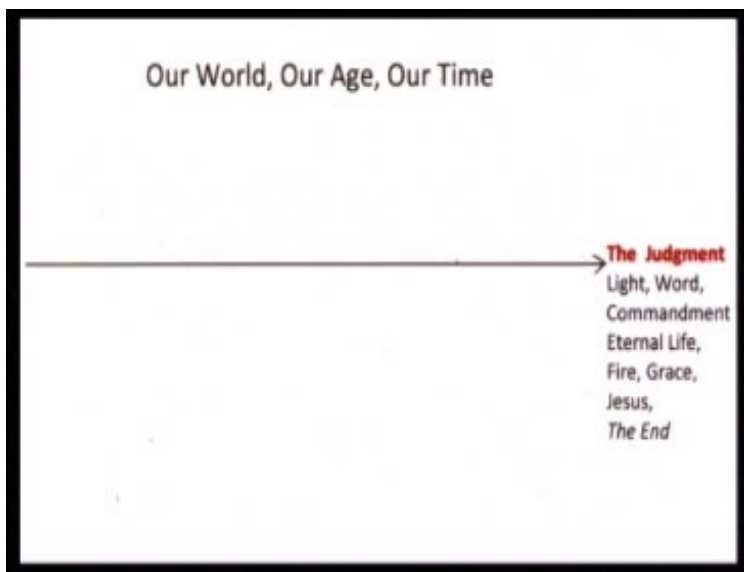
So when people walk in darkness, they are guilty.
But perhaps it's according to plan.
In fact, ever since the garden, they could not have faith.
And yes, they are monsters... about to be transformed into the image of God.
So don't be bitter; you are a witness to creation, and He creates with His Judgment.



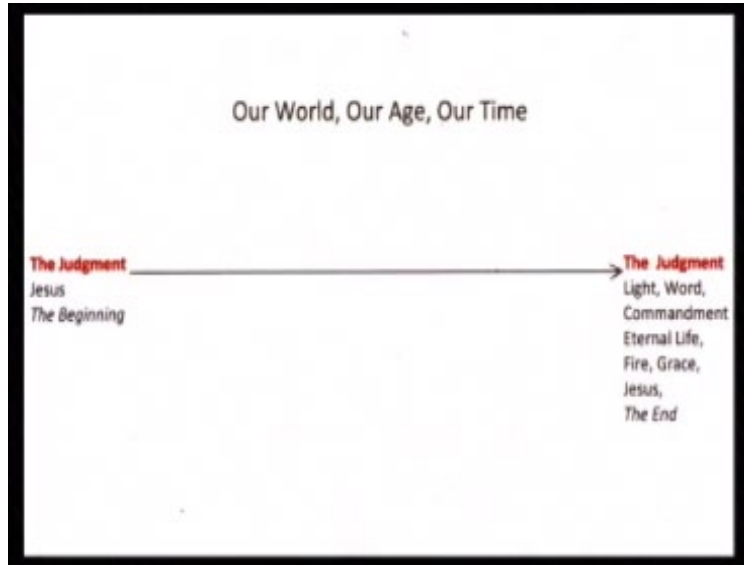
This is our world, our age, our time.



