



## DANIEL 7:9,10 | Look Closely...

Sunday, November 9, 2014 – Pentecost 9A

<sup>9</sup> *“As I looked,*

*“thrones were set in place,  
and the Ancient of Days took his seat.*

*His clothing was as white as snow;  
the hair of his head was white like wool.*

*His throne was flaming with fire,  
and its wheels were all ablaze.*

<sup>10</sup> *A river of fire was flowing,  
coming out from before him.*

*Thousands upon thousands attended him;  
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.*

*The court was seated,  
and the books were opened.*

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It's an unnerving sight. Dread and doom spread quickly throughout the body as your eyes imagine this event—thrones, judges, fire, courts—it doesn't spell good things for a sinful human like you. You know what awaits you post-verdict. You know that the all-consuming fires of hell create a thirst that cannot be quenched. You know that it's never-ending torment and tears. You know that the thought of God's love is replaced with fear and guilt. And you know that lasts forever. So this scene shouldn't sit well with you.

The judge is no one to be reckoned with. His name is the "Ancient of Days"! He was the one who, with simple words, had the first word as he created the world. He's been around for much longer than humans have ever existed. His existence has been perfect—no promise unkept, no sin committed, no deed deserving death—and he will have the last word, too. Issuing verdicts from his throne there will be no chance of making it out alive. After all, you certainly can't consider yourselves even close to perfect. Even when you want to do good, you don't. And even when you don't want to do evil, you end up doing it anyway! The Apostle Paul was right: "What a wretched man you are!"

The judge's appearance shouldn't instill confidence in you, either. His appearance is blindingly brilliant—white hair, white clothing, a throne of fire, a river of flames. He's certainly dressed the part! And what are you showing up in but tattered threads and crusty clothes. Like beggars and vagabonds you show up in this celestial court unprepared. How can you meet such an amazing being looking the way you do? And what gift could you bring to present to such a being? What do you have to offer him? It's not only your clothes that are filthy, but your words, your actions, your deeds and desires. All of them filthy. Disgusting. Depressing. Damning.

So where can you hide? You can't! His throne has wheels! It's moveable. It's not as if he sits in his courts waiting for people to come to him. He is everywhere. There's no escaping his presence! That thing you did last week in secret: on display! That thought you had about your coworker: exposed! The doubts and the worries and the lack of trust: laid bare for all to see!

Then you see the fire. You know what's waiting. You know the fierce heat of the judge's judgement will be directed at you. You know that you've disrespected him. You know that you've disregarded his commands. You know that you've ignored his warnings and stifled his shouts. You know how guilty you truly are. And you know that the heat of hell can be felt on your skin as you stand embarrassed by such a thought. What hope do you have? What mercy can be shown? None! You don't deserve it.

The books are opened. Dread. Names are being read. Despair. You know that your name shouldn't be in that book. You know that what you've done and the things you've said and the thoughts that have passed through your mind don't deserve anything good. You know that every single evil deed you've done has been recorded in that book of deeds. And you're doomed.

And the worse part is that the evidence is crystal clear. It's not as if this judge is prejudicial. It's not as if he's taking out a personal vendetta on you and your life. No. You could—no, have to!—own up to every single thing you've done. The evidence points to nothing but your guilt.

And so you brace yourself for the impending judgement. You're waiting for the fiery breath of the demonic dragon on your neck. With your eyes squeezed shut you brace for the impact of a guilty verdict.

But it doesn't come. You peek open an eye, and in the corner of your eye sits another throne. On it sits a lamb. It appears to have been slain. But in its hands it holds a banner of victory. It sits at the right hand of the judge. And as mortals appear before the throne, the Lamb pleads for those who stand before the judge. Person after person appears, and are granted life. How can this be? What is it about them that makes them different than you?

Nothing.

Look closely. Examine the scene again. Scour every detail. What did you miss?

Thrones were set up. Not a single throne...but thrones—plural! The throne of the Lamb sits beside the throne of the Ancient of Days. The Lamb who was slain was provided for you by the Ancient of Days. And the thrones aren't thrones of judgement. They're thrones of a king and his court. They exist in his kingdom. They are the center of the heavenly city, Jerusalem. In this kingdom is no pain, no tears, no sadness, no death. This kingdom is heaven!

But the thrones are on fire...surely we cannot escape the hellish fires of judgement? But do you remember the bush in the desert? Do you remember the pillar of fire in the wilderness? Do you remember the fire on the mountain, or in the temple, or above the heads of the apostles? This judge has appeared as fire for centuries—always as a reminder of his everlasting covenant with mankind. This fire was a reminder of the consummation of sin by the grace of a God who loved the world. This fire was a sign of the assurance of forgiveness through the promise of a savior from sin. And the Ancient of Days once again sits on a throne of fire...proclaiming peace to people.

And he's gleaming—a blinding brilliance that you cannot look at without turning away your face. But when you look closely, you see not an intimidating perfection, but an inviting warmth of love. You see

that it is not a face of anger and of wrath, but of compassion and mercy. And speaking in one ear is his Spirit. In the other is the Lamb. Both are pleading for you. Both are pointing to the wounds of the Lamb. Both are pointing at the book of life.

The book! Surely your name cannot be in there...surely your dreadful deeds are etched in stone. But when you're called to account, you look at the book expecting to see your laundry list of sins; but you see nothing but blank pages. They're gone...erased...as if they don't exist!

You're confused. How can this be? How are you any different than you were before? You aren't. It wasn't anything you did! It wasn't anything you said. It's not because you were in church every Sunday. It's not because your offering was bigger than others. It's not because you sent your children to a Christian school. It's not because you went to a Christian school. No, it's because of the Lamb. And because of the faith you have in it.

You see, the Lamb—Jesus—stood before this very throne. He stood before the judge. And there was no intercession. There wasn't another lamb pleading on his behalf. No, Jesus waited for a verdict. And the verdict was guilty. And that was absurd! He had lived a perfect life—no disregard for the word; no secret, shameful thoughts; no hurtful words; no despicable deeds. He had lived perfectly. And he gave that to you. Even though he deserved a sentence of, "Innocent," he received a verdict of, "Guilty." And he paid the punishing price for our sins. He endured those hellish fires. He took on Satan head-on. And he won! Satan was defeated. Death could not hold him. Sin could not entangle him. Satan could not kill him. And God gave this Lamb—though wounded—a throne to his right. And now, that Lamb, the lamb who was slain for you, now pleads for you.

So, dear Christian, behold a sight that brings horror for sinners like you and me. But look closely! There sits your Judge, with the Lamb. It's not a day of mourning or wrath. It's a day of mercy and grace. Rejoice, dear Christian! Lift up your heads! Stand confidently before the Lord as he looks closely at you. Because when he does he won't see your life, but the death of his Son. May that sit well with you today, and always. Amen.



*Soli Deo Gloria!*

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