

## I. Theater of Judgment

- A. Let's imagine you breathe your last breath and pass out of this life NOW.
  - 1. This is just an illustration.
- B. You fly beyond the clouds, and come to rest just outside the pearly gates. You are ushered into a giant stadium. It is jam-pack filled with people from every tribe and tongue and nation, of all the ages of human history. There's a buzz in the room. A giant movie screen fills the wall at one end of the stadium. It shows a countdown clock with ten seconds left. It's counting down.
- C. An angel flies up to you and says, "Welcome to the theater of Judgment... It's your turn... Relax..."
- D. The lights go down. A hush falls over the stadium. The screen flickers to life. The words, "Theater of Judgment" flash across the it, and then, much to your horror, there's your name. Thousands of heads turn and their eyes bore into you.
- E. The story of your life is going to be played for everyone to see. And not just the good parts. No, no. This is the *secrets* of your life. The juicy bits. It's the Theater of Judgment and it's your turn.
- F. Aren't you glad you came to church on Easter Sunday?
  - 1. This frightening Theater of Judgment was something I grew up with in the church. It freaked me out. I was sure God was going to display the worst stuff about me for a galactic shaming.
    - a) We'll come back to this Theater of Judgment in a bit.
- G. Happy Easter.
- H. We proclaim today a Risen Savior. We proclaim Christ risen again. Truly. Literally. Bodily. Historically. Eternally. That is the meaning of Easter.

## II. Scripture

- A. On this Easter weekend, would you please join me in going deeper into the meaning of the resurrection of Jesus. Please think with me about this paragraph from the Bible:
  - 1. *We were dead and buried with him in spiritual baptism, so that just as he was raised from the dead by that splendid revelation of the Father's power so we too might rise to life on a new plane altogether. If we have, as it were, shared his death, we shall also share in his resurrection. Let us never forget that our old selves died with him on the cross that the tyranny of sin over us might be broken.* (Romans 6:3-6, Phil)

## III. Happy Easter

- A. Twenty centuries ago, a man named Jesus walked this earth. He taught with astonishing authority. He loved us so much, he sacrificed his life, and he made claims unlike any other spiritual teacher of history.
  - 1. In his death, he went nose to nose with the monster called Sin — the plague that has captivated our race since the beginning.
  - 2. In his resurrection, he not only conquered sin, he also defeated death, the grave, hell, Satan, evil, and he unwound all their consequences.
    - a) It's as if Jesus went to a prison, found a race held captive, vaporized the guards, shattered the doors, and set the captives free.
  - 3. Jesus Christ is the great liberator — not by violence or force or strength alone, but by death and resurrection.
    - a) He did all this at great cost to himself. And he did this because he loves you.
  - 4. Think for a moment about Resurrection weekend.
  - 5. On Friday, Jesus met his death. The Blood of Christ flowed freely down the old, rugged cross. Disciples laid him in a tomb. Soldiers rolled a stone in front of it. Priests sealed it shut.
  - 6. Incarceration complete.
    - a) Darkness celebrated.
    - b) Demons cackled in glee.
    - c) Sin triumphed.
    - d) Hell opened wide.
    - e) Death reigned supreme.
    - f) Satan did a victory dance.
      - (1) The Great Liberator Jesus was himself held captive, and with him, all hope of human freedom was lost.
        - (a) But...
        - (b) But that was Friday, and Sunday was coming.
  - 7. There, in the ground, his body lay, all night Friday. All day Saturday. The cosmos was holding its breath.
  - 8. Then Sunday came.
    - a) Early on that Sunday morning, something happened. Something remarkable. Something unparalleled. Something the devil never saw coming.
      - (1) the ground started shaking,
      - (2) the guards started trembling,
      - (3) the seal started splitting
      - (4) the demons started screeching,
      - (5) The devil started raging,
      - (6) The stone started quaking,

- (a) Because...
- (7) Christ's body started waking,
  - (a) And when heaven's clock counted down to zero...
- (8) Up from the grave, he arose!
  - (a) What a mighty triumph o'er his foes.
  - (b) He arose a victor from the dark domain
  - (c) And he lives forever with his saints to reign.
  - (d) He arose!
  - (e) He arose!
  - (f) Hallelujah, Christ arose!
- (9) He conquered death.
- (10) He shattered the gates of Hell.
- (11) He broke the chains of sin.
- (12) He crushed the devil's head.
- (13) He sealed the demons' doom.
- (14) He shattered the powers of darkness.

(a) And he opened heaven to all who would come to him in faith, just as they are.

