

YOUR FIRST DAY IN HEAVEN

Message 4 5235

INTRO: Turn this morning to Revelation 6. We'll read verses 9-11: *9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.*

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

In these messages we have finally arrived in heaven. We have looked at what happens before believers get to this altar of Revelation 6. First, a person must be saved some time during their life-time on earth. Then they must be faithful to the Lord, whether their life ends in normal death or as a martyr. Only those who are raptured arrive in heaven with resurrected bodies. Those who die are carried by angels to heaven; but those who are raptured are escorted to heaven by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He is coming to the bride's house to get His bride and to take her to His Father's house.

So the believer has been converted while on earth, and has been faithful to the Lord in life, has died in one way or another. I thought back the other day to some of the, what I thought were stalwart Christians, who have become unfaithful. There are those of whom I would have thought it will never happen, and it has. Those of our text have been faithful, have died by martyrdom, and they have been transported to heaven by the angels. And now he arrives at the altar. And that is where we are this morning. And we want to now see what happens at the altar, because something most surely happens.

Recently, I suppose more Canadians, and possibly more Americans paid attention to the election in the United States than generally do. And for us Canadians, it seemed like a long, long

time before election day came. But then, from election day until inauguration of the new president is to take place seems like a long time as well. And what is most notable to us is that you don't have a new president the day after the election. He is president elect, but not president. In the United States it takes some 70 days before the inauguration of the new president.

It is interesting that when the tribulation is over, from Daniel 12 we might conclude that it will take some 70 days before the millennium officially begins. And somehow we think that when someone dies, or if the rapture should take place, it is all over right at that time. All is bliss forever more, and in a sense that is true. But there will be more that is not bliss than I am dealing with in these messages. And I am proposing to you that it may even take more than one day until we are settled in in heaven.

I have mentioned before that when I read the book *Martyr's Mirror*, I came across our passage again and again. The connection is martyrdom. By the way, the word *martyr* comes from the word to witness. It is witnessing to the truth or living for the truth that causes true martyrs. But the picture I kept getting in the *Martyr's Mirror* book, is that martyrs arrive and are accumulated at this altar. So they sit and wait there for the resurrection to take place. I think many see the picture of our verses as a still picture. Martyrs are gathered here and wait for the resurrection. I see this passage as a movie. Believers arrive here. Then they are processed and prepared for residence in heaven. And I propose it will take some time.

Our text says in verse 9, "When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held." John saw those who had been slain for their faith under the altar. So our question now is, "What happens at the altar? Why do they arrive at the altar and not at the throne of God or some other place?"

III. WHAT HAPPENS TO THE BELIEVER AT THE ALTAR

Intro: Let me begin by introducing us to the subject of the altar in heaven, with regard to what I believe will take place here. You see, the tabernacle on earth was patterned after the real tabernacle in heaven. So without doubt, the

real tabernacle in heaven has a real purpose. And we ask, what is the purpose of the altar in heaven? Well, the fence surrounding the tabernacle courtyard pictures, as I see it, heaven. And when we come to this altar in heaven, we have just entered heaven by the one and only gate. There is only one place to enter heaven. I have a niece by marriage who recently chose to live with another woman instead of her husband. By all indication, she thinks she is going to heaven, but if she does not experience repentance, she will never enter this gate.

Well, we have looked at this entrance in an earlier message. And now we are before the very first place one gets to when one enters the white fence and that is the altar. This passage is an incredible window into heaven. I have no doubt it shows us the place we come to right after we enter glory. And now we must ask, why at the altar? And I believe it is because some things need to be taken care of before we are fit to enter the domain of God Almighty. Those who arrive here, are fresh off the boat, so to speak.

Now it is important to note that altar was the place of sacrifice and there were two kinds of sacrifices; voluntary sacrifices of thanksgiving and sin offerings. And again we ask, why would we arrive here? Well, we go to our passage in Revelation 6. We have looked at verse 9, which says, "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.." They have been called, they have been chosen; and they have been faithful, and now they arrive in heaven before the altar.

So verse 10 says, "And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them.." So we note that they come in anguish. They have been violently slain by wicked men, and they are crying for revenge. But revenge is not to happen yet.

Verse 11 then says, "Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow

servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed." I propose that something happens between when they arrive and when they receive a white robe. (** rich man and laz. Not told everything)

Let us turn to Hebrews 9 with this question in mind: What happens here at the altar that they receive white garments? Or does that just automatically happen without anything more happening in between arriving and receiving these white robes? Because Scripture is careful to tell us that they arrive at this altar, I believe something happens. Let us begin at verse 23:

23 Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these (animal blood), but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

We have mentioned already that the tabernacle was a copy of the real tabernacle in heaven. Now notice that he appeared in the presence of God, and note that He appeared in the presence of God *for us*. It is for us, the believer. We go on in verse 25:

25 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another –

26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

All the OT sacrifices looked forward to this one great event of the Messiah, the Christ to appear and put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. It happened once for all. It is never to be repeated. And now listen to our next two verses:

27 *And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,*

28 *so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.*

It is appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment.

