

PROPHETIC TRUTHS FOR TODAY

Unveiling the End-Time Events

by

John E. Dahlin

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (II Corinthians 5:9, 10).

“For why dost thou judge thy brother? . . . for we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (Romans 14:10).

ONE OF the unfortunate concepts maintained by big segments within Christianity is the one which pertains to a general resurrection and a general judgment. Such a view, while persistently held and advocated, is unscriptural and completely unsound. It reflects a gross ignorance of clear New Testament teachings. The Scriptures make it unmistakably clear that the righteous and the unrighteous will not appear simultaneously at a final judgment.

The word translated “*appear*” means “*manifest*.” We might paraphrase the passage thusly, “***We must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ.***” The judgment seat to which the apostle has reference is the *bema* of Christ. Unquestionably the writer has in mind the well known Grecian Olympic Games. Those who participated in them and achieved their coveted goals would be brought onto the plat form (*bema*) and given public recognition and the appropriate reward. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews depicts life as a race. He says, “**Let us run with patience the race that is set before us**” (Hebrews 12:1). Truly our work as Christians on earth will be brought fully into view one day.

Nothing can be concealed, and the believers will be judged according to the things done in the body.

THREE DISTINCTIVE JUDGMENTS

Every careful Bible student will recognize three major judgments with reference to the future. The first is that of *the believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ*; the second is that of *the living nations when the Lord returns from glory*. The third judgment includes *all the impenitent before the Great White Throne*.

There are other judgments, too, but the above are the principal judgments of the future, all of which are distinctly set forth in the New Testament. First Corinthians 3:8-15 describes the judgment of the believers in detail. Matthew 25:31-46 depicts the judgment of the living nations. Revelation 20:11-15 sets forth the judgment of the impenitent dead who will be resurrected at the end of the ages. These judgments are distinct and they occur during different periods.

At funeral services it is often said about the departed saints that they have passed to their reward. *This, like many similar statements, has no scriptural basis.* The saints are not to be individually rewarded, one by one, immediately after death. Paul, the great apostle, has not received his reward yet, nor will he until he does so in common with believers who are manifested at the bema of Christ. It is proper, however, to believe Paul will be the first one rewarded and crowned on that day. Indeed, Second Timothy 4:8 gives such a suggestion.

THE TIME OF THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

The time is fixed in Scripture. It will be immediately after the Rapture of the Church. We read, **“Therefore judge nothing before the time until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then every man shall have praise of God”** (I Corinthians 4:5). In other words, this judgment will be held during the period of the Great Tribulation which will engulf the whole earth. This judgment will be completed, however, before the tribulation is over, for Christ will bring with Him the great company of redeemed and glorified saints when He returns to reign over the earth. At the Rapture all living believers as well as all departed saints will be brought into His presence. We see thus, with reference to the time of judgment, that the Scriptures are clear and precise. Our appearance before the Judgment Seat of Christ takes place immediately after our gathering together unto Him.

THE SUBJECTS OF THE JUDGMENT

Again we do well to allow the Scriptures to speak: **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”** (II Corinthians 5:10).

In the apostle’s selection of the pronoun **“we”** it is obvious that he is addressing the Christians who at that hour will be appearing in glorified, resurrection bodies. It should be clear, I think, that those who are summoned to appear before the judgment seat of Christ are believers. The context makes it plain that this particular judgment is limited to the saints alone; all others are excluded. In First Corinthians 3:13-15 the apostle goes into further detail as he deals with this same judgment, as, e.g., **“The fire shall try every man’s work, of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide, which he hath built thereupon (on Christ), he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.”** The resurrection of the saints who have died, and the translation of the living believers, makes it absolutely certain that salvation is not the issue to be determined on the other side. That is settled here. But the works of the believers will be fully evaluated and scrutinized when they appear before the bema of Christ. Every activity of ours on earth will be revealed in that all-searching light.

THE BASIS OF THE JUDGMENT

In regard to the divine yardstick to be used, let the Scriptures speak: **“Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire”** (I Corinthians 3:11-15). Here we have one of the most solemn passages in the Scriptures. Every one of us must appear before this tribunal, and the work by each Christian will come up for examination. While there can be no question regarding the matter of salvation at the judgment seat, yet our whole life on this earth will be unveiled and examined openly.

