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The Judgment Day — Then What??

In the normal life span of nearly every person there are certain “red letter” days — days which, for various reasons, are considered significant. These days could include one’s birth date, his anniversary date, or some other day of special meaning to the individual. But all the days which are considered important — whether viewed singularly or as a group — pale into insignificance when compared with the day of our Lord’s return. Yes, “there’s a great day coming!” Specifically, I am referring to the day of our Lord’s **return**, the day when He will **judge** all mankind.

That there will be such a day is clearly indicated by these words spoken by the apostle Paul: “*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*” (Acts 17:30-31).

These statements were uttered during Paul’s “second missionary journey.” He had departed from Berea and traveled to Athens, the center of human philosophy, a city “*given over to idols*” (Acts 17:16). In Athens there were many sights which would capture the attention of any regular tourist, but Paul was no ordinary tourist! Witnessing the idolatry which was so rampant, Paul’s “*spirit was provoked within him,*” so he began to reason “*In the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshippers, and in the market place daily with those who happened to be there*” (Acts 17:16-17). In this city, filled with idols representing every imaginable god, Paul preached the truth about the One true God, the God Who “*is Lord of heaven and earth,*” the God Who “*does not dwell in temples made with hands,*” the God in Whom “*we live and move and have our being,*” the God Who will judge the world through Jesus Christ (Acts 17:24,28,30).

Yes, the day of judgment is coming! We do not know when that day will come, but we know that it **will** come. The fact that it will come is affirmed by too many Scriptures for any Bible believer to either doubt or deny. But in keeping with the title of this article, “**then** what?” What, we ask, will happen on the day?

1. Jesus and His angels will come in glory! Jesus expressed it this way: “*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*” (Mat. 25:31). Then in the next 15 verses Jesus described the judgment which will take place upon His return. His return will obviously be an attention-arousing occasion, for when He descends from heaven, it will be accompanied “*with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God*” (I Thess. 4:16)! There will be nothing “secret” about our Lord’s return!

2. All the dead will be raised, both the righteous and the unrighteous! Regarding this point, Jesus said “*Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and shall come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation*” (John 5:28-29). Contrary to premillennial speculations, there will not be a thousand-year separation between the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked; the resurrection of each will occur in the same “*hour!*”

3. The universe as we know it will be destroyed! The apostle Peter expressed it this way: *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up”* (2 Peter 3:10). Yes, we tend to get attached to this world and to the things in it, but one day it will be *“burned up;”* its condition is terminal!

4. Righteous people, living at that time, will be instantly changed! Regarding this point, and regarding the righteous yet living on earth when Jesus returns, the apostle Paul said, *“We shall all be changed — in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be **changed**”* (1 Cor. 15:51,52).

5. The Greatest Person Who ever lived on earth will be the Judge! On this occasion Jesus, *“the righteous judge”* (2 Tim. 4:8), will *“sit on the throne of His glory”* (Matt. 25:31).

6. The Greatest Crowd that ever assembled will gather together! The Bible clearly says that *“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”* (2 Cor. 5:10). While exiled on Patmos, in a vision, the apostle John said *“I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and the 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”* (Rev. 20:12). That crowd will include all the persons about whom you have read in the Bible, all the Presidents and Kings about whom you have read in history books, all the movie stars you have ever seen on screen, all your ancestors, and, yes, it will include **you and me!** Some people refuse to go to worship because they prefer to be alone in a quiet place, but they nonetheless will some day be a part of the greatest crowd that ever assembled!

7. The Greatest of all books will be opened! Describing that scene, John said the *“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”* (Rev. 20:12). The *“books”* incorporate the books of the Bible — both the Old and the New Testament. Those living before the cross will be judged by the Law then in effect; those living after the cross will be judged in keeping with the New Covenant of Jesus Christ, of which He is *“the Mediator”* (Heb. 9:15), and which contains the *“word”* by which we shall be judged (John 12:48).

8. The Greatest of all Separations will take place! *“...anyone not found written in the Book of Life”* will be *“cast into the lake of fire”* (Rev. 20:15). Jesus Himself said that *“all, nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats”* (Matt. 25:32). He further identified those whom he categorized as *“sheep,”* and those whom He called *“goats,”* And to the **“sheep”** He will say *“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,”* and to those described as **“goats,”** He will say *“Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matt. 25:34,41). Later, in the same context, Jesus said of some that *“these will go away into everlasting punishment,”* and of the *“righteous,”* He said they would enter into *“eternal life”* (Matt. 25:46). For the righteous it will be *“eternal life.”* For the lost it will be *“everlasting punishment.”* There will be no place called *“Limbo;”* there will be no *“purgatory,”* from which people could eventually be delivered. It will be heaven or hell, and it will last forever!

Two Important Questions that May Be Asked of the Lost?

1. “Why did you not obey the gospel?” Surely everyone has reason to be motivated to obey — especially in view of the fact that the Gospel of Christ “*is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes*” (Rom. 1:16), and in view of the fact that we are plainly told that Jesus will take “*vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Thess. 1:8)!

2. “Why did you not remain faithful as a child of God?” Yes, tragically, there are some who obey “*the first principles of the oracles of God*” (Heb. 5:12) but who become unfaithful or they become “*again entangled*” in the “*pollutions of the world,*” and of whom it can be said, “*the latter end is worse for them than the beginning*” (2 Peter 2:20). However, in view of the many warnings designed to prevent such, and in view of the stated dire consequences for personal apostasy, why would any child of God neglect to remain faithful unto death — especially in view of the glorious “*crown of life*” (Rev. 2:10), which awaits the faithful in that celestial city of the redeemed?

Conclusion:

Yes, friend, “there’s a great day coming;” you will be present on that occasion! Are **you** ready? May we assist you in getting ready.

— B. Witherington
