

The Judgment Seat of Christ: Living before God's Eyes

INTRODUCTION

Page fifteen. I want to start by telling you a profound experience that rocked my young life when I was twenty-three years old. I'm fifty-five now. This was over thirty years ago. I went to bed one night. I had never had a supernatural encounter with the Lord. I've had several in the last thirty years. I went to bed one night and had a visionary experience. In this experience, I was on my knees and I was looking into the face of Jesus. This was very perplexing to me, because I didn't know what had happened and how I got there. I felt like I was wide awake. It didn't seem like a dream at all. I was sort of feeling myself and wondering, "Where am I?"

I was kneeling, looking the Lord eye to eye. I was perplexed because of the serious look He had upon His face. He looked at me and He said, "You're saved, but your life was wasted." I'm saved, but my life was wasted.

"IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO MANIPULATE THIS MAN, CHRIST JESUS"

I began to protest in my thinking. I didn't say it out loud, but I was thinking, "This is a mistake. You have the wrong person." Because at age twenty-three, I was really devoted to the Lord. I was committed to fasting and prayer; I was going hard after God. I said to myself, not out loud, but I was looking Him in the eye the whole time, "This can't be true; this can't be right. You have the wrong person."

Then the thought rose up in me by the Holy Spirit: "It is impossible to manipulate this Man, Christ Jesus." The Holy Spirit gave me this thought. I was trying to tell Jesus, "No, You have the wrong man. It's a mistake." I tell you one thing, there's no way you'll be able to convince Jesus of anything other than the truth on the day when you stand before Him. No information will change His evaluation and what He's thinking on the last day.

THE GREATEST APPOINTMENT IN YOUR ENTIRE LIFE IS YET TO COME

It's the greatest appointment in your entire life. It's yet in the future. I want to say that again: the greatest appointment in your entire life is yet to come. It's the day when you and the Lord meet eye to eye, and whatever He's thinking in that moment is the most important thing about your life right now.

"IT IS APPOINTED UNTO MAN ONCE TO DIE, AND THEN AFTER THIS THE JUDGMENT"

Anyway, I was kneeling and thinking, "Impossible. Wrong. Wrong!"

This thought rose up in me by the Holy Spirit: "It is impossible to manipulate the Man Christ Jesus. You will never change His opinion."

I cried out. "Can I have a second chance? Can I have a second chance?"

Then the Holy Spirit gave me the verse, Hebrews 9:27: "It is appointed unto man once to die, and then after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27, paraphrased). I understood that I only have one chance on the earth, like every one of us. We only have one opportunity, and then we die and receive the evaluation. *Judgment* means *evaluation*. The judgment isn't always negative; it simply means the truth about our life comes to light.

I cried out, "Can I have another chance?"

The Holy Spirit impressed on me the conviction, “No, it is appointed to man to live once. You get one time on the earth.”

THE MOST PAINFUL EXPERIENCE A BELIEVER CAN EVER HAVE

I was weeping. I mean, I was under such pain of regret. I was weeping before Him, and suddenly this visionary experience lifted. I wasn't in my bed. I had gone to bed that night; but now I was over on the floor, kneeling, weeping in the same position I was in, in this visionary experience. I was wondering, “How did I get over here? I went to bed over there.” Tears were flowing. My shirt was wet from the tears. The pain of regret I felt was the most painful experience I've ever had in my life.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT OUR LIVES RIGHT NOW

This was over thirty years ago. I can remember the experience like it was yesterday. I think of this experience, not every day—that would be exaggerated—but I've thought of it many, many times throughout the months and years. Often I think of this. I picture myself looking into that Man's eyes. I think of what that Man will say to me on that day, the One who is fully God, fully Man, Christ Jesus. That is the most important thing about my life right now. It's not how big the conference is; it's not how good the ministry goes. It's not who likes me or who doesn't like me. The most important thing about my life and your life is what's in His mind on that day when you stand before Him.

THE FOLLY OF LIVING IN THE WAY OF COMMON DEDICATION

Now I was confused. I was kneeling on the floor. Again, I had gone to bed in my bed, but now I was kneeling like in the visionary experience. I still didn't know how I had gotten over there. I said, “Lord, I don't get what's happening. I love You. I'm saved, but my life is wasted? I love You. I don't know.”

