

The Judgment Seat of Christ

Leonard Ravenhill:

"For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."
-Romans 14:10 KJV

I want to tell you a story about when I was a young boy going to school. You know, I didn't mind school too much, but in those days I was very envious of the school Captain. His name was Renton, and he sat just across the aisle from me. He was the best soccer player in the school and that's what I wanted to be. He was the best at cricket, and I liked cricket. He was the best runner we had, and I liked running. He was not only an excellent athlete, but a very good artist as well. And on top of all that, he was the smartest guy in the whole school.

If I could ever save up my stomachaches, I'd save them until the day before the final exam. But my mother was smart. She knew I was saving them up. I don't know how she knew, but she always did. I'd get up that morning and say, "Oh mother, I don't feel good at all. I think I should stay home today." But she'd always say, "You can stay home tomorrow - but not today." But staying home tomorrow wouldn't do me any good because today was the day of the final exam. Today was the day of judgment!

I know Renton never felt like that because whenever we had a test, as soon as the questions were put down on the board, he would get his paper and dash through them. He was through the first two or three subjects before I'd even gotten the thing read. He and another fellow used to say, "Oh boy, exams!" They knew they'd be first and second in the class when the grades came out, and so they were excited about taking the test. Final exams didn't scare them. These boys were always at the top. They were not afraid of the Day of Judgment. They were not afraid - because they were prepared for it.

QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. "Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, "Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work." (I Cor. 3:9-13)

The above scripture is talking about the day all believers will stand before the Lord. When every follower of Jesus will account for his life and his deeds before all of heaven itself. Notice what it says very carefully, "...the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work." Not how much work, but rather what kind of work. Not the quantity but the quality. This scripture is speaking of your whole life's work. In other words, your life's work can be wood or hay or straw -- or it can be silver, gold, or costly stones. And on that day, the fire will put it to the final test. What fire? The Bible tells that God is love, but it also tells us that He is a consuming fire as well. (Heb. 12:29)

Paul continues by saying, "If any man's work which he had built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire. " (I Cor. 3:14-15) This illustration would be extremely significant to the people of Corinth that Paul was speaking to, because not too long before this was written, their whole city was devastated by fire. They all knew firsthand what damage fire could do. When the fire swept through Corinth, every house that was built out of wood, hay, or straw, was devastated and left in ashes. But the more wealthy people there had houses built with beautiful pillars of granite, and some even had houses built totally out of marble. These houses made of costly stones were still standing after the fire swept through, though they were obviously very badly scorched.

YOUR LIFE INVESTMENT

Let's visualize it another way. One man is given \$10,000 and he invests it in wood - maybe some lovely mahogany. So this man's entire life work is made out of wood. It's very beautiful, but when the fire goes through it, what do you have? All you have is ashes, maybe up to your ankles, and that's all there is left. The next man is given \$10,000 and he invests it in hay. Another man given the same amount invests all of it in straw. Does that sound foolish? Well, people do it every day. Why? Because if you put \$10,000 into hay or straw, it looks like you are getting a lot for your money. You could probably buy half the straw in Texas for \$10,000, but, boy, you're going to have a mess when the fire gets to it. Instead of ashes to your ankles, or ashes to your knees, it'll be up

to your nose maybe. But that's what some lives are going to be like: wood, hay, stubble - then ashes.

Now let's look at a few people who made much wiser investments. There's a man over here who has \$10,000, and he invests it in gold. (He won't get much at \$400 an ounce, will he?) The next man invests \$10,000 in silver, and another man invests the same amount in costly stones. Each of the six men I've just spoken of had the same amount of money, but they all chose different things to invest it in. Now, we are talking about your life's work. Do you get the picture? Our whole life, from the very moment we begin to witness for Christ, including all of our service and our labor for Him, is going to be tested by fire. We must be very careful to make wise investments, or in the end, all that will be left is ashes.

ETERNAL VALUE

Will our life's work stand the test of the fire when we come before the Lord? Will it have lasting eternal value - or will it end up in ashes? There's an interesting difference between wood, hay, straw - and gold, silver, and costly stones. Wood, hay, and stubble are found above the ground. They catch the eye, just like many people's ministries do. They are quite plentiful and easy to find. On the other hand, silver, gold, and precious stones are found below the ground. Nobody sees them - again, like many people's ministries. They're not just lying around in a field somewhere for anyone to pick up. They are much harder to come by; in fact, it takes a lot of hard work to get them. That's why they are so expensive. They are of much higher quality than many other things, and much more rare too. Again, it's the quality, not the quantity that sets their value. Many things are difficult in the Christian life, but we should desire to acquire those things which will hold their value, not only on earth, but in heaven as well.

