

Today is the 14th and final installment in our series, “**The Essentials: what Christians believe and why it matters.**” Today we’ll talk about “**The Day of the Lord.**”

1Thessalonians 5:2, **For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.**

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

The Fifth Grade Boys Sunday School class at Glenwood Baptist Church was a tough draw. Here’s your worst nightmare – *volunteer to teach Sunday School and get assigned to the Fifth Grade Boys Class*. These were rowdy boys on the edge of puberty. Here were a few terms used to describe the class: *out-of-control – wild child - jungle savages*. This class went through SS teachers at the same rate the Braves go through relief pitchers. It was the church’s volunteer graveyard.

The Fifth Grade Boys were lethal to a normal faith. Stunned teachers went off muttering, “*I use to think God could change anybody, but after this morning, I’m not so sure...*” Some teachers even wondered if evolution was true. An hour in that class and you could believe we came from monkeys... *FYI, God does work miracles. One of those boys is now your pastor.*

But there was one mountain of a man, a super-teacher who had no problem handling and controlling the Fifth Grade Boys Sunday School Class. This man had those boys under his thumb. *He was my dad*. And here was dad’s secret... As we filed into the room, he’d sat in his chair with an intimidating look on his face. Never too eager - you got the impression He could take you or leave you. He never tipped his hand.

Finally, he’d rise to his feet, walk to the lectern, and announce, “*Alright boys it’s all yours... Say whatever you want, for as long as you want. But when you’re done I’m going to talk - and I better not hear a squeak out of anybody.*” Then dad would sit back down, fold his arms across his chest, and wait. Of course, when given permission nobody had anything to say. By this point, the intimidation factor had kicked in. Dad was the man with whom nobody wanted to mess. *Just shut-up and listen...*

My dad’s classroom management of the Fifth Grade Boys helps make sense of today’s text. Dad’s approach parallels God’s plan for the ages. Paul speaks of a period of history known as “**The Day of the Lord.**” Today is “**The Day of Man.**” Humans are having their say on planet earth. Mankind is running the show. Finite and foolish humans, arrogantly assume they know better than God how to order their lives and society. It’s as if the animals have escaped their cages and taken over the zoo. The patients are running the asylum. *Fifth Grade boys are in charge!*

In essence, for the last 6000 years it’s been mankind’s turn to talk. And unfortunately, when given the opportunity, we’ve been a lot more opinionated than the Fifth Grade Boys. Over the course of history, mankind has said a lot, and most of what we’ve uttered has *doubted God’s Word and questioned His authority*. And God has been mercifully tolerant...

In Acts 17:30 Paul explained God's patience to the Greek philosophers in Athens. He spoke of the past as "times of ignorance God overlooked..." I like how the OKJ renders it, "times of this ignorance God winked at..." If God had *focused* on humanity's evil He would have brought down the hammer, but God winked. He overlooked our sin for a short time in hopes that we'd come to our senses and realize the insanity of our rebellion.

In Paul's sermon he also noted the limits of God's tolerance. God won't wink forever. He warns, "In times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent." And why repent now? "Because (God) has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

There is coming a day, still future, in which the risen Lord Jesus will judge this world. This is the day the Bible calls, "The Day of the Lord."

When Scripture says "day" it doesn't always mean 24 hours. "Day" can mean "a period of time." Often you'll hear the phrase, "day and age." "I can't believe she died of the measles in this day and age." We're not talking about a 24 hour cycle, but a season, or era, or age. Likewise, "The Day of the Lord" is much longer than 24 hours. It begins with an event called the rapture, and culminates with a new creation.

1Thessalonians 5 says "The Day of the Lord" comes like "a thief in the night." It hits unexpectedly, surprisingly. Folks are caught off-guard. This is how the rapture occurs – when the world least expects it – when they've gone to sleep to its possibility – Jesus suddenly descends with a shout. The Bible teaches the doctrine of "Immanence" – the coming of Jesus is immanent, or can happen any time. Nothing needs to occur first.

