Affirming our Faith through the Apostles' Creed
The Judge of the Quick and the Dead

Text: 2 Peter 3:1-10 -- This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, 2 that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, 3 knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. 4 They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." 5 For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, 6 and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. 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 destruction of the ungodly. 8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Introduction: Last week Pastor Brian talked about the Lord's ascension to heaven and why it's important to our faith. Upon His return to the Father, Jesus was glorified. It's not that He was receiving insufficient glory before He came into our world, but greater glory when He left it. This was evidenced when the angels sang His praises for our Lord's willingness to die in our place. "**Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"** (**Revelation 5:12**)." We also made mention of the fact that Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father, His work as our Redeemer complete, His authority over all the universe indisputably established, and with the knowledge that we will reign with Him at His second coming (**Revelation 5:10**).

This morning, I want to spend some time with you looking at the next line of the Apostles' Creed: ***from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead***. Many Christians are disillusioned today because we live in a time in history when the lines between good and evil have been blurred until it's hard to tell them apart. Everything we've been taught about right and wrong from Scripture has been challenged and argued against to the point that those of us who still believe in absolute truth have been set aside as irrelevant and out of touch. **In many cases what was for centuries condemned in the Scriptures** (*things like sexual promiscuity, deceit, pornography, abortion, idolatry, the changing of one's God-given gender, stealing and even violent and murderous acts in some cases*) **has now become acceptable and even preferred**.

If you include yourself as someone who laments a loss of our nation's moral bearings, you're not alone. ***Eighty-One percent of Americans, according to a Gallup poll in 2023, believe there our country has lost its moral compass***. With many of our influencers and decision-makers out of touch with the teachings of Scripture, America has become a divided nation that, apart from revival and awakening, shares little hope of returning to our spiritual roots. This is likely the reason why so many believers have commented to me that they believe the end times are near. After all, Scripture tells us we can expect nations to rise against nations and kingdoms against kingdoms. There will be famines and earthquakes and Christians will suffer persecution. **Listen to this: In 2023, there were 436 hostile acts committed against churches here in America. Which represents an eight-fold increase in just the last five years**. It's clear that hatred toward those of us who follow Christ is intensifying.

Though we studied this a few months ago, let me remind you that the end times kick off with the rapture of the church followed by seven years of intensifying tribulation ***The Bible teaches that this event could happen at any moment***. The word used to describe this is "**imminent**". That's why we are to be vigilant and watchful knowing it is certain our Lord will come back for us so that believers (dead and alive) will be caught up with Him in the clouds (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**). And if it is taking longer than we hoped, it is only because Jesus is patient and continues to give people the opportunity to repent of their sins and put their faith and trust in Him (**2 Peter 3:9 – He is not willing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance**). At the end of the seven years of tribulation, Christ will come again and all those who oppose our Lord will be judged and condemned so that only believers will enter with Jesus into His thousand-year reign on earth. **This is the time when Jesus will judge the quick and the dead just as it says in the Apostle's Creed and Matthew 25:31-33 -- "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left**. As we consider this judgment, I want to remind you of three truths that we must keep in mind.

Jesus is Coming Again. Did you know that the Bible says more about Jesus' second coming than almost anything else regarding His life on earth? One scholar has shown that the Old Testament alone has **1,845** references to His return with **seventeen books** giving it prominence. The New Testament mentions it in **318** verses found in 23 of the 27 books. That's one in every twenty-five verses! This is why every branch of Christianity is united in the belief that Jesus will come again. The same actual, historical person who lived two millennia ago on the other side of the planet, who claimed to be the Son of God and proved it with power through His resurrection from the dead ***is coming back*** in the same way He left (**Acts 1:11 –** *(two men dressed in white robes appeared and said to the twelve aposltes)* **Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven.**