The Holy Spirit helped me to understand the point of this visionary experience. He let me feel the pain, and I want to underline the word *pain*, the pain of regret that I would feel on that day if I lived what's commonly understood as a life of dedication according to the standards of the Western church. He let me understand this: that if you accept what's normally called dedication, and that's the only thing you do in your relationship with Him, instead of what the Word of God describes as dedication, you'll stand before Jesus and you'll have this sentence spoken over you: “Saved, but your life was wasted.” The Holy Spirit was wooing me.

“HOW FAR WILL YOU LET ME GO? HOW ABANDONED WILL YOU LET ME BE?”

Number two, paragraph number two. Paul says it clearly in 2 Corinthians 10:12. He says, “They measured themselves by themselves.” Then he goes on to say at the end of the verse, “You lack wisdom” (2 Cor. 10:12, paraphrased). Beloved, don't be content to be more dedicated than the other man in your fellowship group or in your ministry. Only be content with dedication as the Word of God describes it. I don't want to be more dedicated than you; I want to be dedicated according to what the Word of God declares. In the Western church, there are a whole lot of us who walk around under the image of dedication, but we're not obeying the Word of God with all of our heart as the Word of God teaches. The Lord was telling me, “Don't buy into what's commonly called dedication. Get your measurement from the Word of God itself.”

That experience rocked my life. I determined that I was going to go as far as I could go; whatever God would give the human spirit in this age, I wanted it. I wanted the power to obey. I said, “God, I don't want to know how little I can do to be saved; I want to know how much power You'll give me to be dedicated. I want to give

my strength to obedience. I want to give my strength, my money, my time, to prayer, fasting, holiness, servanthood, sacrifice. Help me go as far as You'll help a human go in this age."

A lot of people have the entirely wrong question. They ask the question, "Can I still do this and be saved?" Their question is, "How little can I do and stay in the kingdom?"

Beloved, that's entirely the wrong question. The right question is, "How far will You let me go in my extravagant obedience? How much power will You give me to give everything back to You?"

I was kneeling before the Lord at twenty-three years old. This experience shocked my life. It shocked my life. I said, "Lord, I don't know how long I'll live. I'll never forget this. Because in a minute, whether it's a year or fifty years, in a minute I will be standing before You one day face to face." Whatever He's thinking about me is the most important thing about my life. It's the most important thing about your life.

I'll tell you what I fear more than anything in life. I have a number of fears, but the thing I fear most is regret. I fear having regret on the last day more than any other thing. If I stand before Him and have regret, it's the most painful tragedy a believer can experience. I mean, we're not in the lake of fire; we're in the kingdom of God. Imagine the pain of regret, of knowing in that day how much He gave us and how little we responded to Him, and our life was wasted, though we were saved.

NEVER SETTLE DOWN IN GOD WHEN YOU CAN GO AS FAR AS YOU CAN GO

I determined, "Lord, I'm going all the way." I remember I began to seek the Lord more diligently. I made a commitment to give my money, my time, my energy, etc. I was twenty-three; I was a young pastor. I remember some of the older preachers, the old men in their thirties and forties—they were the old men back then—would come to me and say, "Mike, you'd better settle down. You don't have to be so intense."

I said, "I have no intention of settling down."

They said, "Well if you don't settle down...you're praying too hard. You're fasting too much. You're giving too much. You're pouring out too much. You're going to burn out."

I said, "I would rather burn out than rust out." I mean it.

Well, that was thirty-two years ago and I've been told by many a pastor to slow down. It's thirty-two years later; I'm not even close to burnt out. They missed it. They missed it. I would say this. I didn't mean it to be smart-aleck; it's a little smart-aleck now that I'm older. Many times I was told, "You don't have to be so intense, chill out."

I would say, "I don't want to chill out. I don't want to grow up and be like you." I meant it. I would look at these thirty-, forty-, fifty-year-old pastors. They didn't have a prayer life; they didn't have a deep history in God. They didn't weep before God when they read the Word of God.

I said, "I don't want to be like that. I want a vibrant spirit; I want to be alive in God when I'm fifty." Beloved, many of you are twenty-two and twenty-three. You can make that same resolve.

YOU'LL HAVE NO REGRETS IN YOUR FIFTIES IF YOU GAVE ALL IN YOUR TWENTIES

Now, I shouldn't have said that. I felt zeal in my heart. I felt bothered by people constantly telling me to give less to God. They were worried that somehow it would hurt me if I gave everything to Him. Beloved, I didn't give everything to Him when I look back. I wish I had gone harder. I have no regrets about whatever I left behind in my pursuit in my twenties and thirties and forties. I want to assure you, young people, you'll have no regrets in your fifties if you gave everything in your twenties. You'll be glad that you did it. You'll be glad.

