

## Ready for Witness

### *Listos! Are You Ready? Pt. 2*

In addition to being the rallying cry of the Austin Football Club – or “soccer” for us Texans – *Listos* is the Spanish word for “ready. As in, “Are you ready? *Listos!*” And we are using that as the title of our series this fall where we look at Jesus’ intensive course of instruction to his disciples, to get them ready for life in the world without him. On the night before his death, the Gospel of John records the longest body of Jesus’ teaching anywhere in the Bible. And his goal is to get the disciples *listos* – ready to continue on the ministry of God’s Kingdom in his physical absence.

And of course, we are the continuation of that apostolic Christian ministry, handed down through the centuries from generation to generation. And so we are spending some time looking at what Jesus’ teaching can get *us* ready for. Now what I am about to read to you is actually the last sermon that Jesus Christ preached on Earth, the *last* time He speaks to the world at large.

Right after this, he goes up into the upper room and he spends time training his disciples, in John 13; 14; 15; 16; 17, getting ready to be sent out. We will join them at the Last Supper next week. But this is the last time Jesus speaks *publicly*, and so when you know this is the end, you’re never going to speak to the crowds again, this is the capstone of all that you’re going to say before you die, usually you say the things that are most important to you.

So these are important, carefully chosen, well thought out words. Let read them in **John 12:37–50**, “*Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in Him. 38 This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: “Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” 39 For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: 40 “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them”.*

*41 Isaiah said this because He saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about Him. 42 Yet at the same time, many even among the leaders believed in Him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue, 43 for they loved human praise more than praise from God.”*

*44 “Then Jesus cried out, “Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. 45 The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. 46 I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. 47 If anyone hears my words, but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.”*

*48 “There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words, the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. 49 For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. 50 I know that His command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”*

There are three things - three ideas - that Jesus gets across in this passage, and they are not at all easy messages for the world to hear, but they're *brilliant*. And it's a great example of *witness*. In Christian nomenclature, our witness is our ability to effectively communicate the good news of Jesus – in all of it's offensive glory. Because the gospel is and has been a stumbling block to every generation and every culture on earth. But it's brilliant and it's true.

And we need to be thinking about this not only because these are the messages that *we* have to take to the world, and we can't look for an easier version, we can't water down what Jesus says, and we have to find ways of being brave at the same time being careful and wise in how we communicate them. So this morning we are asking, are we ready – *estamos listos?* - for witness?

And we have to look at three things in particular. In the first few verses he is saying, “you need my power even to believe”. In the middle verses he's saying “you need my light or you are plunged into darkness forever”, and the very end he actually says, “you need a judgment of God, it's your only hope.” So the three things Jesus says is ‘you need my **power** to believe’, ‘you need my **light** for your darkness’, and ‘the only hope you have is the **judgment** of God.’ So let's take a look at what Jesus is saying – again, they are not easy truths, but they're brilliant.

First of all, You Need **Power** to Believe. From verses 37 down to 43, the message here is we need Jesus' help even to believe. **V. 37** says, “*Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.*” So here's the pressing issue. There are many people who heard Jesus' unparalleled words, they saw Jesus' beautiful life, they witnessed Jesus' astonishing miracles...and they still didn't believe. *Why?* And the text tells us there's two reasons why they didn't believe in Jesus.

Look at the first one, ‘God hardened their hearts.’ Do you see that? In **v. 40**, it says, ‘*He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts...*’ But then down in **v. 43**, it says, ‘*For they loved human praise more than praise from God.*’ They didn't believe because they were afraid of losing their status, losing their reputation. Ok, so which is it? Verse 40, says *God* hardened their hearts, verse 43 says *they* hardened their hearts...which is it?

And what we have here is actually a New Testament version of something you see in several places in the Old Testament. And just a quick aside but this is a good reminder for us of how we are to always read the Old Testament.

We did a series on this a few years ago called “*A Tale of Two Testaments*” and the thesis was that you always have to read the Hebrew Scriptures in a “Christocentric” way - through the lens of Jesus Christ. And this passage contains a reminder of why; v. 41, “*Isaiah said this because He saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about Him.*” The Bible says all the former writers of scripture were looking ahead to the gospel, whether they consciously realized it or not.

