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#1344

Unpacking The Future
Ashamed or Confident?

In 1992 Betty Eadie published a book that skyrocketed to the top of the New York Times best seller list and stayed there for a year and a half. In fact, it's number 44 in the top 100 best sellers. It's currently on track to be made into a feature film. The title is *Embraced By The Light* and in it Eadie chronicals her supposed near death experience and what she learned through it.

The dedication reads, "To the Light, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom I owe all that I have. He is the staff that I lean on. Without Him I would fall."

According to Eadie Jesus Christ is a formless, benevolent being of light. He surrounded her in such a way that she couldn't tell where her light stopped and His began.

She concluded, based on her near death experience, that Jesus was a being completely separate from the Father, that He would not condemn her (so she could stop regretting those pesky past sins), that human beings are not sinful creatures by nature, that human spirit-beings assisted the Heavenly Father at creation, that all those who died in the holocaust had chosen their fates before birth, and that there actually is no tragedy in the world.

Now why is it that anyone would buy into Ms. Eadie's speculations? As one armchair reviewer wrote: "This is one of the most, uplifting books I have ever seen! I don't send a sympathy card anymore, for some ones loss, I give them this book! Full of hope, with the KNOWING that there is NO DEATH just a change of garments, from the flesh into the Light! Heaven is REAL! and DIVINE LOVE is AWESOME!"

No death, no judgment, no consequences. No wonder *Embraced By The Light* continues to be a best seller.

What is truth and where do we find it?

This is week 4 of a study we're calling *Unpacking the Future*. Rather than taking any wild guesses we're looking into the Bible to carefully uncover what God says about the future.

The Bible is an amazing book that clearly substantiates its claim of authority with hundreds of clear, definitive, detailed predictions.

Half or more of those predictions have already happened and are easily verifiable. That's why we can know that what the Bible says about the future is precise and accurate.

Just what does the future hold after death?

The groundwork for books like *Embraced By The Light* was actually laid decades before. In 1975 Raymond Moody wrote a best seller entitled, *Life After Life*.

Before this most Americans believed in an after life, but they assumed it only applied to the dead.

Moody reported on the experiences of 50 survivors of clinical death who claimed to have experienced another world. Their individual episodes varied but Moody identified several reoccurring features like:

Leaving the body, observing events surrounding their death, traveling through a tunnel of light with a being of light at the end welcoming them.

Today we have an International Association for Near-Death Studies and a whole spate of books on the subject.

One Christian researcher has named this phenomenon "The religion of the resuscitated." No sin, no judgment, no cross, no sacrifice.

To quote one source, "Once freed from their fear of death and awakened to their latent power, humans may transcend their self imposed crises and enter the New Age."

How do we evaluate all this?

First of all what Moody and Eadie and others conveniently leave out of their books is all the people who came back in fear. Some speak of a sense of darkness and torment and the presence of evil beings intent on drawing them to their doom.

Second of all similarity of experience proves nothing. Rick Straussman is a Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry at University of New Mexico School of Medicine.

His book is titled *DMT: The Spirit Molecule: A Doctor's Revolutionary Research into the Biology of Near-Death and Mystical Experiences*

Straussman spent years experimenting with DMT which is LSD's faster-acting, shorter-lasting, cousin.

What he found in himself and his subjects was a uniquely mystical experience in which most participants encountered non-material, intelligent life forms. There was a similar experience for almost every person.

DMT is produced naturally in the human body by the pineal gland, which is a small endocrine gland located near the center of the brain.

Straussman's theory is that people who think they've been abducted by aliens probably had an over production of DMT in their bodies for some reason.

My theory is that near death similar experiences are most likely chemically induced too. Almost every one of the subjects in Straussman's experiments saw the same thing and it had nothing to do with God or their soul.

In the end near death experiences prove nothing. The person hasn't experienced biological, irreversible death. They haven't come back in a resurrection. We can't take a near death experience as a reliable determiner of the ultimate destiny of a person's soul.

There is a great deceiver in the spiritual realm.

His name is Satan, and he wants nothing more than to convince people that they don't need a Savior.

Where then do we go for truth?

When we're dealing with eternity the only thing we can depend upon is the revelation God has given in the Bible.

I. Judgment Is Clearly Taught In The Bible

The Bible uses the word "judgment" hundreds of times. A number of those uses refer to man's judgment but the majority deal with the judgment of God.

Turn to II Corinthians 5 Pg. 1027

Read verse 1-10

Contrary to what some would have us to believe there clearly is a judgment of God. The concept of judgment might be one of the least population aspects of the Christian faith, but it's explained and reinforced over and over again in the Bible.

No one who accepts the authority of the Bible can doubt that there is a judgement to come. Hebrews Chapter 9 says, *It's appointed unto man to die once (no reincarnation) and after this the judgment.*

What's important for us to understand though is that just as we use our English word "judge" in two different ways, so does the Bible.

There is the judgement in criminal proceedings where the judge sits on the bench, hears the evidence, and decides the guilt, condemnation, or acquittal of the person charged.