Here is my proposition for you. Some day every Christian is going to stand before a judgment in heaven and here everything in his life that is not in order will be put in order. This judgment will take place in heaven, so it is not to see if we will go to heaven or not. It will be to see what in our life is worth rewarding, and what must be burned up before we proceed further. This is the subject before us then.

A. The Judgment

1. What judgments there are in Scripture

So, let us first consider the judgments which are given in the Bible. There are three formal judgments given in Scripture. There is one judgment that is not formal. That is a judgment we make ourselves. The judgment we make ourselves determines if we go to hell or to heaven. There is no formal judgment where people are gathered and God checks to see who is saved and who is not. That is a judgment we make ourselves. When we reject repentance and confession of sin and acceptance of Christ as Savior, we have made our own judgment that we are going to hell. If we repent of our sins, confess them and receive Christ as our Savior, we have made a judgment that will take us to heaven.

The first formal judgment to take place in time, as I understand Scripture, is called the Judgment Seat of Christ. We will look at this later. It takes place in heaven and only believers will be judged there. It is this judgement that I believe may take place at this altar.

The second formal judgment takes place at the end of the tribulation. It is called the Sheep and Goat judgment spoken of so clearly in Matthew 25:31-46. Only those who live through the tribulation are judged there. The goats go to hell and the sheep enter the millenium and repopulate the earth. The third and last formal judgment is the judgment after the millennium and the short season called the Great White throne judgment and only the lost will be judged there and it will include all the lost from creation to the end of the short season after the millennium.

The subject before us now is the first formal judgment called the Judgment seat of Christ. From looking at all three, you may now distinguish this judgment from the others, and we want to take a closer look at it.

2. What the judgment seat of Christ is

Turn to 2 Corinthians 5:10. We want to zero in on the Judgment Seat of Christ now. Of the three formal judgments, this one happens first and only believers are judged here and it takes place in heaven. So let us read verse 10. It says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." We will see later that by saying 'we' he is referring to Christians. And we must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. That is a most sobering thought.

Now turn to Romans 14:10. This verse says, "But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." What we have borne out in these passages is that there will be a judgment seat of Christ, and every Christian must stand before it some day. This judgement, without doubt, will take place in heaven, and I think the most likely place for it to take place is right after arriving in heaven at this altar.

So let me clarify something here. There are two words used for a place of judgment in the NT. The normal type of judgment we think of is a judgment for violating some law, a judgment for wrongdoing. The word used in the NT is *critereon*. A judge is a *kritees*. To judge is *krinw*. A judgment is a *krisis*. And it is not hard to see that we get our word 'critical' from this.

Turn to Matthew 7. Let me point something out here regarding judgment before we go on. This is a highly important subject in our day. When Jesus said, "Judge not, that you be not judged" in verse 1 the words I just mentioned are used here. And Jesus did not say, "Judge not at all." He warned this way in verse 2, "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." Now notice whom he is speaking to in verses 3-4, "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye?"

Whom is he speaking to? He is speaking to those who have huge problems in their own lives, and they are critical of others. Now notice in verse 5 the word, "Hypocrite!" That is whom He is speaking to. It is hypocrites He is warning here. Now look at His instruction, "First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." Did He say, "Judge not!" period? No! He said don't judge when you have a plank in your own eye. Anybody with a plank in his eye is not fit to judge. The one who does is a hypocrite. He has huge problems but wants to correct somebody with a much smaller problem.

It is amazing to me, that many people who want to be counselors of others, are those with huge problems in their own lives. When God chooses counselors, who by the way, according to the Bible are pastors, He

chooses those who don't have huge problems. Any study of the qualifications of pastors will show you this. Then Jesus says, when you have removed the plank, and can see clearly, then judge. So we are not to make judgment when we ourselves don't see clearly because we have some bigger issue to take care of. But once that is taken care of, now we are to judge, according to the passage.

Look at verse 6. He is speaking to godly Christians now. He says, "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces." Now I ask you, how can you obey that without making a judgment as to who is a swine? You must make a judgment to know someone is a swine, and you should, or you won't know who is a swine.