The verses prior to our text, 4:16-17 tell us, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." The phrase "caught up" literally means "to snatch up." The Day of the Lord begins as Jesus descends in the clouds – and like a child playing jacks – he snatches up all true believers alive at the time.

Chapter 5:9 explains the reason for the rapture. Paul states, "God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation." "The Day of the Lord" brings God's judgment.

Believers are not under judgment, but grace. Our sin was judged on the cross. In Christ we're appointed to salvation. Thus, "before God's judgment goes down, God's Church goes up." With the rapture, God brings to close "The Day of Man." In essence He is saying, "I've heard enough. It's My turn now." God gets the last word!

The Day of the Lord begins with the rapture, but it goes on to include many of the events and characters associated with the end times... *the Tribulation, the four horsemen, Antichrist, 666, Armageddon, the lamb lies with the lion, the Great White Throne, Second Coming of Jesus...* You'll find that Bible-believing Christians disagree over the timing and details of some of these events. We can't be overly-dogmatic and rigid.

But there's no disagreement over the key message of "The Day of the Lord" - **God reigns.** All Christians agree God is sovereign. He has ultimate and absolute control. *History* unfolds according to His plan – that's why it's called "His story." God intervenes in human affairs. God has the final word.

Today God seems to coach from the sidelines. He works under the surface, behind the scenes. But in stark contrast to "The Day of Man" during "The Day of the Lord" God's hand will be visible and tangible. God will be at center stage in the public's mind. The media will cover His moves. Every day's headline will report a deliberate "act of God."

At the moment, it's the Fifth Grade Boys' turn – God is still in the room - but He's overlooking sin, and giving room for human freewill to assert and express itself – *and God is noting the choices each human makes*. But very soon, God will stand up, stride to the lectern, and democracy will end abruptly. He'll shut up every mouth and silence every dissenting opinion. Wicked men won't let go easily – they'll resist the reign of God – yet in the end God takes what belongs to Him and fulfills His promises.

Each Sunday in our series we summarize our *Essential* in a statement of faith. I state it at the outset, and then we recite together at the end. Here is this morning's statement of belief... "We believe history unfolds according to God's plan. Today is "The Day of Man." "The Day of the Lord" comes unexpectedly. It declares that Jesus reigns, redeems, judges, fulfills, and is worshipped. We should live ready for that day."

According to Jesus, in "The Day of Man" the Kingdom of God is present on the earth - but incognito. His kingdom is here invisibly and spiritually. Jesus told the Pharisees, "The kingdom of God is within you." But in "The Day of the Lord" the King and his kingdom come out of the shadows, for the world to see. This is the emphasis in the Revelation.

Thirty-nine times in the book its author mentions *the throne of God*. In chapter 1 He sits on God's throne. In chapter 4 elders cast down their crowns before His throne. In chapter 6, God's judges the world - and men try to hide from Him who sits on the throne. In chapters 7 and 14 people worships and serve God around His throne... Jesus is on the throne! "The Day of the Lord" makes one truth crystal clear, "Jesus reigns."

Someone asked Mark Driscoll, "Why don't men come to church?" He replied, "Men have a hard time worshipping someone they can beat up." He's talking about the portrait some churches paint - *gentle Jesus meek and mild. Jesus is slim and frail, and spends all His time cuddling sheep*.

We're not told about the Guy who called the hypocrites, "sons of the devil"... the Guy who made a whip and beat the stuffing out of the Temple moneychangers... or Who on another occasion ignored the whip, and got so angry He took them down Ultimate Fighter style - with bare knuckles.

Revelation 19 records the climatic event of "The Day of the Lord." Jesus gets off His throne and mounts a white war-horse. There's fire in His eyes, and war on His mind. His head holds many crowns. He wears a white robe dipped in blood... *not His blood, but the blood of His enemies*. If you're one of His enemies that's not a good sign - *you're in trouble*. Jesus flashes a sword. His goal is to strike the nations and rule them with a rod of iron. *Jesus is coming to Earth to kick butt and take names*. He's even tatted up His thigh. It reads, "King of kings and Lord of lords."

