

Coming Soon Living for the Day

“Yes” “No” “I don’t know.” “Yes” “No” “I don’t know.” Those were the three things that I would say to my high school guidance counselor, Miss Skukan, my freshman year. It seemed like I was called to her office nearly every week to figure out why I was doing so badly in school.

My freshman and sophomore years of high school, I attended a college prep school in the Atlanta area called Woodward Academy. It was very prestigious. All of my four older siblings had attended there and would graduate from there. It was the same school that President Carter sent his daughter, Amy, to, and Truett Cathy of Chic-fil-a sent his children there.

My older brothers, Mike and Mark, had both excelled in sports there. My sister, Ina, earned an academic scholarship to attend and was Salutatorian of her class. My sister, Suellen, while a student there, was the champion for the entire state of Georgia in spelling...but I was flunking out. That didn’t go over very well. I’m pretty sure that I’m the only one in my family that ever had to go to summer school. I didn’t know about GPAs and didn’t care. Ultimately, I did graduate from both high school and college but it was never anything to write home about.

I had terrible study habits. If I had a big project do, somehow I was able to convince my Dad that I was sick. Then, while he was at work, I’d get the project done. I’d cram to finish papers. If there was reading due for a class, I’d wait until the last day and then pull an all nighter to get it done. To say I read the material would be a stretch. Basically, I skimmed.

Now in my defense in college, I did work my way through. There were times I could barely stay awake in class because of long work hours. But the truth is, I really didn’t apply myself. So when I decided to go to seminary, I was concerned my GPA might prevent me from even being accepted. There were a lot of contributing factors in why I barely made it but the bottom line was that I was living for today rather than “the Day,” Graduation.

Isn’t that the problem for most of us? We’re living for today rather than **Living for the Day**. We live for the things of today, this world, rather than tomorrow and eternity. I’m talking about heaven and being with Jesus. Obviously, I’m not talking about lost people, I’m talking about us, Christians. My Bible is open to 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 (p. 953).

As far as God’s prophetic program is concerned, we’re looking at the events that bring to a close the age of the Church on earth. The Rapture will remove the Church from this earth, and then, on “*the Day*,” we’ll be evaluated by Jesus Christ to determine our degree of faithfulness to Him and the eternal rewards, or lack thereof, we’ve earned. This is what the Apostle Paul called “*the judgment seat of Christ*” or “*the Bema Seat*” (2 Cor. 5:10).

The judgment seat of Christ pertains only to Christians. It’s not related at all to the final judgment in which all nonbelievers are judged and sent to Hell. So if you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, your judgment in terms of heaven and hell has already been decided. Christ paid for your sins and experienced your hell on the cross. Jesus purchased heaven for you. The Rapture will take all who are in Christ to be with Him—and anyone who’s left behind at the Rapture has another major problem altogether.

Before we go any further, let me make a crucial distinction. Salvation never has been attainable by human works and never will be. Paul said that in the most emphatic, unmistakable way possible in Ephesians 2:8-9, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* Yet, with the very next stroke of his pen he wrote, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* (Eph. 2:10). Our faithfulness in performing the good works God ordained for us is the basis of evaluation at Christ’s judgment, at *“the Day.”*

Here in America, we provide children with a free education in the public schools. That, though, doesn’t mean every child is going to value and use that education equally. Some will work harder and be more faithful and committed students than others. They’ll do better and be rewarded for it. In other words, to graduate with honor will take diligence and some hard work. Students don’t have to earn their seat in the public school classroom, but they are responsible for their efforts.

Unfortunately, too many Christians take grace for granted; they don’t really appreciate what Christ did on the cross. They view their salvation as their ticket to heaven and little else. So they’re not serving in the kingdom the way they should. They’re not **Living for the Day**. With that as our background, I want to talk about important aspects of the future judgment every born-again believer will one day face.

1. Jesus Christ will be the Judge. The Judge will be the Lord Jesus. It’s not difficult to see why. The task of evaluating and passing final judgment on every Christian is so vast, it staggers the imagination. Many millions of persons are involved, each of whom differs from every other one in so many ways that the Judge must, of necessity, be omniscient as well as perfect in His own nature and character. That’s why the Bible warns us to be careful about judging. We’re limited in our knowledge. We don’t know all the facts.

