

Español
Northwest Nazarene University

The Sermons of John Wesley - Sermon 15

The Great Assize

Preached at the Assizes held before the Honorable Sir Edward Clive, Knight, one of the Judges of His Majesty's Court of Common Pleas, in St. Paul's Church, Bedford, on Friday, March 10, 1758; published at the request of William Cole, Esq., High Sheriff of the county, and others.

"We shall all stand before the judgement-seat of Christ." Rom. 14:10

1. How many circumstances concur to raise the awfulness of the present solemnity! -- The general concourse of people of every age, sex, rank, and condition of life, willingly or unwillingly gathered together, not only from the neighboring, but from distant, parts; criminals, speedily to be brought forth and having no way to escape; officers, waiting in their various posts, to execute the orders which shall be given; and the representative of our gracious Sovereign, whom we so highly reverence and honor. The occasion likewise of this assembly adds not a little to the solemnity of it: to hear and determine causes of every kind, some of which are of the most important nature; on which depends no less than life or death, death that uncovers the face of eternity! It was, doubtless, in order to increase the serious sense of these things, and not in the minds of the vulgar only that the wisdom of our forefathers did not disdain to appoint even several minute circumstances of this solemnity. For these also, by means of the eye or ear, may more deeply affect the heart: and when viewed in this light, trumpets, staves, apparel, are no longer trifling or insignificant, but subservient, in their kind and degree, to the most valuable ends of society. 1

2. But, as awful as this solemnity is, one far more awful is at hand. For yet a little while, and "we shall all stand before the judgement-seat of Christ." "For, as I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." And in that day, "every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

3. Had all men a deep sense of this, how effectually would it secure the interests of society! For what more forcible motive can be conceived to the practice of genuine morality to a steady pursuit of solid virtue an uniform walking in justice, mercy, and truth What could strengthen our hands in all that is good, and deter us from all evil, like a strong conviction of this, "The Judge standeth at the door;" and we are shortly to stand before him

4. It may not therefore be improper, or unsuitable to the design of the present assembly, to consider, --

I. The chief circumstances which will precede our standing before the judgement-seat of Christ;

II. The judgement itself; and,

III. A few of the circumstances which will follow it.

I. 1. Let us, in the first place, consider the chief circumstances which will precede our standing before the judgement-seat of Christ.

And, first, God will show "signs in the earth beneath" (Acts 2:19); particularly He will "arise to shake terribly the earth." "The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage" (Isa. 24:20). "There shall be earthquakes," *_kata topous_* (not in divers only, but) "in all

places;" not in one only, or a few, but in every part of the habitable world (Luke 21:2); even "such as were not since men were upon the earth, so mighty earthquakes and so great." In one of these "every island shall flee away, and the mountains will not be found" (Rev. 16:20). Meantime all the waters of the terraqueous globe will feel the violence of those concussions; "the sea and waves roaring" (Luke 21:25), with such an agitation as had never been known before, since the hour that "the fountains of the great deep were broken up," to destroy the earth, which then "stood out of the water and in the water." The air will be all storm and tempest, full of dark vapors and "pillars of smoke" (Joel 2:30); resounding with thunder from pole to pole, and torn with ten thousand lightnings. But the commotion will not stop in the region of the air; "the powers of heaven also shall be shaken. There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars" (Luke 21:25, 26); those fixed, as well as those that move round them. "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 2:31). "The stars shall withdraw their shining" (Joel 3:15), yea, and "fall from heaven" (Rev. 6:13), being thrown out of their orbits. And then shall be heard the universal shout, from all the companies of heaven, followed by the "voice of the archangel," proclaiming the approach of the Son of God and Man, "and the trumpet of God," sounding an alarm to all that sleep in the dust of the earth (1 Thess. 4:16). In consequence of this, all the graves shall open, and the bodies of men arise. The sea also shall give up the dead which are therein (Rev. 20:13), and every one shall rise with "his own body:" his own in substance, although so changed in its properties as we cannot now conceive. "For this corruptible will" then "put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53). Yea, "death and hades," the invisible world, shall "deliver up the dead that are in them" (Rev. 20:13). So that all who ever lived and died, since God created man, shall be raised incorruptible and immortal. 2

