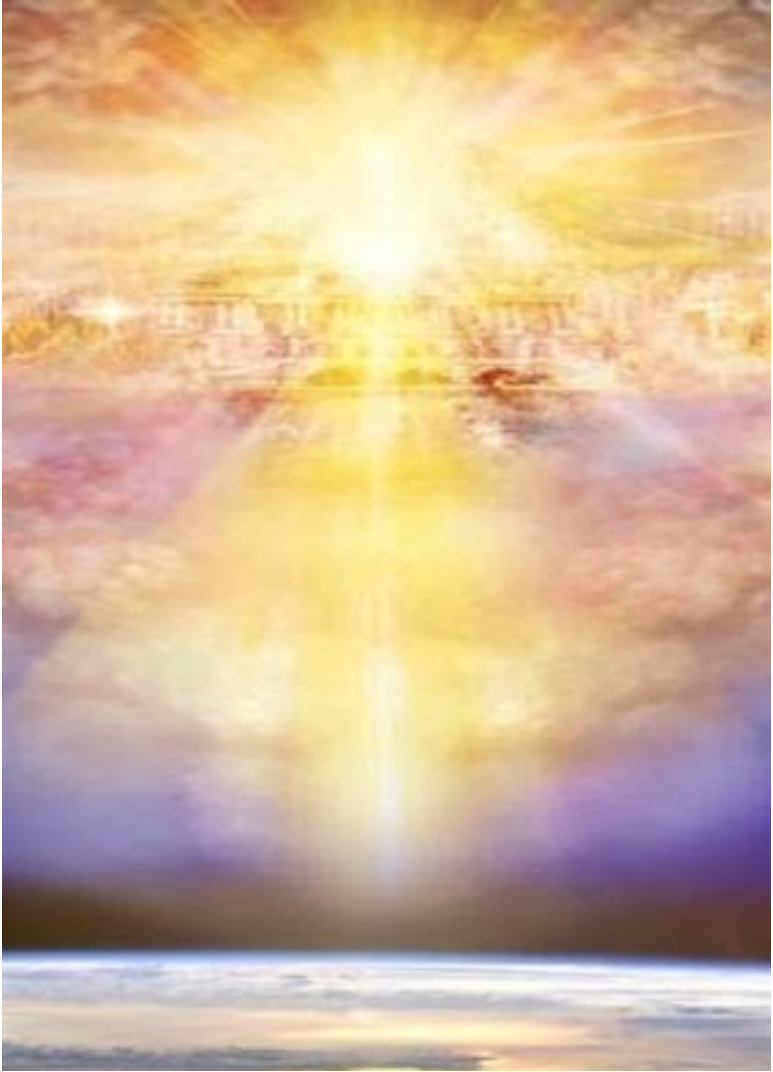


Volume 9: Above the Fray



Things to Come
and Why They Matter
An Introductory Study in Prophecy

Prophecy Series Sermons

Our sermon series for the summer of 2014 investigated the subject of prophecy. The response by the congregation at Vistoso Community Church was so encouraging, that we are publishing each of the sermons both in booklet form and online on our web site.

The first five sermons were released in booklet form in January of 2015. These are the final five booklets that complete our Prophecy series:

- Volume 6: When and Why Will the Believing be Leaving?
- Volume 7: The Signs of the Times
- Volume 8: Two Destinies
- **Volume 9: Above the Fray**
- Volume 10: Connecting the Pieces



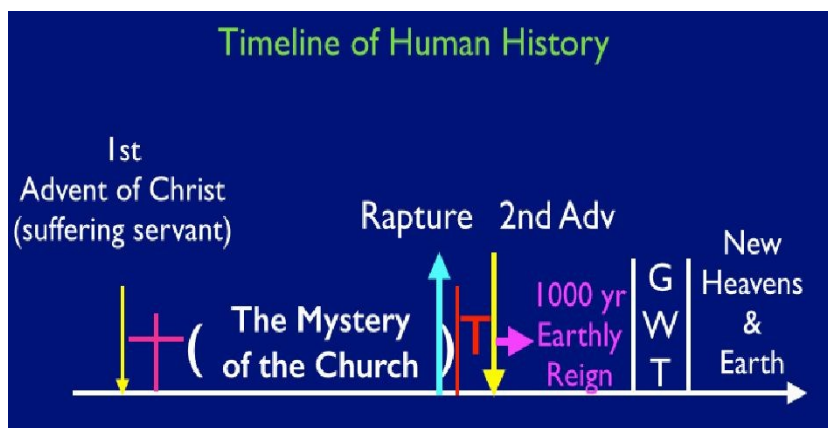
In His grace,

Kevin Redig, Pastor
Vistoso Community Church

Volume 9: Above the Fray

An Introduction

We have finished building the basic timeline for the remainder of human history; specifically, a prophetic timeline built upon our understanding of God's Word.



