

2. Are You READY For Eternity?

Insights into Eternity

YouTube Video Link: https://youtu.be/SekHsU_1-rI

Preparing for Death

When it comes to discussing the topic of death, most people tend to avoid it. J. Kirby Anderson captures this sentiment well when he says, "Death is the most universal and most democratic of all human functions. It strikes people at any time with little respect for age, class, creed, or color." Death has a 100% success rate, yet most people still refuse to engage in discussions or think about the subject. Woody Allen's often-quoted remark is, "I'm not afraid of death. I just don't want to be there when it happens."

No matter how hard we try to avoid it, death does not disappear. Each of us must confront it without exception. It doesn't matter how much money you possess or what type of insurance you have. It is simply a matter of time. None of us knows how much time is ahead for us. The remarkable thing about it is that, even though we know we cannot escape it, many of us will do anything to avoid thinking about it, and many people will do little to prepare for it. An article in the *Boston Globe* some while ago listed the well-known people who had died in that particular year, saying that they had gone to join "the great majority." Death, we might say, is a great certainty, and those who have died are the great majority.

An epitaph on a tombstone reads, "Stop, as you pass by, as you are now, so once was I, as I am now, you will surely be, so prepare yourself to follow me!" One person scrawled underneath, "To follow you, I'm not content until I know the way you went!" The passerby was right. It's important to know where we are going when we die, but when we're pointed in the right direction, we should prepare ourselves for what lies beyond this life.

Prepare to Meet Your God!

Several years ago, when we were living in England, Sandy and I took her parents on vacation to Scotland. One evening, as it started to get dark, we had to look for a hotel along the road. We passed a black-painted wrought iron gate with a sign above it that read, Black Barony Hotel. We couldn't see the buildings from the entrance, so we decided to check out the hotel to see if it would be a suitable place to spend the night. With night approaching and the wrought iron gates, we began to joke that we were heading to Dracula's Castle and that it would probably be haunted. The road kept winding through the trees while our imaginations ran wild. We wondered if they might have a butler who looked like "Igor" from the movie *Young Frankenstein*. I envisioned Marty Feldman's face greeting us at the door.

As we came through the trees, sure enough, it was a castle that had been converted into a hotel, but without a single car in the parking lot! As we got out of the vehicle, a man with a severe hunchback approached us. This is no exaggeration. He did have one wandering eye as well, though he looked nothing like Marty Feldman. To top it off, over the door were these words in large letters: ***Prepare to Meet Thy God, Amos 4:12***, words found in Scripture. It got better! The man who met us at the door told us that we were the only guests staying in the hotel that night; 75 other

rooms were empty. A tour party had canceled at the last minute. Sandy and I spent that night in a four-poster bed that King James once slept in. (Yes, THAT King James, as in the King James Bible.) This bed was a point of pride for the hotel. It was a terrible bed, by the way, with a noticeable dip in the middle. I doubt it was the original mattress, but it felt like it could date back to the 1600s! We found out later that the Bible verse above the door was for soldiers who had used the hotel during their training for war to prepare them to face eternity if they died in battle.

That sign stuck in my mind: "Prepare to Meet Thy God." It is wise to prepare now for the day you will stand before God. In this study, we will explore what our focus in this life ought to be to prepare us for eternity. We will also look at the topic of rewards for the believer. Although we may be reluctant to think about that time, Scripture reminds us that we must all give an account at the end of our lives when God decides our time has come.

*Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment (Hebrews 9:27).
So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God (Romans 14:12).*

There are three judgments referenced in the Scriptures. The first mentioned in the passage above occurs at the moment of departure from the world. This judgment concerns what you did with the free offer of a pardon for sin. The believer in Christ will not be judged for their sin; they are secure in what Jesus accomplished for them at the cross. At death, those who have placed their trust in the Savior's completed work on the cross will go to be with the Lord. They will return with Jesus at the Second Coming of Christ: *"For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him"* (1 Thessalonians 4:14). When we believed and put our trust in Christ, something happened deep within our souls—we passed from a state of death and slavery to Satan to having eternal life imparted to us:

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life (John 5:24, Emphasis added).

As mentioned in our previous study, when believers die, they are separated from their physical bodies but remain very much alive and with Christ. When Jesus returns, and the rapture and resurrection occur, the believer receives a new, glorified body free from the sinful nature inherited from Adam. In our next study, we will explore what the Scriptures say about the Resurrection Body.

The second judgment occurs at Christ's return and involves a judgment of rewards for believers. This appearance before God is known as the Bema Seat Judgment. This judgment is an unveiling of the works that were done in the body, and it involves rewards for faithfulness. The third judgment, referred to as the Great White Throne Judgment, pertains to those who reject God's offer of a free pardon; all who have served themselves and Satan will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:13-15). Today, we will focus much of our study on preparing ourselves as Christians for Christ's Bema Seat Judgment.

The Bema Seat Judgment of Christ

At the Second Coming of Christ, after putting down all rebellion upon Earth, Jesus will take His seat at the Bema Seat Judgment, where He will sit and judge.

Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son (John 5:22).

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done (Matthew 16:27).