2. At the same time, "the Son of Man shall send forth his angels" over all the earth; "and they shall gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24:31). And the Lord himself shall come with clouds, in his own glory, and the glory of his Father, with ten thousand of his saints, even myriads of angels, and shall sit upon the throne of his glory. "And before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, and shall set the sheep," the good, "on his right hand, and the goats," the wicked, "upon the left" (Matt. 25:31, etc.). Concerning this general assembly it is, that the beloved disciple speaks thus: "I saw the dead," all that had been dead, "small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened" (a figurative expression, plainly referring to the manner of proceeding among men), "and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:12). 3

II. These are the chief circumstances which are recorded in the oracles of God, as preceding the general judgement. We are, secondly, to consider the judgement itself, so far as it hath pleased God to reveal it.

1. The person by whom God will judge the world, is his only-begotten Son, whose "goings forth are from everlasting;" "who is God over all, blessed for ever." Unto him, being "the outbeaming of his Father's glory, the express image of his person" (Heb. 1:3), the Father "hath committed all judgement, because he is the Son of Man" (John 5:22, 27); because, though he was "in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet he emptied himself, taking upon him the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:6, 7); yea, because, "being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself" yet farther, "becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God hath highly exalted him," even in his human nature, and "ordained him," as Man, to try the children of men, "to be the Judge both of the quick and the dead;" both of those who shall be

once mentioned unto him' (Ezek. 18:21, 22). How is it consistent with the promise which God has made to all who accept of the gospel covenant, 'I will forgive their iniquities, and remember their sin no more' (Jer. 31:34) Or, as the Apostle expresses it, 'I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more'" (Heb. 8:12).

10. It may be answered, It is apparently and absolutely necessary, for the full display of the glory of God; for the clear and perfect manifestation of his wisdom, justice, power, and mercy, toward the heirs of salvation; that all the circumstances of their life should be placed in open view, together with all their tempers, and all the desires, thoughts, and intents of their hearts: otherwise, how would it appear out of what a depth of sin and misery the grace of God had delivered them And, indeed, if the whole lives of all the children of men were not manifestly discovered, the whole amazing contexture of divine providence could not be manifested; nor should we yet be able, in a thousand instances, "to justify the ways of God to man." Unless our Lord's words were fulfilled in their utmost sense, without any restriction or limitation," There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; or hid, that shall not be known" (Matt. 10: 26); abundance of God's dispensations under the sun would still appear without their reasons. And then only when God hath brought to light all the hidden things of darkness, whosoever were the actors therein, will it be seen that wise and good were all his ways; that he saw through the thick cloud, and governed all things by the wise counsel of his own will; that nothing was left to chance or the caprice of men, but God disposed all strongly and sweetly, and wrought all into one connected chain of justice, mercy, and truth. 9

11. And in the discovery of the divine perfections, the righteous will rejoice with joy unspeakable; far from feeling any painful sorrow or shame, for any of those past transgressions which were long since blotted out as a cloud, washed away by the blood of the Lamb. It will be abundantly sufficient for them, that all the transgressions which they had committed shall not be once mentioned unto them to their disadvantage that their sins, and transgressions, and iniquities shall be remembered no more to their condemnation. This is the plain meaning of the promise; and this all the children of God shall find true, to their everlasting comfort.

12. After the righteous are judged, the King will turn to them upon his left hand; and they shall also be judged, every man according to his works. But not only their outward works will be brought into the account, but all the evil words which they have ever spoken; yea, all the evil desires, affections, tempers, which have, or have had, a place in their souls; and all the evil thoughts or designs which were ever cherished in their hearts. The joyful sentence of acquittal will then be pronounced Upon those upon the right hand; the dreadful sentence of condemnation upon those on the left; both of which must remain fixed and unmovable as the throne of God.

