

Place: Lurgan Baptist 1:2:2004

Readings: 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 James 2:12-13

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

16. WHEN THE BELIEVER FACES GOD !

The story is told of a certain professor who in the early years of X ray was asked to demonstrate this new invention as part of an evenings entertainment. The professor asked some of the guests present to allow him to place their jewels under the X ray machine. When he turned on the current the rays revealed the true character of the jewels and some of the guests found to their embarrassment that the jewels they had purchased as genuine were mere imitations. Did you ever think of

this ? In one sweeping view our entire life of service will be reviewed and revealed at the Judgment Seat !

I wonder will we discover then that we thought was gold is but wood, what we thought was silver, is but hay what we thought was precious stones is but stubble. How awful it will be to pick up the ashes of our worthless service and press them into the nail scarred hands of the Saviour.

You say, “ *what has this got to do with the dangers of discrimination ?* ” Just this. James says that partiality and spiritual snobbery are wrong because of *a coming judgement.* Did you notice (2:12-13) ? Now which judgment was James referring to in these verses ? After all several judgements are mentioned in Scripture. There is:

1. The Judgement of SIN:

This took place at the Cross. Christ did not die for His own sin, for He knew no sin, but He was made sin for us. (2 Cor 5:21) 1.

2. The Judgment of SUBJECTS:

Some refer to this as the Judgement of the Living Nations when “ *before Him shall be gathered all nations.* ” (Matt 25:32) Then there is:

3. The Judgment of SINNERS:

John says, “ *And I saw a great white throne and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away.* ” (Rev 20:11) What a judgment this will be.

But James is not speaking here of (1) (2) (3) but rather he is speaking here about:

4. The Judgment of SERVANTS:

Paul speaking of believers says, “ *We shall all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ,* ” (Rom

14:10)

W.A. Thompson says, “ *this is a family affair and has nothing to do with anyone else.* ” My there is a time in the future when every believer will face God. Now its to this event that James directs our minds in these two verses. Notice he speaks of:

(1) THE SUBJECTS OF THIS JUDGEMENT

You see, having spoken so clearly about their judgment of other people James says, “ *So speak ye, and so do as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.* ” (2:12)

Now remember that he is addressing Christians here.

(1:2 2:1 2:5) You see, the theory of a general judgment is unscriptural. The Spirit of God is careful to make a distinction between the Bema (Judgment Seat) and the Thronos, the Great White Throne Judgement. There is not one general judgement for all members of the human race to be carried out at one time. Rather future judgement falls into two broad periods. *These might be identified as a premillennial judgment, that is judgement before the millennium and a postmillennial judgement that is judgement after the millennium.* Now it’s the first of these judgements that concerns us. The Judgement Seat of Christ, a judgement in which the unbelieving world has no part. Now its interesting to notice that in the N.T. the Christian is subject to a three-fold judgment.

(a) The First Judgment is Past: His Judgment as a Sinner:

You see, when we accept the finished work of Christ as an atonement for our sins, we can never again come into judgement as a sinner. Do you recall Christ’s words ?

“ *He that heareth my word and,* ” (Jn 5:24) Paul adds, “ *There is therefore no more condemnation*

(judgment) to them which are in Christ Jesus. ”

(Rom 8:1) You see, the purpose of the Judgment Seat is not to determine whether a particular person enters heaven or not, for every man’s destiny is determined before he leaves this life. Moreover the purpose of this beam judgment is not to punish believers for sins they have committed either before or after their salvation. Such an interpretation fails to see the efficacy and value of the death of Christ. My when God redeems us He cleanses us thoroughly and completely for “ *the blood of Jesus Christ all sin,* ” (1 Jn 1:7) The Lord removes our sin completely and permanently not partially. (Ps 103:12 Is 38:17 Micah 7:19) Indeed so perfectly and completely did our Saviour’s blood cleanse us that God cannot find nothing in us for which to condemn us. “ *God cannot twice demand mine,* ”

(b) The Second Judgment is Present: His Judgment as a Son:

For are we not all subject to our Heavenly Father’s discipline and rule ? “ *For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.* ” (Heb 12:6) Do you know something ? When you discipline your child and the Word of God says that you ought to, but when you do it, your are doing it according to your imperfect judgement, but when our Heavenly

Father disciplines us He does it with perfect wisdom and love. So there is a present judgment upon disobedient children of God. This is a divine chastening by our Heavenly Father upon us as His sons.

