

Psalm 50 • The True Working of God's Judgment

Introduction

It's nearly universally accepted by everyone, whether or not they profess to be a Christian, that the concept of God and, in particular death and dying, involves some kind of judgment or final reckoning. The Bible speaks of this specifically as far as it concerns believers versus non-believers. But there is another category of God's judgment that is spoken of as well that is limited to His people, those that are **all** supposed to believe in Him. There are those that use His name and even know and use His Word, but never allow it to change their heart and behavior. Within Psalm 50 we have a glimpse of the foundation for which Christ will later state,

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

Matthew 17:21-23

¹The Mighty One, God, the LORD, has spoken,
And summoned the earth from the rising
of the sun to its setting.
²Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God has shone forth.
³May our God come and not keep silence;
Fire devours before Him,
And it is very tempestuous around Him.
⁴He summons the heavens above,
And the earth, to judge His people:
⁵"Gather My godly ones to Me,
Those who have made a covenant with
Me by sacrifice."
⁶And the heavens declare His
righteousness,
For God Himself is judge. Selah.

[Read v.1-6]

Q: What is being described?

A: God's judgment. This is particularly revealed in the statement that God has "summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting". This is an elegant way of stating that not just Israel, but every nation and people of the earth is summoned for judgment.

Q: How does v.2 further corroborate that it's God's Judgment that is being spoken of here?

A: At Christ's First Coming, He is born in Bethlehem and comes in the form of the suffering servant; the biblical references to His Second Coming repeatedly show Him reigning from Jerusalem as the conquering King.

Q: What is the contrast of "silence" referred to in v.3 to Christ's First and Second Comings?

A: First, there is the image of Christ, silent before His accusers as He assumed the role as the Lamb of God, sacrificed for our sins.

Second, there is His Second Coming as King, bringing with Him judgment, which requires Him to speak forth that judgment on every person and nation. It reveals that the opportunity to avoid judgment has passed.

Q: How does v.3 seem to reference the completion of the work of the Messiah as first preached by John the Baptist?

John answered and said to them all, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Luke 3:16-17

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Q: How do we know from v.4-5 which part of God's judgment is being specifically addressed?

A: In v.4, God summons everyone together as witnesses as He specifically comes to "judge His people." The repeated, parallel references throughout Scripture indicate that this specifically refers to Israel. This is further elaborated on and supported in v.5 by referring to "those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice", a distinction that is specific to Jews. But it's important to note that this Psalm speaks to those that are supposed to be His people, making the distinction between those that have followed Him correctly versus those that have not. This is not about "believers vs. non-believers". (More on this coming up.)

Point: *The repeated, biblical pattern of God's judgment is that it always begins with His people first before being extended to everyone else.*

For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

1 Peter 4:17

Q: How does v.6 lay the framework for the rest of Psalm 50?

A: We will be provided with examples of His righteousness as applied to His people that behave correctly in v.7-15 versus His people that behave wickedly in v.16-21. God is the Judge of both and they will stand or fall according to **HIS** standards and definition of what it means to be "righteous".

[Read v.7-15]

⁷Hear, O My people, and I will speak;
O Israel, I will testify against you;
I am God, your God.

⁸I do not reprove you for your sacrifices,
And your burnt offerings are continually
before Me.

⁹I shall take no young bull out of your
house

Nor male goats out of your folds.

¹⁰For every beast of the forest is Mine,
The cattle on a thousand hills.

¹¹I know every bird of the mountains,
And everything that moves in the field is
Mine.

¹²If I were hungry I would not tell you,
For the world is Mine, and all it contains.

¹³Shall I eat the flesh of bulls

Or drink the blood of male goats?

¹⁴Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving
And pay your vows to the Most High;

¹⁵Call upon Me in the day of trouble;
I shall rescue you, and you will honor
Me."

Q: How would you summarize God's main point of teaching in these verses?

A: The worship of God through the Old Testament structure of the sacrifices was not supposed to be undertaken as a ritual obligation with the attitude, "This is what God requires me to do" as if God "needed" it, but they are supposed to be an extension of their heart and faith and loving worship of Him. Fulfilling the Law in every detail from a technical point of view, but retaining an unyielding and selfish heart, negates the value of those sacrifices.