MINISTRY AND MONEY

Every person's life, including all of his ministry, is going to pass through the fire. There's a lot of public ministry that's going to go down in flames on that day, my brothers. The fire is going to take the big showy life of every man and burn it until only a bunch of ashes is left. I'm tired of seeing these fellows begging for money on television. I believe every dime that comes into any ministry will need to be answered for before the Judgment Seat of Christ one day. Jesus talked about these men who'd go and take widows' houses. (Luke 20:46-47) Well, that's what many are doing now. And they're not satisfied that you give while you're living, they ask you to hand over your house and all the rest to them in your will. They're going to give an account to God in that day, but I believe we're also going to give an account.

A brother was telling me this week that when he got baptized and went down into the water, he suddenly realized that he had his wallet in his pocket. Not many wallets get baptized! We kind of say, "Lord, You look after my sins. I'll look after the rest." You'll give an account to God for every penny you've earned since you became the property of Jesus Christ. He doesn't just take your sins - He takes all of you.

Oh yes, many may want to get filled with the Holy Ghost and get a bank balance, but how many of you are big enough to say, "Lord, in this crucial hour in human history, let me fill up with the sufferings of Christ"? Can He share His sorrow with you? Are you prepared to challenge demon power and say, "Listen, I've moved into the place where the Apostle Paul was when he said, I glory in tribulations and necessities and reproaches"? Watch out though, because if you're going to get mature in God, all the dwarfs around you will criticize you and sneer at you and say, "Trying to be holier than the rest of us, huh? So you don't have time for basketball or going to see a baseball game?" No, maybe you don't, but that's nobody's business but yours and God's.

Do you get so near to the heart of God that you share His grief over the world and over the backslidden church that we have today? One of the most famous preachers in the country recently called at nearly midnight and said, "I've come to this conclusion: God Almighty has already taken His hand off America - for the simple reason that we've had so much light and we've rejected it!" It's not only true that we live in a world of bankrupt politics, we live in a world (this is the most tragic part of all) of a bankrupt church.

WILL CHRISTIANS BE JUDGED?

I heard a woman say not long ago, "Well, praise the Lord. I'm glad I don't have to account for anything when I go to heaven. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Wait a minute, you can never isolate a scripture by itself. There's no condemnation for our past sins, and I'm sure we are all mighty glad of that. But God was always saying to Israel, "Remember when thou wast a bondsman in Egypt...remember your sin...remember your iniquity."

You might say, "It doesn't say the Christians are going to be judged out of the books." Yes, I think it does. Where? In Malachi (Mal. 3:16). It says that God has a Book of Remembrance, and I think it would do you good before you go to bed every night this week to ask God, "What did You put in Your book today for my life?" It doesn't have to be some outward act. You can worship God on a tractor. It may not be the best way, but you can do it.

The Bible says that "we shall all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10 KJV). I think that scripture means just what it says.

THE HOLY DEAD

A hymn writer says,

"From earth's wide bounds and ocean's farthest coast, through gates of pearl, stream in a countless host, singing Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Hallelujah."

All the saints of all the ages are going to be there. There's another old hymn and probably not very many of you could recite it, but I'll bet most of you know the chorus: "Oh, when the saints go marching in." You know, they dance to that every night down in New Orleans. They shuffle their feet along Bourbon Street and have a great time, but that song is not for them, it's for the REDEEMED. It says, "When the saints go marching in." The saints will march into heaven in a multitude which no man can number.

I can't wait to see all the saints of all the ages. Man, I'll be thrilled to look at Isaiah and Jeremiah and those major and minor prophets. We'll be looking around and saying, "Hey, there's Abraham. I didn't think he'd look quite like that." But he's going to be there, all right. And just think of seeing Matthew and Mark and Luke and John and everybody in Acts. Won't it be wonderful to see those men who walked with Jesus!

Let's think about Paul for a moment. He gave his intellect to God. He wrote about 14 epistles and traveled all over Asia Minor. He was lashed at the post 195 times. He was in weariness, and fastings, and pain, and tribulation, and distress, and famine, and nakedness. He was subjected to false brethren and to perils of the deep. What do you think his reward is going to be for living a life like that? GRACE is free, but REWARDS are not free. You might say, "But you're talking about works." Sure I am - because God did. Jesus did!