Now listen to Jesus in John 7:24, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." Did you know that that is an imperative? That is a command? We are to judge, based on Jesus' instruction Himself, but it is to be righteous judgment! Now let me tell you why many people warn others not to judge. Do you know why? I dare say that most of them are living in sin in some area. If we desire nothing but to live right, we will welcome righteous judgment no matter how much it hurts!

Well, that is one word for judgment. There is a second word used for judgment or the place of judgment. The passages we read that spoke of the judgment seat of Christ do not use the word *criterion*, they use the word *bema*. Now J. Dwight Pentecost argues that this word is not used for judgment for wrongdoing. The *bema* apparently spoke of a seat, but generally a seat on a raised place. Pentecost quotes Sale-Harrison as saying, "In Grecian games in Athens, the old arena contained a raised platform on which the president or umpire of the arena sat. From here he rewarded all the contestants; and here he rewarded the winners. It was

called the 'bema' or 'reward seat.' It was never used of a judicial bench" (220).

So the judgment seat of Christ is not a judgment where judgment regarding punishment is made, but judgment regarding rewards or loss of rewards, as in the Olympic games. So we want to look at that judgment now and when it will take place.

3. When this judgment will take place

So, let's consider when this judgment will take place. I think it is not necessary to explain that this judgment must take place after death or after the rapture. It is beyond doubt then that it takes place in heaven. When will it take place? I think it is most likely that it takes place as soon as we enter heaven. And when the Church is raptured, all those that enter with Christ will face this judgment. I would not be dogmatic on the timing, but that seems most probable to me. And I propose it takes place at the altar we have looked at in Revelation 6.

B. What Will Be Judged?

Now our next question is: what will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ? By way of introduction to this point, let me share a matter I have wrestled with for many years. And it seems to me that the answer to that question may well take place at this altar.

Let us say I am a new Christian. I am rejoicing in my salvation and have not yet come to discover and deal with the many areas of sin God wants to clean up in my life; and there are many for every new Christian. And then I die suddenly in some fatality. What happens with those things I have done that I have not even recognized as sin yet?

What about things in the past that I have forgotten? Will they ever come up? Or are they gone when I forgot? And it seems to me that, because of the justice of God, it must come up somewhere. Now let me say again, I am not talking about major sins such as we find listed in Romans 1, or 1 Corinthians 6 or Galatians 5. Those who live in such

things, Scripture is clear, will not inherit the kingdom of God. But how about things like shouting at our children; saying something nasty to my life-partner etc... etc...

Let me ask another question. Let me begin with what I know. Let us say we had a revival in our community and there was a genuine work of God, and one after another began to be convicted of sin and they began confessing to one another and the joy of the Lord set in and one after another began sharing what the Lord was doing, and it touched others and thus spread out in our community, and as sometimes happens, it even went beyond our community and many people got right with God and others. I know there is a lot of sin in this very religious community, and if we should have a revival, the proof of what I am saying would become very evident. And in the state we are in before revival, very much of this is not even recognized by many professing Christians as sin.

Now, I am talking about those who are truly Christians. I am fully convinced that many in our community profess to be believers who are not. But we are talking about those who are. But let us now say revival does not come and many of these die with such things that were not recognized and thus not taken care. What happens to those things when they die? Are they fit for heaven?

I am fully convinced that those who are truly Christians and are in that state, and they die, they, like all others will arrive at this altar. And I believe one of the things that will take place is that all that was not right will be cleaned up here. Let me remind you that I am not talking about sins such as are listed in 1 Corinthians 6 or Galatians 5. Those who live in those sins will never arrive at this altar. That is clearly stated.

1. Sins of ignorance

Turn to Hebrew 5. We want to look at what the Bible calls sins of ignorance. Let me remind us now that we are before the altar in heaven. And let us now ask what this altar was for in the earthly tabernacle? All

offerings brought to God were brought here. As I understand the offerings, there were two kinds.

Hebrews 5:1 says, "For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins." So the sacrifices could be gifts, or sacrifices. Now there were also two types of sacrifices for sin. There was the trespass offering. When someone had committed a sin and it was recognized as sin it required a trespass offering. If it required restitution, that had to be made. All sins had to be confessed. So in this offering all kinds of sin were acknowledged, confessed, and a sacrifice was made in order to be forgiven. This offering represented Christ as a sin offering. Just as the sacrifice had to be lifted up onto the altar, so Christ was lifted up on the cross.

Turn to Leviticus 4. Our question is what happens if we enter heaven and there are things we were unaware of, have forgotten about or did not even know they were wrong. Does God just overlook those. Well, we begin in verse 1:

1 ¶ Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

2 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a person sins unintentionally against any of the commandments of the LORD in anything which ought not to be done, and does any of them,

3 'if the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer to the LORD for his sin which he has sinned a young bull without blemish as a sin offering.

