



“Witnesses at the Judgment”

Kevin Presley

There is coming a day of judgment. A day when all people who have ever lived will pass before the Lord Jesus Christ in review. If we can believe one word in the Bible, we must believe that, because the Bible is replete with statement after statement that judgment day is coming. In that day, every thought, word and deed will be weighed against the standard of God’s holy word. The scriptures picture it much like a trial and sentencing. In **Revelation 20:11**, the Spirit of God lifts back the veil of time and eternity and allows John to see an incredible event.

Revelation 20:11-15 “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Here, John pictures a court: a bar of judgment, an impartial judge, a defendant and a mountain of evidence used to examine the case. The verdict is irrevocable and it is gravely serious, because those who do not pass this exam are not sent to prison or placed on probation; they are sent to eternal torment. A frightening picture for the person who is outside of Jesus Christ today.

But on another occasion, Jesus mentions something else that will be at the judgment on that day: witnesses, called to testify against the unrighteous.

The Bible is clear that a judgment day is coming, and neither you nor I can avoid it. No one will bypass the judgment seat of Christ. We are warned throughout the scriptures to carefully consider our words,

our choices, our deeds, even our thoughts and attitudes, because they each and every one will be weighed when we stand before the Lord to be judged. Consider these passages:

Hebrews 9:27 “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:”

Romans 14:10-12 “...for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

II Corinthians 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

Revelation 20:12 “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”

Ecclesiastes 12:14 “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

Matthew 12:36 “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”

Each of these passages should make us stop and seriously consider our lives. There is not a person listening today who will not be present when Jesus, the righteous judge is seated, the books are opened and the examination of all examinations begins. One by one, we will take our places before the judgment bar of Christ and answer for the lives we have lived. We will answer for what we believed, for whether or not we obeyed the Lord. Our cases will not be adjudicated based upon our own opinions, or by popular opinion. We will not be judged by the Constitution or the laws of the United States or any other nation, or by the ruling of the Supreme Court. We won't be subject to the whims of the judge on that particular day, but we'll be measured by His fixed, absolute and eternal standard. John said that *the books were opened*, and perhaps these *books* refer to many things, such as the book of nature, which judges us.

Romans 1:20 “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:”

Perhaps he is also referring to the book of conscience.

Romans 2:15 “Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;”

But he is most certainly referring to the inspired books of the New Testament.

John 12:48 “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”

Romans 2:16 “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.”

The book of life will also be opened, containing the names of those who obeyed Christ and were washed in His blood.

Luke 10:20 “Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.”

Those not found written in that book will be cast into hell.

Revelation 20:15 “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

There really won't be anything the wicked and the unprepared can say in their defense on that day, though they may try. You recall that Jesus pictured the judgment day on one occasion by saying that some would remonstrate the verdict (**Matthew 25:31-46**). But though they argued, they were cast into outer darkness and they were lost.

Perhaps many of us will attempt to make excuses for our poor decisions or our lack of preparation, or have some explanation or rationalization for our sinful living. Many perhaps will plead ignorance. But all of these things will not prevail to change the verdict.

I want you to consider with me for a few moments another picture that Jesus drew of the judgment day in **Matthew 12**, involving witnesses at the judgment. The scribes and Pharisees had asked Jesus to perform a sign or miracle to prove that He was Christ. He refused on that occasion—not because He was averse or unable to perform a miracle, but because He knew their hearts, and He knew that they wouldn't accept a sign even if they had seen one. He knew that because of their blindness and their obstinacy. They wouldn't even accept the greatest sign that was to come, and that was His resurrection from the dead. So, He warns them.

Matthew 12:39-42 “But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”

Jesus says the witnesses will be summoned in the judgment against these stiffnecked, ungodly, unbelieving people. These people were implying, you see, that they couldn't believe without a sign. That was their excuse. Perhaps they would believe if Jesus would perform a miracle. But they had no excuse because they rejected the signs that *had* and *would be* given, and Jesus knew that.

That makes me think of the many excuses we hear from people today as to why they live in sin and refuse to obey the truth. Why they fail to be saved. In fact, many believe that their excuse allows them to be saved despite the wrong in their lives. But, according to Jesus, the righteous judge, the case is sealed. It will be sealed by witnesses that will rise up against them.