Here's the other thing I would tell them: "If you can assure me that where I'm going, the judgment seat of Christ, when I stand before Jesus, if you can assure me that on that day your vote will count about my life, then I'll listen to you. If your vote doesn't count over my life on that day, I'm not listening to you."

DON'T ALLOW THE PASSIVITY OF OTHERS TO LULL YOU INTO A LIFE OF COMPROMISE

That's a little smart-aleck—because we want to have a teachable spirit; we want to have a humble spirit, but I want to tell you this: there are many in the Body of Christ who will use every Bible verse and every bit of logic imaginable to talk you out of your dedication. They're really just affirming their own life of compromise and passivity. They feel bad because of the way you're living and they want to talk you into living like they live so you're both comfortable together. I tell you, you may be saved, but your life will be wasted at the end of your life when you stand before the Lord. I'm talking about the fear of the Lord right now. I'm talking about carrying in your spirit the absolute certainty that you'll meet Him eye to eye one day. That's all that's going to matter about your life.

IT'S NOT THE SIZE OF THE CONFERENCE, BUT THE SIZE OF THE HEART

He's not going to ask me, "How big was the IHOP-KC conference?"

"Well in 2010, we had 28,000 registered. Lord, isn't that great?"

He'll say, "That's not what I'm talking about. I'm not talking about how big your conferences were; I'm talking about how big your heart was. I'm talking about the response you gave to Me. How big was that?"

"But Lord, we had 28,000 registered for the conference!"

He will say, "That means nothing to Me. I want to know about your responsiveness in the secret place of your life where no one was looking."

"SHOCK ME NOW; DON'T SHOCK ME THEN"

I began to pray back in those days, "Lord, shock me now; don't shock me then." Beloved, I urge you to pray that prayer. Ask the Lord to shock you now. If there are areas of disobedience or passivity, tell Him to shock you now, don't wait until then. I don't want to be shocked then; I want to be shocked now.

Sometimes over the years, the Lord would visit me through the Word. I don't mean a supernatural encounter *per se*, but He would speak to me through the Word and say, "I want more of your time, your heart, and your energy. I want a greater humility and a greater giving of your heart."

I would say, "Lord..."

He would say, "I'm telling you, if you do, you won't regret it." If you look to the right and the left, there are plenty of believers who will talk you out of that logic. Don't listen to it. Their vote doesn't count over your life where you're going on that day. Like I told them, "If your vote counts, I'll listen to you. If your vote doesn't count, I'm going harder in my dedication." I'm talking to twenty-year olds about dedication. I'm talking about setting your heart in a way that no devil in hell and no man on the earth, religious or irreligious, no person can talk you out of a life of dedication and radical obedience to the Lord. That's what I'm talking about.

"WE SHALL ALL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST"

Paragraph C. "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10)—every single believer. This verse is only speaking of believers. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God" (v. 12). Unbelievers don't stand at the judgment seat of Christ; they stand before the great white throne and go to the lake of fire.

THE JUDGMENT SEAT

"Judgment seat" is an interesting term. Because when we hear *judgment*, we think, "Oh no!" *Judgment* means *evaluation*. The judgment seat was an actual term used in the ancient world of Roman society. It was a very common term. The judgment seat was the place at the Olympic games, or the equivalent of the Olympic games, where the judges gave what we would call the gold medal, the silver medal, and the bronze medal. They gave the trophies to the athletes. The judgment seat wasn't a place of penalty; it was a place of reward. Take the word *judgment* and write, "Pay back." It's reward time. It's when the Lord expresses to you how He felt about the way you loved Him while you were on the earth. It's not a place of negativity; it's not a place of punishment. There's an indirect negative of the loss of potential reward, but there's not a direct punishment: it's only the knowledge that we could have had more if we had been more responsive. It's coming up short in what could have been ours; that is where the pain would be. It's not negative apart from that. That's a huge negative, but it's not the lake of fire. It's not a penalty in that sense.

THE LORD WON'T EVALUATE YOU BASED ON ABILITIES YOU DON'T HAVE

Paul said each one of us will give an account to the Lord. Did you know that you'll give an account to Jesus for what He gave to you? The good news is this: He has given each one of us certain capacities and abilities—physically, emotionally, mentally, financially, life circumstances. Some of you have greater emotional ability and mental abilities than others. Here is the good news: He's not going to evaluate you based on abilities you don't have.

