

YOUR FIRST DAY IN HEAVEN
Message 6

INTRO: We have been looking at a judgment that will take place in heaven, and I have recommended that it will take place here, at the altar we have been looking at in Revelation 6. We have said that this judgment that takes place in heaven is not to see if we go to heaven or not, because the Christian is already there at the time of this judgment. Nor is it to see what punishment is to be given. It is the bema judgment, where it will be determined what each person will receive as a reward or position after he is past this judgment, or what rewards he will lose.

Now I have suggested that when we die, everything is not over and settled. I have called these messages, "Your First Day In Heaven." Maybe this will be the first week or first year. But it will be what happens as soon as we enter. We arrive, it seems from Revelation 6, at the altar. It seems right that all who enter glory, enter here. And we have considered that first, all of what was forgotten, overlooked, or that we were unaware of that is not fit for glory will be taken care of here. And now we want to look at another matter that will take place in heaven after we die, and I believe it will happen at this altar as well.

If you name the name of Christ, and you have repented of your sins and trust in Christ for your salvation, I want you to consider what it will be like for you to stand before the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who has eyes like a flame of fire. And you are standing there to be judged. Everything you have done, whether good or useless is on the altar and now the fire is lit.

In our last message we considered 2 Corinthians 5. Let me read verses 9-10:

9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

And why do we seek to be well pleasing to Him?

10 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.

I mentioned to you that the word *bad* does not mean that which is morally or ethically wrong, but that which is useless. And I ask you, when you stand before the Lord, what all do you think there will be on the altar? How much do you think will be there? How much of what is there do you think will be like gold or silver, or precious stones, that is, it will stand the test of fire? How much do you think will go up in smoke? That is our subject this morning.

You see, I am recommending that this is the first thing on order after we arrive in heaven. We have this idea that when we die, somehow from that moment on everything is taken care of. It will be bliss and glory forever. I do not find that all tears are wipe away until a long time after we get to heaven. I will not take time for that here. We have other series that deal with that.

Our question now is, when I stand before the Lord when I arrive in heaven, what will be place on the fire? Many years ago, when I was in my twenties, my wife and I took Bible courses at home, and the teacher that did most of the teaching was doctor Harold Willmington. This morning I want to give you most of those things he mentioned those many years ago. I am going to use the outline and the passages he recommended. One of the main passages he used, of course, was 1 Corinthians 3 that we have already considered. But he said that we must first of all see that this passage does not teach purgatory. If one is not saved entirely, one is not saved at all. There is no purgatory.

C. What Will Be The Basis Of This Judgment?

1. How we treat other believers

The first matter Willmington listed is that God will remember how we treated other believers while we were alive. Turn to Matthew 10 while I read Hebrews 6:10 for us. This verse says, *For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.* God will not forget what we have done toward His name and our ministry toward the saints. You see, what we have done in this respect will come up again in heaven. If God would forget

this, He would be unjust. You see, it is His justice that is at stake. So if we do that which is useless, His justice would be at stake if that did not come up as well.

We go now to Matthew 10:41-42:

41 "He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

42 "And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."

Now I think those verses may refer to what happens in the tribulation, but if so, the principle remains that God keeps track of what we do, and each good thing done out of good motivation will be rewarded.

Let me give you an illustration from this present world that gives us some idea of what a surprise is in store for some Christians when they arrive in heaven. Their surprise won't come from fellow human being, but from the Lord Himself.

I am shortening this illustration and will put it in my own words. There was a night clerk in a third class hotel in Philadelphia. One night a couple came in. Not knowing there was a big convention in that town they drove all over town and couldn't find a room. Well, they told the clerk their situation and said they were very tired and almost begged for a room as it was already very late. The clerk said he did not have a room, but since he was working night shift, if they wished, they could stay in his room, which they did.

In the morning they were sitting at a table and he said he hoped they had a good night, and they said they had. Then the man said to the clerk, "You are too fine a hotel man to stay in a hotel like this. How would you like for me to build a big, beautiful

luxurious hotel in the city of New York and make you the general manager?" The clerk hardly knew what to say, not sure if everything was up to par. He finally said, "It sounds wonderful." So the Waldorf Astoria Hotel was built in New York, and the night clerk became the best known hotel man in the world.

