

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, a lady in Connecticut reported that while she was in an ice cream store, the famous actor, Paul Newman, walked in. As she ordered her ice cream cone, she couldn't help but look at his dreamy blue eyes as he surveyed the different flavors. She tried not to seem flustered as she paid for her ice cream cone. She turned to leave and said, "Hello." And he smiled and said, "Hi." When she got outside the front door, she realized she had forgotten her ice cream cone. She walked back into the ice cream shop and Paul Newman said, "If you're looking for your ice cream cone, you put it in your purse with your change."

Most of us get a little flustered when we're in the presence of someone famous. How do you think it will be when we stand in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ? As we will discover in the words of Jesus in this message, everyone is going to stand before the Lord and be judged. The Bible says in Hebrews 9:27-28, "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people."

We are all going to die. I love the story about the preacher who was trying to emphasize this fact once. He said, "Every member of this church is going to die!" A little kid on the front row smiled at that. The preacher didn't like it, so he said it again with more force. "Every member of this church is going to die!" The little boy laughed out loud at that. The preacher was irritated and said, "Son, what's so funny about that?" The kid said, "I'm not a member of this church!"

The Bible says we are all going to die, and after that we will face judgment. And the Judge won't be Judge Judy—it will be Judge Jesus. And it will be a good thing if you know the Judge.

In John 5:22-30 (NIV): "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

In these ten verses, Jesus focuses on two themes: Life and Judgment. He mentions life six times and He mentions judge or judgment six times in these ten verses. So, first we'll about life and then we'll talk about judgment.

I. JESUS OFFERS LIFE TO ANYONE WHO TRUSTS HIM.

John 5:24 is one of the most important verses in the New Testament about salvation. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life."

You may be thinking, "You just said that everyone will face judgment, and yet Jesus says here that those who hears and believes will NOT come under judgment, so which is correct? As we will see, everyone WILL face Judge Jesus, but those of us who know the judge won't face a judgment of condemnation. Jesus is teaching us two important truths about life and death.

A. We are spiritually dead until we trust Jesus.

The Bible says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses." (Ephesians 2:4-5 CSB) In the Greek language in which the New Testament was originally written, there are two different words for life and two different words for death. One word from life is, *bios* from which we get our word, "biology." That refers to physical life. Then there's a word, *zoe* which means spiritual life. Jesus used *zoe* in this passage. Then, for death, there's a word, *thanatos*, which means "spiritual death" and another word, *necros*, which refers to physical death. Jesus used both *thanatos* and *necros* in this passage.

Here's how it works: Everyone alive on earth has *bios*, physical life. But only those who trust Jesus have *zoe*, spiritual life. And before we place or faith in Jesus, we are dead in our sins.

A lot of people are interested in asking, "Is there life after death?" A much more pressing question is: "Is there life after birth?"

So, we are surrounded by dead people. But unlike the television series, *The Walking Dead*, we don't encounter zombies. We relate every day to people who the *Walking Spiritually Dead*.

Let me illustrate this. Every year at Christmas most of us put up Christmas trees. So, raise your hand if you have an artificial Christmas tree. How many of you have a live Christmas tree? If you raised your hand, you're wrong unless your Christmas tree is planted in dirt and is growing. If you bought what you called a "live tree" and it doesn't have roots, that's actually a dead tree; it has been cut off from the source of life. People who don't know Jesus are cut off from the source of life. And the Bible says we were all like that at one time.

B. We receive eternal life the moment we trust Jesus.

The Bible says, "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." (1 John 5:13 CSB) There's a great deal of misunderstanding of what eternal life is. Many of us grew up on the good old KJV which often translated it "everlasting life." So it's easy to get the idea that eternal life is talking about a length of existence. Eternal life really is a quality of life.

One of my mentors, Ray Stedman, who is in heaven, wrote this about eternal life: "It is true that it goes on forever, but primarily the Bible is talking about the richness, the fullness, the beauty of life. It is a quality of life that is enduring, true, but it is also enriching; it cannot be diminished by circumstances or ended by death. It is a quality of life that is given to us NOW." Jesus gave us His definition of eternal life in John 17:3 He was praying and He said to His father, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent—Jesus Christ." Eternal life is knowing God. It isn't about knowing about God it is knowing the Lord.