A woman was entertaining a distant relative in her home. One morning while looking through her kitchen window, she remarked, "My neighbor isn’t very careful with the way she washes her clothes. Look at all those spots on her sheets." To this remark, her relative replied, "Those spots aren't on her sheets; they’re on your window." Our neighbor’s wash looks cleaner when our own windows are clean. Do you remember the words of our Lord to those Scribes and Pharisees when they judged the woman charged with the sin of adultery? Jesus said, *“Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”* We Christians will do well to heed the warnings in God’s Word and be very cautious in judging others.

What a relief to know we can’t judge each other in the next life. Because the Son of God became incarnate, He’s competent to judge. The Father appointed Him as Judge, not because He’s the Son of God, but because He became the Son of Man. This is brought out very clearly in John 5:27, *“And [the Father] has given Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.”* The omniscient Judge, then, is the One who *“in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin”* (Heb. 4:15).

Jesus isn’t lacking in the experience of human temptations. He spent sufficient time on the earth and lived among us long enough to know from personal experience the problems we humans must face. This makes Him the only Person competent to qualify

for the office of Judge, so that it's His Judgment Seat, called by the Holy Spirit "*the Judgment Seat of Christ.*"

This is all confirmatory of what we read in other Scriptures, namely, that Christ, by virtue of His humanity and Resurrection from the dead, has been appointed the Judge of all men. In any study of the future activities of our Lord, judgment is obviously one of them. Each Christian should keep before him daily the words of Paul, "*It is the Lord who judges me*" (1 Cor. 4:4).

2. The Judgment Seat of Christ is only for believers. Romans 14:10 says, "*For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.*" 2 Corinthians 5:9 also speaks of the "*judgment seat.*" It's a translation of Greek word, *bema*. The word *bema* was taken from Isthmian games, which was something of a forerunner to the Olympics. The *bema* was a raised platform where the rewards were given to the winners in the games. But not only was the *bema* the place of recognition, it was also the place where a judgment would be rendered if there was a question about the rules. Paul uses this descriptive word to describe what happens when the Church, when Christians who make up the Church, go to be with Christ.

The victor of a given event was brought up to the platform called the *Bema*. There a laurel wreath was placed on his head as a symbol of victory. In all of these passages, Paul was picturing the believer as a competitor in a spiritual contest. As the victorious Grecian athlete appeared before the *Bema* to receive his perishable award, so the Christian will appear before Christ's *Bema* to receive his imperishable award. The judge at the *Bema* bestowed rewards to the victors but he didn't whip the losers. Nor, did he, we might add, neither did he sentence them to hard labor. In other words, it's a reward seat and portrays a time of rewards or loss of rewards following examination. But it is not a time of punishment where believers are judged for their sins.

This is not an event for the unsaved. It's going to be a universal examination for all believers. As Paul writes, "*We must all appear.*" The word "*all*" means exactly what it says. Everyone who's accepted Jesus Christ as personal Savior will go to the *Bema*. All will face this examination.

That's what raises a problem for many. Paul writes that "*we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ.*" As soon as we hear that word, *judgment*, we picture a court scene and standing before a judge who's dispensing judgment and pronouncing sentence upon the guilty. There's not a single child of God, if he/she is honest before God, who doesn't recognize that he/she is guilty of sins. All of us, even those who've accepted Christ as their personal Savior fall frequently into sin. It's no less sin just because it's committed by a Christian. There's a three-fold judgment for all Christians.

a. Past – our past sins were all judged at the Cross. This is our judgment as sinners. When the believing sinner accepts the Atonement of Christ for his sins, he will never again come into judgment as a sinner. Jesus said, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life*" (John 5:24). Paul adds, "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Rom. 8:1). This means that all of our sins have been judged at the Cross. The Judgment Seat of Christ isn't a judgment in which God will punish Christians for sins they've committed before

becoming His children or after becoming His children. Such an interpretation of Scripture fails completely to see the efficacy and value of the death of Christ. When God redeems the believing sinner who receives Christ, He cleanses him thoroughly, for *“the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 Jn 1:7). God removes our sin completely and perfectly, not partially.

b. Present – our present sins are judged as children of God. Every parent understands this. All Christians are subject to their heavenly Father's correction and discipline. That's what the writer of Hebrews tells us, *“For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?”* (Hebrews 12:6-9).