Do you recall that the Lord chastened some of the Christians at Corinth ? Paul says, “ *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep.* ”

(1 Cor 11:30) Do you think that as Christian you can live as you please ? Well, you can't for the Lord could take you home. But this is not what takes place at the Judgment Seat. The (a) (b) but:

(c) The Third Judgment is Future: His Judgment as a Servant:

Now its this judgment that takes place at the Judgment Seat. Paul says, “ *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.* (2 Cor 5:10) Now this is not a warning to the unsaved, this is a word addressed to believers. The “ *we,* ” in (2 Cor Ch 5) appears not less than 25 times, and its easy to identify. You see, that letter is written to “ *the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints which are in all Achaia.* ”

(2 Cor 1:1) My the subjects of this judgment are

“ *the saints and the saints alone.* ” This judgment is for Christians, it does not deal with sin or salvation. The bema was not a judicial bench were someone was condemned, it was a reward seat. Do you see now what the judgment seat is all about ? It has nothing to do with the Christians Rejection, but everything to do with the believers Reward. Its not about Retribution but about Review, not about Condemnation but about Examination. My in these days of lowering standards and loose living every one of us needs to learn the truth of this coming judgment. (1)

(2) THE STANDARD OF THIS JUDGMENT

You see, when we stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ James says, we shall “ *be judged by the law of liberty.* ”

Now on the surface law and liberty seem to stand in opposition to one another. They appear to be enemies. After all, law restrains liberty and liberty seems to imply being free from the law. But James is saying that law and liberty come together in beautiful harmony. For the way to be really free is to live within the boundaries of God's law. When we do that, we are free indeed. When we are really disciples of Christ, we know the truth and the truth sets us free. (Jn 8:31-32) But those who live outside the parameters of God's law are not really free. Indeed they become slaves to a lifestyle of sinning. You see, to the unsaved person the law is an outward thing pressing it on him, making demands on him against his inclination, but for the Christian, obedience to the law is not a matter of outward pressure, but rather of inward pleasure. The psalmist says, “ *I delight to do Thy will O my God, yea Thy law is within my heart.* ” (Ps 40:8)

The story is told of a Japanese Christian who had been a thief before he was saved. After his conversion, on the first Sunday, he ventured into a Christian church for worship, and as he stepped inside the door he saw on the wall of the church the Ten Commandments.

Out of the commandments there leapt upon this thief this commandment, “ *Thou shalt not steal.* ” But it leapt out from the wall at him in a new way. It no longer said to him, “ *Thou shalt NOT steal,* ” rather it said to him,

“ *Thou **SHALT** not steal,*” you see what had formerly meant bondage now meant liberty. It seems to be that when we stand at the Judgment Seat two things are going to be prominent. The first is:

(a) THE WORD OF GOD:

James says, we are going to “ *be judged by the law of liberty,*” (2:12) Our lives are going to be examined in the light of God’s Word. Could you turn with me to (1 Cor 3:12-15) Now Paul is teaching here that at the Judgment Seat our Service will be Reviewed. Now it is apparent from these verses that God classifies the works of believers into one of the following six areas, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble. The Permanent and the Perishable, the Indestructible and the Destructible, a Golden work and a Stubble work. Now though it is difficult to know what goes to make up a Golden work or a Stubble work we are nevertheless informed of certain areas in which God is especially interested. For e.g.;

1. HOW WE TREAT OUR FELLOW-BELIEVERS:

“ *For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love which ye showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints and do minister.*”

(Heb 6:10 Matt 10:41) Its sad but true but often the shabbiest treatment suffered by a Christian comes from the hand of another Christian. My are you going in for a reward at the Judgment Seat ? Well, how do you treat your fellow-believers ?

2. HOW WE EXERCISE OUR GIFT:

“ *Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit.*”

(1 Cor 12:4) Every believer has at least one gift. In the light of the Bema are you employing your gift for God’s glory ? (Eph 4:7)

3. HOW WE USE OUR MONEY:

“ *Upon the first of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him.*” (1 Cor 16:2)

How much of our money belongs to God ? Well, according to (1 Cor 6:19-20) it all belongs to Him because we are His, purchased with an awesome price.

What does that mean ? Does it just mean that I am responsible for the tithe and offering ? Or does it mean that at the Bema I will be held accountable for the rest ?

4. HOW WE DISCHARGE OUR RESPONSIBILITY:

“ *Feed the flock of God which is among you and when the Chief Shepherd shall appear ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*” (1 Pet 5:2-4) I want to ask the elders, are you going for gold at the Judgment Seat ? Do you and I take our responsibilities seriously ? My God is interested in:

5. HOW WE WIN OUR FRIENDS:

“ *And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.* ” (Dan 12:3) Are these not some of the things that make up a golden work ? Are they part of your life, ministry and service ? There is something else going to be prominent at the Judgment Seat, not only (a) but:

(b) THE WILL OF GOD:

Did you notice what James says ? “ *For he shall,* ” (2:13) James has already spelt out God’s will in our relationships one with another. It can be summarised in one word. Love ! (2:8) But if that love is not revealed, if we show no mercy to needy men and women, then no mercy will be shown to us when rewards are given out at the Bema Judgment. James says, “ *Mercy rejoiceth against judgment.* ” The word “ *rejoiceth,* ” means “ *to have no fear.* ” Merciful, compassionate, loving believers have no fear of Bema Judgment. Now lets not misunderstand what James is saying here. We are not saved by being merciful, we are saved by receiving mercy from Christ, and when we have received His mercy, we will show mercy. A woman told her Pastor,
“ *I’ll forgive Mrs. X but I won’t have anything to do with her. I don’t want to see her again. I won’t let her in my home.* ” The pastor replied, “ *Suppose Christ treated you the same way, would have nothing to do with you, nor ever let you into His heavenly home.* ”

