

JUDGMENT DAY IS COMING

I will never forget his reaction. I should have told him right up front. Years ago, waiting outside a tire dealership in the hot Columbia, South Carolina sun, I was in a conversation with a man, probably in his 70's, also waiting to get his tires fixed. The conversation had so far allowed me to avoid telling him I was at a seminary, studying to become a minister. He asked if I lived in Columbia. I told him no, that I was there visiting my parents. He then asked, "Where do you live?" I told him, "Boston." With a big grin, he immediately shared with me the various things with women he and his sailor buddies did in Scully Square when they were on shore leave in Boston. (Scully Square was the red-light district of his day.) He then asked what I did up in Boston. Trying to prolong the inevitable, I told him I was in graduate school. He then asked, "What are you studying?" "I'm studying to become a minister," I finally said. The poor man literally took a step backward in fear. His face drained of all color; he tried to say something, couldn't, took another step backwards and then walked away.

All of us should fear the Lord. But for those who have not come to terms with their sin, the fear of the Lord is a terror. I can feel that myself at times, when the devil brings to remembrance my past sins. He is great at half-truths by jogging our memory about past sin, but neglecting to mention that Jesus Christ has taken care of those sins. We who follow Christ must firmly declare in those paralyzing moments, even out loud, "The blood of Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for my sin!" (1 Jn 2:1)

To live without having come to terms with one's rebellion against God is to live in a constant state of fear. People cope with this inner torment by avoiding thoughts of God, erecting walls of denial about themselves and God, and by medicating themselves in all the usual ways. But that is not coming to terms with sin. The way to come to terms with sin is by changing your mind about who is best suited to run your life. The Bible calls this repentance. It is to reach a point of hopelessness about life as you know it, to give up on yourself, and to turn to God in the hope of finding mercy. And you will find mercy! By becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, you will receive forgiveness for all your sins, you will be justified before the judgment of God (because of Jesus), and you will begin an interactive life with God through his Holy Spirit. The course of your life will follow along this path: trusting Jesus Christ with everything; taking every little



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task and loving God in it; and treating every human being you meet with kindness.

Here's another story. The woman was used to hard looks from other women and leering looks from men. She had grown accustomed to her loss of innocence. Each day was a simply a matter of getting through, finding men to pay for her favors, trying her best to clean herself when it was all over. The deadness within her covered over whatever ache for cleanness before God she had once felt. But then she heard Jesus of Nazareth. He assured her that God was seeking the lost—those who had strayed—the sick—and the unclean. Something within her woke up, opened up, and came to life. The realization of who she had become dissolved away in the healing of forgiveness. She was clean again! God accepted her. Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven... Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Lk 7:48)

Can you imagine Jesus being wrong about that? Having once assured her that she was forgiven, he later would change his mind when she stood before him on the Judgment Day? Of course not. Granted, she like the rest of us who follow after Jesus must not give up. We are to remain loyal to Jesus Christ, trusting and obeying him. And we will remain loyal, because God will enable us to remain loyal. Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (Jn 10:27)

All of us will stand before Jesus Christ in judgment and give an account for our lives. Here is how Jesus said his followers would be recognized. They saw the hungry and fed them, saw the thirsty and gave them something to drink, saw strangers and

welcomed them, saw those needing clothes and clothed them, saw the sick and looked after them, saw those in prison and visited them. (Mt 25:34)

Deeds of mercy do not give us a "pass" on the Day of Judgment. No, we pass (and have already passed) the Day of Judgment because we joined ourselves to Jesus, who became for us our righteousness before God (1 Cor 1:30). The deeds of mercy spelled out by Jesus are simply the inevitable fruit of those who follow him. **NO LIFESTYLE OF MERCY—NO RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS.**

For those who follow Jesus, Judgment Day will not determine Heaven or Hell. That was decided when we placed our faith in Jesus. Rather, it will apparently be along the lines of an awards banquet. The Apostle Paul remarked in light of this reality, "So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man." (Acts 24:14) We will be rewarded for our faithfulness to God. The more faithful we were to Jesus, the more will be our reward. (Mt 25:21)

I don't doubt that there will be some long faces on that day. But if God went to the effort to send his Son to this world to be a sin offering; if Jesus took upon himself the torment of all our sins, all our sicknesses, and all our sorrows, experienced the pains of Hell, as well as the betrayal and abandonment by close friends, rejection from his own people, and the torture of Roman crucifixion; if God did all this out of love for humanity ("For God so loved the world..."), he will take every possible excuse to save people and get them into Heaven—provided they can stand it. I believe there will be a whole lot more people in Heaven than is sometimes assumed. At the same time, a day of reckoning is coming. We will each give an account for our lives. Our Checkbooks and our Day Planners will reveal more about our lives than probably anything else. What will the evidence show?

"To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen." (Jude 1:24)

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