

Leonard Ravenhill:

"For we shall all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ."

-Romans 14:10

In a very brief and very brilliant biography of a famous English preacher, one of the greatest preachers that ever preached in America or England, it says that he had some very strange habits. One of these habits was to carry in his pocket a handful of precious stones...a diamond, a sapphire, a ruby, an emerald, and so forth. He would walk into a park and take one of those precious stones and hold it up to the light of the sun, moving it around, seeking different shades or different illuminations from it as the sunlight hit it. And as the people would go past, particularly the children, they would all shake their heads indicating that they thought this fellow was just a little bit odd.

The preacher that I am referring to is Jonathan Edwards, and back in the 1700's he preached one of the greatest sermons ever preached in America. It was called "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." The people fell off their seats and clung to the pillars that were holding the gallery up -- crying out in despair. And he didn't say, "Oh friends, please excuse me. I never meant to embarrass you like that." There was a reason for his power and anointing that day, because before he preached, he prayed. Over and over and over again he prayed, "Oh God, stamp eternity on my eyeballs." I don't know anybody else who's ever prayed it. Maybe we've said it -- but if God should stamp eternity or even judgment upon our eyeballs, I'm quite convinced we'd be a very different tribe of people.

Someone once said to that great scholar, Daniel Webster, "You have a colossal mind. What is the greatest thought that you have ever had?" He said, "I've thought about many things, but the most awesome, the most terrifying, the most shattering thought I've ever had, is my personal accountability to God one day."

There are roughly 3/4 million words in the Word of God and one hymn writer calls the Bible, "A golden casket where gems of truth are stored. The heaven drawn picture of Christ, the Living Word." I suggest, like Jonathan Edwards selected a precious stone and lifted it up to the light of the sun, we select one word out of this "golden casket" and hold it up to the light of eternity -- and that word is "Judgment."

You can tell God that you're not concerned about what I have to say about it, but I hope you will at least say, "Please, Lord. Will You give me some new illumination on this awesome fact of judgment?"

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

I want to read from the book of Revelation. Very often preachers call this the book of the Revelation of Saint John -- but that is not the title. It is the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Revelation means the unfolding, the taking away of the veil. I find the book of Revelation a book of mystery, a book of majesty, and a book of misery -- because it shows me the final stage of lost men and women. It shows me that forever and ever they are going to be cut off from God. If there are a million roads into hell, there's not one road out. But if in heaven they continually sing, "Worthy is the Lamb," in hell the only thing they sing is "The harvest is past, the summer is ended and we are not saved" (Jer. 8:20). I suggest you read the 17th, 18th, and 19th chapters of the book of Revelation. This book has an imprint on it that no other book has in the Word of God because it says, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear" (Rev. 1:3). There are a lot of people who read but how many of them really hear?

In Revelation 20:11-12, 14-15, it says, "I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

THE JUDGMENT OF SINNERS

Those passages just quoted from the book of Revelation are usually understood to be referring to the judgment of sinners. "I saw a great white throne" (typical obviously of purity) "and Him who sat upon it." We read these things and they kind of slide over our minds. But listen to the awesomeness of this: "...from whose presence earth and heaven fled away and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne and books were opened..." Various titles have been given to this awesome event. John Wesley called it "The Great Assize." Billy Sunday in his wonderful way called it "Payday Sunday." A

cowboy preacher once called it "The Last Roundup." You can call it, if you like, "A Date With Destiny," or better still, you can call it "Your Day in Court." This book of Revelation begins by telling us that these things will shortly come to pass, and that was 2,000 years ago. We live too much in time. We're too earthbound. We see as other men see. We think as other men think. We invest our time as the world invests it. But if we took hold of eternity as a reality, I'm convinced we'd be a different breed of people.

It must have been very awesome to be living in the days of His flesh. The old boys in the Synagogue muttered and quoted about somebody coming someday, but most of them really didn't believe it. Why didn't Jesus come sweeping through the sky when it was as black as night over Jerusalem? Why didn't He come with ten thousand saints? Why didn't He come with the sound of trumpets? Why didn't He come to the world like that? But when He did come, they couldn't believe that somebody clothed in flesh and blood, who had to eat and sleep and do everything else like they did, was the Son of God.

