

LIII. Timeless Truth for Timely Topics in Biblical Perspective

What Does the Bible Say?

“What Happens When I Die? (Part 6)

The Final State—The New Heavens and Earth”

I Corinthians 15

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We will start by looking at Matthew 25. This is the last study on this topic of what happens when we die. I plan to look at five passages of Scripture that deal with the judgment seat and this is not exhaustive of all the texts that deal with the judgment but they are definitive. Then I want to distill all of what these texts say with about four or five points that you can take away from this. The judgment seat stands before us and the Bible says in Hebrews 9:27, [27] *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.*

If you had an appointment wouldn't you like to know what is going to take place? If you had an appointment with God, wouldn't you want to know what would take place? You might be thinking that believers might not be there. Do believers have that appointment? And if believers are there, are they there in a different status than the unbeliever? Do believers and unbelievers have separate judgments? So how are we to approach this? Do I have that appointment and who do I have it with? Who is the Judge? At that appointment what is the criteria, what is going to be covered? So let's start by looking at Matthew 25.

Matthew 24 is the text that tells us that Jesus is not coming again until all of the elect are saved, the Gospel has gone to all the nations and lastly that God's plan in Christ is utterly and completely fulfilled to take the Kingdom throughout the entire world. Jesus then begins to deal with the judgment by giving two parables in Matthew 25 – the parable of the ten virgins and the parable of the talents. Then He comes to a definitive statement at this concluding era of His ministry concerning the judgment.

Matthew 25:31–46 says [31] *“When the Son of Man (The title Jesus refers to Himself the most in Scripture) comes in his glory (His second coming), and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. [32] Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. [33] And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. [34] Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father (this is salvation by grace for those on His right didn't get there because they blessed the Father but the Father had blessed them), inherit the kingdom prepared for you (this was not earned) from the foundation of the world. [35] For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, [36] I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ [37] Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? [38] And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? [39] And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ [40] And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’*

[41] *“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. [42] For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, [43] I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ [44] Then they*

also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' [45] Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' [46] And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Here our Lord advances the timetable before us to give us glimpse of what will happen when He comes again. When He comes again He will come in glory. He will not come in humiliation (that was in the First Advent) but He will come in exaltation (the Second Advent). He will come not announced by the angels but simply accompanied by the angels. He will come to sit on His glorious throne, also called the Judgment Throne of God, that was appointed to Him by the Father. Then all the nations will be gathered before Him and the peoples will be separated – as sheep and goats. The picture would have resonated with those living at this time because they knew when the herdsmen went out there would be sheep and goats and by command they would divide them up. At night they would be separate places. The ones on the right, the sheep, are the saved and the ones on the left, the goats, do not belong to Him.

Then He tells those on the right that they have inherited the Kingdom of God. The Mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus, has died and rose again and with His death, like every other covenant or will, those who had been appointed as the beneficiaries inherit the blessings of that covenant. He identifies the elect of God as being blessed by the Father, through Him, by whom they inherited the blessings of the Kingdom. But the same grace that gave them a status of blessing is the same grace that went to work at their life. Their life was not a perfect life but it was a changed life. Therefore at the judgment seat throne of God in Christ, He will point out the difference between the sheep and the goats. It is not the difference that saves them but it's the difference that identifies them.

The difference is not the ground of their salvation because they inherited their status but the same God who saved them by grace was at work within them by grace and one of the evidences He points out is their commitment to minister to one another. They minister to Him because when He was sick they came to Him, when He was naked they clothed Him, when He was hungry they fed Him, when He was thirsty they gave Him something to drink and when He was in prison they visited Him. They will say 'when did we do that to You?' His answer is 'when you did it to the least of these.' We tend to say this when we begin a prison ministry and that's appropriate but that is not what this text is talking about.

This text is referring to believers. Jesus has just told them in the previous chapter that believers will be persecuted, marginalized, imprisoned and all of that. They live in a broken world with broken bodies and all the issues that come with that. All of the things in this world they will endure. What do we as God's people do? We reach out to our brothers and sisters in the Lord and He said that when you did it to one of them that you did it to Him. The church is called the body of Christ. When you minister to God's people Jesus takes it personally. By the way, when you abuse, ignore or misuse God's people, by not speaking the truth or speaking the truth without love or by loving without the truth, He takes that personally too. How do I know this?