III. 1. We may, in the Third place, consider a few of the circumstances which will follow the general judgement. And the first is the execution of the sentence pronounced on the evil and on the good: "These shall go away into eternal punishment, and the righteous into life eternal." It should be observed, it is the very same word which is used, both in the former and the latter clause. It follows, that either the punishment lasts for ever, or the reward too will come to an end: -- No, never, unless God could come to an end, or his mercy and truth could fail. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father," "and shall drink of those rivers of pleasure which are at God's right hand for evermore." But here all description falls short; all human language fails! Only one who is caught up into the third heaven can have a just conception of it. But even such a one cannot express what he hath seen: these things it is not possible for man to utter.

The wicked, meantime, shall be turned into hell, even all the people that forget God. They will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." They will be "cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone," originally "prepared for the devil and his angels;" where they will gnaw their tongues for anguish and pain; they will curse God and look upward. There the dogs of hell -- pride, malice, revenge, rage, horror, despair -- continually devour them. There "they have no rest, day or night, but the smoke of their torment ascendeth for ever and ever!" For "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." 10

2. Then the heavens will be shrivelled up as a parchment scroll, and pass away with a great noise: they will "flee from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and there will be found no place for them" (Rev. 20:11). The very manner of their passing away is disclosed to us by the Apostle Peter: "In the day of God, the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved" (2 Pet. 3:12). The whole beautiful fabric will be overthrown by that raging element, the connexion of all its parts destroyed, and every atom torn asunder from the others. By the same, "the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up" (verse 10). The enormous works of nature, the everlasting hills, mountains that have defied the rage of time, and stood unmoved so many thousand years, will sink down in fiery ruin. How much less will the works of art, though of the most durable kind, the utmost efforts of human industry -- tombs, pillars, triumphal arches, castles, pyramids -- be able to withstand the flaming conqueror! All, all will die, perish, vanish away, like a dream when one awaketh! 11

3. It has indeed been imagined by some great and good men, that as it requires that same almighty power to annihilate things as to create; to speak into nothing or out of nothing; so no part of, no atom in, the universe, will be totally or finally destroyed. Rather, they suppose that, as the last operation of fire, which we have yet been able to observe, is to reduce into glass what, by a smaller force, it had reduced to ashes; so, in the day God hath ordained, the whole earth, if not the material heavens also, will undergo this change, after which the fire can have no farther power over them. And they believe this is intimated by that expression in the Revelation made to St. John: "Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like unto crystal" (Rev. 4:6). We cannot now either affirm or deny this; but we shall know hereafter.

4. If it be inquired by the scoffers, the minute philosophers, "How can these things be Whence should come such an immense quantity of fire as would consume the heavens and the whole terraqueous globe" we would beg leave, first, to remind them, that this difficulty is not peculiar to the Christian system. The same opinion almost universally obtained among the unbigoted Heathens. So one of these celebrated freethinkers speaks, according to the generally received sentiment, --

Esse quoque in fatis reminiscitur, affore tempus,	Quo mare, quo tellus,	
correptaque regia coeli	Ardeat, et mundi moles operosa laboret.	[The following is
Dryden's translation of this quotation from Ovid: --	Rememb'ring, in the fates, a time when	
fire	Should to the battlements of heaven aspire;	And all the blazing world above
should burn,	And all the' inferior globe to cinders turn. -- EDIT.]	