The Bible says, the world's armies will gather at Armageddon to keep Jesus from returning, and possessing the Earth. But with a flash of His glory – a burst of His brilliance - He kills them all. It's not even a fight. Yes, Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He'll bring peace to Earth, but peace comes only after He's killed off all the rebels and destroyed His enemies.

"The Day of the Lord" will reveal what's been true all along... Jesus is not a Man with whom you want to play games. He can take you down. Jesus loves you and no matter what you've done He'll forgive you if you ask. But Jesus means business. Fall on Jesus in repentance and receive His pardon - or He'll fall on you in judgment, and it won't be pretty.

You need to choose sides! You're either for Him or against Him?

Remember what we discussed in earlier lessons. Today's world is dominated by two religions – there's **One-ism** and **Two-ism**. One-ism is the religion of Oprah, the Dalai Lama, and a lot of today's pop-culture. It's the belief that all is in God, and God is in all. One-ism forms

a single circle. All that exists gets placed inside the circle of life.

In One-ism there's no distinction between God and creation, or angels and demons, or man and animal, or male and female, or true and false, or light and darkness, or good and evil... Its Star Wars theology - good and evil are two sides to the same force. Nothing exists outside the circle.

This means everything's equal. It's all in the same circle. There's no authority – no absolutes. Rather than pray to a transcendent God, you meditate on the god within. Therapy replaces truth. There's no one to distinguish truth from false. One-ism's only sin is to be judgmental.

Yet sadly, One-ism eliminates any possibility of salvation or redemption. Since there's no one outside the circle, *who do you turn to when life inside goes sideways?* Humanity is left to ourselves to solve our problems.

Christianity though breathes hope. **It's Two-ism.** The one, true God is separate from creation. God exists outside the circle, and distinguishes between truth and false, good and evil - a right way and a wrong way. You could say, "**The Day of the Lord**" is the triumph of Two-ism.

In that day God will show the world how foolish it's been to assume this earthly life is all that exists. There is a God who stands above the circle. Jesus is the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of the universe. All that's in the circle of life belongs to Jesus to do with as He pleases.

"**The Day of the Lord**" will reveal five truths about Jesus. The first truth we've already stated, **Jesus reigns...** The second, **Jesus redeems...**

In Revelation 5 John is transported to heaven where he sees a scroll. It has writing on the inside and out – and it was closed with 7 waxed seals. This scroll turns out to be the title deed to planet Earth. At first John weeps. He sees no one worthy to break its seals and open the scroll.

Understand why this was so troubling to John... When God created the universe, He gave its dominion or control over to the man. But when Adam sinned he forfeited that dominion to Satan. Since the Garden of Eden the Earth has been hijacked – dominated by the devil.

Yet in ancient Israel real estate transactions had a redemption clause. If a parcel was sold it could always be bought back by its original owner, *or a wealthy family member.* That's what John is scoping out in heaven. He's hoping Adam has a rich relative who can buy back the planet. If not, the universe could fall permanently into the hands of Satan.

That's when one heaven's elders says to John, "**Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.**" The family tree of the kings of Israel had the tribe of Judah as its trunk, and the family of David as a branch. Jesus became a man - an heir of David. Jesus is our rich relative! He has the credentials to bankroll the scroll, and break its seven seals.

Understand redemption was *double-or-nothing*... When Adam sinned he lost his relationship with God – and with it, *lost* everything else. *It was double-or-nothing.* But likewise, when Jesus died to restore us to God – the price He paid also *redeemed* everything else.

Not only are humans saved, but because of Jesus' work on the cross all that's been touched by sin will one day be restored to its original glory.

Think of all that sin has spoiled... the oceans are polluted, mountain streams run with toxins, black soot poisons the air... because of sin. Marriages have broken up – friendships have been strained – mothers are alienated from daughters - children have turned against their dads.