Do you remember Saul? Before Saul became Paul he was a religious terrorist. Saul intimidated people so much that people were scared of him even after he was converted. He made sure Christians were put into prison or killed like he did with Stephen. Do you remember what happened to him on the road to Damascus? He was struck with blindness and then a voice from heaven came to him. Acts 9:4–5 says [4] *And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"* [5] *And he said, "Who are you, Lord?"* And he

said, *“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”* What Saul was doing against God’s people was taken personally by Jesus Himself. When you do it to the least of these you have done it unto Me. This is one of the evidences that will be exposed at the judgment seat of the changed life of a believer.

On the other side are the goats. The goats hear Him say that when they didn’t minister to the least of these they did not do it unto Him. So they neglected Him. They not only neglected Him but in many cases they would have persecuted Him. The point is that what they didn’t do, there became an evidence that they did not have a new heart because of the life they were living. They live a life ignoring, persecuting and abandoning the things of God and done these things against God’s people. What they have neglected to do for His people becomes an evidence in their lives. To those who inherit the Kingdom and the evidence is firm are told ‘Enter in to the Kingdom that was prepared for you before the foundation of the world.’ Those who do not know Him and the evidence will convict them (this was just one set of evidences) then they will enter into the lake of fire for an everlasting punishment that is unending and unendurable that is prepared for the devil and his angels.

It’s interesting to note the Kingdom that His people enter into was prepared for them and the hell that the unbeliever enters into was prepared for the devil and his angels. But they will enter into it because they have said ‘no’ to the glory of God and ‘yes’ to the glory of self. Matthew 25 is a key text in the understanding of the judgment seat but now I want to look at John 5.

John 5:25–29 says [25] *“Truly (Amen), truly (Amen), I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. [26] For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. [27] And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. [28] Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice [29] and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”*

Here we are told that Jesus is also coming with a voice and the voice will raise those who are dead, meaning their bodies. From what we have studied already on this topic we know that are souls are in an intermediate state and our bodies are still in the grave. There are only two exceptions to this in the Bible. One was Enoch who walked with God and was no more and the other is Elijah who was taken up into glory. The body of humanity comes from the dust and in the curse of sin returns to the dust but the same God who made us can gather that dust up by His spoken Word and He brings those bodies back into life. The tombs are emptied of all who are in it – both great and small. It also says in Revelation 20:13 that the oceans will give up their dead also as well as the ground. Everyone will be raised to appear before Him.

We see in verse 29 about those who have done good. It is very clearly in the Scripture that it is not what we do that saves us because we do not have a perfect righteousness. Again He is referring to the evidence. There is no one who was saved that there wasn’t a change in evidence. What about a death bed conversion? We see this with the thief on the cross. Before he was converted he was mocking and blaspheming. What did he do after he was saved? He was confessing, worshipping and even evangelizing when he said in Luke 23:40–41, [40] *But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? [41] And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”* He didn’t have time to do a lot of worshipping and

evangelizing but anyone who is saved will have a change and it will be marked out. Therefore evidence will mark one out at the resurrection of the judgment.

Now let's look at Acts 17. This is a great sermon that the Apostle Paul preached in Greece as he is dealing with the Athenians and their idolatry. I'm just going to pick out one piece of his sermon. Acts 17:30–31 says *[30] The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.* Paul lets them know exactly who the Man is that can save them because He is the One that has been raised from the dead. This Jesus has been declared the Judge by the Father. His work as Messiah is His triumphal work over sin, death, hell and the grave and affirms that He will be the Judge on that Day in which God has fixed in which the world will be judged.

Let's look now at II Corinthians 5:1–5 which says *[1] For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. [2] For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, [3] if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. [4] For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. [5] He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.* How do I know I'm going to have a new body in a new heavens and new earth? The down payment, the guarantee, has been the sealing ministry and presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. What is the result?