What this means is, I know some people who are so much in pain over what they don't have: "I'm not smart enough to be a Bible teacher. My emotions aren't stable enough to be this or that. I'm not strong enough." They're so in pain over what they don't have that they don't actually use what they do have. They fret and they're in anguish: "Why did You not give me more?"

Beloved, here is the good news: the judgment seat is the great equalizer. The person with the least amount of gifting, if they have a great responsiveness, can have a far greater reward than a person with a great gift.

Paragraph D. The judgment seat of Christ is the place where we receive rewards. It's not a place of penalty. The only penalty is the place of potential reward we could have received.

“IF YOU UNDERSTOOD THE NATURE OF REWARDS, YOU WOULD CARE ABOUT THEM”

Paragraph E. I've heard this over many years. I've taught on the judgment seat of Christ since that experience for thirty-two years. It's a subject I'm very, very interested in because I know I'm going there. You're going there, too. It's the greatest appointment in your life. It's yet to come. You'll stand before a man who's a king. The good news is that He's a bridegroom king. He loves you, but He really, really wants to talk to you about how you loved Him back.

Over the thirty-plus years that I've taught on the judgment seat of Christ, I've heard many people say, “I don't care about rewards.”

I say, “I don't think you understand them; that's why you don't care about them. If you understood the nature of rewards, you would care about them.” Interestingly, Jesus taught more on rewards than any other man in the Bible. Are you telling me that Jesus missed it by teaching us and motivating us by rewards? I tell you Jesus didn't miss it.

What are rewards? Number one, paragraph E, rewards are Jesus expressing the way He feels about the way you loved Him. There are many types of rewards, and in chapter five of the conference notes, I list a whole bunch of rewards. It's not comprehensive. There's a massive amount in the Bible on this subject. There are many types of rewards. At the core, rewards are Jesus expressing to you how He feels about the way you loved Him. That's what rewards really are.

REWARDS AREN'T ABOUT BEING BETTER THAN OTHERS, BUT CLOSE TO HIS HEART

Secondly, rewards are about you working in close proximity with Him in the age to come. I don't want a reward so I can have something superior to you. Some people think they're given rewards so they can strut around and show other people how much more power they have. No, that view of rewards is wrong. I agree, we don't want those kinds of rewards; but those aren't the kinds of rewards He's giving. When He rewards us more, it will be related to working more closely with Him, in closer proximity, in closer relationship to Him in the age to come, based on our responsiveness in this age. It's not about being over people, it's about being closer to Him. It's not about being superior to others, it's about Jesus expressing to you how He felt about the way you loved Him. Because He has a very precise record of your entire life from the day you were born again.

LIVE AND LOVE THE LORD IN SUCH A WAY AS TO RECEIVE A CROWN

I want to live in such a way that when I stand before the Lord, He gives me a crown. There are nine verses in the New Testament about receiving crowns. Crowns aren't synonymous with salvation. Not every believer gets a crown. I'm living like Paul said: to receive a crown. He was already saved when he said that; he wasn't trying to get saved. The crown that Jesus will put on the heads of some believers will be a statement about how Jesus feels about the way He loved them while they were on the earth. They'll have that crown forever and forever and forever. Beloved, I want that crown. I believe most believers won't end up with that crown. I don't know the percentage; I'm thinking it's more rare than common, but I don't know for sure. I want it, though. I want to stand before Him and I want Him to walk over to me and say to me, “You loved Me hard with all your heart. You were weak and broken, but you kept signing back up to obey Me and pursue Me. Here is how I feel about the way you lived.” And He puts this trophy, this expression of love, this crown on my head. That's the dream of my future. I don't mean a dream in the night, I mean my aspiration. “I want this. I want this. I want these rewards. I want to be near You.” We'll all have access to His heart in eternity, but many of you will be closer to the Lord than others. That's another subject for another day. On our website, I have a number of teachings on

this, but this is a vast subject that most believers are completely ignorant about and it's the most important subject of their entire life.

SAVED BY HIS WORK, REWARDED BY OUR WORKS

Paragraph F. We're saved by a free gift because of Jesus' work. You can't earn your salvation; it's a free gift because of His work. But you're rewarded based on your work. Your entrance into heaven is because of what He did; your place in heaven is because of what you do. I want to say that again; you must get this clear. Your entrance into the eternal city, into heaven, your entrance into it is based on what He did on the cross. Your place in the city, your function in the city, is based on what you did while on the earth after your salvation.