The article said, "In 1976, the 47-Story Waldorf-Astoria served $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million guests in its 1,900 rooms.

Turn to Matthew 25. Our passage speaks of the judgment that happens at the end of the tribulation but it gives us some idea of what this judgment will be like as well, for it speaks first of the judgment of the righteous. We begin at verse 31:

31 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.

32 "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

33 "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

The sheep here are the Christians left alive at the end of the tribulation. And notice now their judgment:

34 "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;

36 'I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

So, here are some of the things they are rewarded for. But listen to the response of these Christians:

37 "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying,
'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or
thirsty and give You drink?

38 'When did we see You a stranger and take You in,
or naked and clothe You?

39 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and
come to You?'

40 "And the King will answer and say to them,
'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to
one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to
Me.'

I recommend that the rewards of some of these
righteous may make the Waldorf Astoria Hotel look like
a miniature. In the new heavens and new earth, the
city of Jerusalem is 1,500 miles cubed!

Well, Harold Willmington gives James 3:1 under the
next point but I think it fits here. James says, *My
brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing
that we shall receive a stricter judgment.* We recently
studied this verse at prayer meeting. I think the idea
is that of believers trying to be advisers of other
believers. But we need to remember that when we do
that, we will receive stricter judgment. Before we
advise others, we need to remember that it will come
up again. I ask, what advice have you given to other
believers? How much will be left when the fire is
done?

2. How we exercise authority over others

For our second point, turn to Hebrews 13:17. This
speaks especially to church leaders. God will
remember, first of all, how we exercised authority
over others. The writer says, *Obey those who rule over
you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your
souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so
with joy and not with grief, for that would be
unprofitable for you.* Some day we must give account
for how we exercised authority in the Church. If God

calls us to serve and we don't, that, no doubt, will also come up. You see, it will all be put in the fire.

But we need to note here that those who are under authority, will also need to give account of how they responded to authority. How did I respond to authority over me? How will I fare when my works in this regard are placed in the fire?

3. How we employ our God-given abilities

Our next point is that the Lord will bring into account the God given abilities which we possess and how we used them. Turn to Luke 19. There are many passages that could be given here. 2 Timothy 1:6 says, *Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.* 1 Corinthians teaches that we have all been given gifts. We are in need of a janitor in Church. I ask you, if we do janitor work in the Church, will this come up on judgment day? And what about how we did it? We are not talking about earning salvation. We are talking about receiving rewards. 1 Peter 4:10 says, *As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

Let us begin reading in Luke 19:11:

11 ¶ *Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately.*

12 *Therefore He said: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.*

13 *"So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.'*

14 *"But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.'*

15 "And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.

16 "Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.'

17 "And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.'

18 "And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned five minas.'

19 "Likewise he said to him, 'You also be over five cities.'

20 "Then another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief.

21 'For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.'

22 "And he said to him, 'Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow.

23 'Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?'

24 "And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten minas.'

25 ("But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.'")

26 'For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

May I ask you, what gift do you have? What ability do you have? What do you think will go on the altar when you stand before the Lord? Am I using my gifts in worldly pursuits, or selfish pursuits? Do you think there will be much smoke?

4. How we use our money

Consider our next point of what will be placed in the fire: How we use our money. Ouch. Well, this wasn't my idea, it was Harold Willmington's idea. Oh how important is this point. Turn to 2 Corinthian 9 while I read 1 Timothy 6:17-19:

17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,

19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

How much do I trust in riches? How do I know? I know one thing, when we get here, we will find out. How much do I trust God? Here I will find out. How much have I stored up for a good foundation? In heaven I will find out. Do you think it will be all bliss at this judgment?

We go not to 2 Corinthians 9:6-7:

6 But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

May I ask you, when will we reap? Here, at this judgment! When will things go up in smoke? Here at

this judgment! May I ask you, how do you think you will fare with regard to money? Each one of us should ask ourselves these questions.