Can you imagine a parent letting their child play in the middle of a busy street without disciplining them? What are they doing? They're trying to protect their child. And the most horrible, the most deadly thing a child of God can do – is sin. Our Heavenly Father loves us too much to let us sin without correcting us. He disciplines us with perfect wisdom and love. The divine purpose in chastisement is always for our profit, to get us to leave the deadly path of sin. What should frighten you is that if you're a professing Christian and living in known sin, and there's no correction from God. Because if your God's child, He loves you too much to let you sin and get away with it.

c. Future – the Judgment Seat of Christ is about our works and how we served the Lord in this life. This is our judgment as *servants*. It's this judgment which takes place at the *Bema*. The *Bema* is not punitive.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 is probably the most familiar passage on the Bema Seat and our future rewards. Paul says that we should think of our lives and our ministries either as gold, silver, or precious stones; or as wood, hay, and stubble. When God torches our works, the truth will come out as to what kind of Christians, what kind of servants of God, we really were and who and what we really served here on earth.

Have you seen charred remains of a home that's burned down? It's haunting. There's usually little left of what was once a beautiful home except the chimney and charred foundation. Everything combustible is gone; only what was made of brick or concrete survived. In the same way, some believers will make it to heaven, but what they've lived for, what they've done in this life (Paul calls it “their works”) will be burned up. They'll be saved, even though only as one escaping through the flames (v 15).

Dr. Harry Ironside, who pastored the great Moody Church during the 1940s, said there are some people who will make it to heaven but they'll smell like they were bought in a fire sale! The imagery is that as they enter heaven their lives will collapse behind them. Everything will go up in smoke. What a tragedy. How sobering!

4. We will be judged thoroughly. *“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). The Greek word for “appear” is a word that

means *"to be revealed."* Yes, we will be revealed before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. One commentator says that it means *"to be laid bare."*

Every Christian will individually experience this judgment seat. It's a personal judgment. We won't be compared with any other person. We will be one-on-one with Jesus, each of us giving an account of ourselves to God. You won't be expected to account for your wife or husband. It will be your record alone that will be examined, and it will be **thorough**.

As children we might say to one another, "You have some money in your pocket," and the reply would be, "No, I don't." Then whoever was asking the question would say, "Yes, you do. I don't believe you." Then, the other child would turn his pocket inside out and would reveal every piece of lint to prove his point. This same imagery was already referred to in 1 Corinthians 3:13 (KJV) where Paul says that our works *"shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire."* In summary, we have three words or phrases used to describe this judgment. Our works will be *"made manifest,"* they will be *"revealed by fire,"* and we will give an account *"for the deeds done while in the body, whether good or bad"* (2 Cor. 5:10).

John Murray, a respected theologian, said that at the judgment seat of Christ Christians will desire this judgment to finally see the depths of God's grace in saving them and then put the sins and failures of the past behind them forever

Let me share an example. Let's say a married Christian man leaves his wife and runs off with the woman of his dreams. He abandons his wife and children and marries his true love and goes to live elsewhere. He neglects his former wife and children that he's left behind. The pain he inflicted on his wife and children is immeasurable, and they pass this legacy on to their children. He dies and goes to heaven, and there he meets his ex-wife and children. What do you think Jesus is going to do? Will He say, "Well now, let's just let bygones be bygones. The two of you just hold hands and walk into eternity and pretend that your sins on earth just don't matter"? Not for a moment do I believe that is going to be the response of Jesus. The judgment seat of Christ is the place where all such issues still need resolution.