Here are a few thoughts regarding His 2nd coming: **First**, we know that when Jesus returns, He will come in person and in bodily form because that's how he left. **Second**, we also know that His return will be as astonishing as His departure. Jesus described it like this, "**In the future, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One, and coming on the clouds of heaven" – Matthew 26:64**. The Lord tells us we can expect to see Him descend from the heavens! What a sight that will be. **Third**, the Bible tells us that we should look forward to Jesus' return (**Revelation 22:20 – Amen. Come, Lord Jesus**!). And **last**, ***we know when it's going to happen***. No, we do not know the exact date, but we know that Jesus will come at the end of the tribulation period to usher in the millennial kingdom. Unfortunately, not everyone has understood this. After 14 years of studying the Bible, a man named **William Miller** became convinced that Christ would return in **1843**. When Miller announced **April 3** as the day, some of his disciples went to mountaintops, hoping for a head start to heaven. Others were in graveyards, planning to ascend in reunion with their departed loved ones. Philadelphia society ladies clustered together outside town to avoid entering God's kingdom amid the common herd. When **April 4th** dawned as usual the Millerites were disillusioned, but they took heart. Their leader had predicted a range of dates for Christ's return. They still had until **March 21, 1844**. The devout continued to make ready, but again they were disappointed. A third date--**October 22, 1844**--was set, but it also passed (*Today in the Word, December 20, 1991*). Listen … anyone who says he knows the exact date of our Lord's return is in error. **Better that we just acknowledge that He's coming following the great tribulation and leave it at that**.

Jesus is Coming to Judge. Many times, throughout the Bible, we're warned that there is nothing we have done or will do that will remain a secret to God. **Proverbs 15:3** says, "**The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good**." The writer of **Hebrews (4:13)** puts it even more succinctly, "…**no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account**." As the Supreme Judge, God knows everything about us … the good, the bad and the ugly! And through His Son, He ***WILL*** judge our secrets (**Romans 2:16**), so that every human being ***WILL*** be held accountable. This includes both the quick (those made alive in Christ – KJV -- **Colossians 2:13 -- And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses**) and the dead (those who are spiritually dead).

So, when the Lord comes again, there will be a ***judgment for UNBELIEVING gentiles*** (the goats of **Matthew 25:33**). There will also be a ***judgment for BELIEVING gentiles*** (the sheep of **Matthew 25:33**). The two will be distinguished by their love and affection for the Jews who will be terribly persecuted during the tribulation. For the goats, who did nothing to comfort the Jews thus revealing that their hearts were far from God, the prospect of facing the Lord's judgment may come as a surprise, but only to them. There will also be **a judgment of Jews** who are alive at the end of the tribulation. They will be gathered from all over the world to the

land of Israel and the Lord will determine which are saved (***the elect – Matthew 24:31***) and unsaved. The saved will enter into the millennial kingdom of Christ, the unsaved will face destruction. **Jew or Gentile**, we dare not forget that God knows everything we do and why we do it and that He will, through Christ, judge us. In an article entitled, ***The Whole World is Watching***, syndicated columnist for the New York Times, **Thomas Friedman**, devoted a recent column to the idea that ***technology has made everyone a potential* paparazzo**. Friedman explains that anyone we encounter could have a cell phone with a camera and record our actions. If we're rude or misbehave, we could end up on the offended party's blog or MySpace website for the whole world to see. (*The Police must bear this in mind every time they make a traffic stop or attempt to apprehend a suspect*!) "***We're all public figures now***," he concludes. For support, Friedman cites the new book ***How*** by **Dov Seidman**. Its thesis: in this world of new and potentially revealing technology, ***how*** we live our lives and conduct our businesses has become far more significant than ***what*** we do. "***We do not live in glass houses; we live on glass microscope slides…visible and exposed to all***," writes **Seidman**. Huh! Go figure … what a concept! ***Someone might be watching***. What has only recently, occurred to columnists and authors is hardly a revelation to those who believe in a sovereign, all-seeing God who, according to the Apostles' Creed, "**will come again to judge the quick and the dead**."

What should we be doing to ready ourselves for Christ's return to judge the quick and the dead?