But, Secondly, it is easy to answer, even from our slight and superficial acquaintance with natural things, that there are abundant magazines of fire ready prepared, and treasured up against the day of the Lord. How soon may a comet, commissioned by him, travel down from the most distant parts of the universe! And were it to fix upon the earth in its return from the sun, when it is some thousand times hotter than a red-hot cannon ball, who does not see what must be the immediate consequence But, not to ascend so high as the ethereal heavens, might not the same lightnings which "give shine to

the world," if commanded by the Lord of nature, give ruin and utter destruction Or, to go no farther than the globe itself; who knows what huge reservoirs of liquid fire are from age to age contained in the bowels of the earth Aetna, Hecla, Vesuvius, and all the other volcanoes that belch out flames and coals of fire, what are they, but so many proofs and mouths of those fiery furnaces; and at the same time so many evidences that God hath in readiness wherewith to fulfil his word Yea, were we to observe no more than the surface of the earth, and the things that surround us on every side, it is most certain (as a thousand experiments prove, beyond all possibility of denial) that we ourselves, our whole bodies, are full of fire, as well as everything round about us. Is it not easy to make this ethereal fire visible even to the naked eye, and to produce thereby the very same effects on combustible matter, which are produced by culinary fire Needs there then any more than for God to unloose that secret chain, whereby this irresistible agent is now bound down, and lies quiescent in every particle of matter And how soon would it tear the universal frame in pieces, and involve all in one common ruin! 12

5. There is one circumstance more which will follow the judgement, that deserves our serious consideration: "We look," says the Apostle, "according to his promise, for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13). The promise stands in the prophecy of Isaiah: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered" (Isa. 65:17), so great shall the glory of the latter be! These St. John did behold in the visions of God. "I saw," saith he, "a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away" (Rev. 21:1). And only righteousness dwelt therein: accordingly, he adds, "And I heard a great voice from" the third "heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (21:3). Of necessity, therefore, they will all be happy: "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" (21:4). "There shall be no more curse; but they shall see his face" (21:3,4), -- shall have the nearest access to, and thence the highest, resemblance of, him. This is the strongest expression in the language of Scripture, to denote the most perfect happiness. "And his name shall be on their foreheads;" they shall be openly acknowledged as God's own property, and his glorious nature shall most visibly shine forth in them. "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever."

IV. It remains only to apply the preceding considerations to all who are here before God. And are we not directly led so to do, by the present solemnity, which so naturally points us to that day, when the Lord will judge the world in righteousness This, therefore, by reminding us of that more awful season, may furnish many lessons of instruction. A few of these I may be permitted just to touch on. May God write them on all our hearts!

1. And, First, how beautiful are the feet of those who are sent by the wise and gracious providence of God, to execute justice on earth, to defend the injured, and punish the wrongdoer! Are they not the ministers of God to us for good; the grand supporters of the public tranquillity; the patrons of innocence and virtue; the great security of all our temporal blessings And does not every one of these represent, not only an earthly prince, but the Judge of the earth Him whose "name is written upon his thigh, King of kings, and Lord of lords" O that all these sons of the right hand of the Most High may be as holy as he is holy! wise with the wisdom that sitteth by his throne, like him who is the eternal Wisdom of the Father! no respecters of persons, as he is none; but rendering to every man according to his works; like him inflexibly, inexorably just, though pitiful and of tender mercy! So shall they be terrible indeed to them that do evil, as not bearing the sword in vain. So shall the laws of our land have

their full use and due honor, and the throne of our King be still established in righteousness.

2. Ye truly honorable men, whom God and the King have commissioned, in a lower degree, to administer justice; may not ye be compared to those ministering spirits who will attend the Judge coming in the clouds May you, like them, burn with love to God and man! May you love righteousness and hate iniquity! May ye all minister, in your several spheres (such honor hath God given you also to them that shall be heirs of salvation, and to the glory of your great sovereign! May ye remain the establishers of peace, the blessing and ornaments of your country, the protectors of a guilty land, the guardian angels of all that are round about you!