II Corinthians 5:6–10 says *[6] So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord (not in His actual presence at the throne), [7] for we walk by faith, not by sight. [8] Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. [9] So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. [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.*

This tells us when believers die they are at home. There are so many things I hear Christians say and I know why they say it but it's just not accurate. They say 'you can't please the Lord because He is already pleased in Jesus for you.' What kind of relationship is that? Are you saying that I can't disappoint Him or give pleasure to Him in my relationship with Him? Are you speaking to me legally? Yes, because He is satisfied through Jesus on my behalf and all my sins are paid for but I can promise you that I can do things that bring displeasure to God. He is slow to anger but that doesn't mean He doesn't get angry with our sins and that doesn't mean you lose your salvation.

There is a walk with the Lord where you can actually bring a smile to your Father's face, if I may speak in those terms. It doesn't mean you get saved because you did well. It means He is pleased with His children when they walk away from sin and walk to Him. He is pleased when we do it to the least of these, His brothers and our brothers in the Lord. Therefore in my life I've got a Savior but to give glory to God whether here or there, my new occupation is to please Him. I belong to Him. I am His and He is mine. So whether here or there our aim is to please Him. When you started last year, where did pleasure to God enter into the planning process? Our goal, singular, overriding, because we love Him who first loved us is to please Him whether here or there.

I realize this because of II Corinthians 5:10 says. Is my salvation at stake? No that is secure, but rewards and affirmations will be declared in that judgment. The evidences will be

there in word, thought and deed. Has God's saving grace come upon this man or this woman? Have they moved from self-fulfillment to self-sacrifice to fulfill the glory of God with their life? Will those evidences be there? The judgment seat will reveal not only the status but the evidences of the believer and the unbeliever and all must appear.

So those of us who think we belong on the judgment seat, we just got a word from Romans 14:10–12 which says *[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; [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.* This doesn't mean we don't have to just behavior but we are not in the place to judge our brother as if we know their heart because God has not appointed that to us. We will all stand at the judgment. That person doesn't stand before you for you with that person will stand before the judgment seat of God.

Now let's look at I Peter 2:11–12 which says *[11] Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. [12] Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.* When He comes on the Day of Judgment what they have maligned they will then have to glorify God for in your life as you live for His honor with honorable intentions in this world. They are imperfect but it is with honorable intentions marking it out.

Now Revelation 20:11–15 says *[11] Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. [12] And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. [13] And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. [14] Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. [15] And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

The One who sits on the Judgment Seat brings all of humanity before Him. There are a set of books on one side and one book on the other side which is the book of life. That means the other set of books is the book of death. If your name is not written in the book of life then your verdict is already in and that is guilty. Which book do I want to be in? I want to be in the book of life with Jesus Christ, the Judge, as my Savior. Those in the other book will have their deeds displayed to declare their everlasting appointment. Those written in the book of life are received into eternal life because of the One who wrote them by His blood in the book of life. Their deeds will be unfolded as evidence of the life that is in them.

So if this is the case, how many judgments are there? If you're a premillennialist you have two to seven judgments for it depends on the premillennialist that you are. The Bible is pretty clear in that whenever it speaks of the judgment day it's singular. There is a definite article there. It is not a day or one of the days but it is the Day of Judgment – one judgment. There are multiple purposes and multiple agendas but there is one judgment.

Secondly, what will happen at that judgment? Four things will happen. One, on the Day of Judgment there will be a separation of believers and unbelievers. Remember the sheep and the goats. Number two, there will be a revelation of the evidences of who are the sheep and the goats. It will reveal who has received everlasting life and who has earned everlasting judgment. Again, Jesus reveals some of these evidences in Matthew 25 but this is not the ground

for our salvation. Thirdly, there will be an adjudication. In other words, there is a verdict. Those who are in Christ will be declared in Christ. Those who are apart from Christ will be declared apart from Christ. There will be a definitive statement and an adjudication. There will be no arguing for a postponement. Hebrews 9:27, [27] *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.* That's it, no recycling, no working your way out.