5. How much we suffer for Jesus

There is another matter that will be important at this judgment. It is this, how much we suffered for Jesus. Turn to 1 Peter 4 while I read Matthew 5:11-12. Jesus said in that great Sermon on the Mount:

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Now I will tell you that this feels anything but blessed, as you well know, but in the Lord's eyes this is a huge thing. To be considered worthy of the devil paying enough notice to our lives to bring about persecution is a huge honor.

We go now to 1 Peter 4:12-14:

12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;

13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, (Now note these next words) that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

Do you feel blessed when you are reproached for the name of Christ? Does it feel like the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you? No. But those are the facts. May I ask you, are you able to fit in everywhere

without raising any problems? But let me point out as well that the passage goes on to say that we are to be careful not to suffer for wrongdoing.

Turn to Mark 10. And I ask you, when you stand before the Lord, will there be any of this to go through the fire in your life? And do you think it will stand the test of the fire? Listen to 2 Corinthians 4:17: *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

Now let us read Mark 10:23-30:

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

24 And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!

25 "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

26 And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?"

27 But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

28 Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You."

29 So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's,

30 "who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time — houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and

children and lands, with persecutions – and in the age to come, eternal life.

May I ask you what you have left for the Lord? Will there be anything on the altar? And if there is, will it stand the test of the fire?

6. How we spend our time

Our next point is how we spend our time. Turn to 1 Peter 1. Here is the question: how do I spend my time? Psalm 90:12 teaches us to number our days. Oh, time is so very important. Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5 teach us to redeem the time. Make use of it for the Lord. How much time do I squander on TV, internet, Facebook, Pinterest, oops, I mean...?

1 Peter 1:17-19 says:

17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;

18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,

19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

We all have a time of our stay. Some less, some more, but we are exhorted to conduct our stay in fear. Why? Because God will judge each one's work without partiality. Nobody is going to be a little bit special. If our time is placed on the altar, what will be found to be wood, hay or straw?

7. How we run our race

Turn to 1 Corinthians 9. There is another matter that will come up at this judgment and that is how we ran our race. The bema judgment seat was used at such places as the Olympics, so look at 1 Corinthians 9:24:

24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

We will consider later what the rewards will be, as determined from whatever is left when the fire is done with testing our life. We go on in verse 26:

26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.

27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

One of the huge things in athletics is what we call self control. It is temperance. Without question, this will come up here at this judgment.

Hebrews 12:1 says that we are to lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily besets us. This besetting sin, I believe, is unbelief. Oh how it wants to hinder our race.

When we left our former church because of the sins that took place, I spoke with one of the men for whom I felt some measure of responsibility. And he said, "Do you know what this community or the other churches will say if you do this?" I said, "Yes, I have a good idea. But I'll tell you what weighs on me more. When I meet the Lord, will He say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant'?"

Here is the important question: Did we compromise in our race? Is what we do determined by what others will say or by what God will someday say? There is One who sees and records it all. Will the fire reveal me as a compromiser, a man motivated by the fear of man? Well, that same man compromised and went back to a sinning church with a sinning leadership and I can tell you

with no fear of contradiction, the Lord is keeping a list. How we handle such things is coming up again. So Paul says, "Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men." Why? Because of the judgment seat of Christ. All who do not meet Him here, will meet Him at the judgment that will determine the punishment that he or she will meet in hell.

8. How we witness to the lost

We come to another matter, a matter very high on the Lord's mind, and it is our witness of the truth to the lost. Turn to 1 Thessalonians 2. Proverbs 11:30 says, *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who wins souls is wise.* Daniel 12:3 says, *Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.* Now consider this, if those who win many to salvation shine as the stars forever, what does this mean? Well, the stars are noticed again and again, forever. Their work will be noticed forever.

Now to 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20:

19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

20 For you are our glory and joy.

Paul says, "What is our hope?" Hope is always future. Crowns are future. And then he says that this hope and crown will take place in the presence of Christ at Christ's coming. Now Paul did not then expect to die. He expected Christ to come while he was alive. And here, in the Thessalonian believers was his hope and crown; his reward at Christ's coming.