When Paul wrote that we should not avenge ourselves (Romans 12:19) this also applies to relationships between believers. The reason we don't have to avenge ourselves in our personal relationships, even with other Christians, is because at the judgment seat of Christ, I can't help but believe that Jesus is going to set the record straight. That's why it's so important for us as believers to resolve as many conflicts as possible while we are on earth so that there will be fewer issues to resolve when we reach heaven.

While the *Bema* is not a place of judging sin. Our sins are already paid for. Those accounts are settled. The judgment seat is the place of evaluation and resolution.

What if—and I'm speculating here—what if Jesus took all of our works since we've been saved and translated them either into gold, silver, and precious stones; or wood, hay, and stubble. Then, He would torch the pile as it is laid before Him. This would provide a powerful evaluation of your life and mine without us having to see any of our sins. The point, of course, is that it's a thorough judgment, even though our sins are legally taken away.

So will Jesus be angry with us? No, all the anger of God was appeased when Jesus died on the cross. Yet, I can't help but think He'll be disappointed in the way that we've

lived in light of His many blessings toward us. Paul says we should live in such a way that we *"please him,"* which means that we can also live in such a way that displeases Him. Be assured He loves us no matter how well or how poorly we do.

And finally, there's this word of encouragement: He will find something good in all of us for which to praise us, *"Then each one will receive his commendation from God"* (1 Cor. 4:5).

So let's not take the word judgment out of the phrase, *"the judgment seat of Christ."* We have a serious appointment with Jesus. Thankfully, we still have time to prepare for it! For many believers, the judgment seat of Christ is going to be a time of profound joy and delight. They'll be lavishly rewarded for their faithfulness. But for others, their evaluation will produce shame, tears, and pain as they see their life's work burned up in their presence.

5. What will Jesus be looking for at the Bema Seat? When you start a class in college, the professor gives out a syllabus of the class requirements. Right now we're encouraging you to read your Bible through this coming year. One reason for that is that our Bibles are our syllabus for knowing how to please Jesus and how to live a godly life, one that counts for eternity. So what will Jesus be looking for? What will survive the fire? Without question that is one of the most important questions we could ever ask.

*** Jesus will seek for our joyous acceptance of injustice and false accusations.** *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you"* (Matt. 5:11-12.) As believers, we're expected to endure hardship and persecution. While suffering for Christ has been the experience of the church throughout history, it's intensifying even in the United States. In the last few years at least seven books have been written saying that Christians are the real jihad, and that Christians are the ones Americans should really fear. False evidence and false accusations will increasingly be used against us. If we respond to such accusations with joy, such an attitude will survive the fire of the judgment.

*** Jesus will evaluate our financial generosity.** *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matt. 6:19-21). A stingy Christian is an anomaly. Erwin Lutzer writes, *"Stingy Christians should question whether they are Christians at all. Christians are expected to be generous, giving, and eager to help."* When someone gets their attitude toward money straight, it will help straighten out almost every other area in their life.

*** Jesus will reveal the extent of our hospitality.** Read this remarkable commentary: *"When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous"* (Luke 14:12-14). Unfortunately, many of us, content with "it's my home and time" attitude, have the philosophy that we should leave others

alone and be left alone. While this may be the mind-set of our culture, it must not be our attitude. We're called to show hospitality, to care for the lonely, to reach out to our neighbors. One reason Christianity spread during the early centuries is because the Christians practiced generous hospitality. John Piper writes, *"If you are afraid of hospitality—that you don't have much personal strength or personal wealth—good. Then you won't intimidate anybody. You will depend all the more on God's grace. You will look all the more to the work of Christ and not your own work. And what a blessing people will get in your simple home or little apartment."*

* **Jesus will review our faithfulness in our vocation.** Paul wrote, *"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him"* (Col. 3:17). Want to be rewarded by Jesus? Do your job for Jesus; go to work because you're serving Him, not your boss or the company. A joyful attitude, heartily working despite unfairness, merits reward at the judgment seat.