3. You, whose office it is to execute what is given you in charge by him before whom you stand; how nearly are you concerned to resemble those that stand before the face of the Son of Man, those servants of his that do his pleasure, and hearken to the voice of his words! Does it not highly import you, to be as uncorrupt as them to approve yourselves the servants of God to do justly, and love mercy to do to all as ye would they should do to you So shall that great Judge, under whose eye you continually stand, say to you also, "Well done, good and faithful servants: enter ye into the joy of your Lord!"

4. Suffer me to add a few words to all of you who are at this day present before the Lord. Should not you bear it in your minds all the day long, that a more awful day is coming A large assembly this! But what is it to that which every eye will then behold, the general assembly of all the children of men that ever lived on the face of the whole earth A few will stand at the judgement-seat this day, to be judged touching what shall be laid to their charge; and they are now reserved in prison, perhaps in chains, till they are brought forth to be tried and sentenced. But we shall all, I that speak and you that hear, "stand at the judgement-seat of Christ." And we are now reserved on this earth, which is not our home, in this prison of flesh and blood, perhaps many of us in chains of darkness too, till we are ordered to be brought forth. Here a man is questioned concerning one or two facts, which he is supposed to have committed: there we are to give an account of all our works, from the cradle to the grave; of all our words; of all our desires and tempers, all the thoughts and intents of our hearts; of all the use we have made of our various talents, whether of mind, body, or fortune, till God said, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." In this court, it is possible, some who are guilty may escape for want of evidence; but there is no want of evidence in that court. All men, with whom you had the most secret intercourse, who were privy to all your designs and actions, are ready before your face. So are all the spirits of darkness, who inspired evil designs and assisted in the execution of them. So are all the angels of God; those eyes of the Lord, that run to and fro over all the earth, who watched over your soul, and labored for your good, so far as you would permit. So is your own conscience, a thousand witnesses in one, now no more capable of being either blinded or silenced, but constrained to know and to speak the naked truth, touching all your thoughts, and words, and actions. And is conscience as a thousand witnesses -- yea, but God is as a thousand consciences! O, who can stand before the face of the great God, even our Savior Jesus Christ!

See! See! He cometh! He maketh the clouds his chariots! He rideth upon the wings of the wind! A devouring fire goeth before him, and after him a flame burneth! See! He sitteth upon his throne, clothed with light as with a garment, arrayed with majesty and honor! Behold, his eyes are as a flame of fire, his voice as the sound of many waters!

How will ye escape Will ye call to the mountains to fall, on you, the rocks to cover you Alas, the mountains themselves, the rocks, the earth, the heavens, are just ready to flee away! Can ye prevent

the sentence Wherewith With all the substance of thy house, with thousands of gold and, silver Blind wretch! Thou camest naked from thy mother's womb, and more naked into eternity. Hear the Lord, the Judge! "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Joyful sound! How widely different from that voice which echoes, through the expanse of heaven, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" And who is he that can prevent or retard the full execution of either sentence Vain hope! Lo, hell is moved from beneath to receive those who are ripe for destruction. And the everlasting doors lift up their heads, that the heirs of glory may come in! 13

5. "What manner of persons then ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness!" We know it cannot be long before the Lord will descend with the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God; when every one of us shall appear before him, and give account of his own works. "Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye look for these things," seeing ye know he will come and will not tarry, "be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless." Why should ye not Why should one of you be found on the left hand at his appearing He willeth not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance; by repentance, to faith in a bleeding Lord; by faith, to spotless love, to the full image of God renewed in the heart, and producing all holiness of conversation. Can you doubt of this, when you remember, the Judge of all is likewise the Savior of all Hath he not bought you with his own blood, that ye might not perish, but have everlasting life O make proof of his mercy, rather than his justice; of his love, rather than the thunder of his power! He is not far from every one of us; and he is now come, not to condemn, but to save the world he standeth in the midst! Sinner, doth he not now, even now, knock at the door of thy heart O that thou mayest know, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! O that ye may now give yourselves to him who gave himself for you, in humble faith, in holy, active, patient love! So shall ye rejoice with exceeding joy in his day, when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.

