

How should I now live?

Sermon by Pastor Diana J. Perkins

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Many times I have been asked difficult questions about how different people will be judged when Jesus returns to judge the world. My usual response is that God is the final judge and He is just and fair and I am just a human with imperfect understanding of God's ways.

I'm hoping that the Scriptures that I want to bring to you today will help you to focus on your own path and life rather than trying to figure out what God will do to those who fail in their walk with the Lord. Let's consider the story written in 2 Samuel 24.

King David decided to number the people of Israel contrary to the command that God had given to him. He instructed Joab, the commander of the army to go through the land from Dan to Beersheba and count the people. Joab-questioned King David concerning this request, but David insisted that this was to be done. Nine months and twenty days later they came back with the total. A list was handed to the king with the 800,000 men in Israel who could use the sword and 500,000 men in Judah. It seemed like a minor error in judgment to consider, yet in God's eyes all disobedience is sin and will be dealt with either on this side of life or in the hereafter. In verse 10, we read that David felt ashamed for this deed and prayed and confessed his sin to God concerning his act. He begged for forgiveness and admitted that he had sinned greatly and acted foolishly in sending Joab on a mission that was contrary to what God had told David to do. When David arose the next morning, God sent the prophet Gad to David and confronted him with his error. Gad gave David three choices of punishment that God would use to correct him with and whichever one David chose, God would implement.

All three were tough. The first was that there would be three years of hunger that would come to David and his people. The second was that David's enemies would chase him for three months. The third was that there would be three days of disease in the land. Gad told David to think about it and let him know and he would take the answer back to God on David's behalf. David answered, "I am in great trouble. Let the LORD punish us, because the LORD is very merciful. Don't let my punishment come from human beings." How many of us have discovered that people will judge harshly the wrongs of people, but they make excuses for their sins or the sins of those close to them.

If you read the story of Jonah, you see an example of judgment from the human perspective. Jonah felt that the people of Nineveh deserved to be destroyed and he knew that God was a merciful God, so he disobeyed and jumped on a ship heading for Tarshish in the opposite direction that God told him to go. After he spent 3 days and nights in the belly of a fish, he was willing to be obedient to the voice of God. The people repented and God withheld judgment on the city. In Jonah chapter 4:1 Jonah prayed to God and said, "When I was still in my own country this is what I said would happen and that is why I

quickly ran away to Tarshish. I know that you are a God who is kind and shows mercy. You don't become angry quickly and you have great love. I knew that you would choose not to cause harm." He then asked the Lord to take his life for he didn't want to live. Even with this foolish, self-centered request, God showed kindness and mercy to his servant, Jonah. He brought Jonah to the place where he saw God's mercy extended to him as well as to the inhabitants of Nineveh.

God deals with us as individuals and He sees the hearts of men and knows all about us. We judge people by our standards many times when it would be most beneficial if we concentrated on our own shortcomings and worked on our relationship with God.

In Luke 18:9 Jesus told a story of two men who went to the temple to pray. He addressed the issue for those who thought they were good and looked down on everyone else.

One man was a Pharisee and the other was a publican (tax collector). The Pharisee stood alone and prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people who steal, cheat, or take part in adultery, or even like this tax collector. I give up eating twice a week and I give 10 % of everything I get."

The publican stood at a distance and would not even look up towards heaven. He beat on his chest because he was so sad. He spoke this prayer, "God have mercy on me a sinner." Jesus said this man went home forgiven, whereas the Pharisee went home in the same condition that he had come, self-righteous and sinful.

Jesus continued by saying that those who make themselves out to be great will be made humble and those who realize that they are humble will be made great.

If you continue reading this chapter you will discover the answer Jesus gave to a rich ruler who approached him with the question, "Good teacher, what good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?" This man was used to buying whatever he wanted in life. He was very wealthy and he was looking to earn his way into the kingdom of God. Jesus addressed the fact that he was calling Jesus "good" when he wasn't aware that Jesus was God in the likeness of man, so he told him that there was only one good and that was God. Jesus said, "You know the commandments: Don't commit adultery, don't murder anyone, don't steal, don't lie about your neighbor and honor your parents." The man said, "I've obeyed them from my youth up. What do I lack?" Then Jesus addressed the one sore spot the man had that caused him to be defiled. The commandment of "You shall have no other gods before me." His money was his god! Jesus told him to go sell everything that he had and give to the poor and he would have great treasures in heaven. He told the rich man to take up his cross and follow him. The man turned away and was sad because he wouldn't bring himself to forsake earth's treasures in order to attain heaven's wealth. In chapter 19, Zacchaeus (a wealthy tax collector) desired to see Jesus. He was a short man so he knew that he would not be able to see over the heads of people who surrounded Jesus. He climbed up into a sycamore tree and when Jesus passed by on the Jericho road, he stopped at the base of the tree and said, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down for I

