

Lecture 8 - "Judgments"

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As we're working our way through the timeline of prophecy, we've talked about the condition of the world (self-centeredness and godless attitudes); the apostasy of the church (the falling away from truth); the Rapture of believers (those living and dead who are Christians who hear the trumpet of God and rise to meet Jesus in the air and receive their glorified eternal bodies); the revealing of the Antichrist who will fulfill Daniel's 70th week of prophecy for the Jews. He will proclaim to be their deliverer and bring peace for 3 1/2 years, then turn on them and usher in a terrible time of tribulation and persecution for another 3 1/2 years, at which time Israel will be invaded from the north and the battle of Gog and Magog will take place. Before mankind is destroyed, Jesus will return in His Second Coming to the Mount of Olives, along with His saints who are in heaven, and the Antichrist will be defeated.

There are many Old Testament prophecies yet to be fulfilled that God had promised to the Jewish nation. There is to be both a spiritual renewal and a fulfillment of the promises concerning the land that were made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Before the establishment of the one thousand year millennial kingdom, however, there is some unfinished business that we're trying to understand in today's lesson. It has to do with the subject of judgments.

The judgment of sin has already taken place at the cross of Jesus. God made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us. The term is "propitiation" . . . Jesus was the substitute sacrifice who paid for the debt of sin that we owe. Just as the blood of a lamb saved the Hebrews in Egypt from the death angel, so the blood of Jesus Christ, the perfect Passover lamb, saves us from spiritual death and separation from God. All sin, past – present – and future, has been covered by His blood. So, when we accept and acknowledge that sacrifice on our behalf, Romans 8:1 says, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Does that mean a Christian will never sin? No, of course not. While we are still in the flesh we will have to struggle with its desires. Now there is an ongoing "judgment" of sorts taking place. When we believe and accept Jesus as Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us. He begins to change our attitudes, develop the fruit of the Spirit, conform us to the image of Jesus Christ and, as a part of that, He convicts us of sin. We know in our hearts when we've done something wrong.

If we refuse to listen to the Holy Spirit and agree that we're guilty and repent, God will discipline like any good parent. Lovingly and fairly and often strictly. Hebrews 12:6 "the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son." 12:10 goes on to say, "Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." From time to time in our Christian walk we may need that discipline.

There is good news, too. The closer we walk to Jesus, the more we listen to the Holy Spirit's leading, the less likely we'll need that discipline. 1 John 1:8 says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. (vs.9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." When we sin (not if we sin), we need to repent and confess it and then rest in full assurance that we are totally forgiven and restored to fellowship with God. After accepting Christ as Savior, sin does not change our status as a "child of God," that was taken care of on the cross. But our Father wants His children to be obedient and holy – for He is holy.

That brings us to the judgment that is yet to come. There are three groups to be judged: 1) believers, 2) unbelievers, 3) Satan and the fallen angels. It's not complicated. Briefly (and then I'll expand on each) – believers, those who are saved, will be judged for what rewards they are to receive; unbelievers (alive and the wicked dead) whose names are not found written in the Lamb's Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire; Satan and the fallen angels, as well as the beast and false prophet we'll study about in Revelation, will also be cast into the lake of fire. The lake of fire was prepared for them, but wicked mankind has made the choice himself for that to be his final destination also.

Now let's look at each of these more closely.

All believers must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. No one who has accepted Jesus Christ is exempted from examination. What raises the problem is the word judgment. That brings to mind a court scene where a judge sentences the guilty to punishment. Let's dispel several erroneous ideas about the judgment seat of Christ.

- 1) Some picture this as a judgment at death to determine whether or not a person is permitted to enter heaven. Not so. We die and go to heaven (to be absent from body is to be at home with the Lord – 2 Cor. 5:8). There is no soul-sleep or purgatory in Scripture. This judgment takes place after we've been glorified into the likeness of God's Son. The cross guaranteed our admittance into heaven. The presence of the Holy Spirit is a deposit, a guarantee right now, that we will be allowed in and the righteousness of Christ given us at conversion allows us to get in without judgment or examination. So eliminate that idea.
- 2) Another erroneous view of the judgment seat of Christ is that it's a time for God to punish believers for the sins they committed after they accepted Jesus as Savior. Some people think only sins committed before conversion were covered by the cross, so at this judgment God will examine believer's lives between conversion and death and mete out the appropriate punishment. This devalues the death of Christ. When God removes sin, He does it completely, not partially. Psalm 103:12 "as far as the east is from the west so far has He removed our transgressions from us." Micah 7:19 says, "I will cast their sins into the depth of the sea." The most glorious words in all the Bible about our sins is found in both

the Old and New Testaments – “Their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more.” (Jer. 31:34 & Heb. 8:12).