COSTLY STONES

Silver, gold, precious stones. What are the precious stones? When I read that, I think of the breastplate that was on the priests in the Old Testament. It was divided by four rows of stones - three stones in each row. Each stone was different. Each stone stood for the name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. The priest wore the breastplate over his heart as he went into the Holy Place to pray for the sins of the people. How do you handle this? Do you enter the holiest place of all to make intercession for the sins of the people? Do you enter into intercession at all? This is only possible through the blood of Christ and the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Intercession is our job now. We don't need to send a priest into the Holy of Holies. We can go ourselves! The New Testament tells us that we are all priests - that we are a part of the Royal Priesthood (I Peter 2:9). Do you wonder why the world is poor and sick outside? Because we really don't know how to pray, that's why! Because we're satisfied that we've left our lousy living and we don't drink or lust or damn ourselves every day. We're Christians now...and we're so content and so happy and so satisfied.

SILVER

The silver . . . what is the silver? I guess you can interpret it in different ways. But I like to think of the scripture in the book of Proverbs that says, "The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver" (Proverbs 10:20). I believe that the silver may signify the words that we speak. I believe that God has an eternal record of every word we have spoken since we've been saved. That may be embarrassing. Oh, we won't be ashamed of the good things we've said, but what about our idle words? You know, the gossip, the slander, the criticism, the prejudice. What about the time when somebody upset you and instead of being quiet, you just spilled out everything that was on your heart at that moment? And can you think of all the awesome words we've preached to thousands of people over the years? We're going to answer for every word - and the fire is going to be put to them. Will they be wood, hay, or stubble - or will they abide the fire?

GOLD

What is gold a sign of? I believe it's a sign of our devotion to God. If I could have a small melting pot here, I'd put your \$10,000 worth of gold in it and melt it down. What happens when you burn gold? Nothing! It just changes from solid to liquid, but you don't reduce it. Can you see all the saints standing in heaven? And there's Leonard Ravenhill - standing before Christ whose eyes are filled with holiness. The whole place is breathing holiness. There in the presence and the majesty of an awesome God, the record of my poor life is read before all the saints of all the ages. And He puts the fire to my devotional life. Am I just a good showman? I sure like to preach because God called me to preach. I don't care how I preach, and I don't care whether you believe me either. I'm not responsible for that. I preach out of my heart all I believe, and I'd die for it. But say, am I just a showman? What's my secret life like?

I've said it many times and I'll say it again - no man is greater than his prayer life. I don't care how big his organization is. Let me live with a man awhile and share his prayer life, and I'll tell you how tall I think he is, or how majestic I think he is in God. What's your devotional life like right now? Would you like Gabriel to hand down the book of your devotional life for the last month so it could be read out loud at church this Sunday? The gold is going to be tried through our devotional life.

GREAT MEN OF PRAYER

You'll discover this: The men that have been the most heroic for God have been the men with the greatest devotional life. America has produced some of the greatest prayer warriors in the world. John Hyde was one of them. I knew someone who had prayed with him, and they said it was just awesome when this man went into prayer. There's a little book out on him called "Praying Hyde" that would be well worth your reading.

Edward Payson, better known as praying Payson of Portland, was another great prayer warrior. He used to kneel at the side of his bed and pray, and pray, and pray. When they washed his body for burial, they found great big pads on his knees like a camel has. Tradition says that James had camel's knees, but it's a living fact that Payson had them. When they were washing him, somebody said, "What abnormal knees. They're heavy with callouses." That's because he used to pray at the side of his bed with energy - and he wore two grooves about six or seven inches long into that hard floor where he used to pray and make intercession.

One day I was in the Bible School of Wales and there was dear Mrs. Rees Howells. (Her husband was dead now.) We stood on the terrace and she turned and said, "Do you see the room there?" I said, "Yes, I see that room." "That door?" "Yes." "Daddy (meaning her husband) went through that door at six o'clock in the morning and he stayed there until six o'clock at night every day for 11 months except the one day that his mother died."

Let's preview eternity and look at all the apostles and all the saints of all the ages. Look, there's Charles Finney with his amazing revivals. There's William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army. There's John Wesley. Here are all the great heroic figures we've all read about, and they are all watching while the book is handed down and somebody's going to read the record. Would you volunteer and say, "Well, I'll be happy to read my record to this multitude"?