Because of sin there's porn on the internet, and corruption in our courts, and steroids in baseball, and TV shows like the Bachelor, and car crashes, and Elvis impersonators, and teenagers who think they know-it-all, and frivolous lawsuits, and Smoltz in a Red Sox uniform, and tornados, and home invasions... Sin has seriously damaged our world!

Now think of what the world would be like without sin... The whole world would flower like a garden paradise. Peace would rule. There's no more crime, or war, or storms, or racism, or computer crashes. Marriages stay intact. Families live in harmony. Kids always respect their parents – and parents never abuse their kids. Television and the internet promote pure thoughts. Everyone is honest, fair, and kind.

If there's no sin, your son gets the same opportunities as the coach's son – the police pull you over to pass out coffee, rather than tickets.

Sin causes sickness, cancer, and death... Jesus rids us of all the above. In Revelation 21, John welcomes us to the new heaven and new earth Jesus establishes at the end of time. He says, "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Eyes will see... Legs will run... Lungs will breathe... Ticketers will tick... Bladders will hold long enough to make it through a two hour movie... Jesus will see to it that everything stained by sin will be restored.

And this includes post-mortem bodies. In 1Corinthians 15 Paul explains that these earthly bodies are incompatible with heaven's environment. If we're going to live with Jesus we need a new, eternal model.

And we get upgraded at the rapture. Listen to verse 51, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

As we said last week when a believer dies his spirit goes straight to Jesus. "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." But due to sin our bodies are subject to death and decay. They return to dust. Decomposition can occur over-years underground, or in 20 minutes at a crematory. How it happens doesn't matter. The cure is the same...

1Thessalonians 4:17 tells us at the rapture the dead in Christ rise first. Like Jesus every follower's body will be resurrected. Our molecules will be gathered and transformed – then reunited with our spirit in the air. Here's the point, everything sin has stained will be restored by Jesus!

The story of mankind ends the way it starts. The Bible begins with *man in a Garden*, and it ends with *man in a Garden*. The New Jerusalem has trees, fruit, and a river. In Genesis 3 man's sin bars us from the garden and the tree of life. In Revelation 22 we're invited to return and eat.

In the beginning Adam and Eve walked and ate with God. In Revelation 19 Jesus steps off His throne, and eats a feast with us, His friends.

Genesis 2 records a love song Adam sings to his bride, Eve, "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." There's a passage that implies Jesus will sing a love song to His Bride. Zephaniah 3:17 tells us, "He will rejoice over you with singing..." *Jesus will sing over us!* It all ends the way it starts. Here's the point, in "The Day of the Lord" when Jesus opens the scroll, and takes possession of this world, He'll restore all that sin has spoiled.

But notice what happens in Revelation 5, before Jesus opens the scroll, He first has to break its seals. And when He does, Revelation 6 records enormous, cataclysmic events that God uses to punish the Earth. "The Day of the Lord" reveals Jesus reigns, redeems, and judges.

Talk about being at the wrong place at the wrong time - evil men have always roamed the Earth, but the inhabitants of planet Earth in the last days are in for a barrage of God's wrath no generation has ever seen. All God's pent-up anger and frustration over sins and injustices that He winked at in the past are suddenly going to be vented upon this planet. Persecuted people

who've long suffered injustices will be relieved.

I read of a North Carolina man who purchased a rare case of expensive cigars. He insured them against fire damage. Before he paid the premium this guy lit the cigars and smoked them all one by one. He then filed a claim saying the cigars had been lost through "a series of small fires."

The insurance company refused to pay, and the case went to court. Unbelievably, the judge ordered the company to pay up \$15,000.

When I read the story I cried, "Foul! That's just not right! How can anyone get away with such a scam?" Then I read the *whole story*...

As soon as the man cashed the check, the insurer had him arrested - *on 24 counts of arson*. He'd already admitted to setting the fires. He was easily convicted. I read that and thought, "Great! Right wins in the end!"

My soul let out a sigh of relief... I believe we were made in God's image, and thus, we long for a world that's just and fair – that punishes evil. In "The Day of the Lord" Jesus will establish this same sense of justice.

