

Valley Bible Church – Adult Class

Living in Light of His Return: The Judgment Seat of Christ

Adult SS ~ June 21, 2015

Introduction:

Happy Father's Day to you dads! Being a faithful father is one of the hardest and most fulfilling roles to play in life. It is an enormous responsibility and has such incredible rewards!

Considering the concept of *reward*, this morning we are going with the raptured and resurrected church into the heavens to watch her receive her rewards of righteous living. According to the Scriptures, two eschatological events still remain for the church *after* it's rapture and *before* Christ's second coming to earth to establish His Millennial Kingdom. These two events occur in the heavens some time during the Tribulation that will be happening on the earth. They are the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Marriage of the Lamb and the first we will cover today.

Thesis:

We are headed into the heavens—before the very presence of Christ—with all the church as we look at five components of the Judgment Seat of Christ. I hope to consider this first experience of the raptured and resurrected saints with you in order “to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy” (**Jude 24**).

Outline:

1. The Necessity of the Judgment

- a. All men whether saved or not will one day give an account to God, therefore there must be a time allotted for every person to be judged
- b. Several Scriptures reinforce this general truth:
 - i. **Matthew 12:36** “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.”
 - ii. **Colossians 3:24, 25** “knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. **25** For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.”
 - iii. **First Corinthians 3:13** “*each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it*, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.”

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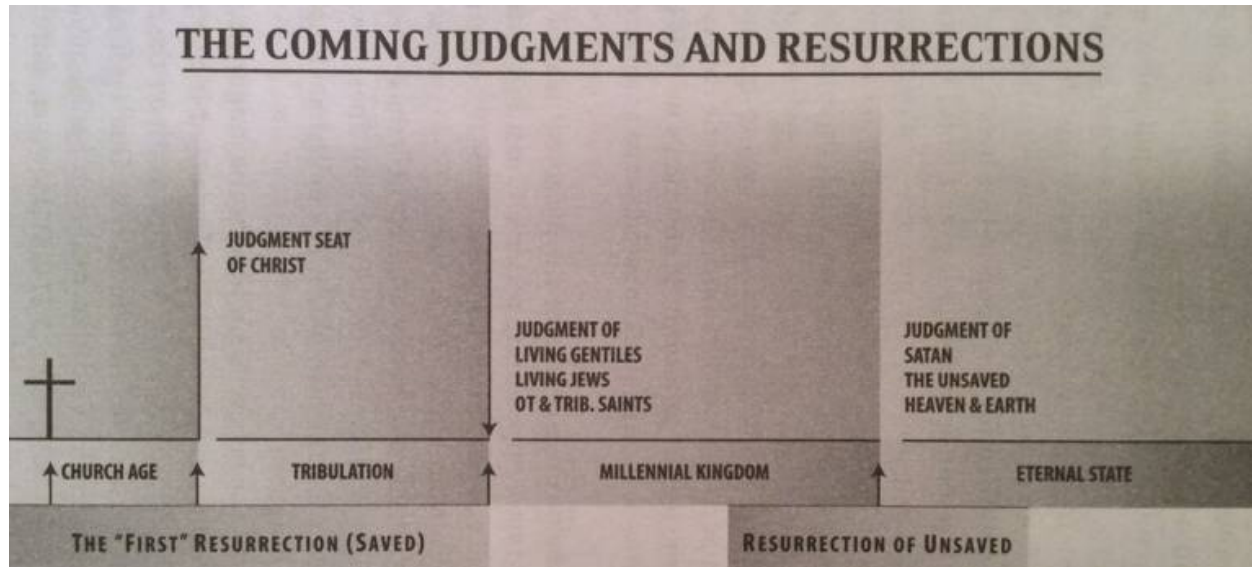
- iv. **Romans 14:10–12** “Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? *For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God*; **11** for it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ **12** *So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.*”
- v. **Second Corinthians 5:10** “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”

2. The Time of the Judgment

- a. The Scriptures speak of three distinct future periods of judgment:
 - i. At the Rapture, involving the whole church (**Rom 14:10, 12; 1 Cor 3:13; 2 Cor 5:10**).
 - ii. At the Second Coming, involving:
 - 1. Gentiles alive at end of Tribulation (**Matt 25:31–46** “the sheep and goats judgment” and **Joel 3:1, 2**)
 - 2. Jewish people alive at end of Tribulation (**Matt 25:1–30; Ezek 20:34–38**)
 - 3. OT and Tribulation saints (**Dan 12:2–3; Rev 20:4–6**)
 - iii. After the Millennial Kingdom, involving:
 - 1. Satan and the fallen angels (**Rev 20:10**)
 - 2. Present heavens and earth (**2 Pet 3:10; Rev 21:1**)
 - 3. The unsaved (**Rev 20:11–15** “the Great White Throne”; **Jn 5:22, 26–29**)

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- b. See Paul Benware's chart from *Understanding End Times Prophecy*:



- c. The Judgment Seat is best placed shortly after the rapture of the church and some time within the seven-year tribulation period, based on logical deduction
- d. If Christians are being judged for works done prior to the rapture, then it would reasonably follow that it would take place as soon after the rapture as possible
- e. A few Scriptures support this reasoning:
- Luke 14:14** "You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just"
 - First Corinthians 4:5** "Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God."
 - Revelation 22:12** "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done."

3. The Nature of the Judgment

- a. We must define what the focal point of the morning is: *the Bema*. *Bema* is the Greek word for "judgment seat." The "judgment seat" was a raised platform where a judge sat to judge cases or make announcements.