Suppose I say, "Gabriel, hand me the record for the year of 1724." When I open the book to that year and go to the "B's," I find the name, David Brainerd. He was a young American who died at the age of 28. All he possessed was a cowhide that he wore with a rope tied around it. He used to ride over the Susquehanna River to follow the Indians. David had a severe case of tuberculosis and only weighed about 95 pounds. I remember reading his diary once. He said, "I got up this morning and the Indians were still committing adultery and drinking and beating their tom-toms and shouting like hell itself. I prayed from a half hour after sunrise to a half hour before sunset. There was nowhere to pray in the Indian camp. I went into the woods and knelt in the snow. It was up to my chin." No, he didn't have a heater with him or anything else. He was just there in the frigid snow, tuberculosis and all. He continued, "I wrestled in prayer until a half hour before sunset, and I could only touch the snow with the tips of my fingers. The heat of my body had melted the snow." What amazing intercessory prayer!

Well, God pity us. We can't even get people into our churches to pray, and we have velvet cushions on the seats and nice stuff on the floor so our darling little knees won't get hurt. David Brainerd, Praying Payson of Portland, John Hyde, and Rees Howells - when God puts the fire to their devotional life, I don't think there will be anything lost. It won't be wood, it won't be hay, and it won't be stubble.

TRUE JOY

I'm embarrassed to be part of the Church today because I believe it's an embarrassment to a holy God. Most of

our joy is clapping our hands and having a good time and then afterwards we talk all the nonsense of the world. We're overboard on laughter and happiness. There's an old saying in the world, "Laugh and the world laughs with you." I change it and say, "Laugh and the Church laughs with you, but weep and you weep alone." Because there isn't enough real joy in the house of God, we need entertainment. Entertainment is the devil's substitute for joy. Because there isn't enough power in the house of God, people are always looking for something to take its place. We point the finger at the world, but we need to turn to the Church and say we'd better all get sackcloth and ashes and humble ourselves and say "Almighty God!" When I see the Church in the New Testament, they didn't have stately buildings or paid evangelists or a lot of money. (They couldn't get on television and beg!) But I'll tell you what they did - they turned the world upside-down!

Have you ever seen the little plaque that reads, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last?" Well, that's not what the poet wrote. The poet wrote this: "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last. And when I am dying, how happy I'll be, if the lamp of my life has been burned out for Thee." Do you think all Christians die happy? Not on your life! Some of them die as miserable as sinners. Why? Because they've misused their time and wasted their lives. Many of you have laid dying on a hospital bed and prayed, "Lord, if You would only spare me, I'll do this, that, or the other." Well, have you done it?

I discovered this poem the other day and I want to share it with you.

His Plan For Me

When I stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ
 And He shows His plan for me,
 The plan of my life as it might have been
 Had He had His way - and I see
 How I blocked Him here, and checked Him there,
 And I would not yield my will,
 Will there be grief in my Savior's eyes,
 Grief though He loves me still?
 Would He have me rich and I stand there poor,
 Stripped of all but His grace,
 While memory runs like a hunted thing,
 Down the paths I cannot retrace.
 Lord, of the years that are left to me
 I give them to Thy hand
 Take me and break me and mold me,
 To the pattern that Thou hast planned!
 -Author Unknown

The only thing that will tie me in victory continually, through the blood of Christ, is that I give Him my adoration and my tribute every day. It's more than my service. It's more than giving money. But I need to love Him, magnify Him, and adore Him. I need to take Him, as it were, by the feet and worship Him. If we will do this, then we will experience real joy and lasting happiness.

CROWNS, CROWNS, CROWNS!

I don't believe there will be any envy in heaven, but I could remind you that there are at least five crowns to be given in reward. Paul says the Lord will give him a crown of righteousness, which he says the Lord will not only give to him, but to all those who love His appearing (II Tim. 4:8). There's a crown for the martyrs - those who have died and those yet to die. Crowns, crowns, crowns! We won't all be the same in heaven. There will be great distinctions there. When you see a political convention, you see people holding up signs from California or somewhere. Well, maybe there will be signs in heaven. "These are the Prayer Warriors." "These are the Great Sufferers." "These are the Travailers." "These are the Missionaries." "These are the Failures." All kinds of people are going to be listed in that Great Day. There will be great distinctions between people in heaven.

There was a little woman in Ireland who had two shops. She paid all the family expenses with what she made from one shop and she saved all the money that came in from the other shop for missions. She ended up sending four of her children to the mission field and she financed each one of them. Man, she's going to have a

reward some day, isn't she? Because she was doing it as unto Him!