⁹So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the *judgment seat* of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

This judgment pertains to the rewards for believers based on how they have invested their time, energy, gifts, talents, and money. The Greek word *bēmatos* is translated into English as “judgment seat.” In the original Greek text of the New Testament, the judgment seat served as a rewards platform in sporting contests. In a secular legal context, the term *bēma* literally means “to set (his foot) on,” indicating a raised place or platform at the assembly's location. I believe the Lord Jesus will judge all Christians regarding two distinct matters:

- 1) How much of the fruit of the Holy Spirit is in our lives, i.e., our Christlikeness of character.
- 2) How we have utilized our resources, including our time, energy, skills, and money.

The author and conference speaker, John Bevere, in his book *Driven by Eternity*, writes about eternity and the judgment of all believers in this way:

Any finite number divided by, or compared to, infinity is zero. It doesn't matter how long you live on Earth. Even if you were to make it 150 years before dying, our life on Earth is zero compared to eternity. That means that as believers in Christ, everything we do here in this zero window of time will determine how we spend eternity. Remember, *where* we spend eternity is determined by what we do with the cross of Jesus and His saving grace, but *how* we will live for eternity in His kingdom is determined by how we live here as believers.¹

What I want us to consider is what we are building with our lives now. The spiritual investments we make in this life will echo for eternity. Everything we have been given—our time, energy, talents, and money—can be used for an eternal purpose. Why money? Money is simply a way to store time, energy, and talents.

Our Investment in God's Kingdom

The Apostle Paul discussed the evaluation on the day when each believer will stand before God:

¹ John Bevere, *Driven by Eternity*, Warner Faith Publishers, Page 187.

¹⁰By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But **each one** should build with care. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Paul the apostle writes that each of us is building something with our lives. He reminds us to build with care (v. 10). All labor in the Kingdom of God is constructed on the foundation of an intimate relationship with Christ. All other works are just wood, hay, and stubble. The quality of the building materials is influenced by the motives and attitudes behind the actions taken during construction. Some things are significant about it, the first being that before Christ, every act and rationale will be brought out into the open (“**their work will be shown...**” (v. 13):

For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open (Luke 8:17).

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:13).

Again, John Bevere writes:

Many have the erroneous idea that their salvation eradicates all future judgment. Indeed, Jesus' blood cleanses us from the sins that would have kept us from the kingdom; however, it does not exempt us from the judgment of how we conducted ourselves as believers, whether good or bad.²

Finally, everything will be made known. The Lord will uncover all things, and nothing will remain hidden. We will find out the great mysteries of this life. We shouldn't take this just in the negative; for acts of kindness that many have done in secret before men, God will reward openly. He sees the desire and motive of all hearts. At that time, God will reward those who have worked quietly without recognition in the background, where their motives and efforts have been pleasing to our God. Some of you have given generously and sacrificially to care for the poor and have done it to God alone in that you have kept it a secret from men.

“...your Father, who sees what is done in **secret**, will reward you” (Matthew 6:18).

And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward (Matthew 10:42).

The Lord sees everything we have ever done for Him, and nothing escapes His attention. The day will come when we will receive the inheritance given to us in Christ before time began.

² John Bevere, *Driven by Eternity*, Warner Faith Publishers, Page 186.

³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” ⁴⁰“The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:34-40).

What do you think Jesus meant when He said, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me?” Who could be considered the least? (v. 40).

I find it interesting that believers in Christ had forgotten the acts of kindness they had done, but God hadn't. He recorded every act of devotion and will reward us openly at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Who was He referring to in calling some the least of His brothers? It is those around us who are hardly ever noticed. Perhaps they are those who cannot help themselves, those sick, or those in prison. He is close to those who are poor in the things of this world, strangers to us, and those in bondage to a religion of works. He wants to use each of us to set them free, to visit them, to feed them—not only bread and water but also to give them the Bread of Life (John 6:35).

The Reward of Christlikeness

The second aspect for which believers will be judged at the Bema Seat judgment is the quality of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives—specifically, the love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, and so on, mentioned by the apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22-23. This reflects the godly character present in your life. Preparation for eternity can only occur while we are here on Earth because we transition to eternity with the character we possess at death. I believe our “position” in heaven depends on how much of Christ’s servant nature we have exemplified on Earth. To whatever extent Christ’s character is reflected in your life while on Earth, that will determine your degree of reward in eternity. The English word "character" was first used to describe the imprint of printing press letters on paper. God has sought to divinely inscribe the nature and character of Christ deep into your soul for others to perceive.

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being **transformed into his image** with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).

When we come to Christ, our spirit is renewed and brought to life from its dead state of being separate from God (Ephesians 2:1, 5). However, there is still work to be done in our soul—our mind, will, conscience, and emotions. God desires to renew and transform that inner part of us as we meditate on His Word and obey His Spirit. King David expressed it well in the Shepherd Psalm: “He restores my soul” (Psalm 23:3). The apostle Peter wrote, “For you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:9). Our mind, will, and emotions must be

transformed, molded and shaped by the Spirit of God. Developing godly character is the aim of our faith. The Lord will reward us based on the extent to which the nature and character of Christ reside in us.