WEAKNESS ISN'T A HINDRANCE TO PROFOUND REWARD

People have this confusion about works. I hear it all the time. There's more confusion about where works fit. People say the common phrase—it's half true and half false—"I'm not into works."

I say, "Well, it depends on what you mean by that statement."

"No brother, I'm into grace. I'm not into works."

I say, "If you mean you're not trying to earn your salvation, that's a true statement. If you mean you have no value in what you do related to your place in the age to come, you're greatly deceived and mistaken."

Your works really do matter. They don't gain you an entrance into the city, but they do determine your role in the city. I tell you one thing for sure: you will never manipulate the Man Christ Jesus. There's nothing you'll tell Him on that day that will change the truth about the way we responded to Him while we were on the earth. I'm not talking about our weakness; we all have profound weakness. Our weakness doesn't get in the way. It really doesn't. If we repent of our weakness and we chase hard after Him and we fail again, repent, chase hard, fail again, chase hard, we can press delete, delete, delete and it's gone. Because when we fail, when we really repent, and I don't mean fake repent, but really repent and war against the area that made us stumble, that's a good work in His sight. That really matters. That really matters. It's within the reach of every one of you, to be rewarded in a profound way in the age to come. It's not based on how big your ministry is, how good your ministry is, how great your abilities are. It's based on one thing: your heart responses according to the abilities He gave you.

"I WILL GIVE TO EVERY ONE OF YOU ACCORDING TO YOUR WORKS"

Look at what Jesus said about works. This is Jesus talking. How many of you know Jesus has really good doctrines? Jesus understands salvation by faith really well. He's a good Bible teacher. Here is what He said: When He comes at the second coming, He will reward each person according to their works (Mt. 16:27).

He says, "You get in the city for free, but I will reward you based on your works." Later in the book of Revelation, Jesus appears to John the apostle and He says the same thing. He's talking about the second coming when you read the context. He says, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give everyone according to his work" (Rev. 22:12).

Jesus thinks your works are really important. This statement that's half true and half false, "I'm not into works," is confused. Beloved, it matters what you mean by that statement. You had better be into works if you're talking

about the way you respond to God after your salvation. You had better not be into works if you're talking about the way you receive the free gift. I've heard that statement a hundred times over the years. I ask them, "What exactly do you mean by works?" Because you may have good doctrine with a seed of error in it. Jesus thinks good works are important.

YOU'RE NOT REWARDED ACCORDING TO PLANS OR INTENTIONS, BUT WORKS

Top of page seventeen. You're not rewarded according to your life vision. You're not rewarded according to your plans. You're rewarded according to your follow through, your good works. Here's what I mean by this. I meet young people all the time, and old people as well, who have a fiery life vision: "I'm going to change the world, go deeply in God, be a man or woman of prayer, move in the Spirit, confront devils, change cities." I mean, wow, wow, wow. Their life vision is awesome. On life vision, give them an A-plus.

I say, "What's your plan?"

"All my money is going to be God's, all my time is going to be God's, I'm going to be a servant. I'm going to go deeply in the Word. I'm going to grow in the Word and in love."

"Good plan." A-plus on vision and A-plus on plan. But Jesus doesn't reward us based on our plan. He loves us and part of that is our intention. Our intentions matter; even though we sometimes fail in carrying them out, it does bring joy to the Lord when we have right intentions. But they don't bring rewards. He enjoys your right intentions, but He won't reward you based on intention; He rewards based on follow through, on works. He says, "Mike, I love your heart. I love relating to you, but only what you actually do is going to show up in the age to come as a reward."

I've been very careful—not careful enough, but I've been pretty careful over the years. I want to follow through. I don't mean follow through when you're watching me; it's easy to follow through when people are watching. I mean follow through when no one is watching but His eyes. I want to follow through. He's watching. He's writing it in His book. He rewards us based on deeds, what we do, not what we plan to do.

PLANNING TO DO WELL IS NOT ENOUGH; PERSEVERANCE IS NEEDED

I've been a pastor for right at thirty-five years. I know many people in their twenties, thirties, and forties, who planned to do well. Now they're in their forties, fifties, and sixties; they didn't follow through. Those were just plans, and they did nothing with them. I know thousands of them. I say, "God, I don't want to be like that." Beloved, most of you are in your twenties. You're at the age where you can have a life filled with responsiveness, even in your weakness. You fail, you repent, you sign back up, and you war against your sin. I tell you, you will surely find follow through in the days to come in the areas in which you're stumbling if you stay with it. Don't give up, don't give in, and you'll find breakthrough in time. Stay with it.