- **Prepare yourself by confessing and repenting of your sin**. The last thing any true believer wants is to be found living in rebellion to Jesus when He returns. Paul says as much to Titus, his true child in the faith: "…**live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**" – **Titus 2:12-13**). The more Christians are caught up in the things of the world and focusing on them rather than the Lord, the less we look forward to His return. The closer our walk with Christ the more excited we are to see Him coming in the clouds. To remain faithful, we must keep short accounts with God when it comes to acts of sin. ***Our goal should always be to minimize the time we walk in the flesh and maximize the time we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit***. The key, of course, is confession (and repentance). **When a believer makes it his habit to admit his sin to God as soon as the Holy Spirit brings it to mind and turn from it, he will always be prepared for Jesus' return**. This of course brings us to the question: IS THERE ANY PARTICULAR SIN THAT YOU NEED TO CONFESS AND REPENT OF TODAY? All those who want to ready themselves for His 2nd coming should make this their regular practice.
- **Prepare yourself by reconciling with others**. In **1 Thessalonians 3:12-13** Paul spoke these words of blessing to the believers in Thessalonica, "**May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, … so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all the Holy ones**." The apostle knew that our love for others both in the body and outside it, is what sets us apart and removes any fear we might have when Jesus comes again. This

demands that we reconcile with anyone with whom we are in conflict. It is after all the loving thing to do. IS THERE ANYONE YOU'RE NOT RECONCILED WITH?

- **Prepare yourself by making the most of each day**. The great missionary and evangelist, **C. T. Studd** wrote a poem, the last stanza of which says, "**Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last. And when I am dying, how happy I'll be, If the lamp of my life has been burned out for Thee**". The story is told of a man named **Colonel Davenport**, the Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives who on May 19th, 1780 watched as the sky above Hartford darkened ominously. Some of the representatives, glancing out the windows, feared the end was at hand. They began to clamor for immediate adjournment until Davenport rose and said, "***The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought***." Rather than fearing what is to come, we are to be faithful until Christ comes. Instead of fearing the dark, we're to be lights as we watch and wait. ARE YOU MAKING THE MOST OF EACH DAY KNOWING THAT THIS TIME AS WE KNOW IT WILL COME TO AN END?

Conclusion: Jesus is coming again to judge the quick and the dead. We would be wise to live each day knowing that it could happen at any moment. I think of **the wife of Craig Brian Larson**, editor of **Preachingtoday.com**, who shared an experience that serves as a good summary for this message on Jesus' role as Judge of the quick and the dead. Some time ago she took a job as a temp at a bank. In the first two weeks on the job, she quickly noticed some extremely unprofessional behavior by four people that she worked with and as well as their supervisor. Somewhat older than those under her charge, the supervisor was nonetheless very chummy with the younger staff, taking long coffee breaks with them. They would often sit together at her desk to chat and gossip. Unfortunately, the same group was not very friendly with a new member of the team. This person, a woman in her thirties, was shunned. If she walked up and tried to join the conversation, it ended abruptly. The others made jokes about her behind her back and laughed at the way she dressed. It was obvious that this middle management worker was an unnecessary intrusion to the others. Two weeks into the job, Larson's wife walked into the office on a Monday morning and was shocked to find a much different scenario. No gossiping, no kidding around, no long coffee breaks. All the workers had their eyes riveted on their work. The previous supervisor was not at her desk. It turned out she'd been replaced. The cliquish team addressed the new supervisor with formal, professional respect. She was not a stranger either. It was the thirty-something woman who had been shunned and mocked. The bank had hired her to be the new supervisor from the first day she showed up on the job, but they agreed to conceal her identity so she could observe how things were going around the office. Evidently, she wasn't all that happy! In some ways, this situation resembles the coming of Christ to earth. In His first coming, Jesus revealed His true identity and glory to a relatively small group of followers, but for those who did not believe in Him, His glory was largely hidden. Following the resurrection, the Lord ascended to the right hand of God, where He rules all things. But remember: One day He is coming again to

the earth to establish His glorious kingdom over everything. At that time, neither the living nor the dead will mistake who is in charge.

NOW JOIN ME AND LET'S DECLARE WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT CHRIST'S RETURN BY RECITING TOGETHER THE APOSTLES' CREED.

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I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ His only Son, Our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into Hades; The third day He rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.