Wood, hay, stubble

The Scriptures make it clear that there is a marked difference in being just saved, and being saved victoriously. Much of the work on earth, even by believers, is done for self-aggrandizement. Even preaching, singing, offering prayer and giving of money may be done for personal glory and satisfaction rather than being for the glory of Christ. Many religious activities carried on while on earth will not necessarily have any value on that day. Wood, hay, stubble seem to suggest bulkiness. Truly, many Christians are busily engaged in doing many things each day. It is only the motive of the heart which counts with the Lord. Oftentimes people are much more concerned to please men, and to be in the limelight, than to render service to the Lord humbly and lovingly. All selfish motives and personal ambition constitute the wood, hay, and stubble. These elements are not fireproof, and all of such properties will burn at the judgment seat of Christ. No reward will be given for activities which are done for human glory. Such will be completely eliminated at that solemn hour.

Many years ago a farmer in northern Minnesota told me of an unusual event which he and his family experienced. In the late summer one evening right after midnight, lightning struck the farm dwelling. He was suddenly awakened and discovered the house was on fire. There was actually only one exit in that simple home. The fire which was caused by the bolt of lightning spread rapidly. The farmer told me he literally had to carry all his young children through the flames. Even though they were covered with blankets, they still were not free from the smell of smoke. The wife of the man had to be escorted out from the building the same way. Within a very few minutes all eight in the family were standing out in the yard witnessing their house aflame. The farmer was a dairyman and hence he tried to enter the basement by breaking a window in order to rescue his cream-separator, but that section of the house caved in, and he was unable to get in. He was unable to save one solitary item. There they stood with only their night clothes, yet all were saved through fire as it were. I thought, what a lesson pointing to the occasion when people will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, where all of their earthly activities will vanish in the fiery test. The text says, **“They shall suffer loss.”** What that loss will be is not specifically stated. It might well involve being left out from the participation in the reign of Jesus Christ during the kingdom period.

Certainly, they will not receive the “**well done**” from our Lord. While no one ought to be dogmatic concerning this loss to which reference is made, it must be something very substantial, nevertheless. To enter glory empty-handed will be a great disappointment, and many will experience such a position when they appear before the bema of Christ.

Gold, silver, precious stones

Thank God, many Christians are building with durable materials. These are fireproof, as it were, in that day before the bema of Christ. These three items represent the highest and noblest of spiritual motives. Indeed, they must be associated with services of love and faith during the earthly life. All such Christians will be generously rewarded on that day. The reward which the Judge will give will consist of no ten-cent-store articles. Inspiringly we have set forth in the New Testament five distinct crowns, and each one is singled out for a proper emphasis.

1. “**The crown of life**” (Revelation 2:10). This is the martyr’s crown.
2. “**The crown of glory**” (I Peter 5:2-4).

It is unquestionably the elder’s crown, or the pastor’s reward. It will likely include also Christian workers who have been leaders in activities for Christ.

3. “**The crown of rejoicing**” (I Thessalonians 2:19-20). Here is the coveted soul winner’s crown.
4. “**The crown incorruptible**” (I Corinthians 9:25-27). This is the victor’s crown. What a coveted reward on that day!
5. “**The crown of righteousness**” (II Timothy 4:8). This crown is reserved for Paul, and for all others who love His appearing. In other words, it is for those who have lived in daily anticipation of His second coming.

Which position will be yours on that day? It will be determined mainly by the kind of life you live on earth. The examination is inescapable before the bema of Christ. Each one must give an account of himself before the Lord. Will you pass that examination with flying colors? Whether we fare well or ill depends on our motives in the Christian life, and the extent of our consecration and devotion to Jesus Christ. The Day of Christ with its rewards is thus kept before us in Scripture to incite us to faithfulness and zeal. The smallest service humbly rendered unto Him will not be forgotten on that day. “**God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name**” (Hebrews 6:10). This is all to take place in “**The Day of Christ**” which is the day of reward and rejoicing. Let us with Paul resolve to achieve spiritually, “**that I may rejoice in the Day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain**” (Philippians 2:16).

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