"FOR WE MUST ALL APPEAR BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST"

Paragraph H. 2 Corinthians 5:9-11. Paul made one of the most dynamic statements about his life. I want you to follow Paul's logic. This is one of the most important statements that Paul makes about his life, his heart. He opens his heart and says, "I'll let you know what motivates me now." He says in verse 9, "We make it our aim to be well pleasing to Jesus" (2 Cor. 5:9, paraphrased). Why? "[Because] we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (v. 10, NKJV). Each one of us will receive a reward for the things that are done with

our body (v. 10b). Our words count as things done with our body. Our words are considered deeds and actions. Again, it's not something you plan to do; it's what you actually did with your body.

“KNOWING, THEREFORE, THE TERROR OF THE LORD, WE PERSUADE MEN”

Now look at the next verse: “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11). Paul said, “I have the terror of the Lord. I feel the fear of God.” He didn't mean he was afraid of God in a negative sense. He was saying, “This is the most awesome, terrifying responsibility, to know that what I do each day is actually remembered forever.” He says, “This really gets hold of me. It fills my heart with the fear of the Lord, with the terror of the Lord. And knowing this, I persuade other people.”

Beloved, I'm persuading you about this because I believe this is the most solemn day of your life. I believe this about my life. It's the most solemn day. I feel the fear of the Lord. Therefore I want to talk you into it. When this truth touches you, you'll want to talk your loved ones into this. Paul said, “It's not enough for me that I know it; I want to tell others. I want to convince other human beings of the importance of this solemn day in their life.”

“WE ARE WELL KNOWN TO GOD”

Then Paul goes on to make a most remarkable statement. He says, “But we are well known to God” (2 Cor. 5:11b). That was the key to Paul's life: we are well known to God. What Paul was saying is, “I'm very aware that God is aware of everything I'm doing. He sees the desire of my heart; He sees every little act of obedience. He sees it. Not one small act of obedience is overlooked by God—not even one.” He says, “I'm well known.” Beloved, you can give someone a cup of cold water. No man will ever see it, but God will see it. It's well known by God. This motivated Paul. He says, “God sees when I say no to lust and temptation and bitterness and pride, and when no one else sees it, God sees it. I know that He knows and I know that it moves Him and I know that He will reward me on the last day by expressing His enthusiasm for the way I loved Him.”

“WE MAKE IT OUR AIM... TO BE WELL PLEASING TO HIM”

Let's break this down just for a few moments; then we'll take a break and look at this subject in a different light in the next session. Paul said, “We make it our aim to be well pleasing.” Beloved, what's the aim of your life? When Paul said, “My aim,” he meant the primary dream of his life.

YOUR SPOUSE WILL LOVE YOU FAR MORE IF HE OR SHE LOVES GOD MORE

Every human being has a primary dream. It's the dream that's bigger than all the other dreams. We don't only have one dream, we have many dreams. We picture the future and we imagine our finances, ministry, relationships—there are many facets related to what we dream about in the future. Those are good, but there's one dream that's above all the other dreams. For most people, their primary dream, the thing they daydream about the most, is getting more money, getting a bigger ministry, falling in love, and having a great marriage. Those are all cool things. Having a good ministry is cool; having money is cool; being in love is cool. Those are great things. I want to tell you this: if that's what you have made the primary aim of your life, you're going to end up with all kinds of spiritual confusion. They must be secondary. Husbands, you'll love your wives far better if Jesus is number one in your life. Ladies, get a man who loves Jesus more than he loves you and he will come to love you even more than he does now, I assure you. You won't lose anything if he's on fire for God; he'll actually love you far better. Men, it's the same thing with the ladies. Get a woman who loves Jesus more than she loves you and she'll love you far more than she does now. I assure you, that's how it works.

THE THING THAT PLEASES GOD THE MOST IS LOVING HIM FIRST

Paul said, “It’s my primary dream to be well pleasing.” Over “well pleasing” you can write, “for the first commandment to be first.” The thing that’s most pleasing to God is when we love God with all our heart. Jesus said, “That’s the first thing; that’s the great thing” (Mt. 22:37-38, paraphrased). That’s what God wants most. He wants that more than a big ministry; He wants that more than big money. He wants you to have a big heart to love Him with all your heart. That’s what He wants most. Paul said, “That’s the number one dream in my life. It’s my aim. I’ve made it my aim.”