We began by establishing the fact of Christ's certain return at what we have referred to as His *Second Advent*. From there, we moved forward in time to discuss the establishment of a literal Kingdom over which Christ will reign for 1000 years as King of kings and Lord of lords. After quashing Satan's last rebellion, all those who died without Christ throughout all of human history are judged at what we have labeled the *Great White Throne of Judgment*. Finally, the current heavens and earth are destroyed, and God ushers in eternity via a new heavens, new earth and New Jerusalem. We also looked at two events that occurred prior to the return of Jesus Christ; specifically, a seven-year period of the out-pouring of God's wrath called the Tribulation which is preceded by God's snatching away of His Church.

Now after our study, I think we would all agree that the Tribulation is going to be a terrible, terrible time in the earth's history. The reason—it is a time of the outpouring of God's wrath. Half the earth's population will die during this short time—the one bright spot is that the tremendous pressure that comes upon the human race will cause many to turn to God. And, as mentioned, praise God that He is going to snatch away His Bride, the Church, prior to the releasing of the Antichrist and the judgment that follows. Now here is where we begin to focus today's study. During the timeframe of the Tribulation, there is something going on at the same time in heaven, in fact, two things that should draw our attention. This is the reason for today's title: *Above the Fray*. While the Tribulation is playing out on earth the Bema Seat Judgment and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb will be playing out in heaven. Consider the revised and expanded graphic.



Now what would lead us to the conclusion that these two events, the Bema Seat Judgment and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, are occurring simultaneously in heaven, while the Tribulation is unfolding on earth?

Two things for you to consider. First:

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each ones praise will come from God.

I Corinthians 4:5

We start with the subject of judging, and then the admonition to leave it until the Lord comes. What coming? Is it His coming to take His Bride, the Church, to be with Him forever; or is it coming to rule and reign on this earth fulfilling His covenants to the Jewish people? Since this passage is to the church in Corinth, the timeline we have already developed would lead us to conclude that we are to leave judgment, at least as far as the Church is concerned, to the time of the Rapture. The passage continues to reveal to us that following the Rapture—then will be brought to light “hidden things” and the “counsels of the heart” and, if warranted, praise from God. So in summary, we have a judgment related to the Church that is occurring following the Rapture, which as we have learned is the same time as the Tribulation is unfolding.

We will develop this in more detail shortly; but for now, let me introduce a second event for your consideration:

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. These he said to me, Write: “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the lamb!” And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God.”

Revelation 19:7-9

And then in the very next verse heaven opens and Christ returns. So in the context of Revelation 19, at a minimum, the Bride of Christ is declared ready as she stands in heaven, and as we shall see, her raiment is related to an evaluation of her deeds. Are you following? As believers living right now, during the time of the Church, we are told to leave judgment until a time period following the Rapture. Furthermore, the determination of “righteous acts” would naturally occur during this judgment, which is then connected to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb—and all before Christ returns to reign (and us with Him). This is the time-frame of the Tribulation, but it is occurring in heaven, that is *Above the Fray!*

The Four Phases of a Jewish Wedding

Now there is much more to add, and although the Bema Seat Judgment is chronologically the place to start, it will help our understanding if we first discuss the historical setting of a Jewish wedding at the time of Christ. We need to understand that it consists of four parts—and each one has a close parallel within the plan of God.

1. The Selection of the Bride

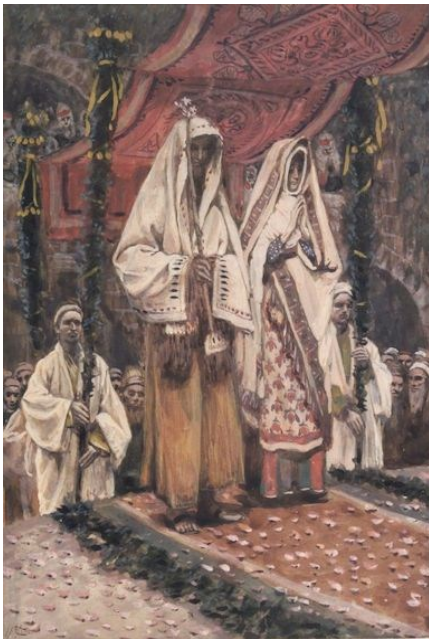
This was done by the Father (presumably with input by the mother and the groom), and often occurred at a young age. Now consider the following Scripture and see if you can identify the parallels.