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- b. There are a few examples seen in Scripture:
 - i. **Matthew 27:19** “Besides, while he was sitting on the *judgment seat*, his wife sent word to him, ‘Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.’”
 - ii. **Acts 18:12** NASB “But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the *judgment seat*.”
 - iii. Knowing what it is like to be tried before a judgment seat, Paul says, “For we must all appear before the *judgment seat* of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (**2 Cor 5:10**).
 - iv. **Romans 14:10** “Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the *judgment seat* of God.”
- c. There are multiple reconstructed ruins of ancient bema in biblical lands
- d. In the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* under the word *bema*, it comments, “Jesus who (like his apostle) appeared before the judgment seat of men and suffered unjust judgment will one day sit in righteous judgment over unjust men. But Paul reminds his readers that believers are not exempt from this scrutiny and judgment. Even though reconciled (**2 Cor. 5:20**) and justified (**Rom. 5:1; 8:1**), they still have to give account and have their work tested (**1 Cor. 3:13 ff.**).”
- e. “Bema” was also commonly understood to be a raised platform that an umpire or referee sat during the Olympic games. This was the place that the winners would come to receive their reward. The Apostle Paul seems to have this idea of reward in mind as he speaks of the “judgment seat of Christ” (Benware).

4. The Results of the Judgment

- a. The results of this judgment will either be a “reward” for works approved by God or a “loss” for those not approved by God
- b. **First Corinthians 3:10–15** is the key passage here. Let’s read the chapter.
- c. Here Paul talks about building materials of two different classes:

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- i. “gold, silver, and precious stones,” which are not destroyed by fire
 - ii. “wood, hay, and stubble,” which are destroyed by fire
- d. Laborers build with either materials in their work for Christ, but the fire of judgment will reveal of which class they are
- e. Those who build with materials that will endure the fire will receive reward and those who build with materials that will not endure will suffer loss
- f. The criteria for this judging will be the good pleasure of God
- g. Those who make it their aim to please God in their work will build with “gold, silver, and precious stones” and those who do not please God in their work will build with “wood, hay, and stubble”
- h. Parallel passages point to what the “reward” may involve: opportunities to serve Christ in greater ways in His future kingdom (**Matt 25:19–23**), experience a special joy and fellowship (**Matt 25:21, 23; 1 Pet 4:12–13**), receive divine commendation (**Matt 25:21**), and obtain a variety of “crowns.”
- i. The New Testament speaks of five distinct types of crowns:
 - i. An “imperishable crown” for those who keep the old nature in subjection (**1 Cor 9:25** *“Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.”*);
 - ii. A “crown of rejoicing” for those who bring others to Christ (**1 Thess 2:19** *“For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?”*);
 - iii. A “crown of righteousness” for those who love Christ’s appearing (**2 Tim 4:8** *“Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”*);
 - iv. A “crown of life” for those who maintain their love for the Lord in the midst of trials (**Jam 1:12** *“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”*); and

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- v. A “crown of glory” for those who are good shepherds of God’s flock (1 Pet 5:4 “And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory”).
- j. These may not be all the different types of crowns awarded but we can know for sure that God will reward equitably, according to what each person deserves
- k. DISCUSS: *What is the “loss” experienced by those laborers who build with flammable materials?*
 - i. We know it does not concern the person’s salvation because Paul says, “But he himself *will be saved*; yet so as by fire” (1 Cor 3:15). Also consider:
 1. **Colossians 2:13** “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, **14** by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. **15** He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”
 2. **Romans 8:1** “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ.”
 3. **1 John 4:17** “By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. **18** There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.”
 - ii. Notice that the word “work” is used four times in three verses (vv. 13–15)
 - iii. We may assume that judgment has to do with punishment, but that is not the only connotation of the word judgment; it can also be used in the sense of *evaluation*, like it is here
 - iv. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, He will not *punish* His children for their sin; rather, He will *evaluate* their work while on earth
 - v. The fire of the end will disclose or reveal what was done *in* and *for* Christ

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- i. **Summary:** the “reward” involves the bestowal of certain crowns or rewards for righteousness and the “loss” involves the lack of reward for righteousness, NOT the judgment for sin

5. The Impact of the Judgment

- a. Think about the Apostle Paul’s situation in **2 Corinthians 9:24–27**...
 - i. What may disqualify me to receive the “imperishable wreath”?
 - ii. In what ways do I not practice what I preach?
 - iii. Is my flesh gaining mastery over me? If so, how?
- b. Think about the Pharisees’ situation in **Matthew 6:1ff**...
 - i. Do I care more about what others think of my righteousness than what my heavenly Father thinks?
 - ii. What value is the “secret reward” to me?
- c. Be careful how you are building your life (**1 Cor 3:10**). Like John said in **2 John 8** “Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.” Ask yourself:
 - i. What impact am I having on the Kingdom of God?
 - ii. Am I getting too caught up in the things of this life rather than the things of the next?
 - iii. What things am I doing that are undoing the ministry I have been trying to do?
- d. When you are standing before Christ on that Day, none of the “fun” you have in your flesh will have been worth it. As you behold the glory of Christ, you will suddenly realize how little you brought glory to Him in your life. Repent and confess your sins to God now.
- e. On the other hand, if you have denied yourself, carried your cross, and followed Christ (**Mk 8:34**) with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength (**Mk 12:30**), then there will be no cost, no trial, no trouble too great in this life in light of your heavenly reward. Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven (**Matt 5:12**).

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Conclusion:

At any moment, the church will be raptured and the dead in Christ will be raised to meet Him in the sky. At that very point, all church-age believers will be rewarded for their work done in God's strength and for His glory.

Oh to hear the voice of the One that spoke and the heavens and the earth were formed and filled, speak your name and say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Join me in the place I have been preparing for you." What power those words will have over your soul!

In what condition will you be when you finish the race?