At the end of time is the judgment,

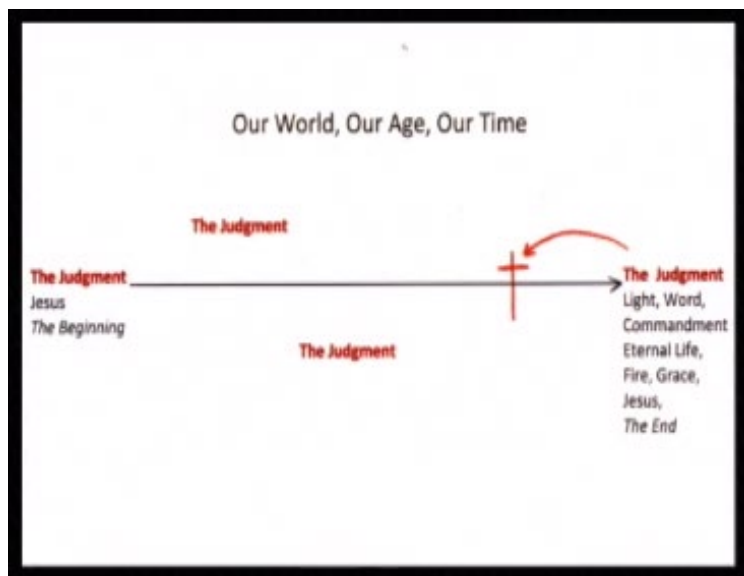


Which is the Light, which is the Word, which is God's commandment, which is Eternal life and eternal Fire, which is God's Grace, which is Jesus



And He is also the Beginning, and He is the Word that upholds all things

You see, the Judgment is God, who creates space and time, and yet



The Judgment happened in space and time at the Cross.

The judgment is now, whenever you surrender your judgment to God's judgment and receive eternal life.

God consigns us to disobedience so we may see His Mercy – His Judgment.

He consigns us to sin so we might see His Grace.

He consigns us to darkness so we can see the Light.

He blinded those Jews so they could see Christ and trust Christ.

And yet...

It appears that most of those Jews in John Chapter 12 never trusted Christ in this world of space and time... and so they will be judged by the Word on the last day. And yet, that Word is eternal life.

And maybe that's why Jesus said, "Many sons of the kingdom will be cast into outer darkness..." So that eventually they will see the Light. Perhaps many will descend into death and Hades and Sheol... the Pit... because Jesus descends into those places as well, and all those places come to an end in Jesus.

Maybe "Sons of the Kingdom" are cast into the outer darkness, for the Light still shines in the darkness, and "the darkness still cannot overcome it."

And so, just like me, and just like you, they were predestined to wrath and predestined to Mercy ... predestined to bondage and predestined to freedom ... predestined to judgment and predestined to eternal life.

And so at the appointed time, just like me and just like you, they are saved "By grace through faith." And if that bothers you or bothers me, perhaps we don't have much faith in Grace.

I mean, if I look down at the last and least the way that crowd looked down on Ruby Bridges... if I judge others as inferior the way Mary judged people like Sarge ... if I never pray for folks like Osama Bin Laden or the neighbor that hates me ... if I'm bitter, jealous, and resentful ... if I like to judge the unsaved ... maybe I'm not very saved.

Maybe I have very little faith in Grace.
Maybe I'm in darkness and I think my darkness is light.
That was the situation with those Jews.

Now, all kinds of religious folk say they're "saved by Grace."
And by that, they mean their choice... their judgment.
Or perhaps that God made them better than someone else.
If God healed us in that state... if He preserved us in that state... if He removed the sentence of death while our hearts were still in that state... we'd be forever stuck in our own private hell of bitterness and rage, incapable of love, hiding in the trees.

So, the Lord says to Isaiah,

"Preach to those religious folks... swing the flaming sword...
Preach my glory that will fill the whole earth.
Preach my grace 'till they're disillusioned with all their illusions.
Preach my judgment 'till their arrogance, pride, and flesh is burned away,
and their city lies in ruins.

Preach 'em into darkness."

Recently a friend wrote me:

"When we haven't hit the wall, we maintain a sense of religious righteousness, and protect our self-made identity. Thank God there's Hell. Without it, I would still be a drunk, wandering around thinking I'm somebody, but afraid they'll find me out.

Once you experience Hell, you have no choice but to face your emptiness and your sinful nature – you come face to face with all the things a self-made man gets: fear, anger, disappointment, confusion, and eventually self-hatred. This leads to alcohol and other ways of self-dealing.

I cursed God until I was worn out asking, then begging for my heart to stop beating ... in Hell He fixed the problem. I had to live there a while, or I would not know the real god and the meaning of His Love."

You see, even damnation is the "Damnation of Love," for God is Love, and His commandment is life.

So the Lord said to Isaiah, "Preach 'em into the darkness, until all they can see is my light." And that's exactly what Jesus did when He walked this earth: He demonstrated God's grace and He preached God's grace so thoroughly and completely that it infuriated the Jews, driving them into such darkness that they delivered their Messiah....