- **... He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him. . .** Ephesians 1:4
- **Husbands love your wives as Christ also loved the church. . .** Ephesians 5:25

Do you see it? The Father chose us, the Church—individually and collectively, before even this world was created. Furthermore, the entire section that encompasses Ephesians 5:25 goes back and forth contrasting the husband/wife relationship with the relationship between Christ and His bride, the Church.

2. The Betrothal

Consider this the contractual part of the marriage, for this included an oral commitment before witnesses on the



part of those involved from each family, plus, typically, the transfer of money, and the signing of a written contract. The bride and groom were considered husband and wife at this point. (This is why it was such a serious matter in Matthew 1:18 where it says Mary was, “betrothed to Joseph. . . found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.” For not only was Mary pregnant, but she was legally married at the time she

was found to be so.) Again, look at how strongly the parallel stands in Paul’s mind:

“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

II Corinthians 11:2

The betrothal in particular has a richness of parallels between a Jewish wedding at the time of Christ and between Christ and the Church. For example, it was customary for the groom to present a gift to the wife's father—Christ's sacrifice on the cross was in obedience to the Father's will. There was also a dowry from the bride's father to the bride and ultimately to the groom—how about the gift of the Holy Spirit who is a deposit “guaranteeing our inheritance.” Finally, there was a gift from the groom to the bride—Christ in us is the hope of glory!

3. The Marriage *Presentation*

When all was ready for the bride and groom to begin their lives together—often in the home of the groom's father, the groom would come for his wife. The whole thing might begin with the words the groom was waiting to hear from His father: “Go get your bride and bring her home!” That is what is happening in Matthew 25:6 in the midst of the parable of the ten virgins—they had been patiently waiting for the betrothal to be consummated, but some were simply not ready when the groom finally did arrive.

This event typically happened at night, and consisted of a joyous precession from the groom's home to that of the bride. The bride's father would put his daughter's hand into that of the groom's, and he would take her away, as mentioned, often to reside in his father's house. Do you see the connection—this is what we—the Church—are waiting for as the Bride of Christ. The Father is soon going to give the command: “Go and get Your Bride, and bring her to the home that you have prepared!” It would be equivalent to say: “Go and get Your Church and bring her to Heaven.” We, as the Bride, are waiting for this glorious day to occur.

4. Lastly, there is the *Marriage Supper*

Following the presentation of the bride, the groom and a procession of those involved would head to a feast—very similar to our reception. It would typically be hosted by a close friend, and unlike our wedding celebrations, the bridegroom would be the center of attention. This feast would last for anywhere between one and seven days, and in some cases even longer. (Keep the extended nature of a particularly noteworthy wedding in mind as we investigate this further.) We see both the future marriage supper of the Lamb of God in Revelation 19, and the consequences of rejecting the invitation to attend in Matthew 22:1-14. Notice in Rev 19:7:

Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!

This passage strikes both a joyous note and occurs just before heaven opens and Jesus returns. So this supper is clearly at the end of the Tribulation and announced in heaven prior to the return of Christ.

So in summary: the Bride—the Church—has been selected and the Betrothal has occurred! (see II Corinthians 11:2). And right now, at our time in history, we are waiting for the Presentation (the groom to come to take His bride to Himself) and the joyous marriage celebration that will apparently occur in heaven. Now before we investigate this glorious Marriage Supper to come, something every believer should be looking forward to, we must investigate something else that must come first.



Again, it is a principle associated with the ancient wedding practices of the Jews—attendance at a wedding feast required a special kind of wedding clothing. Notice in Revelation 19, the same passage that introduces the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, states that:

... the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Revelation 19:7-8

Do you see the issue of both clothing and what it represents? Some kind of evaluation has taken place that has resulted in a certain kind of clothing being given to the saints (Church-age believers).