But Jesus began to make a stir. Why, He actually raised a man from the dead! My, that must have excited them. Just imagine Jesus going to the tomb and saying, "Roll away the stone." (He didn't roll it away. There's some labor we have to do.) And then He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus!" As Campbell Morgan says, "He said, 'Lazarus, come forth.' If He had just said 'Come forth,' all the cemetery would have come -- and it wasn't their time yet!" So Lazarus came forth. I'll bet the disciples were a proud bunch that day, saying, "What do you think about our Master now? He's even raising the dead!"

WHEN ALL THE DEAD ARE RAISED

But Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead is only a preview of what's yet to come. In John 5:28-29, Jesus says "...an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds, to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment." Did you get that? He says that the day is coming in which all who are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they shall rise! From Adam, wherever he is right now, in the sands or in the dust -- all who are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God. You see, Jesus said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (John 11:25) and I believe He did rise from the dead. In the end of the book of Revelation, He says, "I was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades" (Rev. 1:18).

I've crossed the Atlantic about 18 times on different ships, and almost every time I've crossed it, I've looked overboard and said, "Hey, you down there, you're gonna get up one day! You thieving buccaneers who died in the Spanish Main, and the folks who sank in the Lusitania and the Titanic, and all those who sank in the great ships during the wars -- you're all gonna get up one day." At the voice of the Son of God, they're going to rise. Millions, billions of them. And they're all going to stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ. That's going to be a spectacle. Where is it going to take place? I don't know where, but I know it will take place, since the Bible is the only book in the whole world that you can rely on.

The book of Revelation is not only the end of the Bible, but it deals with the end of time and then it deals with the things that happen after the end of time. Look for a minute at Revelation 6:12-17, And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon become like blood; And the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; For the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?"

WHAT WILL JESUS LOOK LIKE?

In contrast, at the end of the book of Revelation it says of the redeemed that they're going to come and they long to see His face. What do you think Jesus will look like? Fanny Crosby, who was the first woman in American history to address the joint session of Congress, was blind for 84 years. Someone once said to her, "It's a shame a great Christian like you is blind. You can't see the sunset. You can't see the lovely flowers. You're at such a disadvantage." "Oh, NO," she said, "I'm at a great advantage over you. Don't you realize the first face I ever see will be His face?!" Do you wonder that she wrote so many hymns about His face? Again, what do you think Jesus will look like? In Australia they show me pictures of Jesus with lovely blond hair, bright blue eyes, and a flaxen beard. And the Chinese have an interpretation of Christ through their artists! And there are some dreadful pictures, I think, that have been done by the so-called great masters. But I'll tell you what -- the Word of God paints a very different picture of Jesus than all of these put together.

The Apostle Paul got a picture of Jesus, not with a lamb in His arms, and not like the stained glass windows where Jesus looks pathetically feminine. He sees Jesus, and he says He's "the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, to whom be praise and glory forever" (I Tim. 1:17). So we're going to see the King of kings. He's the Judge of judges in the Court of courts. There is no tribunal after this. It is finished!

And when I hear people singing "Put your hand in the hand of the man who stilled the waters," or "Shake hands with Jesus," I say, "Forget it!" Listen, when you see Jesus, you're not going to go up and say, "Hey, buddy, I'm glad You died for me." When you see Jesus, you'll be almost paralyzed with fear unless you have a glorified body and a glorified mind. John was given the book of Revelation as a prisoner on a devil's island -- but he was in the Spirit when this enormous revelation was given to him. The picture of Jesus here is not a picture of a pathetic individual pushed around by anybody who wants to push Him around. I think sometimes we think we're going to march up and say, "Well, Jesus. You know how many years I served You, and how many souls I won for You, and how many sermons I preached for You..." Oh, no...it won't be like that at all.

The Bible says that " His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; And His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. (Rev. 1:14-16) And here is John, who used to lean his head on the bosom of Jesus and hear that divine heartbeat. John was the man that I believe knew more about Jesus than anyone else, and when he saw Jesus in His majesty, this man who had walked with Him and talked with Him for three years, says, "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man" (Rev. 1:17). If John responded like that, what do you think you and I are going to do?!