And so we can look, for example, at the Book of Exodus which is about how God sends Moses with a message to King Pharaoh of Egypt and the message is “let My people go.” Right? And when Moses would come and give Pharaoh the message, sometimes, the text - you can read this in Exodus 7; 8; 9; 10 - sometimes the text says, “*Pharaoh hardened his heart and wouldn’t listen.*” But sometimes it says, “*God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he wouldn’t listen.*” And very often they are just a few verses apart. And so again...Which is it? *Why* did Pharaoh not listen? Was it *God* who hardened his heart? Or did *he* harden his heart?

And the answer is...*totally*. And I’ve used that word carefully because we are now standing before one of the more important teachings of the Bible without which you’re not going understand big parts of the Bible. There is for example, in the Old Testament, a number of places where God says to Israel, He says, “I’m going to

bring in Assyria, and they’re going to attack you, and I will punish you for your sins through Assyria; Assyria will be the rod of my anger.”

And then *one* chapter later, God says, “Surely I will severely punish Assyria for attacking you.” And you say, “Okay, now, wait a minute...did *God* attack the Israelites or did the *Assyrians* attack the Israelites? Did God make them do it or did they do it freely?” That’s the question, right? And the correct theological answer, the answer of the Bible, is “*totally!*”

In **Acts 2:23**, the very first sermon of the church, Peter says that – talking about Jesus - “*This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge...*” God *destined* Jesus Christ to die on that cross. He ordained that Jesus Christ would die on that cross. It was absolutely planned. He *had* to die on that cross or we wouldn’t be saved. And yet he continues and says, “...and **you**, with the help of wicked men, **put him to death** by nailing him to the cross.”

Okay, did God do it, or did they do it? And the answer is “yes.” And the reason why we’re struggling here -aren’t we struggling? - is because when you and I think of the relationship between God’s control and our freewill, we think of it as a zero-sum game. Right? So we think of it either as “if God is in control, then we’re not free”. Or “if we’re free and responsible, then God’s not in control.”

Or *maybe* it's 80/20. Right? Maybe mainly God has control, but we have a little bit of wiggle room. You know, God only gives us two options, we can choose a or b, but not c and d because He's in control. Or maybe it's the other way around. Maybe it's 80/20 *us*. Maybe *we* have 80 percent control and God just reserves enough room to take evasive action now and then. You know, sometimes it's so atrocious God says, 'Oh my goodness, I can't believe they did *that*, now what am I going to do?'

So we think it's 80/20 or 20/80, or 50/50, or 100/0 or a 0/100. But the math of the Kingdom of God is 100 *and* 100. It's 100 percent. The Bible says God is *absolutely* in control of everything that happens. That every one of your choices is part of His plan. That *everything* you and I do is something that He's decreed will happen, and there is *no* deviation from the plan.

And yet at the same time, *when* you make that choice, none of us are ever coerced by God. We're morally free agents – because God *willed* for us to be. And so our action is something that we have freely chosen, therefore, we are absolutely *responsible* for what we've done. Now look, I know that you're saying, "I don't see how that could be." And guess what, after over two decades of preaching and teaching...after two post-graduate degrees in theology - true confessions - I don't know how that works either. But I can tell you this, if you're willing to embrace it if you are willing to live in the tension - it's one of the most practical doctrines in the Bible.

If you're willing to embrace it, let me tell you what happens. If you really believe this...First of all, it gives you a life of – let's call it - *Peaceful initiative*. See if you really thought that everything depended on you, that your whole life was determined by the wisdom of your choices...if you were smart, you wouldn't get out of bed in the morning. If you understood what that meant you'd be filled with anxiety all the time. Because you might get it wrong, and one slip, and your whole life collapses.

On the other hand, if you thought everything you did was fated, and *destined*, you'd be passive, you'd be cynical. You'd be the Borg – "Resistance is futile." If you thought nothing was in your control you'd be *shallow*, if you thought everything was up to you, you'd be *scared*.

But again, let's look at some of the Old Testament stories. We wrapped up our series on the life of Abraham a couple of weeks ago. But if you continued on to the life of his grandson, Jacob, or his great-grandson, Joseph – their stories are in Genesis chapters 28 to the end, chapter 50. Read their stories. Joseph and Jacob both did stupid things, constantly did stupid things. And they *suffered* because of the stupid and their foolish - sometimes evil – choices. And they not only hurt themselves, but they hurt people all around them. And they shouldn't have done it. And they were responsible for what they'd done, and if they hadn't done it, they wouldn't have suffered so much.

