

"THE LAST ROUNDUP"

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THE BAPTIST HOUR

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A midwestern farmer, with no love for religion, worked his farm on Sunday. He deliberately chose ten acres of his best ground and planted them in corn. He planted, plowed and fertilized these acres only on Sunday just to prove that religion is talk. The acres yielded more than any other ten acres, so he noised it abroad, "See, I told you. I defied God's law and nothing happened." In the local newspaper the next week one small line appeared as the editor's comment on the farmer. He said, "God does not always settle His accounts in October."

Today is the last Sunday in 1954. A note of pathos runs through final things. All that we did this year, whether good or bad is not behind us but before us. God does not always settle his accounts in 1954. Before us is the great judgment—the final reckoning of every man before God. Countless throngs of businessmen and women are closing the books this fiscal year, inventories are being run, trial balances, balance sheets, tax computations, but have you stopped to think of your record this year in the light of the final judgment? Despite the fact that many have assigned the belief in the final judgment to the old-fashioned, still the Word of God speaks its message with clarity. Look with me to some simple truths about this climatic day.

GOD IS THE JUDGE

"And God shall judge . . ." Oh blessed thought that the final disposition of man's soul is not left to the whims of earthly jurors or minor judges, not to the rulings of impersonal deities. God as judge is also God as our Father and when we know him in that personal relation, there will be no fears of Him in the hour of judgment. What a boost to our expectations to know that one so impartial, so objective, will be in the ruling seat.

Here we are subject to every human judgment, where prejudice and rancor doth prevail, where suspicion oftentimes clouds the issue and innocence is overridden by the guilty. Not so in

the final hour. God is the judge! And he never leaves that to any subordinates. Nothing is more cruel on the earthly scene than one person's judgment of the other. Despite the warning, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," tens of millions who go in the name of Christ have set themselves up as both judge and jury.

God, being God, means that he has no favorites. He will not be given to sentimentality. When Steve, my youngest son, really wants his way, he attacks me along the lines of my least resistance by saying, "But Daddy, have you thought about it this way?" And then I give in.

Not so with God in the judgment, though we pull all our wily arts and say, "God, but remember when I did this, or I gave to this community drive? After all, I am a pretty good person, and you know I had two strikes against me anyway." Then God, being merciful but also just, will say, "Be done with your rationalization. You were taught the truth, you were given the book of rules. Now the judgment must be on the basis of how you lived."

"When the great judge comes to write against our name,
He will not ask you whether you won or lost, but how you played the game!"

He would not be God if his nature wavered and weakened by the onslaught of pity and sentiment. This is not being hard or reading into God's doings the desires of little preachers; it is his own word's unchanging promise.

IT'S FOR ALL

Then the Bible says that we shall "ALL appear in the judgment," not just the rankest of sinners, nor the base and vile and vulgar, but ALL of us. Everybody will walk that one-way street. Kings and commoners, masters and slaves, young and old, rich and poor, saint and sinner. In that grand parade will appear the cripple, the unfortunate, primitive tribes, the cultured and educated, the militant, the

mEEK, the cynic, the agnostic . . . everyone will walk that road. Oh that in this moment YOU would know of a surety that YOU, TOO, will be there! Not by choice of yours, but by the necessity of God. . . . He has so ordained. Not one will be exempted.

Moreover, the judgment will be FAIR. It weighs every opportunity against the exploitation. It will remember that some are slow of mind, others are fast. God knows those who were limited from birth either by health of body or mind. Oh, such delicate, precise fairness! The mother divorced by a goddess husband and left to eke out a living for the children, all that will be given special consideration in that day. The orphan, hardened by hate and self-defense, his motives will be reviewed with care. The self-righteousness, assuming his superiority by virtue of his little humanitarian service, will be rudely shucked of his hypocrisy. The mentally ill, the senile, the children of war's ravage, the penniless beggar—these are special charges of a righteous God who will see to it that the judgment will be fair.

TRIAL BY FIRE

The apostle Paul says that the judgment will be a **trial by fire**. "If any man's works be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." Fire will consume as a deadly enemy, but it will also refine as a warming friend. "God shall try every man's work, whether it be good or whether it be evil."

Oh, there is so much that will not withstand the heat: the church member who gives more to one night of revelling than to the name of Christ in a fortnight, that will not stand the judgment heat; the **spirit** that is defiant and worldly, an attitude of scorn and selfishness, a driving, relentless mania for more, an obsession about the body, these will appear as dross in the refiner's fire.

Now in this crucial moment look at the results of the test. When the chil-

dren of God go through the fires they are not burned. The fire proves to be an asset; that which is unfit for the heavenly abode is purged and the gold is refined. Fire does not hurt their kind. "He shall go with thee through the fire." This is the logic of heaven . . . a nature conditioned by service in His name on earth now withstands the heat of trial and is made perfect thereby. Heaven fits the heavenly like a glove fits the hand . . . one was made for the other. The judgment fires say to the Christian, "You have graduated now. You are ready for the highest curriculum in the university of God. Move on, the fires do not burn you. The blood of Christ Jesus made your immunization possible . . . you are fire-proof! No hell glows for your kind, for your nature is heavenly."

RESPECTABLE SINNERS

But how about the evil . . . the respectable sinners . . . those who never really concerned themselves with God at all? They were too busy for discipleship. They said, "Christianity is too elemental. It is all right for the little children and the grandparents, but not for me. I just cannot quite see it!" How about them in the judgment? Jesus told about the sheep and the goats . . . one at the end of the day into one barn and one into another. At harvest time he said the wheat would be separated from the tares. He said the trees that bore fruit would grow on in the orchard but the evil ones would be cut down and thrown into the fire.

This is the logic of hell. Living like hell on earth, then hell as the final abode is the logical consequence. A sinner would be out of place anywhere else. Oh, this is the tragic fact! He would be like an Eskimo trying to live in the tropics—his nature is against it.

All your disagreements with me will not change the facts. You were made for God and made by God, and he never is content to see the judgment fires consume your soul. Why not make it right with him now?

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