Well, of course, if you have a judgment, you must have a judge! I believe that the Church of Jesus Christ needs a new revelation of the majesty of God! This is the King of kings! And He's the Judge of judges! And this is the Tribunal of tribunals! And there's no court of appeals afterwards. The verdict is final! There will be no biased judgment! People have said to me, "There is no justice in the earth today!" Well maybe there isn't! But I hang on to the Word which says, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25).

THE UNHOLY DEAD

We see here the Judge in all His awesome majesty, in all His glory. What do you think the unholy dead, great and small, are going to do when they see Him on His throne? Do you think they will worship Him? No, they are going to be terrified! This is the great exposure! Everything is going to be exposed at the Judgment Seat of Christ! They couldn't find the 18 minutes on the tapes that Mr. Nixon had. Well, I'll tell you who has a perfect record of them! And the transcripts are going to be read one day before everyone! There will be a thousand million or billion people when you stand there at the Judgment Seat without your wife to lean on, or your husband, or your preacher, or a friend. You can't send your lawyer. You can't send a representative. Paul writes in Romans 14, "We must all stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ." There is no exception.

Can you see those millions of unholy dead? All the criminals who ever lived. All the prostitutes. All the men who make millions from pornography. Can you think of the pimps who pollute those little girls on West 42nd Street in New York? Can you imagine when God takes hold of history and empties it?! When every man who ever walked the streets of ancient Babylon with all its lusts, or Corinth which was just one colossal cesspool of impurity, must account for himself? When all that has happened in Las Vegas last night is going to be "thrown on the screen" in eternity! Every king that has ruled over England, the caliphs of Baghdad, the maharajis of India, the multi-millionaires, the billionaires -- they're all going to stand one day! Can you imagine that? At the Judgment Seat of Christ they will have to account for all of their deeds done in the body. Every judge that sits in the high court is going to be judged one day by an Infallible Judge. How long will it take? I don't know and I don't care...because we're not going anywhere! I think one of the joys of eternity will be that the redeemed will see all the unholy dead judged, but the unholy won't see the judgment of the saints, because they won't be there.

MEMORY IS ETERNAL

You may say, "Well, Mr. Ravenhill, I won't be in serious trouble because I don't have a good memory." Well, you'll have one that day. There's going to be some awful revelations. There's going to be some weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. John says the books were opened (Rev. 20:12). What books? I'm not really sure what the books are, but I think the book of the Ten Commandments for one, and I think maybe the Book of Memory for another thing (Mal. 3:16). You see, memory is an amazing thing. Memory will last into eternity. I don't think the redeemed will remember their sorrows and heartaches, but I'll tell you the unholy dead will remember every time somebody put a tract into their hand. They'll remember it through eternity and wish to God they still had a chance to respond. They'll remember every one of their mother's prayers they ever heard.

They'll remember every word of every sermon they ever sat through. They're going to remember everything. How do I know? Because one day a man in hell prayed. It was not only the wrong place to pray, but he prayed to the wrong person (to Abraham), and he of course got the wrong answer (according to the answer he was looking for). "Child, remember that during your life, you received your good things..." "But I don't want my brothers to come here!" But Jesus says, "REMEMBER" (Luke 16:19-31). Memory is eternal. It will never die. Your memory isn't faulty. Everything you've done, every idle word you've spoken, and every action will one day be recalled.

THE GREAT AND THE SMALL

The unholy dead are going to stand, great and small, before God. Sometimes I look at my Encyclopedia Britannica and I think of all the history that is going to pass before me in the flesh. I'll be interested to see Julius Caesar and Tiberius Caesar. I'll be fascinated when Pontius Pilate stands before Jesus. I think he'll be more uncomfortable than Jesus felt standing before him! It will be awesome when we see the founders of these cults stand before God. When, in God's name, is the Church going to open their heart and mind and see that every man will stand accountable to God? I don't care if he flies his own private jet or how many cities or millions of people he rules. It doesn't matter. The great of the earth and the lowest of the earth are all going to spend their time in eternity. They are going to live there forever and ever, "where their worm does not die" (Mark 9:48). Hell won't be the same for everybody. Some will be beaten with a few stripes, some with many stripes (Luke 12:47-48). But I tell you what -- I'd rather be the least in the Kingdom of God than the greatest in the kingdom of the devil, both in time and in eternity.