EDWARD H. SUGDEN'S INTRODUCTION TO "THE GREAT ASSIZE"

This sermon was added in the 1771 edition partly because of the unique occasion of its delivery, partly because there was no sermon in the original forty-four on this subject. Wesley says of it in his Journal for September 1, 1778, "I cannot write a better [sermon] on the Great Assize than I did twenty years ago." It was customary for the judges of Assize to attend a service in the parish church of the town in which they were sitting, in all the splendor of their scarlet and ermine, with their trumpeters, javelin-men, and other officers of the Court in attendance; and it was one of the duties of the High Sheriff of the County to make arrangements for the preaching of the sermon. Mr. William Cole, who was High Sheriff of Bedfordshire at this time, was a friend of Wesley, and was his host in November 1759. He lived at Sundon, a village a little to the east of the main road from Luton to Bedford, about five miles north of Luton. He built the first Methodist preaching-house in Luton. Probably he made the arrangements for the Assize sermon when Wesley was at Bedford in November 1757; and on Monday, February 27, Wesley records, "Having a sermon to write against the Assizes at Bedford, I retired for a few days to Lewisham" -- doubtless to the house of Mr. Ebenezer Blackwell. He left London on Monday, March 6, at seven in the morning, and reached Mr. Cole's house at Sundon by three in the afternoon. On the Thursday he rode to Bedford, expecting to have to preach that day; but for some reason, probably because the cases at the previous Assize town had taken more time than was anticipated, the service was postponed to the following day. The service was held in the forenoon at St. Paul's Church, one of the chief architectural ornaments of the town. It stands on the north side of the River Ouse, and has a fine tower and octagonal spire. The old stone pulpit from which Wesley

preached is still preserved in the south aisle, and a photograph of it and the church may be seen in the Standard edition of the Journal vol 4. p. 403. The Journal records, "The congregation at St. Paul's was very large and very attentive. The judge, immediately after sermon, sent me an invitation to dine with him; but having no time I was obliged to send my excuse, and set out between one and two." He had to reach Epworth for the Sunday, and got to Stilton, about thirty miles, by seven. Next morning he started between four and five, and through frost and flood covered the ninety miles to Epworth by ten that night. He says, "I was little more tired than when I rose in the morning!" -- tough, wiry little man that he was!

The judge on this occasion was Sir Edward Clive, who had been made a Judge of the Common Pleas and knighted in 1753. He was just a year younger than John Wesley, and died in 1771. A caricature of him may be found in Hogarth's plate "The Bench," published in this very year, 1758. He is sitting between the Lord Chief Justice Willes and Mr. Justice Bathurst, who has fallen asleep. He is represented with a small head almost lost in his full-bottomed wig, a long, thin nose, and a nut-cracker chin. The sermon was published separately by Trye in the same year at the request of the High Sheriff and others, and went through some ten editions in Wesley's lifetime. The Rev. Richard Green calls it "a model sermon," and says, "It is well-formed, plain, practical, earnest; the statements are all supported by apt scripture, and the truth faithfully applied to the conscience." The title "The Great Assize" was a familiar name for the Last Judgement; it is found as early as 1340 in Hampole's Prick of Conscience, 5514, and several other instances are given in the Oxford Dictionary, s.v. "Assize." The preliminary note, "Preached at the Assizes," etc., in the modern editions is from the title-page of the second edition, also published in London by Trye; it appears in an abbreviated form in the 1771 edition, without the last clause "Published at the request," etc.