YOUR MINISTRY WILL BRUISE AND BETRAY YOU IF YOU MAKE IT YOUR PRIMARY AIM

Every young man, every young woman, has to decide, “What’s the primary dream of my life?” Many fiery young men choose a powerful ministry. That’s their primary dream. Let me tell you, that will trick you; it will backfire on you if it’s your primary dream. That will bruise you and burn you out more than you know. It will betray you. Sometimes they pick a prosperous business. Prosperity is good. Others pick relationships. Those are good, too. I urge you to make it your aim to be well pleasing to Him. It’s a decision that you make that no one else can make. Only you can make it. It’s a paradigm shift—meaning it’s a shift in the whole way you picture your life.

ONLY YOU CAN DECIDE WHAT THE NUMBER ONE DREAM OF YOUR LIFE IS

There was a time in my life, in my late teens, early twenties—I did it several times—where I began to picture my future differently. Instead of picturing my future related to money and ministry and marriage and friends, I begin to picture my future under the anointing to love God with all my heart. That became the predominant picture in my mind when I looked at my forties, fifties, and sixties: will I have the anointing to love God with all my heart? That became my primary daydream. I still want a successful ministry; I want a good marriage; I want financial blessing; I want health. I want all those things. The Lord has blessed me in those areas. But they’re not the number one picture of my life. They’re not the way I picture my future, even today.

I urge you, even before we leave today, that some of you would shift the dream of your heart and make it different. Because Paul said, “We make it our aim.” God won’t make you do this; no one else can do this for you. Only you can decide what the number one dream of your life is. Paul said he made it his dream to be well pleasing, to walk in the first commandment. That’s what that means in New Testament language.

GOD VALUES EVEN THE SMALLEST EFFORTS THAT WE MAKE TO LOVE HIM

Paragraph J. Now he tells us why. Why do we want to be well pleasing? Because we must stand before the Lord and give an account. Paul said, “I want to be well pleasing. I love Him, but I know that it will matter one day. I know one day I shall stand before Him and there’s no way to avoid this solemn appointment in my life.” It’s foolishness to think that somehow this day won’t come. It really will come. He said, “Because of that, I’m going to stand before the Judge who gives out the gold medals. I’m going to stand before the Judge who gives the gold and silver.” He’s not talking about a negative judgment; he’s talking about reward here. Beloved, I want the rewards where Jesus expresses the way He feels about the way that I loved Him.

“Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men, because we are well known to God” (2 Cor. 5:11, paraphrased). Paragraph L. We’re well known to God. Paul knew that God’s eyes were on him. Paul knew that God cared about even the smallest efforts he was making to love Him. Beloved, God knows you well. He watches. You’re lying on your bed at night; you’re crying out to obey Him in a greater way. He sees that; that moves Him. He sees you saying, “You know what, I’m going to make my ministry and money and marriage

and everything else secondary. I'm going to make the anointing to walk in the first commandment first." He sees that and it moves Him. He writes that in His book.

LIVE FOR THE EVERLASTING APPLAUSE OF THE MAN CHRIST JESUS

Paragraph M. Which applause and which audience are we living before? It's most natural for us to live before the audience of men. If the cool people like us, we get better jobs, more money, we get bigger opportunities, and we have cool friends. If the big men like us, we go forward. So it's our natural tendency to live before the eyes of men, whether it's leaders in the Church, leaders in the community, leaders in the family. We want men and women to say, "Wow, you're awesome."

But Jesus warned us, "You can really get off track living mostly before the audience of men." Live before the audience of His eyes. Live for the applause of the Man Christ Jesus. Because I tell you, you will stand before Him one day. When He applauds you on that day and rewards you at that reward seat, that judgment seat, that reward will last forever.

Here in Matthew 6, Jesus encouraged us to live a life of charitable deeds, but He said, "Don't do it as before men; do it before the eyes of God. If you do it before God's eyes, He will reward you forever" (Mt. 6:1-4, paraphrased).