First of all, Jesus shows that those who reject the preaching of the gospel will be condemned by righteous witnesses.

Matthew 12:40-41 “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.”

Without rehearsing the story that I suppose many of us have heard all of our lives, Jonah refused to go to Nineveh and preach to them, and he got into trouble with the Lord for that. He boarded a ship, trying to run away from the Lord, but God prepared a great fish and a storm came up and the men of the ship threw Jonah overboard and the fish swallowed him. He spent three days and nights in the belly of that great fish until God finally caused it to vomit him out upon the shore, and Jonah resolved that he would do the will of the Lord and preach to wicked Nineveh, to make a long story short.

Jesus said that that pointed forward, or prefigured Jesus Christ. The fact that, just as Jonah spent three days and nights in the belly of the fish, so Jesus would spend three days and nights in the heart of the earth; that is, in the grave. Then, the greatest miracle of all time would take place, and it is the lynchpin of Christianity. It is the great truth claim of the Christian message, and that is that Jesus broke the surly bonds of death and hell and the grave, and came forth resurrected. He was then seen by hundreds of witnesses after His resurrection, and on the Day of Pentecost, the apostles, who were eyewitnesses of His resurrection, would testify to the world that He was indeed raised, and therefore indisputably and undeniably, the Son of God and Lord and Christ! Some, on that day, would believe in Jesus and render obedience to Christ and the gospel and be saved.

But the Jewish nation as a whole would still reject Jesus. These very religious leaders who were so set against Jesus and accused Him of blasphemy, even in the face of the resurrection would not accept the fact that He was the Son of God. That He IS King of kings and Lord of lords. Therefore, Jesus said that Nineveh repented when Jonah went and preached to them after the great miracle that occurred, but they themselves wouldn't even believe the preaching of the gospel after it was confirmed by the greatest miracle of all time. He said that those people of Nineveh would rise and condemn those who reject the gospel in the day of judgment.

Then, there are those who are too busy for the church. They are too unconcerned about Christ. Those who squander the opportunities they have to learn the truth and prepare for eternity. Some won't show much interest in the Bible because they don't immediately understand all of it. Friend, it's not the parts we DON'T understand that concern me, as much as the parts that we DO. You see, when we do what we understand is right, it becomes easier to unravel and do the rest. Some are too caught up in carnal and worldly matters to truly investigate the truth claims of the Bible and give them a fair and sincere hearing. Jesus spoke of them this way:

Luke 14:16-20 “Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.”

Well, what about those who are so indifferent to the Bible? So indifferent about their souls? So indifferent about the great invitation that has been extended to them? Look again at what Jesus said in **Matthew 12**.

Matthew 12:42 “The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.”

The people to whom Jesus was speaking revered Solomon. They looked back upon him as a REAL king. They longed for Israel to be as it was in the days of Solomon. They acknowledged the great wisdom and power and might and kingship of Solomon, but they cared nothing about the truth of Jesus. Jesus told them that *a greater than Solomon is here*.

There are people today who are moved by what the President says, or what a famous actor in Hollywood says. They care very much about how the Supreme Court rules. But they couldn't care less about what Jesus and His apostles said. But this busy, powerful, mighty woman of old recognized the wisdom of Solomon, Jesus says, and she went a great distance to great trouble and effort to eagerly sit at the feet of Solomon and learn from him. Is truth and salvation important enough to you to put everything else in your life below the privilege and opportunity of sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning of Him and the life He wants you to lead? To consider your soul and where you'll spend eternity—not a few years upon this earth, but eternity in heaven or in hell? Jesus said that she will testify against those who undervalue or even reject the teachings of Christ.

Then there are those who say *perhaps I'm wrong, but it's because I've been misled, and if someone misled me, then they will answer for that*. Have you met people who have comforted themselves with such a thought? I have. I wonder about the noble Bereans we read about.