Two points in the sermon call for criticism in view of recent investigations into the eschatological teaching of the New Testament. First, Wesley identifies without discussion the Day of Jehovah of the Old Testament prophets and the Jewish Apocalyptic writers with the Day of our Lord's second coming, the general resurrection, and the last Judgement, of the New Testament documents; and he uses indiscriminately passages from all these sources to give detail and picturesqueness to his picture. Moreover he adopts the most literal interpretation of them all, the only point at which he balks being the length of the Day of Judgement, which he thinks "may not improbably comprise several thousand years;" and the opening of the books, which he says is "a figurative expression." It can hardly be doubted that our Lord's teaching was largely influenced by the Old Testament and Apocalyptic conception, especially in His predictions about the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish polity; but He added to it the idea of an individual as well as a national judgement, and extended its scope to the whole world.

In the second place Wesley adopts the view that the Last Judgement will take place at some definite time in the future history of the world, when the lives of all men will be reviewed and sentence pronounced upon them. This is certainly the obvious meaning of the teaching of the books of the New Testament which were written before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans; but when that tremendous catastrophe had taken place, and it became clear that the General Judgement and the End of the Age had not come, we find in the writings of St. John a new strain of teaching, implying that the Judgement is really continuous and is now going on. Thus "He that believeth on Him is not judged; he that believeth not hath been judged already.... And this is the judgement, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil" (John 3:18). Again, "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth my word and believeth Him that sent me, hath eternal

life, and cometh not into judgement.... The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live" (John 5:24). Again, "For judgement came I into this world" (John 9:39). Again, "Now is the judgement of this world" (John 12:31). At the same time St. John also speaks of a future general resurrection, of "the last day" and "the day of judgement." It seems clear (1) that our Lord spoke in terms of the current national belief of His time, which was derived from the Old Testament prophets and the Apocalypses of the Persian and Greek periods, the time "between the Books;" (2) that He used the pictorial rather than the abstract method of conveying the truth to His hearers. We may thus safely say that the essential elements of His teaching are (1) that there will be a universal judgement of all men; (2) that He Himself will be the Judge; (3) that the standard of judgement will be His own life and teaching, as far as those who have had the opportunity of knowing it are concerned; (4) that for the heathen the standard will be their own conscience; (5) that the issues of the judgement are decided in this life, and (6) that the decision will be final. But as to the extent to which His representations of the Last Judgement are to be taken as expressing literal physical fact, we shall be wisest if we confess our ignorance and our inability to reach any dogmatic conclusion. As to the text, the better attested reading is, "We shall all stand before the judgement seat of God;" indeed, this text is used by some of the Fathers to prove the divinity of Christ, because it is plain from many passages that He will be the Judge; and the Judge is here called God.

SUGDEN'S FOOTNOTES

1. "Our gracious Sovereign" is George II. Wesley was always intensely loyal. In 1744 he wrote an Address from his Societies to the King in which he says, "we are ready to obey your Majesty to the uttermost, in all things which we conceive to be agreeable [to the Word of God]. And we earnestly exhort all with whom we converse, as they fear God to honor the King." The Address was not sent, mainly because it might have been taken to imply that the Methodists were "a body distinct from the National Church." in 1745, the year of the Young Pretenders's invasion of England, he wrote to the Mayor of Newcastle, "All I can do for his Majesty, whom I honor and love -- I think not less than I did my own father -- is this: I cry unto God, day by day, to put all his enemies to confusion," etc. When George II died in October 1760 he records in his Journal (October 25), "King George was gathered to his fathers. When will England have a better Prince" One thinks of Carlyle (Sartor 1.9). "Has not your Red hanging-individual a horsehair wig, squirrel-skins, and a plush-gown, whereby all mortals know that he is a JUDGE. Society, which the more I think of it astonishes me the more, is founded upon Cloth." Wesley never despised form and ceremonial; he robed himself even for his Bible studies with his Societies in London and Bristol and for his open-air services.