*But*, when you look back from the advantage of history, when you see how God used every single one of their stupid, evil choices, to accomplish His ultimate plan of blessing for His people...well...may I ask you a question? If you believe this doctrine, can you really mess up your life? You know what the answer is? **Yes, but ultimately No.** Not Yes. And not *just* no. Yes, but ultimately, no. And that means you have *all* the initiative - you work harder to become as wise as you possibly can be - and yet in the end, there's a deeper peacefulness that says, "Well in the end, though, my Father is in charge, and I trust my Father." So you get peaceful initiative.

Not only that, but you also get Security. People say, "Pastor, do you believe in eternal security?" Well, that's a very nuanced question, but I sure don't believe in eternal *insecurity*! Which I have seen do a lot of damage to a lot of Christians. See let's talk for a minute about why - not just *how* you choose - but *why* you chose to believe in Jesus?

Are you a Christian? Well, in **John 6:44**, Jesus says, "*You did not choose me, I chose you*". Now Jesus doesn't mean, by the way, that we don't choose him. But what he's saying is, 'I don't choose you *because* you've chosen Me. You chose Me because I've chosen you'.

"Tis not that I did choose Thee,  
For, Lord, that could not be;  
This heart would still refuse Thee,  
But Thou hast chosen me."

Jesus says, "I don't love you because you loved me. I don't love you because you surrendered to me, because you gave yourself to me. See, then you'd be a little smarter, a little humbler, a little more moral, a little *better* than another people around you. No, no, no. I first loved you. I sent my love on you. And *that's* the reason why you love me."

Now, do you know what kind of security that is? First of all, it humbles you, doesn't it? Over and over the Bible says that God hates pride, detests a haughty spirit. It's very hard not to feel superior to people who are different than we are. People on the other side, the rival tribe, the opposing party. We think by default that we're one of the good guys. And we bolster our sense of being one of the good guys by saying, "I'm not one of *those* awful people over there...in Oklahoma."

There is a disease of pride in the heart of every human being. But *this* is the medicine. Because this is saying, "If you love Jesus Christ, it's not because you were any smarter or better. It's just because Jesus opened your heart. He opened your blind eyes. 'You chose me only because I chose you.'" And that is a source of great security.

Let me illustrate this. And I'm going to speak to the husbands, just because I am one. But fella's, at some point your wife is going to say, "Do you love me?" Now, I would advise you to say "yes" and to say it very quickly. Especially you engineers and accountants, this is the time for poetry, not cost-benefit analysis. Ok, good news is, a robot can learn to do that. "Do you love me?" "Yes I do." But the *real* test is going to be when she comes back and she says, 'Why? Why do you love me?'

And now we are in the deep waters where all the AI in the world can't save you. Because if you say, "Oh, honey, you are about the prettiest girl I've ever seen." Or, "I love you because of your mind, you're so well read and just a great intellectual conversation partner." Or, "You're such a great mother to our kids." "There are just all of these reasons why I love you." There should be warning lights flashing. Because do you know what you're saying?

In essence what you're saying is, 'I love you because you're *useful* to me. I love you because you have certain attributes...and you better *keep* those attributes. Better not lose those looks, get behind on that reading or – God-forbid - let those kids express their free-will and screw up our lives. Because it's good for my self-esteem to have this kind of woman at my side. I love you because those attributes make you useful to me.' Now, you didn't come out and *say* that...but you said that. And you've sewn seeds of insecurity in your marriage.

Now, by the way, it's perfectly fine to *compliment* your spouse – and you better. It's fine to say, "I really appreciate how good you are at this. I'm really grateful for how hard you work at that. Your beauty really does take my breath away." But listen, the only answer to the question, "why do you love" me that she wants, that you want, and the only answer that God gives us, is this... "I love you just because I love you."

See, God is saying "I don't love you because you humbled yourself. I don't love you because you chose Me. I don't love you because you somehow got yourself moral enough to come follow Me. I love you just because I love you." And the Bible says in **Ephesians 1:4 NLT**, "*Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.*"

And that means a Christian can say, "I'm going to screw up, of course I'm going to screw up. But the stars may fall from the heavens, and yet God's love for me will stand." Why? Because God's love is *older* than the stars and it will *outlive* the stars. And therefore, I'm *safe* in His love! How powerful! And that's the power that we need to even believe. And that power gives us peaceful initiative and security - it frees you from from the ups and downs of a self-image based on your performance, what people say about you, etc. So Jesus Christ says, the text says, ultimately, you can't even believe in him without his help, and that's good news.