Q: There are several kinds of sacrifices designated in the Old Testament Law. Which ones are specifically being emphasized by God?

A: God is specifically emphasizing the thanksgiving offerings, or what is also known as "peace offerings". There were 3 kinds of peace offerings:

1. A voluntary offering in response to an unsolicited, special divine blessing.
2. A voluntarily vowed offering when making a request or pledge to God.
3. A freewill offering spontaneously presented in worship and praise

Q: How does God's emphasis of the peace offerings over other types teach?

A: The last thing God wants are the offerings that are required as a result of sin. What He desires most is an obedient and loving heart that comes to Him voluntarily to praise and worship Him according to every positive attribute imaginable because we've been obedient from the heart.

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For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it;
You are not pleased with burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.
Psalm 51:16-17

Application: Have you ever considered that a measure of your maturity in Christ is the degree to which you approach Him with a joyful, willing, obedient heart versus the feeling that you're obligated to act certain ways? Why should you be concerned if your obedience is not derived from a right, committed heart?

¹⁶But to the wicked God says,
“What right have you to tell of My statutes
And to take My covenant in your mouth?
¹⁷For you hate discipline,
And you cast My words behind you.
¹⁸When you see a thief, you are pleased with him,
And you associate with adulterers.
¹⁹You let your mouth loose in evil
And your tongue frames deceit.
²⁰You sit and speak against your brother;
You slander your own mother's son.
²¹These things you have done and I kept silence;
You thought that I was just like you;
I will reprove you and state *the case* in order before your eyes.

[Read v.16-21]

Q: How does v.16 substantiate the previous statement that the distinction being made here is not between outright believers and non-believers, but those that are supposed to be His people?

A: The wicked are identified as having taken His “covenant in your mouth” and speaking “of My statutes”. The second group being addressed is clearly comprised of people that embrace God’s Word in speech only, but not from the heart. The proper term for them is “false believers”.

Q: What is the defining characteristic of a false believer according to v.17?

A: “...you hate discipline, and...cast My words behind you.” They may know God’s Word, but they don’t actually put it into practice, allowing it to change their heart and behavior.

Q: What are some of the characteristics listed in v.18-20 which betray a false believer?

1. **“When you see a thief, you are pleased with him”.** They are not merely tolerant of sin, but embrace it.
2. **“...you associate with adulterers”.** They are unfaithful in ALL of their relationships, but earthly and heavenly.
3. **“You let your mouth loose in evil and your tongue frames deceit”.** Their speech betrays the true nature of their heart.
4. **“You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother's son”.** There is no love in them for their neighbor, not even in reality for their family. It speaks not just of being possessed of pride, but selfishness. They are completely self-centered.

Q: According to v.21, what is the overall result of their lifestyle?

A: Knowing God’s Word, but never putting it into practice from the heart, they end up being deceived, clinging to the false notion that “I [God] was just like you”.

Q: How do the final lines in v.21 speak of formal judgment?

A: The language “I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes” is a series of legal terms that renders what we ultimately envision happening when called to personal account before God. Having professed His Word, they will be formally judged by it.

Application: Does it seem a strange thing to you that someone would actually **WELCOME** God’s discipline? How might that reveal something about the quality of your own walk? Do any of the characteristics of a false believer listed above hit a little too close to the mark for you?

²²“Now consider this, you who forget
God,
Or I will tear *you* in pieces, and there will
be none to deliver.

²³He who offers a sacrifice of
thanksgiving honors Me;
And to him who orders *his way aright*
I shall show the salvation of God.”

[Read v.22-23]

Q: What are the defining characteristics of those found righteous according to God's standards?

1. **“He...offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving”.** That is, this person shuns sin and embraces God's ways to such a high degree that they are not making sacrifices to cover sin, but to worship and praise Him from a yielded, right heart.
2. **“...order his way aright...”** Walks in obedience to God's Word, allowing it to mold his heart and change his behavior so that it is clearly witnessed by both God and man.

Overall Application

As believers, what should Final Judgment motivate us to do? Instead of being overly focused on the meaning of prophecy and signs, shouldn't we be even more obsessed with pursuing the one thing we're commanded to do in these times: Draw closer to Him from the heart?