2. This paragraph, finely and impressively composed as it is, is a defiance of all sound exegesis. Some of the passages quoted refer to the invasion of Judah by the Assyrians, some to the coming of the Holy Ghost, some to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, some to the downfall of Rome herself. All these were in a sense "days of Jehovah;" but there is no warrant for transferring all these signs to the final day of judgement, nor for their literal interpretation. This just remark on the difference between the present and the resurrection bodies is worked out in detail in Sermon 138, originally written by Benjamin Calamy and revised and abridged by Wesley in 1732. "Substance" and "properties" are here used in their philosophical sense" the body will be the same in essence (not composed of the same material particles), but its properties, i.e. its characteristics and qualities will be entirely changed. Above all, it will be a "pneumatical" and not a "physical" body, i.e. it will be well adapted for the use and manifestation of the spirit, as the present body is adapted for the use and manifestation of the psyche or animal soul. "Hades" is a very properly substituted for the A.V. "hell," which is here, and

concealed."

9. "To justify the way of God to man:" from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 1.26. In the original the last line is "men."

10. "The third heaven" Paul (2 Cor. 12:2) tells how he was caught up into the third heave, or paradise, and heard unutterable words which it is not in the power of man to speak, It is doubtful where he thought of three heavens only -- viz. the heaven of the atmosphere and clouds, the heaven of the sun and stars, and the heaven of the blessed dead -- or accepted the Jewish belief in seven heavens, of which Paradise was the third in order from below. Wesley admits of no hope for the finally impenitent, and interprets literally these passages which speak of their doom. In the first, however, Hell is Sheol, and all that the Psalmist says is that all the nations (no the people) that forget God will depart in to the world of the dead. In the Sermon 73, on Hell, he is quite explicit as to his belief in the endless torment of the wicked in material fire. Neither of these sermons are, however, part of the standard Methodist doctrine.

11. The finale destruction of the earth by means of fires is quite within the bounds of possibility. The impact of some wandering star would generate heat enough for the purpose; of it may be that gravitation will at last overcome the centrifugal force and the arch will fall into the sun. But such speculations are as fruitless as they are uncertain; and the idea in the next paragraph of the origin of the sea of glass is merely grotesque.

12. Cicero is the author of the phrase "minute philosophers." He speaks in *de Senect.*= 23 of "Quidam minuti philosophi," meaning trifling, insignificant. In English use it rather means meticulous, over-precise, speculators. All this discussion as to quantity of fire is absurd: fire is not a thing, but a state of violent chemical combination; a match is quite enough to kindle a conflagration if there be fuel enough. Wesley was keenly interested in electrical phenomena, and was the first man in England to make use of it as a curative agent. His pamphlet called *The Desideratum; or, Electricity made Plain, and Useful*, published in 1760, details many of Franklin's experiments, such as drawing sparks out of the human body or from the fur of a cat. This is what he is thinking of when he says that our bodies are full of fire. "Freethinker" was a name claimed by the Deists and other rejecters of the Christian revelation at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Here Wesley uses it of Ovid, the Roman poet, with a kind of suggestion that the modern freethinkers were akin to him in their religious views. The quotation is from the *Metamorphoses*, 1.256, where Jupiter, preparing to hurl his thunderbolts, hesitates to do so lest he should set the ether aflame, "for he remembers that it is amongst the decrees of the Fates that a time will come when the sea, the earth, and the palace of heaven shall catch fire and blaze, and the mass of the world, so laboriously constructed, shall be imperilled."

13. "Your in conscience;" so the author of the old Kentish *Poema Morale* says: "Elch man sceal him then biclupien and eeach sceal him demen; His aye weorc and his ithanc to witesse he sceal temen", which is, being interpreted. Every man shall accuse himself there, and every man shall judge himself; His own work and his conscience he shall bring to witness. "See! See! He cometh!" One of Wesley's finest and most impassioned perorations.

Edited by Clem P. Guthro, Senior Reference Librarian, Berntsen Resource Center at Northwestern College (St. Paul, MN), with minor corrections by Ryan Danker and George Lyons, Northwest Nazarene University (Nampa, ID) for the Wesley Center for Applied Theology.

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