



SHOCKED AT THE SENTENCE

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Greetings and welcome to the program today. In our last study together, we talked about the second coming of Christ and what kind of day the bible says that will be. We saw that it will be a day when the world will stand before Christ, the righteous judge. Jesus, Himself, described a scene from that ominous day as He concluded His Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 7, verses 21 through 23, our Lord says: ***“Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”***

That last verse contains one of the most tragic thoughts recorded in scripture. Many who have zealously served God and have done mighty works in His name will be shocked to find out that they never really served Him at all. They will go to the judgment bar feeling confident about their service but will hear the Lord say, “depart from me, I never knew you.” That, of course, emphasizes that we must be careful to do the Lord’s will and do so from a humble and devoted heart and not think that religious activity equals serving and worshipping God in spirit and in truth. These people acted on their own and offered to Christ service He did not authorize. They banked on their good intentions and their good deeds to compensate for the sin in their life. All these things will lead them to a devastating disappointment at the end of the way. I would like to talk about the Day of Judgment today and some of the surprises that await many when we stand before the Lord.

There is no warning any more plainly stated in the word of God than there will be a day of judgment. The writer of Hebrews succinctly said: “...it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,” (Hebrews 9:27) At some point following death, you and I will stand before the Lord to be judged and answer for our lives. The Hebrew writer does not specify the timing of the judgment except that it will be after we leave this world, but the bible is clear in other places that there is coming a DAY of judgment. Jesus said in John 12:48 “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that

which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” The “last day” refers to the day when Jesus comes again, and the dead are raised to life. Martha said to Jesus concerning her dead brother, Lazarus, in John 11:24, “...”I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”” So, the last day refers to the culmination of all world history when the Lord returns and all the dead who ever lived are raised back to life and one by one stand before Christ, the righteous judge.

Many folks give little to no thought about that certain appointment. They dread April 15th more than they do the Day of Judgment. They worry more about an examination in school than they do that great examination before God. And still many who acknowledge that there is coming a judgment day, give little attention to preparing for it, instead thinking that it will just all work out when the time comes. Such people are in for a great shock. Jesus said in the text we read at the beginning that there will be many who stand in stunned surprise when they hear the Lord’s verdict. It will be a shocking day for the much of the human family.

First, many will be shocked at THE REALITY OF THE JUDGMENT. I think it is fair to say that relatively few people give a considerable amount of thought to the fact that they will stand before Christ and answer for their decisions deeds, and even the thoughts and motives of the heart! It’s easy to live in the here and now and push thoughts of eternal consequence out of our minds. When the preacher in the Book of Ecclesiastes admonished the young man who likely had most of the opportunities of his life yet before him, he said “Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes; But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.” (Ecclesiastes 11:9) Young people, especially, have a harder time looking at things through the lens of eternity but Solomon says we are wise and will avoid many difficulties and heartaches in life – as well as some surprises at the judgment – if we live in view of the fact that we will one day account for the choices we made and the deeds we committed. He said in the next chapter, chapter 12, verses 13-14: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.”

In the New Testament, Paul warns us in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10, “Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 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.” Those who believe that this life with its rewards and punishments is all there is, are going to be astonished at the reality of a final day of reckoning. Think of all the atheists and infidels who mocked God, and mocked the bible, and so opposed Christ and His church and how stunned they are going to be when that day occurs. Think of all who were so consumed with this life and what it offers that they were too busy, having too much fun, too drunk of the pleasures of sin and of the world, think how shocked they will all be when the gears of this life come grinding to a halt and they are in the twinkling of an eye brought to the judgment bar of God. The reality of the judgment is going to be a shocking thing for billions of people who have lived. It doesn’t have to be that way for you. You can prepare and live your life circumspectly and in view of that great accounting day.

Second, some will be shocked at THOSE WHO WILL BE PRESENT AT THE JUDGMENT. The promise of a judgment day is universal. None will escape it. None will be exempt from answering to God and receiving either reward or punishment. As we read earlier: “it is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27). The Amplified says, “And just as it is appointed and destined for ALL men to die once and after this [comes certain] judgment,” Some who acknowledge a coming judgment readily confess that people such as murderers and terrorists and rapists and child abusers will

have their day of judgment, but they don't picture themselves standing there as well because of their respectability.

When Paul went to Athens and to the Areopagus, as he walked among the idols that represented the many vain religions of the Greek world, he stood among a learned and sophisticated crowd and lamented their woeful ignorance of the true and living God. He preached his masterful sermon which, at the first, piqued the interest of the philosophers and idolators. As far as they were concerned, Paul was just adding another philosophy and another religion to the pile, and they listened with great curiosity. You know, you can get some people to listen to you explain your religion so long as it is just a novelty that no one takes too seriously. I can picture them leaning toward Paul and hanging on every word – until – he came to the conclusion. The mood changed when he said these words recorded in Acts 17:30-32. He said, "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." You see, the thought of a resurrection and then standing before God in judgment was more than these sophisticated people could believe. Things haven't really changed much. One thing that certainly has not changed is God's promise that He will one day judge all the world through His Son Jesus Christ.