- b) In his resurrection, Jesus found all those who labored under a lifetime of captivity to heartbreak, addiction, confusion, pain, and despair. He swept them into his loving embrace and delivered them from the power of darkness once for all. He set the captives free.

9. Aren't you thankful for a Risen Savior?

B. Reality.

1. I would like to lay out for you three Easter realities, and talk about what they mean.

- a) I want to be very up front about this. After I talk a little about these three great realities, I'm going to ask you to make a choice. I want you to actually respond.
- b) You might have gotten up today and said, It's Easter, I'm going to church because that's what you do on Easter.
- c) But what if God is saying something more. What if he is saying, "It's Easter, I want you to encounter me."
- d) If you look around this room, you see hundreds of little clouds. Each one has a name on it. We have been praying for you, by name, to encounter Jesus today.
  - (1) So, heads up, I am going to lead you to that encounter. It is something called salvation.
  - (2) It won't be too weird. I won't single you out. I won't embarrass you. I just will simply open a spiritual door of prayer, and if you want, you can step through. It's invitation.
  - (3) You might not be ready... but you don't have to be.
  - (4) Just be willing.

C. According to the verse I just read, "the tyranny of sin over us can be broken."

1. Most normal people would want that, don't you think? That the tyranny of sin over them would be broken.

D. And the consequence is that will be "that we might rise to life on a new plane altogether."

1. Most normal people want that too.

E. Think about what this is saying. It is saying that Easter Sunday happened for you. It's not just a holiday; it happened for your sake. You have the potential to rise to life "on a new plane altogether."

F. May I illustrate?

IV. Illustration.

A. BASKET.

- 1. We are going to let this basket represent you.
- 2. God created you to soar. He designed you to thrive. Jesus promised an abundant life. Or, in the words of our verse, life on a new plane altogether.
- 3. So the basket represents you with all your enormous potential.

B. CHAINS.

- 1. To use the language of our Bible verse, these chains represent the tyranny of sin.
- 2. God designed you to soar, but the chains hold you down.
- 3. The Bible speaks of sin as a Captor and of the human race as its captives.
- 4. Sin is sin...
  - a) because it hurts your relationships.
  - b) It damages your emotions.
  - c) It fractures your relationship with God.
  - d) Sin hurts the people around you.
  - e) It violates the standards of cosmic justice.
  - f) It beats up your conscience with guilt and shame.

- (1) Worst of all, it righteously puts you in a position of condemnation from the infinite justice of God.
5. Sin is a tyrant in the sense that you can't escape it on your own. You can't erase it. Can't stop doing it. You can't undo the damage you have done.
6. So these chains represent the Tyranny of Sin.
  - a) This is the chain of addiction and despair.
  - b) This is the chain of arrogance and pride.
  - c) This is the chain of immorality, unkindness, selfishness, and abuse.
  - d) This is the chain of indifference and rebellion against God.
7. The chains can represent a million things. All of the little Inner Gollums that dominate your life and hold you down.
  - a) This is the stuff nobody wants exposed. This is why we all naturally dread the theater of judgment!
    - (1) I did. All the way through my early years, growing up in church, I dreaded the Theater of Judgment. It scared me. God was going to expose all the worst stuff about me, and I would be humiliated.
    - b) The basket represents you, designed to soar.
    - c) The chains represent the tyranny of sin.
      - (1) Next...
- C. THE BALLOONS...
  1. These balloons represent the three epic realities that set a person free from the tyranny of sin.
    - a) These balloons represent the LOVE OF GOD.
      - (1) God loves you because of who and what he is, not because of who and what you are, or because of what you do or don't do or start doing or stop doing.
    - b) These balloons represent the DEATH OF CHRIST.
      - (1) When Jesus died on the cross, he paid the price for all your sins. While he was on the Cross, God transferred all your guilt and shame and sins to Jesus. And God did something absolutely fantastic. He punished Christ for our sins instead of punishing you. That punishment was a death sentence, and Jesus paid it in full. This is the power of the death of Christ. Forgiveness and release from sin.
    - c) These balloons represent the RESURRECTION of Christ.
      - (1) Jesus defeated death, crushed the devil, and opened the door to heaven. He set captives free.
      - (2) Divine justice was satisfied.
        - (a) Divine love for sinners was made legit.
- D. In the three days, from the Cross to the Resurrection, Jesus did absolutely everything to bring us all back to God.
  1. That is why you can be saved, and I want to help you step across that line in just a few moments.
- E. So what is keeping a person down?
- F. You still have to get rid of these chains.
- G. People try all kinds of things to get rid of the chains.
  1. FILE... Maybe if I serve God hard enough...
  2. BOLT CUTTERS... Maybe if I cut out enough of my sins...
  3. SLEDGE HAMMER... Maybe if I put forth effort by sacrificing and strain to do good works....
  4. GRINDER... Maybe I can try the big guns of religion, baptism, confirmation, communion, confession...
- H. But none of these things work, and they never will.
  1. This was my life.
  2. I was so afraid of the Theater of Judgment, that all through my youth and young adult years, I was very busy for Jesus. Actually, I overachieved. I worked in Awana, led the youth group, cleaned the bathrooms, helped with music, I set up chairs, and went to church three times a week. Everybody thought I was this ideal Christian young man, and I was... but really, I was afraid. I was afraid of the Theater of Judgment, and public shaming in the end. So I worked hard for God.
  3. But no matter how hard I worked, I never felt peace with God.
  4. And here's why:
- I. Since it was Human power that forged the chains of sin, only God's power can make them go away.
  1. *For it is by grace that you are saved, through faith. This does not depend on anything you have achieved, it is the free gift of God; and because it is not earned no human can boast about it. (Ephesians 2:8, 9, Phil)*
- J. Look at this verse. What is God's part? Grace — The love of God, plus the death of Christ, plus his resurrection from the dead. Grace. God's work is already finished. Grace.
- K. But what is your part? Your part is faith — and you can do that part today.
  1. It is what I want to help you with.
- L. Wouldn't Resurrection Day be a perfect day for you to put your faith in Jesus?
- M. Only God can end the tyranny of sin.
- N. Only God can "raise you to life" on a new plane altogether.
  1. And he already done all that is required.
- O. The only thing remaining is for you to just say yes.