4 'He shall bring the bull to the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD, lay his hand on the bull's head, and kill the bull before the LORD.

5 'Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and bring it to the tabernacle of meeting.

6 'The priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the LORD, in front of the veil of the sanctuary.

7 'And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the LORD, which is in the tabernacle of meeting; and he shall pour the remaining blood of the bull at the base of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

8 'He shall take from it all the fat of the bull as the sin offering. The fat that covers the entrails and all the fat which is on the entrails,

9 'the two kidneys and the fat that is on them by the flanks, and the fatty lobe attached to the liver above the kidneys, he shall remove,

10 'as it was taken from the bull of the sacrifice of the peace offering; and the priest shall burn them on the altar of the burnt offering.

11 'But the bull's hide and all its flesh, with its head and legs, its entrails and offal -

12 'the whole bull he shall carry outside the camp to a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn it on wood with fire; where the ashes are poured out it shall be burned.

Because it is a sin offering, the body of the sacrifice is burned outside the camp. When Christ died, He was carried outside the camp. He was our sin offering. In other offerings the meat was used by the priests.

Now we are dealing here with sins of ignorance. We have seen that presumptuous sins have no sacrifice. Those who sin presumptuously will not enter the white fence, or heaven if you will. This should speak loudly to us. You see, I think in this picture in the tabernacle is the answer to my question, what happens to things that a person is not aware of. I expect that

at this altar they will be recognized, acknowledged, and in Christ's sacrifice as a sin offering they were carried outside the camp so they will not enter the camp. All of this won't enter the gates of glory.

Now let me remind us, if these sins came to mind, they were to be repented of when they came to mind. I have heard of those who have taken care of things that happened before they were Christians long after they were Christians. The Lord brought it to mind, and they could not find peace about it until they took care of it.

I gave an illustration regarding this some years ago in a certain church. I had this larger container of water that pictured an unlimited source of the Holy Spirit. Attached to the side was this smaller container that had no water but was full of thing picturing sin. Then I pictured the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Some major sins are repented of and Christ is accepted as Savior in all humility. And the Holy Spirit gushes in and fills the entire vessel. And the new believer is rejoicing and feels so clean and life is wonderful, and the new believer can't figure out why all the older Christians are not as exuberant as he is.

What he does not realize is that he is just at the beginning of the Christian walk. But, there is still plenty in here that needs to go. And then I demonstrated the filling of the Holy Spirit. You see, the baptism of the Holy Spirit happens once and the filling happens again and again. And so, maybe I can't control my use of the cell phone or the internet, and it needs to go. I am wasting too much time and some of the things I watch are not good. The best for me is to repent of my waste of time and watching things not good for me, and so I repent and get rid of it. Immediately the Spirit fills that place. Then I repent of smoking and drinking socially, and the Lord removes them and immediately the Holy Spirit fills that place, and so on.

Well, after the message several people came and questioned me about this. How could a person still have some of this stuff in there if he is a Christian? They were of the persuasion a Christian could not have any sin left inside. And so I said, "I have never been able to answer that question yet. But it is fortunate your pastor is right here. Maybe he can answer", and I was surprised at what he said. He said, "I go to 1 John 2:1 which says, 'My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.'" "

We have an advocate with the Father. We have a lawyer in heaven. We have a comforter in heaven. And I believe if we are not living in willful sin and there are still things that need to be cleaned up, it will happen here. We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous! Praise the Lord. All uncleanness by sins of ignorance, I believe, will be cleaned up here. I cannot see how anything that is not right will enter past this altar.

Let me read Hebrews 9:24 which we read earlier, "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us..." Christ appears in the presence of God for us. How amazing.

CONCL: Well, we have begun to look at the altar. Our subject is, "Your First Day In Heaven." I have proposed that someday all that is not in order when we enter heaven will be dealt with. We have this idea that when we enter heaven, all is over and all is forgotten and it will be bliss from the first moment on. But I see in Revelation 6:9-11 that the believer enters at the altar. And later he is given a white robe. I believe that something happens between when the believer arrives and when he is given a white robe. And I think it is most appropriate that each believer is judged at the point of entrance. It would not seem right that that which is not in order would wait for some future judgment.

Forgiveness of sin requires confession and repentance. When sin happens between us and other believers, that is where confession and repentance is the hardest of all. But we will see later some of the consequences of letting, even small things go.

And once more I want to say that those who live in sins such as are listed in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and Galatians 5, and anything like those must be dealt with before death, for such persons will not inherit the kingdom of God. The Bible is most clear on that.