- 3) Third, and again erroneous, is the idea that only the sins we confess are forgiven and what we don't will be judged at the this time. Again, as I just said, this presupposes that our sins have not been completely and perfectly dealt with by the blood of Christ. Remember that Paul was the one who wrote, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ”, and he was also the one who wrote in Romans 8:1, “There is now no condemnation (judgment) to them that are in Christ Jesus.”

The judgment seat of Christ in the original language is the “bema” seat. This was a familiar term to the Corinthians. When the Greek games were held, the victors were presented with prizes by the judges sitting on the bema seat. This is not a judgment time for sin, but where we appear before Him to receive our rewards. 2 Cor. 5:10 says, “that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that which he has done, whether it be good or bad.” We take “good or bad” to contribute to the idea that this is somehow connected with a judgment of sin.

God wants us to use our lives for the purpose for which He designed us, and He will reward us accordingly. The apostle was not speaking of things that were morally good as opposed to morally bad, but of things that were useful as opposed to useless.

Paul uses a building metaphor of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or stubble. God is not measuring by appearance but by eternal endurance. We like lists, so this is one as to possibly what might be included in “gold, silver, precious stones.”

1. how we treat others
2. how we exercise authority over others
3. how we employ God-given abilities
4. how we use our money
5. how much we suffer for Jesus
6. how we spend our time
7. how we run the particular race which God has chosen for us
8. how effectively we control the old nature
9. how many souls we witness to and win to Christ
10. how we react to temptation
11. how faithful we are to the Word of God
12. how faithful we are to the people of God.

It's not the what, it's the why. "If any man's work shall be burned up, he shall suffer loss." (1 Cor. 3:15) Not of salvation, but of rewards.

I want to share a practical scenario for the judgment seat of Christ from Joe Wall's book "Going for the Gold." Mr. Wall is a professor of Theology at Grace School of Theology and a past president of Colorado Christian University as well as a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary. He writes this:

"The scene is breathtaking. You have died, and the Lord has come for those who believe in Him. You have been joined to your resurrection body and now stand in the presence of your glorious Savior, the matchless Lord of the church and absolute Monarch of the entire creation.

"Your life flashes before you with three-dimensional vividness and stereophonic clarity (1 Cor. 3:13). Your beloved Lord publicly sets the record straight. All the false accusations, lies, and unfair criticisms you received in life are exposed for what they really were – full vindication at last! (Rom. 14:6-12; 1 Cor. 4:3-5; 2 Thess 1:4-10). Jesus then examines all that you have said, thought, and done in light of your purposes and motives. Why did you do that? Why didn't you do this? (Romans 14:12). His fiery eye reveals the true value of all that you have brought before Him (Rev. 1:14; 1 Cor. 3:13).

"You are awestruck and defenseless as you hear Jesus' declaration of all that is worthless and sinful, and you are pierced with a deep sense of shame (1 John 2:28). Your true spiritual maturity in life is examined, and He decrees the kind of welcome (reward) you will experience when you enter His glorious kingdom (2 Peter 1:11).

"You are commended publicly for your faithful service (Matt. 25:21) and for your public loyalty to Him (Luke 12:8-9). Then He awards you incorruptible symbols of honor (crowns) that are accompanied with the announcement of your responsibilities in Jesus' glorious eternal kingdom. Because Jesus Himself is ultimately the source of all that is good in your life, He is glorified by every honor He bestows on you.

"You have just been through the judgment seat (bema) of Christ."

Now that may not be the exact way it will happen in heaven, but all the elements of the bema seat that are revealed in Scripture are in that scenario. We must be careful to remember that "loss" will not involve punishment – there is no punitive time to be served or a time of purgatory. Again, purgatory is not a biblical concept, but a concept of man.

The shame we feel for what we did or did not do may even cause us to cry, but Jesus will wipe away all tears. 1 John 2:28 admonishes us "And now, dear children, continue in Him, so that when He appears we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming." Knowing we've disappointed our Lord in some way will be all the punishment we get.

