

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. Acts 17.30-31.

Today I want to go back to that remarkable speech which Paul made on the Areopagus when Jerusalem came to Athens, when God's revelation in the Bible met human philosophy. The smart philosophers laughed their sophisticated heads off when they heard Paul speaking about rising from the dead, but what I want us to look at today is v31 where he talks of *judgement*, v31...

When was the last time you heard a sermon on *judgement*? These days it's all about how God loves us, isn't it? No matter what we've done, God will always forgive us, because he's a God of love. So we don't get sermons on judgement and hell any more. It's true that Jesus himself spoke more than you think about hell, but in our non-judgemental world where it's all diversity and tolerance, we now know better than Jesus!

But do we really? Aren't you glad that finally our MPs have been caught out? Of course, in one sense it's desperately sad to have proof that they are such pathetic, self-pitying pygmies who would even claim back money for a church collection. It's very worrying for the state of our democracy, but it is deeply satisfying to know that they haven't got away with it. They've been caught out. For too long they have been taking us for fools. Well now we've got them! There is still some justice in this world, and *that* is satisfying.

But it's more than just MPs. Ruth Padel thought she could get herself elected to the very prestigious Professorship of Poetry at Oxford by smearing her rival, Derek Walcott. She

actually did win the election, the first woman to hold the post. But she was found out and had to resign.

The other week the Ryan Report came out cataloguing child abuse in Ireland by RC clergy over *sixty years!* The priests and nuns thought they had got away with it. They hadn't. Justice had finally been done, and now judgement is on the Church.

The whiz-kids in the banks and financial world with their bonuses and big braces all thought they were living the life as they laughed at us. Well, the credit-crunch and the recession have caught *them* out. Even we, the ordinary punter, have been finally caught out as we thought we could live way beyond our means by getting deeper and deeper into debt.

St Paul told the Athenians that God has set a day when he will judge the world. Judge the world? There's no *judgement*. What nonsense! Even the *Church* has stopped preaching judgement. But it's not true, is it? Politicians, bankers, churchmen, Oxford Professors of Poetry - they've all been caught out. Judgement has come upon them, and we're glad, aren't we?

For a generation or two we have been living a huge lie. There's no God. There's no absolute truth. There's no final justice. So we've been doing whatever we can get away with. We've been kidding ourselves that we live in a consequence-free culture. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the snake. Our politicians blamed the 'system'. It's the 'system' which needs to be cleaned up. No, it isn't. It's the *politicians* who need to be cleaned up. Recession, credit crunch? Not our fault! It started in America. Not me!

It was utterly woeful to watch politicians justifying

their pathetic actions. Their self-pity was bad enough, but to watch ministers smugly waving cheques to pay back the defrauded amounts as though that were something *virtuous* which we should all admire was deeply insulting. Do they have *no* moral sense? We would have cheered if someone had actually voluntarily resigned from the whole thing without being forced. It's the hanging on to the bitter end that angers us so much.

We all make mistakes. The whole point of the Bible is about sin and human weakness. The whole point of Jesus is that he came to help us; isn't the Cross a place of healing and forgiveness? Actually the Bible gives a perfect example of a man caught red-handed. King David was one of the greatest men of the Bible, 'a man after God's own heart', no less. And yet he did something truly terrible. He not only committed adultery with Bathsheba, but abused his royal power to get her husband, Uriah the Hittite, out of the way, by having him placed in the front line of battle. Nathan the prophet pointed at him and famously said, 'Thou art the man'. David was weak like the rest of us. He failed. But his greatness was in the way he faced up to it. Turn to p573, to *Psalm 51*. Let's read vv1-6...

David's greatness is that he made no excuse. He didn't blame the 'system', or his mother, or his genes. Fair cop, he said, and took the rap. David shewed true repentance, and gives us all hope in v17, because we have all failed like David in some form or another ... If only our bankers, and politicians had come clean like King David and taken it like a man!

These past turbulent months judgement has come upon our land, and finally, those people in politics, in finance, and in

the Church, who thought they were untouchable have been rumbled. They are shocked. All they can do now is whine.

But it's all here in the Bible. Paul wrote famously in *Galatians 6.7*: 'Be not deceived. God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap'. Recent events have shewn us that that is still true. We *did* deceive ourselves into thinking that we can live without consequences.

If we go back to *Acts 17.31* Paul tells us that God will judge the world by *Christ* ... The crowd was given a choice: Jesus or Barabbas? They chose Barabbas the terrorist. Why? Why did the crowd reject the Prince of Peace for a terrorist like Barabbas? Why does the crowd *still* exalt cheap celebrities (movie stars, models, footballers), paying them millions, while turning our backs on Jesus Christ? What does that say about us, our values and priorities? By that choice we condemn ourselves.

The MPs, and all the others never thought this day would come. The vast majority of our people who can't be bothered with God, with church; can't be bothered with Jesus never think that one day judgement will come on *them*. One day they will be not be facing the *Daily Telegraph* listing claims for poppy wreaths and Mars Bars but standing before God the *great* Judge. He will have all the receipts that we thought no-one would ever see. No doubt, like the MPs they'll be snivelling and blaming everyone else. So now is the time to repent. Now is the time to get right with God, and we *can* get right with him, by coming to know Jesus. And we know the Day is coming. The world laughed when it killed Jesus. Well, God raised him from the dead to judge the world. Like the MPs, it won't be laughing then.