There is also the judgment of the umpire or referee who, in the olympics, for instance, takes his judgment seat and pronounces a winner and awards the prize. The judge determined who has participated fairly and well.

According to the Bible, God through Jesus Christ, carries out both of those types of judgments.

Which one we face is determined by our response to God in this life.

Look with me at gospel of John Chapter 3, page 940

Read 14 - 18

Read 35 - 36

According to the Bible, all of us stand judicially condemned before a holy and righteous God. In one sense the criminal proceedings have already taken place and we've been found guilty.

Our lives fall far short of the perfect, righteous standard of God. Without Jesus Christ, the Bible says we're condemned already.

But God didn't send His Son into the world to bring condemnation. He sent Him to bring life. Jesus Christ died to pay the wages of sin. He died in our place as an innocent substitute for guilty sinners.

Isaiah the prophet said *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.* Isaiah 53:6

Jehovah God, the judge, places the burden of guilt on His Son at the cross.

Jesus paid the price, said “it is finished,” died and rose again.

We receive the benefits of the death of Jesus Christ by faith. There is nothing that we could do that could add to the death of Christ. It is finished.

We come by faith believing and trusting in Jesus Christ. God the judge says, “The legal penalty has been paid. I now pronounce you forgiven.”

He that believes on Him is not condemned. Now, what happens to those who refuse to trust Jesus Christ as Savior? What happens to those who don't have God's judicial pronouncement of not guilty.

I. Judgment Is Clearly Taught In The Bible

II. Those Without Christ Will Be Judged At The Great White Throne

Turn to the last book of the Bible, Revelation 20 Page 1102

We looked at this passage a few weeks ago when we talked about hell. Time-wise this is at the end of the thousand year reign of Christ in His earthly kingdom. The righteous dead have already been resurrected.

This resurrection we're going to read about only involve those who were not believers in Christ. This only involves those who were not forgiven because of faith in Jesus Christ.

Read verses 11 - 15

The Book of Life contains the names of believers. None of these names are there. The Book of Life is a witness to their standing before God.

The only thing left as a basis of judgment is their works.

The Bible clearly says, *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* Ephesians 2:8-9

There's no salvation by works. So each one is judged by works which come far short of

God's standard, their name is not in the book of life and they are cast into the Lake of Fire.

This is definitely not a benevolent being of light telling everyone that there is no judgment. This is a sobering, awesome picture of the reality of condemnation for those without Christ.

There is only one way to escape that judgment. Jesus said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.* John 14:6

He declared *He that believes on me has everlasting life.* John 6:47

Now, that is the judicial or legal judgment. But what about the other kind of judgment. The one that has to do with awarding the prize?

I. Judgment Is Clearly Taught In The Bible

II. Those Without Christ Will Be Judged At The Great White Throne

III. Believers Will Be Judged At The Judgment Seat Of Christ

Go back with me now to the verse we started with **II Corinthians 5:10 page 1027 Read verse 10**

The "we" of this verse refers to believers. II Corinthians is a church epistle written to those who have trusted in Christ and are part of the church at Corinth Greece.

Those of us who receive Jesus Christ as Savior won't stand at the great white throne judgment but we'll all appear at the judgement seat of Christ.

Not every believer is equally ambitious for their Lord. Not every believer is as committed to pleasing God as they should be.

But there is one thing you can be sure of. Every believer will stand before the Lord and now's the time to prepare.

The words "judgment seat" are a translation of one Greek word, *bema*.

The bema was the platform or raised area in Greek towns where political speeches were made or decisions handed down by rulers.

It was also, and here's where the New Testament picks up on the imagery, the place where the awards were given out to the winners in the annual olympic games.

The great white throne is a place of condemnation and judgement. The judgement seat of Christ is a place of evaluation and reward.

The Great White Throne is associated with the resurrection of the unjust. It will take place at least 1000 years from now (1007 would be the minimum).

The judgement seat of Christ is associated with the Rapture. And that could take place at any time. That is why the New Testament gives admonitions like James 5:8-9 *You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!*

The judgement seat of Christ could take place at any moment, even today.

It's the next logical event after Christ comes to take His church into heaven.

It will take place in heaven during the great tribulation period before Christ comes to earth at the Battle of Armageddon. The church will be evaluated, rewarded and prepared in advance so that she'll be able to return with Christ and to reign with him as His queen during the thousand year kingdom.

So, at this *bema*, believers will be evaluated by Jesus Christ.

There are 20 verses in the New Testament that use the word "reward" in the context of future evaluation.

Remember, this is a crucial distinction, salvation is through faith. It can't be earned. Rewards are for works done by those who are saved by God's grace.

Mark 9:41 *For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.*

I Corinthians 3:8 *Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.*

Colossians 2:18 *Let no one cheat you of your reward...*

2 John 1:8 *Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.*

Revelation 22:12 *And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.*

So we (Christians) must appear (personally) before the judgement seat (the *bema* seat) of Christ. (All judgment has been committed to the son). That each one may receive the things done in the body (that's works, done after salvation) according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Some people have really struggled with this verse and others too, that speak of works and rewards. If all of our sins were forgiven at the cross how could we be called to give an account of bad we have done? That answer is found in the word translated "bad" in II Corinthians 5:10.