* **Jesus will examine our faithfulness in sharing the Gospel.** Daniel 12:3 says, *"And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."* You and I have the opportunity to make a difference in someone's life both now and for all eternity. As David Jeremiah writes, *"We should be holy people eager to greet our Lord when He returns, ready at any moment for the trumpet's call, people of optimism, busy in evangelism, hands to the plow, eyes on the prize."*

* **Jesus will reveal to us the extent to which we loved the unlovable.** *"But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked"* (Luke 6:35). Perhaps God will bring someone into your life who's difficult to love. Why? To paraphrase, God says, *"I brought them into your life because I want you to have many rewards. Start loving them and your reward will be great"* (Luke 6:32-36).

Do you realize how faithful Jesus is? Even a cup of water given in His name is noticed and will be rewarded (Matt. 10:42). Our good works are an expression of our devotion to Jesus as His children. Although all of our works are still tainted with sin, Jesus takes them and cleanses them so that they're acceptable to the Father. The Bible says that we are to *"offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 2:5). Yes, even when we do those works that merit reward, it will be because they've been made acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Incredibly, Jesus gives us the desire and strength to do good works and then rewards us for the works He gives us the grace to do! From beginning to end, it's all a gift of disproportionate and undeserved grace. If we love Him, it's only because He first loved us!

Conclusion: Imagine, tears in heaven! In Revelation 21 we read, *"He will wipe every tear from their eyes"*(vs. 4). The question we're forced to ask ourselves is: Why are there tears in heaven? Why would God need to wipe them away?

Two answers have been suggested: one is that we will be grieved because some people we love won't be in heaven. We can imagine a mother whose son doesn't appear in heaven's roll count. Well might she cry.

But there's a second reason why there might be tears in heaven. Many of us will weep when we're overwhelmed with regret for the wasted, self-absorbed lives we lived on earth. We may very well weep because of how badly we fare as we stand before the Lord at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. But it doesn't have to be that way.

I blew it in high school. I didn't do all that well in college. When I went to seminary, I was really focused. I'd matured and I really wanted to learn and do a good job. I was shocked though when I finally finished my degree and went to graduation. I had no idea that I was also graduating with honors. I'd just been seeking to do my best. But God rewarded me for my faithfulness.

As we close today, let me remind you that we are all the builders of our own temple to God. Since the quality of our workmanship has eternal consequences, we must undertake this building project with the utmost care and respect. The foundation of our building is nothing other than Christ and His Gospel of forgiveness and salvation. We're encouraged to find more mature Christians to help us develop in the faith and lead us on the right path. The construction of our temple should be undertaken with only the best materials using quality labor. The best building materials of our temple are found when our motivation is to serve God with our entire mind, heart, and soul. Since the Lord Jesus is the ultimate inspector of our work He sees everything and knows when we're shortchanging Him or are working for others when we're on His building project. Therefore, we must pay careful attention at all times because if we're faithful, diligent, and obedient workers, our one-story temple that withstands God's fire test will be greater and grander than the Taj Mahal. We need to think: *What can I do this week that will help me put in another fireproof room?*

But maybe up until now, for the most part, you've been building junk. The game isn't over. Being disqualified from participation in the Kingdom is like a hockey player who's been sent to the penalty box. He's still on the team, but he didn't play by the rules and had to be "cast out." He can watch the action, but he can't participate for a certain length of time. But when the penalty time is up, the player can jump back into the game. He just has to work a little harder to make up for the time he has lost.

My friend, that's my encouragement to you in case you're saying, "Scott, you just messed up my day because if I died right now, I wouldn't have much of real value to present to Christ."

If that's the case for you, get out of the penalty box and get back in the game. You can't fix yesterday, but you can do something about today and tomorrow. What you need to do is pick up speed. By that I mean you don't just keep going at the same old pace. Turn up the intensity on your service so that you'll have many years of faithful service to present to Christ at the Bema. And if you're discouraged or feel like it's too late to get going, let me leave you with a word of encouragement from our friend Paul. It's very simple: "*Forget what's behind and press on for the prize.*" We serve a gracious God who says, "*I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten*" (Joel 2:25).

My friend, it's not too late! Get back in the game! You can do well at the Bema. It can be gold, silver and precious stones. Investing today for Christ prepares us for "*The Day.*" Christian friend, what are you living for? Are you wasting your life, living for today, or are you **Living for the Day!**