Finally and fourthly, what will happen at the judgment is there is a vindication for those saved by grace the evidences will be vindicated and their life that was maligned in this world will be vindicated. They will glorify God for what is revealed about His people on the day of visitation. Their changed life will be an occasion to give glory to God. So there is a vindication of the lifestyle of the believer that vindicates the power of God's grace to not only change status but to initiate the changing and transforming of a life. There will be a vindication of the reputation of God's people in this world before the Gentiles for the glory of God. There will be a vindication for God's glory and a vindication of Christ on that day. Christ as the Judge will be vindicated as Lord, Savior and with all authority in heaven and upon the earth. I didn't come up with those four things that will happen at the judgment for the writer of the Belgic confession is the one who came up with those and I'm very grateful for them.

Thirdly, who will be at the Judgment Seat? The Bible has told us that fallen angels will be there to be judged. Survivors, those who are alive when Jesus returns, will be at the Judgment Seat. All who have died and entered into the intermediate state will be brought to the adjudication of their final state at this Judgment Seat. So those in the intermediate state, their bodies will be raised from the grave and their intermediate status will be vindicated and declared into the eternal status and eternal state that they will enter into with a new body, as well as the transformed soul which they already have.

Number four, when will this happen? It will happen when Jesus comes back. When will that happen? It will happen when all the elect are saved and the Gospel has gone to all the world and God has fixed the day in His sovereign grace and appointment.

Who will be the Judge? God is the Judge and He has assigned judgment with all authority to His Son. Revelation tells us that God is on the throne with the Lamb beside Him. For the judgment, the Father gives the throne to the Lamb and the Lamb will sit on the glorious throne in judgment in all authority over all of humanity.

Psalms 1:6 says [6] *for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.* Notice 'the way' for the evidence will be in. Where did our new way come from? It was when we came to Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. That is when we received the changed life – imperfect, up, down – but it is the changed life that will vindicate the glory of God's grace. We have not only a changed status but a changed life. You will know them by their fruits. That Day will display it. They are imperfect but will display it.

There is one glorious thing I have not dealt with yet. On that Day the degrees of torment and judgment will be declared and the blessings of our rewards will be granted. Isn't that amazing? We are saved by grace, changed by grace, our lives will display it with all of our imperfections and then God will give us rewards. Do you know what we are going to do with that? We are going to use that to praise His Name. When I get there I sure would like to hear Him say to me 'well done, good (not perfect) and faithful servant.' I don't want to hear something mediocre. The amazing thing about this is that we did that by His grace and then we get rewards for doing what He enabled us to do. That is absolutely astounding to me.

I have a great illustration to help you understand those rewards and I will give it in the next study when we talk about the new heavens and the new earth but I will give you one

glimpse. Those rewards are worship material. I want to have a lot of worship material for all eternity to give praise to Him.

The Bible says in Luke 2:47–48, [47] *And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. [48] But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.* I can't explain it to you but I know hell is absolute unendurable, everlasting torment but in some sense there are degrees of torment based upon degrees of culpability. Did I come to the judgment seat from the creation light or did I come having heard the Gospel preached Sunday after Sunday but said 'no'? With greater light comes greater responsibility and greater culpability.

One of my pet peeves is when I hear someone say 'all sins are equal.' No they are not. I can hate you and be guilty emotionally of murder but it's a heinous thing for me to take your life and rob someone of a wife, mother, father, sister etc. All sins and consequences are not equal. All sin deserves the judgment of God but some sins are more heinous than others. Therefore with greater light comes greater responsibility and the greater consequences of judgment. So just as there are degrees of punishment there are rewards in the new heavens and new earth and that requires understanding of what the new heavens and new earth are going to be like. We will cover that in our next study.

The unbeliever will not stand in the judgment but you can, when you stand in Christ and your name is in the book of life. Praise His Name! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You so much for the privilege of the Lord's Day to learn that we might grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus but not knowledge for knowledge sake. We want to know that we can trust, surrender and live so help us to live with the reality of the Judgment and the assurance of salvation and the book of life that will be revealed in our lives to vindicate Your glorious grace for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.