P. On the day you say YES to God's gift, on that day you will be saved.

Q. Invitation

1. If you recall, I began by bringing you to beyond the clouds to the Cosmic Theater of Judgment.
2. Three great realities: God's love, Christ's Cross, Christ's resurrection.
3. There was a day when it hit me that those three realities completely redefined the Theater of Judgment for me.
4. By his Cross, Jesus edited out all the bad stuff from my video. He didn't simply erase my sins — he put them into his own video and paid their price in full.
5. By his Resurrection, Jesus added his own good stuff to my video. All his goodness and righteousness has been edited in to the story of my life.
6. Because of the love of God.
  - a) The day I used to dread, I no longer dread.
  - b) When I finally meet my God, and it's time for the Theater of Judgment, I've got nothing to fear. Everything on the video of my life has been so remade by Jesus, that when the story is told, heaven will cheer, and God will smile and say "Welcome home."
    - (1) It turns out it's not a theater of judgment at all. It's a theater of honor and grace.
    - (2) In fact, I'll be the one who clicks PLAY.

R. I said at the beginning that I was hoping you would actually respond today. Let's do that now.

S. Maybe your heart is pounding. Maybe your mouth is dry. God is tugging at your heart. Or maybe you feel nothing at all. It makes no difference. This is your day. You can say yes,.

T. I'm going to walk you through the lines of a prayer. If you are willing, you can pray this prayer to God right now, silently in your heart. God hears the silent prayer of your believing heart.

U. Our prayer follows an ABC pattern.

V. Prayer

A. A stands for ADMIT.

1. God, on this Easter week, I admit I need you. I have sinned, and I cannot break the chains of sin by my own power. Only you can bring me back to you.

B. B stands for BELIEVE.

1. I believe Jesus is my way back to you. He is the only way. I believe he died for my sins. I believe he rose again. Thank you God for your great love.

C. C stands for CHOOSE.

1. God, right now, I choose Jesus as my only hope. I choose to trust him. I choose to receive him. I choose to open my life to you. God I'm asking you right now, for Jesus' sake, please save me. Please forgive me. Please make your child forever.

VI. Closing prayer

A. Lord we praise you as the risen king. You conquered sin, you defeated death, and you crushed the head of Satan.

B. We are so excited for every person who has believed in you today. Grant that they would rest their hearts in you, and grow in grace in their new life with you

C. We worship your mighty name.

D. There is no God like you. And there is no Savior beside you.

1. We praise you for your sacrificial death.
2. We thank you for your triumphant resurrection.
3. We glorify you for such a great and permanent salvation.
  - a) You have shattered the tyranny of sin.
  - b) You have broken every chain.
  - c) You have rewritten the story of our lives to reflect all the goodness of Christ.
  - d) You have raised us to life on a new plane.

E. On this Easter weekend, we praise you as our Savior, our Lord, our King, and our chain breaker.

F. In Jesus name,

G. Amen.