must stay at your house today." Notice the responds of the people as they muttered among themselves, "Jesus is staying with a sinner!" Zacchaeus said to the Lord, "I will give half of my possessions to the poor. If I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times more." Jesus said, "Salvation has come to his house today for he is a son of Abraham. The Son of Man came to find lost people and save them." Jesus didn't come for the righteous; he came to save sinners. In John 4, Jesus had to go through Samaria. It was about 12:00 noon when he was tired and so he sat down beside the well that Jacob had dug many years ago and given to his son Joseph. A Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well and Jesus asked her for a drink of water. (Jesus had sent his followers into town to buy food.) The woman was very surprised that Jesus would even speak to her and even more surprised that he asked a favor of her. Jews had no dealings with Samaritans and would not approach a Samaritan woman. Jesus said, "you knew the free gift of God and who it is that is asking you for water, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

The woman didn't understand and asked Jesus if he was greater than the fathers that provided the well and also she mentioned that the well was deep and Jesus had nothing to dip it out with. Jesus began to explain spiritual water to her and when she asked him to give her this living water so she wouldn't have to come to get water from the well, Jesus approached the subject of the sin that was dragging her down and causing her so much pain and regret. "Go get your husband and come back here," he said.

She answered simply, "I have no husband." Jesus then said, "You are right to say you have no husband. Really you have had 5 husbands and the man you live with now is not your husband. You have told the truth!"

The woman recognized that Jesus must be a prophet. She started to turn the conversation around to the difference between where her ancestors worshipped and the place where Jews believed that one must worship. Yet Jesus revealed to her that He is the Messiah that she had been longing for, that she had been looking for and had hoped for. By the time he finished his conversation with her, his disciples returned and was surprised that he was talking to a Samaritan woman yet they didn't ask him what he wanted or why he was talking to her. The woman left her water pots, ran into the city and told the men of the city, "Come see a man who told me everything that I have ever done. Is not this the Christ?" They followed her back to Jesus and many believed on him through the testimony of the woman. Jesus stayed two days and then the men said to the woman, "First we believed because of what you said about Jesus; now we believe because we have heard him for ourselves." We must have a personal experience with God and not follow just because of what others say about him.

When John the Baptist was baptizing converts a group of people came to him to be baptized. He recognized that they lacked a repentant heart so he called them vipers and asked them who had warned them of coming judgment. He told them that anyone who doesn't produce fruit in their lives will be rejected on Judgment Day. They asked, "What

shall we do?" John replied, "If you have two shirts and you know someone who has none, share one with them. If you have food, share that also." To the tax collectors, John said, "Don't take more money from people than what you are ordered to take."

To the soldiers, John said, "Don't force people to give you money and don't lie about them. Be satisfied with your pay. "John addressed each group with their individual sins that were hindering them from God's blessing on their lives.

Matthew 7 addresses judging others. Be careful of judging others for you will be judged by the same yardstick that you judge others by. Why is it that we notice the speck of dust in our brother's eye, but we don't deal with the plank of wood that is sticking out of our own eyes? Don't try to remove the dust from your brother's eye until you first remove the beam from your own. Then you will see clearly to remove the speck from his eye.

After Peter had denied the Lord three times, Jesus restored his position in him. He then told Peter that there would come a day that he also would be carried where he didn't want to go and he would die for the cause of Christ. He told Peter, "Follow me."

John the beloved was walking behind Jesus as he talked to Peter and Peter asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus replied, "If I want him to live until I return, what is that to you? You follow me."

The book of James is one that I recommend that everyone read. In chapter 1:19, James says this: "Always be willing to listen and slow to speak. Be careful of anger as it will not help you live the right kind of life that God wants. So put out of your life every evil thing and every kind of wrong. Then in gentleness accept God's teaching that is planted in your hearts, which can save you. When you hear God's teaching and you don't obey the words, you are like people who look into a mirror and they see their faces, yet they go away and quickly forget what they looked like. But the truly happy people are those who carefully study God's perfect law that makes people free and they continue to study it. They don't forget what they heard and they obey what God is teaching them. Those who do this will be happy. The true way to worship God is this: People who think they are religious but say things they shouldn't say are only fooling themselves. Their religion is worthless. Religion that God accepts as pure and without fault is this: caring for orphans or widows who need help and keeping yourselves free from the world's evil influence."

The Apostle Paul exhorted people to examine their lives to make sure that they were on the right path. 2 Corinthians 13:5. The more you focus on yourself and where you are coming up short, the less you will look at others and criticize them for their shortcomings. Look to Jesus Christ to strengthen you that you might overcome temptations.

My prayer is that God will convict each of us in the areas that we are weak in and show his power in our lives to help us overcome them and give us wisdom and mercy in dealing with the faults of others. Let us pray one for another that God will convict us of our sins that we might find healing in his wonderful name, the name of Jesus.