Now, the second thing Jesus says here is, **You Need Light for your Darkness**. It's right here in v. 46, "*I have come into the world as a light so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.*" Okay, so if the first part of this text is telling us that we're so weak that we can't believe unless God helps us to believe, but that's good news. Well, this doctrine is just as insulting. And that is Jesus says, "unless you have me, you're in darkness." It doesn't say that you might *fall into* darkness if you don't have me – you'll *stay* in darkness. It's *assuming* that everybody in this world is in darkness, and Jesus is the only light! Now how could that be true?

Well, what Jesus is saying here is the world is a dark place, and it cannot ignite its own light. See, darkness is a metaphor, we use it the same way that the Bible does. If you don't know what's going on at work you might say, "I'm in the dark here." The metaphor can mean a number of things, but one of the things that it means is hopelessness. If you ask somebody who's going through a hard time, "How are you doing?" They may say, "I see light at the end of the tunnel" what does that mean? It means things may still be bad, but I've got hope. But no light, no hope.

Darkness, of course, can also be a metaphor for evil. One of my favorite movies as a youngster was 1992's Sam Raimi demon-zombie thriller, *Army of Darkness*. And so when Jesus says, "without me, this world is a

dark place", he's saying that the world does not have the resources for either hope or a solution for evil. The world cannot *generate* its own resources, cannot *possibly* give hope, or deal with the problem of evil; that has to come from outside.

Let me give you two famous quotes that explain that; the first one has to do with hope. Bertrand Russell - twentieth century philosopher – is one of my favorite atheists. He believed in science – which I do too. But he was a materialist - meaning he *only* believed in a material world that could be weighed and measured. See, you can't weight a soul, therefore it must not exist. But what I appreciate about Russell was he was honest about his conclusions. He didn't sugar-coat what it really means if *all* there was was scientific method.

Here's a quote from his famous essay, *A Free Man's Worship*: "Even more purposeless, more void of meaning, is **the world which Science presents for our belief**... That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins."

Now, what is Bertrand Russell saying? Believe it or not, he's saying exactly what Jesus is saying. If this life is all there is, there's no God, there's no afterlife. We were *not* put here for any purpose. And while we're here, we can do what we want to do, but when we die, we rot. And after a little while, nobody will remember anything you've done. And after a little *longer* while, the sun will burn up, and nobody will be even around to remember anything that ever happened. And if that's all there is to life, your prospects are dark. Right?

Bertrand Russell's saying if you have science *only* and you don't have anything outside of the material world, *that's* your prospect. In fact, he goes so far as to say that if you don't believe there's anything outside of this world: "Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built." He says, "Don't get your hopes up. There is no hope. Build your life on unyielding despair." And that's exactly what Jesus was saying. "You got nothing but darkness unless you look to me."

So, we've said darkness is a metaphor for hopelessness, but darkness also symbolizes evil, right? And therefore, what Jesus is saying when he says, 'I am the light, and you are in the darkness', He's saying, without me, you also have no solution

for the problem of evil. Now the person who I think most helps us here is certainly no atheist. He is probably the greatest theologian America has ever produced – he's definitely in the top two.

In 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. was put in jail in Birmingham, Alabama for civil disobedience. He had been actively breaking some unjust segregation laws and the racist local law-enforcement arrested him. And a number of white ministers wrote him a letter, and they said, "How can you, as a Christian minister, encourage people to break the law? God says we have to obey the government. So how can you tell people disobey the law?"

And this is what Martin Luther King said in his, very famous, letter from Birmingham Jail – you probably read it in school, I *hope* you did. He says "How does one determine when a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law, or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is **out of harmony with the moral law.** To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law." So MLK says, "Look, because there's an eternal law, because there's *God's* law, human laws might be just or unjust; we have to decide. And if they are unjust - because they're not in line with God's law - then we can disobey them."



Now here's something fascinating about what he's saying. If this world is all there is – if Bertrand Russel is right - and there is no eternal law, there *is no* divine law, right? If this world is all we have - there's no God, there's no afterlife, there's no eternal law - then actually, what have we got when you look at the laws? We've just got another power struggle. *You* may think the law is right, *they* may think the law is wrong, whoever gets the most votes, whoever has the most money, whoever uses the most violence, that's the way it is.