Actually, we all delivered our Messiah.

We are the mob.

We all delivered our Messiah to crucifixion on the ancient tree.

But there on that tree, as the sky grew dark and the earth shook, the Word of God issued the Judgment of God. He spoke it as a prayer, crying out:

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Then He cried, "It is finished," and gave up His Spirit.

Like a seed.

Within one generation, Jerusalem was burned to the ground, and yet the Holy Seed remains. The Light still shines in the darkness. It is the Glory of God, it's the power of God, it's the Judgment of God, and it's the commandment of God.

It's Love.

It destroys you and then sets you free.

Dr. Robert Coles said it set him free.

He said Ruby changed his life.

He looked down at 6-year-old Ruby and said, "You pray for them?"

And she said, "Well of course ... don't you think they need prayin' for?"

And Dr. Coles said, "What do you pray?"

And little Ruby answered:

"Every day I say the same prayer in the morning and at night.

'Please God, try to forgive those people,

'cause even if they say those bad things,

They don't know what they're doing.

So, could you forgive them, just like you forgave those folks

A long time ago when they said those bad things about you?" "

Imagine if you really believed that prayer and prayed that prayer.

You'd be free.

You wouldn't "enter into judgment, but would've passed from death into life... eternal life."

Well, it wasn't just Ruby that day in 1960 praying that prayer in front of the angry mob...

So if those folks didn't hear that prayer that day, they will hear it on the last day, from the Throne... the same Word, same Commandment, the same Judgment ... Jesus.

And if they haven't learned to trust Him by that day, I suspect the Judgment will burn like nothing else ever burns... it'll burn the hell out of 'em... burn 'em right down to the seed... eternal seed... Life.

And this is the good news – Gospel:

You don't have to go to hell to see the Judgment.

You can see the Judgment and trust the Judgment right here, right now.

When He says, "Take and Eat ... Take and Drink," it's a commandment.

And the commandment is eternal life.

Just say it with me right now, silently in your heart,

"Lord God, in Jesus' name... I surrender my judgments to Your judgment.

For I'm beginning to see it: You're good."

Benediction:

And so, you see... there is Someone far better, far more good, far more gracious, far more kind than Sarge... who serves you every day.

Every cup of coffee you drink that's good, He gives you.

Every cheeseburger you eat that's yummy, He gives you.

Every good thought that enters your brain, He gives you.

Every heartbeat in your chest is a gift from Him.

Every cell in your body is constantly upheld by Him, because He loves you.

And one day, you'll see Him.

And when You see Him... you see, it's so important that you have learned to trust His judgments, that you have learned to trust His commandment... so that when you see Him, when He manifests before you... you won't run in terror, longing to hide yourself in hell... under the rocks and the mountain and the cliffs of the earth.

But you'll surrender to Him.

You'll run into Him.

You see, not trusting His judgment is called sin.

We think God's big thing with sin is that He's up there, and He just gets so offended by what we do to Him.

But that's not it.

It's that He wants us to run to Him on that day, rather than run away from Him.

He wants us to surrender to ecstasy on that day, rather than to be filled with terror.

And so every time we sin, we teach our hearts not to trust His judgment... not to trust His commandment.

And so what do we do?

Every week we come here, and we seek to surrender to His judgment.

Remember what happened to Isaiah the moment he saw God in all of His glory ... Jesus in all His glory, sitting on the throne?

Do you remember what he did?

He cursed himself.

He cried, "Woe is me! For I am unclean!"

And he fell upon the ground.

It's the same thing that happened to the Apostle Paul when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus.

It's the same thing that happened to John when he saw Jesus in the Revelation.

He fell to the ground until Jesus walked up to him, picked him up, and said,

"John, John, John... it's me. Your friend. Jesus."

And so every weekend, we come to church, and we surrender to God's judgment.

And a Seraphim – a messenger – takes a coal from the altar... something far more holy, something far more powerful than just a chunk of earthly fire ... and he touches our lips.

And he says, "Your sins are atoned for. Your guilt is taken away."

Believe the Gospel.

Live the Gospel, in Jesus' name.

Trust the judgment of the Lord, the Word of the Lord, and live.