At the beginning of this year (2004) I paid a tribute at a funeral service in Belfast to a dear servant of Christ. Tommy was a lovely brother, a man who saturated himself in the Word of God, a man who had a burden for souls, a man who though not an elder faithfully visited the saints of God. To hear him pray at the Lords Table was a delight as he retraced the footsteps of Christ to the Cross. He and I often talked about the Saviour whom He adored. I learnt a lot from him, but I remember something that he said to me often that I have never forgot. With all the fervour of his heart, he would say, “ *Denis, this unforgiving spirit that often prevails among God’s people will have to be sorted out at the Judgment Seat.* ” (Matt 18:21-35) My do you belong to that sad company who do not and will not forgive ? Has someone asked for your forgiveness but as a believer you refused to forgive and forget ! Then let me tell you that at Bema Judgment you’ll lose out for you see, we cannot sin lightly and serve faithfully. 1: 2:

(3) THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS JUDGMENT

What is the practical significance of this Bema Judgment ? Well, James puts it like this, “ *So speak ye and so do,* ” (2:12) In other words living in the light of the Judgment Seat will affect:

(a) OUR WORDS:

“ *So speak ye,* ” Now James has already spoken about the sins of the tongue in (1:19,26) indeed most of (Ch 3) deals with the same subject, but the significant fact is surely this, that in considering the

theme of the Judgment Seat James should specifically mention the use of the tongue. My who can calculate the blessing and reward that would be ours at the Judgment Seat were it not held back by the misuse of our tongues ?

(Matt 12:36) Some years ago some Indian students formed a “ *Society for the confession of sins.* ” One of their members was asked, “ *Isn't it difficult meeting in a closed circle and confessing your sins to each other ?* ”

To which he replied, “ *but we don't confess our own sins we confess other peoples.* ” Are you constantly a critic of others ? Do you engage of in spiteful criticism of your fellow-believers ? (Matt 7:1 1 Cor 4:5) Then don't tell me that you're living the light of the Judgment Seat ! (a)

(b) OUR WORKS:

“ *So speak ye and so do,* ” (2:12) My one day we're going to have give an account of our stewardship for responsibility brings accountability. A minister in giving his final charge to candidates on the eve of their ordination used to say to them, “ *Tomorrow I shall say to you, wilt thou, wilt thou, wilt thou ? But always remember that the day is coming when Another will say to you, Hast thou ? Hast thou ? Hast thou ?* ” You see, responsibility brings accountability. On a Saturday afternoon in the winter of 1906, a theatre in Chicago caught fire. That afternoon 596 people were burned to death in that inferno. It happened that there was a man in the theatre who escaped but in order to get out, he had to climb over the trampled down bodies of women and children. Earlier that afternoon a young man whose Uncle was one of Chicago's distinguished ministers had been talking in the study with his preacher uncle. As he was about to leave his eye fell on the message prepared for the next morning. The text was this, “ *To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world to bear witness to the truth.* ” The phrase, “ *to this end was I born,* ” fascinated the nephew and he said, “ *Uncle I wish I knew why I had been born.* ” They spoke together for a little about the need for God's will to prevail in our lives. The young man went out, was walking down the street when he heard the clanging of fire bells. He was close to the theatre fire, and he decided to help. With a couple of others, they went upstairs in the building opposite, across the alleyway from the theatre. They got some boards and improvised a bridge. Then this young man positioned himself in a dangerous place close to the burning building, and began to lift people out of the window, and across the bridge to safety.

All was going well, until a burning ember from above fell and hit him, he lost his balance and went hurtling to the concrete below. He lived only a few hours but long enough for that preacher uncle to reach him and say to him, “ *Do you know why you were born ? It was to give your life for others ?* ” Some months later an U.S.A. traveller was in an hotel in Switzerland, and a man walked up to him and engaged him in conversation. Suddenly this man ceased to speak coherently and began to mutter something that the traveller could not understand. Immediately a third man appeared and let the poor man away. Later that day the traveller found out, that this was a rich man from Chicago, he had been in the theatre that afternoon. He was the man who had saved his life by climbing over the bodies of women and children. He could not sleep that night, nor the next, nor the next. Finally, there came a breakdown, and his Doctor ordered him to go to Europe, where it was hoped that he would recover. But do you know what he continually said to

his wife and family, “ *I have saved nobody but myself,*” “ *I have saved nobody but myself.*”
When you stand before the Lord at the Judgment Seat will you have to say, “ *Lord, I have saved nobody but myself.*”

*“ Shall I empty handed be
When before the crystal sea
I shall stand before the everlasting throne
Will I hang my head in shame
As I answer to my name
Not a thing that My Redeemer there can own.”*