MOSES RESISTED THE PLEASURES OF SIN BY LIVING BEFORE THE INVISIBLE GOD

Paragraph N. Hebrews 11. Moses was a very radical, obedient man of God. His obedience was radical. He resisted sin. He embraced hardship because of obedience. Why? Hebrews 11 tells us. Moses chose rather to suffer affliction than to enjoy the momentary pleasure of sin (Heb. 11:25). How did Moses resist sin? It tells us here in verse 26. "He looked to the reward ... He endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:26-27). Moses looked into a vision of being watched by the invisible God. Moses said, "No one else knows that You're watching me because they can't see You, but I know You're watching me. You're invisible, but I know You're watching me and You're rewarding me." He made the most radical decisions and he endured difficulty in his obedience because he saw Him who is invisible.

Here is my question: can you see Him who is invisible? His name is Jesus. Well, a little? We have to see Him to some degree, by the eyes of our spirit, by faith, in order to be saved. Beloved, it's not enough for me to just see Him enough to be saved. I want to see Him enough to endure and to press into holiness and to obey God. I want to see Him that clearly. The Word of God makes it clear: He will open the eyes of your spirit. I want to see that He's looking at me.

Paul said, "I'm well known to God. God is gazing on me all the time." Paul wasn't saying that in a negative way. He was saying, "This is exciting. Because when no one notices my obedience, He does. When no one else sees me saying yes to purity and no to lust, He does, and it moves Him, and He remembers it." Beloved, we need to see Him who is unseen.

"GOD IS NOT UNJUST TO FORGET YOUR WORK AND LABOR OF LOVE"

Paragraph Q on page nineteen. Just another moment or two and then we'll take a break and take a look at the next set of notes. We'll stay on the same subject, but we'll go a different direction with it.

“God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints” (Heb. 6:10). Here is what the writer of Hebrews is saying: God will never forget one single act of service or obedience that you have done to someone else because you love Him. You could give someone a cup of cold water and they may not even know why you were motivated to do it—because you love Jesus. You want to serve others. Maybe you give money; you give time; you give words of encouragement. The work is inconvenient; the work is hard; the work is unnoticed by man, but you do it because you know you love Him and the Word of God says this. God won't forget even one small deed you do because you love Jesus in the way you serve other people. I can help a friend and encourage them when my body is tired and inconvenient. I love Jesus, and therefore I want to love this person. They may not even appreciate what I'm doing, but Jesus nods and says, “I'll remember this, and we'll talk about this again in the age to come.” I mean, I forget about it, but He doesn't. He charges Himself with injustice. He says, “You could call Me an unjust God if I forget one single deed you have ever done, if I don't write it in My book. You can charge Me with injustice on the last day.” I assure you, He will remember every single deed you do.

THE EXCHANGE RATE WILL NEVER BE HIGHER THAN IT IS RIGHT NOW

Paragraph R. I love this statement here. This is the only time in your eternal existence where the exchange rate is so high. Right now you can give Jesus time and money and it's exchanged into eternal gold. Beloved, the exchange rate will never be higher than it is right now. In the age to come, for billions of years, we can give ourselves to Him, but we'll never get a greater reward than when we give ourselves to Him now. This is the time to cash in. You can speak words of blessing; you can press into God, give your money to the kingdom, serve people, even though they're not grateful for it, and you look up and say, “I'm doing it for You, before Your eyes.”

Beloved, the exchange rate is awesome, because He pays so well when we do so little. This is the time to cash in. This is the time to get rich. I'm not joking.

SOME LABOR FOR GOLD THAT PERISHES, OTHER FOR GOLD THAT ENDURES FOREVER

I remember telling our young people at IHOP-KC, “I committed to live a simple lifestyle over thirty years ago. I committed to give as much money as I could to the kingdom.”

For thirty-five years I've had people tell me, “You have to take more money.”

I say, “No.”

They would say, “Well, you're into poverty.”

I say, “No, you've really got me wrong.” Of course they didn't know about my judgment seat experience at the age of twenty-three. I say, “You've got me all wrong. I love money; I love riches.”

They would say, “You do?”

I say, “Yes, I just want them forever. You just want them for a few decades; I want them forever.”

I mean it. That's not a joke. I say, “You're content with a big house now,” and big houses can be in the will of God for sure, but I said, “I want a big house forever, and I mean it. I'll invite you over. I'm really into

everything big, but I want it forever.” I mean it; this isn’t a joke. I’m sober about this. I want to be great; I want to be rich; I want to be powerful. I want to be close to Jesus for billions of years, so I’m willing to go without a lot of things right now.

I believe this stuff. I really believe it. I charge you to believe it. It’s in the Bible. Let’s end with that.