But Martin Luther King said, “No. If you know that there's a divine law, there's something *outside* of this world that sheds *light* on what's going on here and we can tell what is right and what is wrong, we can work for justice.” Of course, one of the ironies of our modern age is that our cultural elites, all revere the Rev. Dr. King – as well they should! - for what he did, and yet they *reject* this very idea which was his stated basis and motivation for his action.

They say, “Oh no, we don't *believe* in God's law. We don't believe there's a moral law out there. We believe in moral *relativism*; we believe that all moral values are culturally constructed.” So they deny the very basis for what he did. And you know what happens when you spend 50 years in all of our universities telling young people that morality is

relative, there is no eternal law by which we can judge who's right and wrong and basically you can do whatever you can get away with? You know what happens?

Wells Fargo – our bank here at the church - thousands of employees for years opened 2 million checking, savings and credit card accounts without the permission of the clients in order to charge them fees. That's systemic evil on an incredible scale. You get Purdue Pharma knowingly pushing OxyContin – in spite of internal studies that knew how deadly it was. And doctors who prescribed it because they were getting corporate kickbacks to do so. You get politicians admittedly cheating on their taxes and bragging that they're smart to do it. Because only suckers pay their fair share.

Paul Krugman of all people, he writes an economics solemn in the *New York Times*. I couldn't find the article, but after the Great Recession, I remember he wrote about the moral implications of the crisis. It made an impact on me, because it was such a surprising source. But he said he realized in the 60's and 70s, for the first time we were told anything goes with regard to sex. And sexual disease skyrocketed.

He says he came to realize that in the 80's and 90's the same thing was happening with money and finance – remember “Greed is good”? When it comes to making money, anything goes. And he says the chickens have simply come home to roost. There is financial disease. He says, you can't be relativistic in one area of life, like sex, and not be relativistic in the area of law and money and business. I think that is spot on.

So you tell everybody morality is relative and then you expect them to be honest. Or as CS Lewis put it “We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.” (*Abolition of Man*, 26) MLK said, “there's a light up there that sheds light down here, there's an eternal law. Otherwise, there is no way to tell what is right and what is wrong, what is just and what is unjust.” And that's *exactly* what Jesus is saying. He says, “If this world is all you got, if human resources are all you have, you will stay in darkness, but I am the Light of the world.”

Now here's the last thing he says. And this may be the most offensive thing of all. But his third point is **The Only Hope You Have is the Judgment of God.** The very end of the chapter - verses 47–50 - is about judgment, and Jesus tells us two things about judgment. And they are both in v. 48, “*There is a*

*judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words, the very words I have spoken will condemn them **at the last day.***” There *will be* a judge and he will judge on the last day - there'll be a Judgement Day. And that's actually good news.

Miroslav Volf is a theologian at Yale - and one of my favorites – who experienced first-hand the atrocities of the Serbian-Croatian war in the 90's – his father was an Assemblies of God Croatian pastor who had faced persecution under the Soviet Union. But Miroslav was drafted into the Balkan conflict and saw terrible things up close. And out of that experience he wrote a very important book about forgiveness called *Exclusion and Embrace*.

And he says that “it takes the quiet of a suburban home” to give birth to the thesis that God doesn't judge, but only loves. He says it's hard for Western people to understand the importance of the doctrine of Judgment Day – but that's only because we are so sheltered. He says, try preaching that sermon – that God doesn't judge – to people “whose cities and villages have been plundered, then burned and leveled to the ground, whose daughters and sisters have been raped, whose fathers and brothers have had their throats slit.”

Tell *them* there's not Judgment Day and they just need to learn to get along with their abusers. They're going to push you aside and they're going to pick up whatever weapon is available and they're going to go out and have their *own* judgement day. And he says anybody who's been wronged like that will know that. But Volf said, however, if you believe there *is* a Judgement Day coming, if you believe that someday God will stand on the earth and He will right *every* wrong, and *every* evil will be redressed, and *every* sin will be paid for, and He will do it perfectly, and He will do it proportionately, and everything will be set straight...If you believe *that*, then and only then have you got something powerful enough perhaps to get you to put your weapon down and to start living at peace'. Hmm.