Yes, the criminal and menace to society will stand there. But so will the religious people of the world. So will your neighbors and so will your family. And so will you and so will I. Jesus said, "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." (Matthew 25:32). Jesus also said the people of ancient Sodom will be there. (Matthew 10:15) He said the people of Nineveh where Jonah went and preached will be there. (Matthew 12:41) The renowned Queen of Sheba will be there according to verse 42. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, all who perished in the flood, Abraham, all the Jewish nation, those who crucified Jesus, Pilate, the Roman Soldiers, the Roman Emperors, every person from the high to the lowly will stand before the Lord and that includes you and me. The multitude present will shock many on the day of judgment.

But then the BASIS OF THE JUDGMENT will surprise many. When one stands in a courtroom on earth, he is judged according to the law of that land. His or her conduct is held up next to the standard of what the law says. If they have broken the law, whether it be by actively committing a crime or failing to obey a requirement of the law – that person is found guilty, and punishment is meted out. It is the same in the court of heaven, except for two things. We are judged by the higher law of God and thank God; the Christian has an advocate in Christ Jesus who pleads his or her case. But where does that leave the person without Christ? Where does that leave the person who refuses to submit to Christ but instead lives in rebellion to Him? What of the person who does not obey the gospel of Christ? Paul tells us what their fate will be in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 "...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,"

John was given a vivid view of the judgment on the last day and he records it in Revelation 20:12-13. "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things

which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.”

Notice that John said books were opened at the judgment. One was the Book of Life. This is the book in which the names of all who are washed in the blood of Christ the Lamb are written. In Philippians 4:3, Paul speaks of his fellow workers “whose names are written in the book of life.” Those who never obeyed the gospel of Christ don’t have a chance in that day. Your name is written there or it’s not. It is written there when we place our faith in Jesus Christ by repenting of sin, confessing Him as the Christ, and entering a relationship with Him when we are baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38, Galatians 3:27). Is your name written there? That book will be searched. Those whose names were not already written there will be condemned in the day of judgment. I take no pleasure in saying that. It grieves me to say that. But God’s word says it and therefore it’s true.

John also said the dead were judged according to their works. Not just what they thought, or felt, or intended, but by their conduct. And that conduct will be compared to the perfect standard of God’s word. Jesus said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” (John 12:48) Paul said in Romans 2:16 “in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.” This book is the standard; not how you or I felt about something; not how the United States Supreme Court ruled, not what congress legislated, and not what the President says. It will not be what the majority thought because the majority is usually wrong about spiritual matters. It will not be what most religious leaders said or the traditions of their denominations. We will ultimately be compared to the standard of Christ’s own Word recorded in the New Testament scriptures. Friend, you have a copy of the great exam at your fingertips. Do you study it? Have you even read it? Are you checking to see that your life, your doctrine, your worship are according to what it says and not what men have said?

That’s so very important because many will be just as shocked at THE RESULT OF THE JUDGMENT. “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it,” said Jesus in Matthew 7:13. Remember, He also said “many” religious people will be lost on that day! People who thought they were serving the Lord, but they weren’t really doing the WILL of the Lord. My friend, please listen: it matters what you believe; it matters what you practice; it matters what you do and what you don’t and it matters WHY you do those things. People who carelessly follow religious error are in for a rude awakening on judgment day.

Many careless and nominal Christians are also in for a great surprise. Christ said in Matthew 25: 31-33, “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. 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. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.” Now, listen to verses 41-46: “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” That’s a surprised multitude that Jesus describes.

And then, many will surely be surprised at THE FINALITY OF THE JUDGMENT. The Judgment is not like a job evaluation where you take your marks and then work to improve. The Judgment is final. As Solomon described in Proverbs 29:1 “He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, Will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” After the Judgment an eternity of reward or an eternity of suffering begins. That’s a grim picture. It’s a true picture but a grim one. What hope do any of us have? Jesus Christ! Have you obeyed His saving gospel? Have you accepted His mercy by trusting Him, turning away from sin, and having your sins washed away in baptism? Are you faithful to Him? He’s your only hope and my only hope in that day.

Tillit S. Teddlie was a preacher and songwriter on the 20th century. Nearly a hundred years ago, he was in a small town in west Texas I believe and attended the sentencing of a murderer whose trial had commanded the attention of the entire town. He had never witnessed such a thing before. He shuddered when the judge’s gavel came down and he heard the words “I hereby sentence you to death...” It haunted Brother Teddlie until he wrote this song lyric:

*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.*

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