Take a look at the dying thief. Oh, he'll be in heaven all right because Jesus said he would - but he wasted his life. Then look at John Wesley for example. He was saved soundly when he was 35 years of age, and he served the Lord for the next 53 years. You couldn't think that the dying thief, a man who got in at the last tick of the clock, is going to have the same reward as John Wesley, could you? Wesley made an awful lot of money. Do you know what he did with it? He built orphanages and churches. He printed Bibles and hymn books. There was no time wasted in his life. He was methodical and systematic. He went to dinner with the greatest man in English literature and the man said, "Now you've finished dinner, let's fold our legs under the table and have a nice time of conversation." Wesley said, "I'm sorry, I have to go." "But it's not yet nine o'clock, why are you going?" Wesley said, "I have an appointment in the morning at four o'clock." "At four o'clock tomorrow morning?" "Every morning of my life," he said. "With whom?" "With God." He disciplined his life. He disciplined his body in eating. He disciplined his hand in his pocket. He'll stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ...an awesome prospect for any of us. "We ought to live every day as though we've come out of another world into this world - but with the power of that world still upon us. We should live and speak and move in that power, and have our whole being in Jesus Christ!"

THE FRAGRANCE OF WORSHIP

I heard the story for years, about the woman who came to Jesus with an alabaster box of ointment, before I understood it - before I realized that she came for one reason only. She came to worship Jesus. How do I know? Because she brought the most sacrificial gift she had and because she never said a word while she was there. How do I know? Because she didn't wash His feet with water, but with her tears. She didn't dry His feet with a towel, but she dried His feet with the hair of her head. And she poured out that costly fragrance and then wiped His feet. So what happened? The fragrance she poured out on Him came back on her.

Do you wonder why your life isn't more fragrant? It's because you don't take time to be holy. You don't take time to be with Jesus. Because you think all the knowledge you get at Bible school is enough. Oh no, God isn't going to measure your intellect. He's going to try your life with His fire. Did you get up this morning and thank God you were pure? Did you thank Him that He broke that devilish fever you used to have for sniffing cocaine or something? Are you really glad you're not a prostitute anymore, but now you're a part of the Bride of the Lamb instead? Are you glad He removed your bad temper and all those creepy horrible things that used to master you?

I think again of a statement A. W. Tozer made to me once. He said, "Len, you know, we'll hardly get our feet out of time into eternity that we'll bow our heads in shame and humiliation. We'll gaze on eternity and say, 'Look at all the riches there were in Jesus Christ, and I've come to the Judgment Seat almost a pauper.'" For God had not only given us Jesus Christ - He has with Him freely given us all things (Rom. 8:32).

A DIFFERENT PEOPLE

I remember crossing a square in the city of Bath in the 1940s. I saw two very fine young ladies - well, one was a young lady and the other was only a girl. They were beautifully dressed and as they marched across that square I thought, "There's something different about those girls." Then I discovered that they were princesses. It was our present Queen of England, Queen Elizabeth, and her sister, Margaret. They were part of English royalty, and you know, there was a dignity about them very different from anybody else who walked there. Well, as Christians, we are part of GOD'S Royal Family, and it should be evident to all that we meet that we are a different type of people. If we can't live as a different people on this earth, we've no right to live here. We shouldn't be affected by changing customs or changing styles or changing opinions, or whether the stock market goes up or down, or whether the clouds are gathering for war. Those things don't make any difference. We ought to live every day as though we've come out of another world into this world - but with the power of that world still upon us. We should live and speak and move in that power, and have our whole being in Jesus Christ!

BAPTISM OF OBEDIENCE

That final day is going to be awesome. Have you figured how you'll get on when you stand there? You and I will stand there alone on that day and be judged for every aspect of our lives - for our praying, our giving, our talking, and our doing. I still believe in the majesty of that eternal court, with the King of kings and the Lord of lords and the Judge of judges. You see, there's no possibility of any rehearsal, and what's more, there's no possibility of any repetition. Because, again, this is the Final Judgment, and to some God will say, "Come, ye

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blessed," but to others He'll say, "Depart from Me." No, it's not so simple to be a Christian after all. It's a majestic thing.

We ought to live our lives conscious of eternity - ready to be cut off at any moment. If you were to stand before the Lord at this very moment, would you like your life story read by all the millions in eternity? None of the outcasts of hell are going to be there. Won't it be wonderful - or will it? Or do you think you might shrink a bit when you hear now God used David Brainerd or John Wesley or some little washerwoman that had a life of intercession?

There's no burden too heavy, or no situation too hard for the one that you love. If we are love-controlled, love-motivated, and love-energized, it will be all right when we stand up there, because if there's anything about love - it's obedient. We need to become a people who are baptized with obedience. We need to be submissive to the total will of God, not concerned about human opinion, and not asking for more to spend on ourselves. We need to say, "Oh God, I want this life of mine to glorify You, so that when I stand in Your awesome presence, as John says, I shall not be ashamed at Your appearing" (1 John 2:28).

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