You might say, "I don't really believe in God and I don't like to hear this kind of stuff." Well, friend, let me tell you lovingly. If you like to drink, go with the drinkers. If you like to lust, go with the prostitutes. In hell, if you're given to lust, you'll have that lust, but there'll be nothing to satisfy it. In hell, if you drink, you'll still be thirsty, but there'll be nothing to satisfy your thirst. You'd give a king's ransom for one drop of water, but there isn't any -- never mind the other stuff you drink.

WHEN MERCY IS GONE FOREVER

Oh, we'll wish we could change some things once we reach eternity, at least lost men and women will. We read in the sixth chapter of Revelation, "They said to the mountains and rocks 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come: and who is able to stand?'" He says in Revelation 9:6, "And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; and they will long to die and death flees from them." I believe there'll be a day when a man will put a gun to his head and blow his brains out, and, to his amazement, he'll still be living. He'll throw himself from the top of the Empire State Building and still be living. "They shall seek death, but shall not find it." There's an awesome aspect for you. Men seeking death and not finding it. Can you think of men seeing every sin they have ever committed? Sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit. Sins against God and sins against man. They are pursued by the hounds of hell baying after them and they say, "If only I could die and get out of this!" And yet if he tries to die, he will not die. In Revelation 4, you have Christ on the throne, you have a rainbow over the throne which is a covenant sign of mercy, and you have four and twenty elders. But there's nobody here sharing justice with Jesus. He sits supreme on the throne. There's no four and twenty elders. There's no sea of glass. There's no rainbow of mercy. Mercy has gone forever.

IT'S NOT TOO LATE FOR MERCY YET

I don't care how twisted and corrupt your life is at this moment -- it is not too late to ask for forgiveness. God can and will forgive you if you repent of your sin, plead for the blood of Christ, and ask for mercy! It is not too late to ask for mercy. You may wonder, "Can God really forgive all the rottenness and corruption in my life?" He certainly can. Why? Because today Jesus is still on a throne of mercy. You can find His grace and His help. But when we see Him at the judgment, He's no longer on a throne of mercy. He is on a throne of justice. His first time on earth He was a tender Christ, the Lamb of God, who went about kissing little babies and blessing people. There's nothing more beautiful than a little lamb and there's nothing more terrible than the wrath of the Lamb. One day God's mercy is going to be cut off and then we will have the wrath of the Lamb.

Think of all the tribes and nations that will be judged. Think of Pharaoh and Herod the Great standing before Jesus and having to account for their deeds. Did you have your tribulations today? Maybe the bacon burned this morning or some other tragedy happened. Did you think this morning that somebody for Christ's sake is going to lose his head in Afghanistan or Vietnam or Russia? Do you think that Stalin ever dreamed that after all the bloody purges he made, he'd have to answer for every precious drop of blood he ever spilled? The Psalmist David says, "Store my tears in Thy bottle" (Psalm 56:8). I don't believe that anyone ever shed a tear, whether in compassion for souls or because of a broken heart, that fell to the ground. Our tears are stored by God, and God is going to count them out one day. The Jews perhaps may cry of Hitler, "God, scourge him, scourge him.

Turn the furnace up in hell." But listen, God doesn't need any reminders. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). If a man is torn with lust, if his mind is full of wickedness, if by his own actions he asks to be cast away from God with his own sin and misery forever and ever -- then what? Well, what do you think it would be like if you'd killed six million people like that? God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing.

THE GOODNESS AND SEVERITY OF GOD

I think we'd better watch this business of giving people only part of the Gospel. We need to be very careful of our sloppy evangelism techniques. Yes, it is absolutely true that God loves us, but will you remind people of the goodness and the severity of God? One thing that's wrong with the world is that it thinks it's done with Jesus Christ and it hasn't even started with Him yet. For He stands at the end of the trail for every man -- rich or poor, bondsman or freeman, black or white. Will you remind them that there is a day when mercy is cut off forever? Will you remind them that people pray in hell, but nobody answers? The dead, great and small, are going to stand before God in that awesome day. The books are going to be opened, and justice, not mercy, will prevail. There is no mercy. Mercy is gone forever. Multitudes of people will be crying, "The harvest is past and the summer is ended and we are not saved" (Jer. 8:20). Will you remind them while God is still sitting on a throne of mercy, that everyone, without exception, will one day stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ? Be wise, repent, and believe the Gospel.

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