Do you know the Lord? How many of you have ever heard of Nolan Ryan the Hall of Fame baseball pitcher? Of course, how many of you know him? I watched him on television for many years, but I didn't know him. Then a few years ago, he came to speak at CrossWalk for an event, and I got to meet him. Cindy and I sat at his table for the meal and got to talk to him. There was a time I only knew about him and then I got to meet him.

For many people, they know about Jesus but they've never met him. Have you? But I know Jesus Christ. He's as real to me as the skin on my bones. I talked to Him just this morning. Jesus said that when we trust Him we have passed from death unto life.

Just imagine there is a line on this stage. This side represents those who are not believers—lost without Christ. And this side represents those who are believers. At some time in your life, you hear the good news and the Holy Spirit convicts you and you place your faith in Jesus and you pass from death to life.

Jesus can give spiritual life to anyone who is spiritually dead. But Jesus also talked about how at the end of time, He will restore to life all those who are in the graves, those who are physically dead. The purpose of this is for judgment. So we've addressed the subject of life, now let's see what Jesus had to say about the subject of judgment.

II. JESUS IS THE JUDGE WHOSE VERDICT IS FINAL.

The Bible contains many warnings telling us to get ready for the final judgment, a warning repeated about a final judgement. Paul was speaking to the philosophers in Athens, Greece when he said, "Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31 CSB)

Jesus is a perfect judge. There will be no appeals process. Trust me, it will be a good thing for you to know the Judge.

When I was a freshman in college, I often drove home from Samford University in Birmingham to LA (Lower Alabama) on the weekend. One of my high school classmates, Donna Bush, also attended Samford. She often rode home with me on the weekends. One Sunday afternoon we were driving back up to our school. We were on I-65 south of Montgomery heading North just minding our business and chilling out to the Young Rascals on the 8-track tape player. This pickup with a couple of real rednecks pulled up beside us to pass and when they saw Donna they started pointing and making obscene gestures so I slowed down and they passed me and then slowed down so I had to put on my brakes. I pulled out in the passing lane and sped up and they matched my speed. The driver rolled down his window and was yelling at Donna so I slowed down. They slowed down. I said, "Enough with this." So I floored it. I had a souped up Ford Fairlane and we were flying down the interstate, with them matching my speed. As we approached an exit, suddenly the pickup took the exit without slowing down. So I breathed a sigh of relief and took my foot off the accelerator. But right on the other side of the overpass was a State Trooper and he got me. I was clocked at 98 miles an hour. I told the officer there were a couple of guys harassing Donna, and she confirmed the story. I described the truck. But guess what? He didn't believe us. So because I was going so fast, I got a ticket for speeding and reckless driving. It was under the jurisdiction of a judge in Montgomery County. The trooper told me if I wanted to challenge the citation, I could appear before the judge on a certain date.

The next weekend we were back in South Alabama, and I was telling the story to one of my buddies whose dad was a judge in Covington County. He said, "You ought to tell my dad about it." This judge attended the same church we did and where I had been licensed to the ministry earlier that year. So I went over to the judge's house and told him the story. He called Donna and she confirmed the story. He looked at the ticket and said, "I have a friend who's a judge up there." He called him up and said, "There's a fine young preacher boy down here who was being harassed up in your county by a couple of delinquents and got a ticket for speeding and reckless driving while he was trying to get away from them. I believe his story. Can you help us?" Now I don't know if what they did was legal, and I'm sure both those judges are no longer living. But all I know is that after that phone call, he said, "Son, don't worry about it. The charge has been removed. You don't have to appear in court. And there is only a filing fee, and I'll pay that for you."

I want you to know that it was certainly a good thing to know the judge! And if that's true in a human sense, it is certainly true in a heavenly sense! Whether you are a Christian, or an unbeliever, you will face God's judgement after you die. But there are two totally distinct judgements that will occur after death.

A. The Judgment of Praise: "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

This is the judgment for Christians. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil...It is the Lord who judges me. So don't judge anything prematurely, before the Lord comes, who will

both bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the intentions of the hearts. And then praise will come to each one from God." (2 Corinthians 5:10, 1 Corinthians 4:4-5 CSB)

This is going to be a judgment of reward and rejoicing for believers. If you are a fully-devoted follower of Jesus Christ, you don't need to fear judgment, because you know the judge. The same is true with Judge Jesus. Our great promise is found in Romans 8:1, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

To understand this judgment, it's important to know that the word "judgment seat" is the word *bema*, and it comes from the world of Olympic athletic contests in ancient Greece. A *bema* was a raised platform where the athletic officials would pass out the prizes to the competitors.