Dictionary.com defines the word "character" as: "the aggregate of features and traits that form the individual nature of a person or thing." We are transformed day by day in our inner selves—our soul and spirit—through every event we experience. Everything in life tests our character, and our reactions to life's inequities shape and measure it accurately. Reputation is not the same as a godly character. Reputation is what others think you are; character is what God knows you are. If we respond in obedience to the Spirit of Christ in each situation we encounter, we become more and more like Christ. If you are a Christian, you are predestined by God to be transformed by the Holy Spirit into the image of Jesus Christ.

²⁸And we know that in **all things God works** for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those God foreknew **he also predestined** to be **conformed to the likeness of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers (Romans 8:28-29, Emphasis added).

What challenging situations come to mind where God has worked for good in your life to mold and shape your character for eternity?

God foreknew you and predestined you to be conformed or shaped into the image of His Son. We can read the Scripture above without considering the implications of what the Holy Spirit seeks to teach us. We cannot blame God for the unfortunate events that occur in our lives. Often, these difficulties arise from our own poor choices. It can be hard for us at times to understand the trials we go through, especially when we are in the midst of them! We wonder why we suffer certain things. God assures us that He will use every situation for good if we remain open to His teachings and the guidance of His Spirit. The wonderful truth is that God has known the end from the beginning. He held each of us in His heart before the world was created. He foreknew and predestined us to be shaped and molded into the likeness of His Son. "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:16). The Message Bible expresses this verse as follows: "Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you, the days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived one day." God's work in the world is to prepare you for eternity.

"Character on earth will prove an everlasting possession in the world to come" (J.C. Ryle). If you want to be great in the eyes of God, how are you responding to the difficult circumstances that have come your way? Are you ready and prepared to meet your God? How much of the character of Christ will you reflect on that day?

A few years ago, I read a top-rated book called Stephen Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Covey explained that one of the key habits of productive individuals is to Begin with the End in View. What do you want the outcome of your life to be? What do you hope Jesus will say when you stand before Him on that day? He will say to many, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." But what do you want Him to say that for? If you want to be effective with your life and leave the world a little better by being here, it's wise to stop and ask yourself what kind of

difference you are making with your life. Is it a difference that lasts only for this life, or is it eternal? Do you work for temporary rewards for your skills, time, energy, and money spent, or for eternal rewards? ¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal” (Matthew 6:19-20).

What do you think are things that you can store up and take with you to heaven?

This is not a complete list, but three things come to mind:

- 1) Other people, as in the lives that we have helped along the way.
- 2) The things we have learned, e.g., the Word of God imprinted in our hearts.
- 3) The character of Christ that’s been molded by the Holy Spirit into your inner being.

Spiritual Investment

Now, let’s return to considering how we are investing our time, energy, talents, and money. There is an intriguing parable that Jesus shares in Luke 19:11-27. It tells the story of a nobleman who is preparing to travel far to obtain a kingdom for himself. Before he left, aware that it would be some time before he returned, he entrusted each of his ten servants with an equal amount of money, a mina, which was roughly three months' wages for a laborer. He instructed them to conduct business and put the money to work until the nobleman came back. The Greek word translated as "put this money to work" (NIV) or "occupy" (KJV) is *pragmateuomai*. It signifies engaging in business, investing, or trading with the aim of yielding a return on the investment.

Interestingly, the term "pragmatic" is derived from the aforementioned Greek word. To be pragmatic means to approach a situation sensibly and realistically. We need to sit down and explore ways to invest our resources pragmatically in order to maximize returns for the kingdom of God.

Knowing the character of our Nobleman, King Jesus, we should labor and invest in the things that He has on His heart. He cares most about people—we must have God’s heart for others if we are to build with gold, silver, or precious stones. In the parable, the first steward invested the master's money and generated a return of ten minas from his initial one mina. When the nobleman returned and began the accounting of what his servants had done with his resources, he responded to the servant’s labor by allowing the steward to keep the ten minas and rewarding him with ten cities in His kingdom. There was a notable difference between the steward's investment and the compensation granted for his exceptional stewardship.

The cities serve as metaphorical language to help us understand that there will be a great reward at the Bema Seat for how we expend our time caring for those He loves. There will be a significant difference between what we invest—our time, energy, talents, and finances—and the reward He will provide on that Day. I don't know what the reward will be, but I can wait to find out. Your duty and mine for our Noble Master is to do what we can to reach and build up others in the Kingdom of God while allowing the Holy Spirit to conform us to the image of Christ.

Again, if you have believed and placed your trust in Christ, you will enter the eternal kingdom. Your entrance into the Kingdom of God does not depend on your works but on receiving the gift of God—eternal life in Christ. How gracious is our God!

I want to leave you with this thought: All you have gone through to bring you to this day is to prepare you. The events in your life are not random. There is a purpose. The Apostle Paul wrote,

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17 KJV).

Prayer: Father, cause us to be aware that every day is a preparation for eternity. Help us be open to the ways that You want to teach us and prepare us for that day. Thank You for watching over us until that day comes. Amen.

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