So if you care about justice, the doctrine of Judgment Day is good news. There's no hope for the world if there's no Judgment Day, *but* there's another problem. Yeah, if there's no Judgment Day, there's no hope for the world. But if there *is* a Judgement Day, what hope is there for *you and me*? Because we're far from perfect. I don't remember who came up with it, but there's sort of a perfect illustration that gets to this. Imagine that, at birth, God puts a little invisible recorder around your neck, and all during your life all it records is whenever you tell somebody else how they ought to be living. So every time you say "you ought to" or "you should", it's recording.

Well imagine that on Judgment Day, God produces a transcript of all those recordings, and He says, "I'm the Judge of all the earth, this is Judgment Day, but I'm going to show you how fair-minded I am. During your time on earth, you said you didn't believe there was an eternal law. Fair enough, let's leave that aside, (this is just an illustration, ok?) I'm just going to judge you according to your *own standards*. I'm only going to judge you based on the standards you have laid on other people."

How much fairer could that be? And then He's going to start reading and there's not a person on the face of the earth who could even live up to *that* low bar of Judgment Day. And that's just you, imagine how screwed I am! There actually *are* 20-years of transcripts of how I've been telling *you* to live! Look, if there's no Judgment Day there's no hope for the world, if there *is* a Judgment Day there's no hope for us...unless you believe.

**Verse 47**, "*If anyone hears my word, but does not keep them, I do not judge that person...*" - Why? - "*For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.*" Here's your hope. Why is Jesus saying this? Because When Jesus came into the world he didn't come to *bring* judgment, he came to *bear* judgment. He didn't come with a spear in his hand, he came with a spear in his side. With nails in his hands, with thorns in his skull. On the cross the light of the world was plunged into darkness. It literally says it was the middle of the day, but when Jesus Christ was on the cross, *darkness* fell upon the land. Why? The Light of the world was being plunged into darkness.

You see, Jesus' tape-recorder was perfect. The one person who had the *right* to judge us was *being* judged. The one person who had the *right* to condemn us was *being* condemned. He was standing in our place. He was *taking* our Judgment Day. Didn't we say Judgment Day was a day when every sin is paid for? But if you believe in Jesus Christ, *he* pays for it, and that means your Judgment Day is already over.

If you believe in Jesus Christ - the *day* you believe in him, the *moment* you believe in him - your Judgment Day is in the past, and you don't have to worry about the verdict because the verdict is in. "This is my beloved child and in whom I'm well pleased"...in Jesus Christ, *you* are perfect, you are loved, you are beautiful, you are clean in the eyes of the Father!

And you know what that means? Not just that you don't need be afraid of that day, but you don't have to care what anybody else thinks in this day. We used to have a *Planet Fitness* down the street at the Y. It was very convenient for me to work out on the way home from the office. But does anyone remember their slogan? It was plastered in purple and yellow all over the place. This is a judgment free zone. Remember that?

That's a very Austin thing, because Austinites like to say, "Oh we're not judgmental, we're not like the people out there in the rest of America. No judgments, we don't judge people, you know, we let you be who you want to be, no judgments." Nonsense! Just because you can wear jeans to any restaurant in town, don't think you're not being judged. This is a very ideological town. Don't get caught with the wrong beliefs. Don't get caught with the wrong degree – or lack of one.

Forget a future judgement. In *this* world you're being judged all the time. They're looking at you, "look at how she dresses", you're going to be judged on your waistline, you're going to be judged on your looks, you're going to be judged on your smarts, you're gonna be judged on how productive you are, you're gonna be judged on your bank account; you will be *constantly* judged. And I haven't even started talking about your mom yet!

And if you live for those things, if those affirmations are the main things you live for really – if those are the verdicts that prove you are worthy. If you just come to church in order to, you know, get a little bit of a boost inspiration, but the *main* things that give meaning to your life are your career, or romance or something like that, you're going be living your whole life judged.

The mirror will judge you. Your bank account will judge you. But Jesus Christ is the only judge who *was* judged already. If you go to Jesus and make him the center of your life, then you can say to everybody else in the world, “I don’t care what you think. You are of course welcome to your opinion, but that’s really all they are. Because my verdict is already in.”

And that’s freedom in Jesus Christ – the only judgment free zone - because the judgments all fell on him. And so Jesus Christ says to crowds 2,000 years ago, and to all of us today, “Come to me, know my secure love...know my light...know my power.”

Let’s pray...