New Testament scholar Don Stewart wrote: "After the ancient Olympic contests were over, the successful competitors would assemble before the raised platform (*bema*) to receive their rewards or olive-leaf crowns (*stephanos*). The *bema* was not a judicial bench where someone was condemned; it was a reward platform. The Christian life is a race, and after the race is over for each believer, Jesus will gather every member before the *bema* for the purpose of examining each one and giving the proper reward to each."

In Paul's last letter he wrote, "The time of my departure is near (he meant his death)." Then he used two metaphors from Olympic sports. He wrote, "I have fought a good fight. I have finished the race." Then he wrote about his reward. He wrote, "There is reserved for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:7-8 CSB)

Our reward will be receiving crowns. There are five different crowns mentioned in the New Testament—but there may be many more. But these aren't royal crowns. There's a word for crowns, *diadem*, which is used for the crown that Jesus will be wearing when He returns. The *diadem* was the crown for kings. Revelation 19 says the King of Kings will be wearing many *diadems*. But the word that is always used for the crowns we'll receive is *stephanos*, which means an olive-leaf crown. If your name is Steve or Steven, this is what your name means.

In 2004, the Summer Olympics were held in Athens, Greece. They followed this biblical model and gave olive-leaf crowns to the winners. Here's picture of some of the members of the Girls soccer team who won the gold medal.

You may be saying, "Pastor, I don't really want to receive crowns." We don't serve the Lord to receive any reward. Our motivation for service is our love for the Lord. But the more faithful you are to serve Him, the more reward you will receive. And we should all strive to be faithful. In Matthew 25 Jesus said that the Master would tell the faithful steward, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master's joy." (Matthew 25:21 CSB)

It will be a scene of joy when it says every man will receive praise FROM God. Can you imagine? We spend all our lives serving and praising the Lord and it will give Him joy to give us His

praise! But don't worry. You won't spend eternity wearing your crowns. The Bible says in Revelation 4 that all the redeemed will lay our crowns at the feet of the Lamb on the throne and say, "You are worthy, Oh Lord."

So my challenge to you is to be faithful in your service for the Lord and you will be rewarded, not necessarily in this life, but at the *bema* judgment.

B. The Judgment of Punishment: "I never knew you. Depart from me."

Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, and do many miracles in your name?' Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you lawbreakers!'" (Matthew 7:21-23 CSB)

It's very important for you to distinguish between these two judgments. The *bema* is for those who know the Lord. It's a judgment of praise. But everyone who ever rejected God's offer of life, will be resurrected to this judgment of punishment. John describes it completely in Revelation 20. "Then I saw a great white throne and one seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. I also saw the dead [spiritually dead], the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books...And anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:11-12,15 CSB)

Who will stand before Jesus at this Great White Throne Judgment? Only lost people. If you know the Lord you will NOT be at this judgment. But everyone in history, great and small, who never trusted Jesus will be standing there. Of course, there will be people there who mocked God and cursed the name of Christ all their lives. They probably won't be surprised at the verdict.

But the sad truth is there will also be people there who expected to go to Heaven. They are the ones who will argue. "Wait a minute, Lord. I used religious language. I called you Lord. I did religious acts, I even performed exorcism." Then Jesus will speak the saddest words in the history of the Universe. He'll say, "It was never about being religious. It was always about *knowing* me—and I never knew you."

So we're all going to face Judge Jesus. For those who know the Judge, it will be a judgment of rewards and rejoicing. For those who never knew the Judge, it will be a verdict of condemnation.

CONCLUSION

One of the greatest Christian thinkers of the 20th Century was Clive Staples Lewis. His book, *Mere Christianity*, should be on every Christian's reading list. Here's what C.S. wrote about this

final judgment. "God is going to invade this earth in force. But what is the good of saying you are on his side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream, and something else—something it never entered your head to conceive—comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us, and so terrible to others, that none of us will have any choice left? It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing; it will be the time when we discover which side we have really chosen, whether we realized it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back, to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it." C.S. Lewis (*Mere Christianity*)

Will you place your faith in Jesus today? If you will, when you face judgement, you will know the Judge—and that will be a GOOD thing!

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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