May I ask you, have you led anyone to Christ? Is this a drive in you? How about seeking every opportunity to present salvation from sin to the lost. And let me add a word here to that. Salvation does not begin with accepting Christ as Savior. It begins with recognizing

our sinful and lost condition. We do not go to hell for not believing in Christ. We go to hell for not repenting of our sins, and then believing in Christ. It is my strongest conviction that one cannot get save until one recognizes one is lost. And one is lost because one has come short of the glory of God. And one comes short of the glory of God by sinning. I am in full agreement with those who use the commandments to show a person that he or she is a sinner. And one needs to understand the consequences of dying without having one's sins taken care of.

9. How we handle temptation

Well, we go on to our next point. In this life we are tested by many temptations, and victory in this area will show up at this judgment. Turn to Revelation 2. James 1:2-3 says:

2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

Revelation 2:10 says, *Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.* It is clear that faithfulness in testing and temptation will be rewarded.

No doubt, if you have lived any amount of time as a Christian, you know what it is like to fail in temptation. But do you repent? When you give in to the temptation to be mean to your wife or children, do you repent? I do not like to talk about such things because no sooner have I preached something then I come under the test myself.

I wonder, how much will remain when the fire is done testing this area of our lives?

10. How much the return of Christ means to us

Turn to 2 Timothy 4:8. And while you do that, let me ask you, how much does the return of Christ mean to you? Do you study it? Do you think about it? Do you long for His return? Or does it put fear into you?

Paul says in this verse: *Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.* Paul is very bold and he has no trouble with assurance of salvation. He says he is going to receive the crown of righteousness. It has been laid up for him. It is waiting for him. And how does he know this? It is because he has loved the appearing of Christ.

Now let me point out that it is not a past tense, he has loved the Lord's appearing. It is a perfect tense, he has and still does love His appearing. We have just come past the calendar day when some Christians commemorate epiphany. It was Christ's appearing to the Gentiles at His birth. This is an epiphany as well, but it is, I believe, His appearing for the Church.

A complaint I have heard about my preaching is that almost all I preach about is the return of Christ. Well, I try to preach on this very important subject at least once a year. But I have done several series that have to do with this. But I think rather, that preaching on numerous occasions on the return of Christ, that is if it is accurate preaching, will be a positive on this judgment. And for those who make such comments, it would be good to remember that some day that will come up when I stand in the presence of the Lord Himself.

I wonder, how much does His appearing mean to you? Do you study it? Do you hope for it? How will this subject do in the fire when my life or your life works are in the fire?

11. What we do with the Word of God

I believe that we will also give account for what we have done with the Word of God. Here we have the treasure of treasures. For pastors it is a very crucial matter that they rightly divide the Word of God. Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15, *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* There is simply no question to me, that for every teacher of the Word of God, this will come up at this judgment. It is so very easy to study the Scriptures for what we want to find, but it is very taxing to search it for what was actually intended in the writer's mind.

When I teach the class, "Bible Interpretation", or "Hermeneutics" as it is known, I use an illustration from a sign on a woodworking shop. It said, "Many fancy twistings and turnings done here." So it is in many a pastor's study.

But it may not only be the pastor's study where fancy twistings and turnings are done. That may happen in many a believer's home. Oh to be diligent to rightly divide the word of truth.

Jesus, quoting the OT to the devil, said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." I am so encouraged by those who read through the Bible. I was encouraged the other day when one of our pastors had a quiz to check and see if we could discern between sayings that sounded like Scripture and the Scripture that it sounded like. That little quiz demonstrated a group of Christians who know what the Bible says.

CONCL: May I remind all of us, this very day, if we are truly Christians, we might enter that white fence yet today. And if I am right, this judgment may be one of the very first things we meet. My wife pointed out one of the church bulletin quotes the other day by Leonard Ravenhill. He said, "Five minutes inside of

eternity, everyone of us will wish we had sacrificed more, prayed more, loved more, sweated more, grieved more, wept more..."

2 Corinthians 5:9-11 says:

9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. And why do we do that? He answers:

10 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.

And then listen to his next words:

11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

This word terror is the word fear, phobos. In this context this is not fear of hell, this is fear of standing before the Lord in judgment for my life as a Christian. I am recommending that this judgment may be the first thing on the agenda when we arrive in heaven. Oh, to be ready.