Admittedly, we have a difficult time in visualizing these judgments. We tend to think of individuals standing in long lines, each awaiting his turn, which would take years. But because

Jesus Christ is God as well as man, it will probably take place simultaneously, yet each believer will be conscious of a personal encounter with the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings.

Certainly not all believers will get the same number of rewards, but there will be no envy in heaven. Every person in heaven will be satisfied that Jesus Christ was absolutely fair.

We need to look briefly at the rewards themselves. There are five “crowns” mentioned in Scripture.

The “imperishable crown” (1 Cor. 9:25) or “victor’s crown” is for the one who victoriously runs the race of life and “exercises self-control in all things,” like a long distance runner in training. Reaching this goal requires self-control such as the ability to say no to temptation, to self-indulgence, to distractions. It’s for those who pursue holiness.

The “crown of exultation” (1 Thess 2:19) or “soul-winner’s crown” is for those who have declared the gospel to unbelievers, led them to Christ and built them up as new believers. Reaching this goal means being obedient to the Holy Spirit’s leading to speak out, being available, tactful, and – like Philip with the Ethiopian eunuch – finding the right approach to present Jesus Christ.

The “crown of righteousness” (2 Tim. 4:8) is reserved for those who, like Paul, have lived for Christ’s return. Reaching this goal is fighting the good fight, perseverance, maintaining the faith and longing for Christ’s return.

The “crown of life” (Rev. 2:10) is for the one who perseveres under trial. Sometimes it’s called the “martyr’s crown.” Reaching this goal means heeding James’ advice to “count it all joy when you encounter various trials.” Seeing the bigger picture of what God may be doing and maturing through it. Remember, “There is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still.”

The fifth crown is the “crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4) given to leaders who shepherd God’s flock willingly, sacrificially, humbly and with integrity. Reaching this goal Peter tells us is performing ministry that magnifies Christ and is not under compulsion, or for sordid gain, or lording it over the flock.

I spent a little more time on the judgment seat of Christ because, as believers, this is the judgment in our future. However, we need to also know what is to be expected for the unbelievers and for Satan and his angels.

After the Antichrist is defeated and before the millennial kingdom gets underway in full swing, Jesus will judge three groups:

First, Christ judges Israel - the Jews who survive the tribulation period. Total fulfillment of the covenants and promises is about to begin. The prophet Ezekiel (20:33-44) used the figure of a shepherd checking out his sheep as they enter the fold to portray the Lord as He examines each tribulation survivor to determine whether or not he/she is eligible for entrance into the kingdom. During the tribulation period the earth's population will either accept Jesus Christ or will decide to join the Antichrist in his revolt against God. The outcome is that the righteous enter the millennial kingdom and the wicked rejecting Jews will be condemned.

Second, having judged the Jews, the judgment of Matthew 25:31-46 takes place. Verse 32 says, "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." So this is commonly called the "judgment of nations." The word translated nations in Greek is "ethnos," which can also be translated "gentiles." God will seal 144,000 Jews to be evangelists during the tribulation as we'll study in Revelation 7:4. How were they treated?

The sheep (those in every nation who believed their message about Jesus Christ) will go to the right. They were the ones who ministered with food /drink /hospitality/ clothes/ compassion. They were saved during the tribulation. Remember they are not saved because they were kind to the Jews, but they were kind to the Jews because they were saved. The basis of salvation is always faith in Jesus Christ not by works or good deeds.

The goats, on the other hand, rejected the Jews and their message and go to the left. The basis for judgment the same for both. The rebels "goats" will be put to death and depart into Hades, the believers "sheep" will enter the millennial kingdom.

When we think of hell, the lake of fire, we picture Dante's Inferno description of a region with people writhing and screaming in pain. It's futile to speculate about the temperature in hell or the nature of the suffering that people will endure there. It will be God's penitentiary and He will dispense justice to each lost individual. Because He is perfectly holy, He must punish all disobedience equitably. We must neither minimize its severity nor exaggerate its intensity. We can count on this . . . it's a place we don't want to be.

I don't like the idea of anyone suffering forever. Don't you wish we could find one Bible statement that would give us a basis to say that every fallen angel and every human being will ultimately be saved? But not one passage even hints in that direction. Therefore, painful as it is, we must accept the doctrine of eternal punishment for the lost. With Abraham, we need to acknowledge, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right? (Genesis 18:25).