If you were to look up *kakos* in a Greek lexicon you'd find something very interesting. I generally use Arndt & Gingrich "Greek English Lexicon Of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature. Under the listing for *kakos* they give 3 main definitions.

1. Bad (in the sense of morally evil)
2. Worthless
3. Inferior

Here in II Corinthians the contrast isn't between morally good and morally evil but valuable and worthless.

And in the end that's the whole basis for how Jesus Christ evaluates in his children. Do our works have value or are they worthless.

Turn with me now to another key passage on this subject.

I Corinthians 3 page 1014

Romans 14:10 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. So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.*

An account of what? Here's the answer. **Read verses 11- 15**

I Corinthians 10:31 says, *Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

That means that from preaching a sermon to serving your family dinner, our life is a ministry dedicated to God.

The foundation for our lives is Christ. But how we build on that foundation is up to us. We can build that which has value or that which is worthless.

Now notice God contrasts the building materials gold, silver and precious stones with wood, hay and stubble.

Valuable - Worthless Permanent - Temporary

The choice is ours, isn't it? The day of God's judgement will test the work.

Whatever else this passage teaches, it makes it clear that we can have a saved soul but a lost life. And it's based on unfaithful stewardship of life.

What do gold, silver and precious stones represent? What is the criteria for God's assessment of us? What is going to be examined?

J. Oswald Sanders had a book called *Heaven: Better by Far*. In It, he lists 9 areas!

1. Our testimony for Christ Philippians 2:16
2. Our suffering for Christ I Peter 4:13
3. Our faithfulness to Christ Revelation 2:10
4. Our service for Christ Hebrews 6:10
5. Our generosity for Christ II Corinthians 9:6
6. Our use of time for Christ Colossians 4:5
7. Our exercise of spiritual gifts. I Peter 4:10
8. Our self-discipline for Christ I Corinthians 9:24
9. Our leading people to Christ I Thessalonians 2:19

All of these areas are tied in in the New Testament to the coming of Christ and his recognition.

All the awards are conferred by Christ from the umpire's seat. But not everyone will receive rewards. Some will be ashamed of Christ when he comes because their building materials were worthless.

Remember we are talking about believers now:

I John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

F. E. Marsh has written: They are ashamed because “they have built the material of earth’s products upon the foundation of Christ’s being and work. The gold of Christ’s deity, the silver of his vicarious sacrifice, and the precious stones of his peerless worth and coming glory are truth’s that will stand the tests of God’s fire; but the wood of self-esteem, the hay of man’s fragility, and the straw of human eloquence will be burned up.”

Look over a page to **I Corinthians 4:5** **Read verse 5**

God is going to judge the counsels of the heart. He’s not just going to deal with outward good works but with what motivates us to do what we do.

Rene Pache writes “Here is a searching word - the motive of our works is what counts. In that day, God will test everything by his standard of truth. If it meets his approval, a reward will be given.”

Rewards in the New Testament are called crowns. In the Greek N. T. there are two words used for crown.

One is *diadema*, which means “a royal crown.” The other is *stephanos*. It means “a victors crown” in the olympics. It was a laurel wreath woven and given as a coveted prize.

There are 5 crowns given to faithful believers. All are translations of *stephanos*.

1. James 1:12 The Crown of Life for enduring trials.
2. II Timothy 4:8 The Crown of Righteousness for those who run the race with integrity looking for the coming of the Lord.
3. I Corinthians 9:25 The Incorruptible Crown - for those who practice godly self discipline.
4. I Thessalonians 2:19 The Crown of Rejoicing for those who win others to Christ.
5. I Peter 5:2-4 The Crown of Glory for faithful church leaders.

What is your attitude this morning toward the judgment seat of Christ?

You might be thinking, “So what’s the big deal about rewards? So I slack off some here. I’m not out doing anything bad. God still loves me. I’m still going to heaven!”

But now think about this, one day you’re going to stand before Almighty God. You’re going to see the nail prints in Christ’s hands. You’re going to look into the face of the one who became sin for you.

Now let me ask you something. When you're standing there before the one who served you totally and unconditionally. The one who suffered so much before He went to the cross Luke says, *And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.* Luke 22:44 The one who anticipated the horrors of the cross and prayed, *O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.* Matthew 26:39

The one who cried out from the cross, *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?* Mark 15:34

When you're standing there eyeball to eyeball with the Son of God, do you think you'll still say, 'What's the big deal about doing my best in life to honor Him?'

The judgment seat of Christ ought to motivate us to get busy for the Lord. If we're a believer in Christ we're ambassadors who give an account to our superior in our home country some day.

It should make us long for the greatest commendation we could ever receive - Jesus Christ saying *well done you good and faithful servant.*

It's a paradox, but if we do anything that is good and faithful, it's only because God has worked in our lives.

We love Him because He first loved us. We serve Him because He first served us.

And you know what we'll ultimately do with those crowns? I believe we'll follow the lead of the 24 elders in John's vision in the Book of Revelation: *The twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."* Revelation 4:10-11