Read of the judgments in Revelation 6-8. Our planet wobbles under the wrath of the Lamb. Quakes, fires, famine – Earth is on the disabled list. And don't fault God. You get to where love has to stop the insanity. At one point God pelts the Earth with 100 pound hailstones. In the OT blasphemers were stoned. Here God makes His point in a gigantic way.

And the judgment of Jesus lasts not just seven years, but for eternity.

Revelation 20:11 speaks of a "Great White Throne of Judgment" where every person, "small and great," are "judged according to their works." Thankfully, no follower of Jesus will stand at this "Throne of Judgment."

True believers are judged by the work of Jesus on the cross– not their own works. Reject Jesus and you'll find out just how inadequate all your goodness and religion are, up against the demands of a holy God.

Believers *are* judged by Jesus, but not at the Great White Throne. We read in 1Corinthians 3 of the *Bema-seat of Christ*. A bema-seat was where the athletes were awarded prizes. Here Christians receive their rewards.

"We're not judged by our works, but our works are judged..." *to see of what sort they are*. What was my motivation? Did I serve the Lord to be seen - then my service will be as wood, hay, and stubble – highly combustible. All I did for Jesus will burn up - and be in vain. But if my works were of a sincere, unselfish motive – they'll come through the fire like pure gold. I'll receive a heavenly reward.

In Joel 3 and Matthew 25 Jesus also judges nations based on how they treated Israel. Apparently, countries and people groups are also judged.

America should pay attention. Psalm 144 reads, "Happy are the people whose God is the LORD!" That's true, especially on judgment day.

"The Day of the Lord" reveals that Jesus *reigns, redeems, judges, and fulfills*. God keeps His promises – all His promises. We've seen this take place in our generation. As predicted by Ezekiel 2500 years ago, Jews from all over the world have returned to their ancient homeland.

On May 14, 1948 a nation was born in a day. *Who could've imagined?* Usually, a dispersed people without a home and language dwindle into oblivion. Where are the Hittites, Amorites, Assyrians – these were once mighty nations – *where are they today?* They no longer exist.

But the Jew! The nation Israel is a modern day fulfillment of a biblical prophecy. Its proof that God intends to fulfill all OT and NT promises. The “**Day of the Lord**” will expand Israel’s borders and establish a king in Israel named Jesus. We’ll reign and rule with Him. Every shadow and symbol – every promise - will be fulfilled in “**The Day of the Lord.**”

Finally, “**The Day of the Lord**” reveals the object of our worship. When the smoke clears it’s apparent that Jesus **reigns, redeems, judges, fulfills, and is worshipped**. This is what your Bible and Christianity are all about.

Revelation 4 focuses on heaven’s elders. They’ve been to the Bema-seat. They’ve been rewarded for their service – *with crowns*. But rather than wear them as badges of honor, they cast their crowns at Jesus’ feet. All the credit for what they’ve accomplished goes to Jesus.

All things come from Jesus. In the end, **all things return to Jesus**. In Revelation 5 all heaven – folks from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation come together and erupt in worship, “**Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain... Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!**” *Will you be in this crowd?*

You were made by Jesus to worship Him. Worship has been embedded in your nature. This is why you’ll never be fulfilled until you worship Jesus.

And we worship Him not just with our hearts, or our voices, but with our lifestyle. As Paul says to the Thessalonians we worship by being “**children of light**” – by staying vigilant – by watching and being ready for His return.

Martin Luther use to say, “**There are only two days on my calendar: today and that day.**” Live **today** in light of “**The Day of the Lord**” and when Jesus comes He’ll find you grateful, and pure, and on-the-job.

I hope you’ve benefit from our Essentials series. If you missed a lesson you can pick up a free CD, or listen to the message on the website. Let’s close today by reciting our statement of faith... “**We believe history unfolds according to God’s plan. Today is “The Day of Man.” “The Day of the Lord” comes unexpectedly. It declares that Jesus reigns, redeems, judges, fulfills, and is worshipped. We should live ready for that day.**”