The third type of judgment at the Second Coming of Jesus will be His binding Satan and judgment of the fallen angels. There are two classes of fallen angels – unchained and chained. The unchained fallen angels (we usually refer to them as demons) have had freedom of movement to assist Satan in his evil throughout history and are the ones who can possess

unsaved men and women. Their primary sin was that they followed Satan in his rebellion against God. (Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:12-19)

The chained fallen angels (2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6) have been kept in "solitary confinement" so to speak awaiting their judgment at the end of the tribulation. Some Bible scholars think they were guilty of dual sins, not only did they join Satan's revolt, but they also committed sexual perversion with the "daughters of men" before the flood. (Genesis 6:2)

Having cleansed the world of evil and unbelief, Jesus now establishes His millennial kingdom. That's another lesson.

There is one more judgment to look at quickly that takes place at the end of the millennial period. It's called the Great White Throne judgment. Our concept of God's righteousness and holiness has been so diluted that we see only God's love and think of Him as too kind to judge anyone for sin.

We're going to read in Revelation (20:11-13), "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up its dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done."

God is a divine bookkeeper. He has been keeping an unchangeable record throughout time. Here we see He has been keeping two sets of books. In the first, God is keeping a record of the works, both good and bad, of sinners. Our own record was contained in them until it was purged by the blood of Jesus.

God, in infinite grace, gave Jesus Christ to be our Sin-bearer, and when we accept Him as Savior, He wiped the record clean of our evil works. The righteousness of Jesus Christ has been credited to our account and has paid for all our sins past and future. When God looks at our record now, all He sees on the sin side is a clean slate.

John, as he recorded Revelation, was not speaking of those whose records have been cleared. He was speaking of the unsaved who stand before God to have the books opened. All the sin, unrighteousness and unholiness in their lives will be revealed.

But there is a second book called the Lamb's Book of Life. It is the register of those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This book is a safety check. When an individual stands before God and the books are opened, there is the undeniable record of his sins, guilt, unrighteousness, and unworthiness to be received into the presence of a holy God.

The record stands. And then, as though to demonstrate that no error has been made, God will take the Book of Life and look for the person's name. If God doesn't find the name, the sentence against the sinner will stand; the sinner did not accept God's provision of grace. He or she must pay the sentence and bear the curse. Revelation 20:15 says, "Whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

How black or white a person's record is according to human standards does not matter. Nor does it matter if you are better than your neighbor. According to God, the record is imperfect because it doesn't measure up to God's standard of righteousness and holiness. People will not be sent to eternal punishment because of what they did, but because of what they were. They were rebels who would not avail themselves of God's grace. They would not receive the righteousness provided by God through His son, Jesus.

The issue at the Great White Throne will not be to decide a person's eternal destiny. Choosing between heaven or hell is always decided in this life. It is an individual choice. Being a "good person" or church attendance/membership is not enough. Having been dedicated or baptized as a baby certainly got you on the right track, but again it's not enough.

If you can't recall a specific time in your life when you consciously made the decision - I believe in Jesus Christ and accept Him as my Savior, then maybe now is the time. Maybe you've never made that decision because no one asked you to directly. I've done this the last couple of times I've spoken to you, but I'm compelled to do it again because it is so important. Please bow your heads, listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in your heart, and if you feel convicted that you've heard the truth, then pray in your heart this prayer that changes your eternal destiny.

Will you bow.

"Father, I thank you that Jesus died for me. I confess I am a sinner as You said. I repent. Please forgive my sins. I receive that pardon right now. Lord Jesus, come into my life. Give me a new heart and new desires. And by your Spirit, give me the power to live a life that is pleasing to You. Thank You for forgiving me as You promised. Thank You for the gift of Your grace and for eternal life with You."

If you prayed with a heartfelt prayer, then you can be assured that the Lord has prepared a place for you in heaven. Your name was just written in the Book of Life. Your sins past, present and future have been covered by the blood of the Lamb. That's how easy it is for you. But it wasn't free – it cost God the Father the life of His beloved Son in your place. Just thank Him for such love for you.

Grace doesn't demand perfection in the Christian life – as long as we have a mortal body, which Scripture terms the "flesh," we will be subject to sin. But praise God our eternal destination is settled once and for all by what the judgment of the cross accomplished for us

and we just have to accept God's grace in faith. Ephesians 2:8 "For it is by grace you have been saved, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast."

There is just one more thing . . . if you accepted Jesus into your heart as your Savior, tell someone before you leave. We want to rejoice with you. May God richly bless each one of you is my heartfelt prayer.