Acts 17:11 “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

I wonder if they'll be called to testify against those who are willingly ignorant and those who are spiritually and theologically lazy in the day of judgment. No man can really plead ignorance to Jesus in that day because we have been given the inspired scriptures to read, study and apply and compare, which are profitable to teach, reprove, correct and instruct us in all the ways of righteousness (**II Timothy 3:16**).

What about those who say that they live a morally clean life? They are respectable people, kind to their neighbors and love the people around them. What of those who take refuge in their own goodness and virtue and morality? Surely they won't be lost. *Surely God won't condemn me. Surely Jesus won't send me to hell because I live what most people around me would consider a good life*. I wonder if Cornelius will be called up to testify against them and condemn them at the judgment?

Acts 10:1-2 “There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.”

He was a devout man, he feared God, he gave much to the poor and prayed *always*. But he wasn't saved until he obeyed the gospel of Christ (**Acts 10-11**). Perhaps he will rise in the judgment and condemn

many who make excuse—not for what they DID, but for what they DIDN'T do; not for what they WERE, but for what they WEREN'T.

Then I think of many I have personally known through the years in the kingdom of the Lord. I think of many devoted Christians who sacrificed, toiled, prayed, worked, cared, evangelized, served, and many of them despite great obstacles and hindrances, put the kingdom of God first in their lives and served the Lord faithfully. You say *I'd like to visit that church you talk about. I'm a Christian and I know I should be in a congregation where they faithfully meet and worship God, but it's too far...You don't understand that I'm busy...I don't really feel well. I have a headache today...Gas is expensive, you know...and on and on.* I personally know people who, this very day, will get into a vehicle and drive two hours or more to be in an assembly of the saints, where they know they can worship God in spirit and in truth. And they do it every Sunday. Without fail. Will they perhaps rise in the judgment and condemn those who refuse to seek the Lord and His kingdom first?

Friend, the judgment is looming for all of us. That is the point. It is an urgent matter with eternal implications. Witnesses at the judgment. For some of us, that should be a frightening thought. Have you obeyed the gospel? Have you thus far failed to repent of your sins, confess your faith in Christ and be baptized in water for the remission of your sins, being then added to the Lord's body?

Are you a member of the church that you read about in the Bible? Are you a faithful part of a local congregation that worships and operates according to the scriptures? Are you doing your part? Are you faithful within the church, serving Jesus every day?

Tillit S. Teddlie was a prolific and a great songwriter among the churches of Christ throughout the 20th century. Many, many years ago, it is said that he was in a town in west Texas where a well-publicized criminal trial was wrapping up. A man was convicted of capital murder and it came the day for him to be sentenced. The town turned out and packed that old courtroom to hear the judge pass down sentence. Bro. Teddlie was curious. He had never seen such a proceeding, so he wanted to go and see what it was like. He said that the courtroom was packed with a crowd of people who were quietly waiting to see what the judge would decide. To see the sentence handed down. A hush fell over the courtroom and he said as the condemned man stood, the judge said these chilling words: "I hereby sentence you to death." There was something about hearing those words that sent a chill over bro. Teddlie, prompting him to go away and write a song that has been sung for nearly a century now.

*Someday you'll stand at the bar on high, Someday your record you'll see.
Someday you'll answer the question of life; What will your answer be?
Sadly you'll stand if you're unprepared. Trembling, you'll fall on your knee.
Facing the sentence of life or of death; What will that sentence be?
Now is the time to prepare, my friend. Make your soul spotless and free.
Washed in the blood of the Crucified One. He will your answer be.
What will it be? What will it be? Where will you spend your eternity?
What will it be? O, what will it be? What will your answer be?*

I want to challenge you today. Give that question some very serious consideration. What will your answer be when you stand before the righteous judge, the Lord Jesus Christ? If judgment were today, what would your answer be and what witnesses could stand and testify against you in the great court of eternity? It very well could be today. If you were to leave this world unexpectedly through death, the

judgment awaits you. There is no putting it off, there is no preparing at another time. Judgment day, for all practical purposes, will have arrived.

I hope you'll make no delay in preparing to meet the Lord. If you've not obeyed the gospel, we want to help you do that. We want to help you find the answers from God's word as to what you should do, how you should be living and how you should prepare, to be robed and ready to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the great day of judgment. Reach out to us today.

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