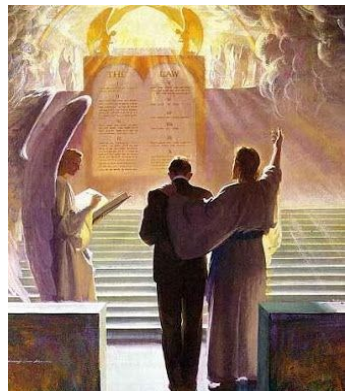
When did this happen? First, let's establish the reality of the evaluation. Consider the following passage:

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.

II Corinthians 5:10

The Bema Seat Judgment

Romans 14:2 reinforces this reality of the evaluation by stating that we must all “give an account to God.” The word translated *judgment* in the above verse is the Greek word Bema. This concept of a coming Bema evaluation for every Church-age child of God is so important, that I want to break it down step-by-step.



Placing the Judgment

The first thing that we need to do is to properly place this particular judgment. If we do, much will fall into place.

- **For the saved.** II Corinthians 5:10, quoted above, in context is clearly addressed to *saved* individuals during the Church-age (this concept is not found in the Old Testament).
- **When God Comes.** Furthermore, notice the content of 1 Corinthians 4:5.

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

Do you see it? Judgment is to occur when God comes—and again I ask the same question as earlier, is this a reference to His coming for His Church or His return to reign and rule on this earth? Given that both I and II Corinthians are written to the church, it is most reasonable to understand this to be the raptured Church. At the Second Coming, there will be no Church and there will be a mixture of those who have believed and those who have not. (That is why this judgment is described as a separation of the sheep from the goats in Matthew 25:32).

Understanding the Term

It is also very important to understand the term *bema*. It literally refers to an elevated platform from which an authority figure would make official pronouncements. It could be simple legal issues, but more often the bestowal of some kind of reward. It was also the place where the officials would render decisions on whether or not athletes at the ancient games had participated by the rules or were to be disqualified.

It bears little resemblance to the formal legal setting that we studied at the Great White Throne judgment in our previous lesson. That is because what is being evaluated is totally different. Can you see it from the basic meaning of the term—every believer is going to stand before God for an evaluation of their life as a Christian. It is a place where God intends to bestow reward, but there are going to be those who are found to be *disqualified* for a failure to *obey the rules*, that is failure to live as disciples of Christ appropriating the grace He has provided to do so.

Understanding Salvation

It would appear then, that our salvation is not at issue! Well then exactly what is? In I Corinthians, Chapter 3, Paul is very clear—as Christians, there is only one foundation upon which we can build our lives, and that is the foundation of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, what we build through the course of our lives as Christians will be characterized as either something of value or something of little worth. And this is what the Bema Judgment is all about—for following the Rapture of the Church, every Christian will appear before the Bema Seat of Christ to have his or her life's work evaluated! Here is how it will play out:

Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay , straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Corinthians 3:12-15

Do you see how clearly this judgment is not about eternal salvation, but about eternal reward? This very fact is explicitly stated in the text! It is more subtle, but sin is not the issue either.



Even back in II Corinthians 5:10 where the issue of *bad* or *good* works is raised, the word translated bad means worthless or inferior and not inherently evil. Furthermore, as Christians, our sin debt has been *paid in full* and the issue of sin no longer stands between us and God.

Rather, what is going to be scrutinized by the Lord is the quality of the life lived. Personally, as we stand before the Lord and have our lives evaluated by Him for their quality—if there is going to be a moment of angst in heaven for each of us, I would have to say it is going to be right here. Pastor Erwin Lutzer captures the solemnity of this occasion in the following quote:

Imagine staring into the face of Christ. Just the two of you, one-on-one! Your entire life is present before you. In a flash you see what He sees. No hiding. No opportunity to put a better spin on what you did. No attorney to represent you. The look in His eyes says it all. Like it or not, that is precisely where you and I shall be someday.

(E. Lutzer)

Let me put it this way based upon the things we have studied in our last few lessons: If you are going to have a moment of angst—you want it to be at the Bema Judgment and not the Great White Throne. You want it to be in heaven as part of the snatched away Bride of Christ and not those who begin the Tribulation because of their rejection of Christ. You want it to be at the hand of the Lord to whose cross you cling and not before the righteous judge you rejected.

Human Viewpoint Baggage

Not only should the coming Bema-seat judgment motivate us to appropriate what God has provided for us to follow after Him, but it is also very important for us to realize that without a doubt, we carry a lot of human-viewpoint *baggage* when it comes to this subject. In the 20th chapter of Matthew you can see a hint of this in the parable of the laborers who are hired at various times throughout the day. Those who worked a full day (served the Lord the majority of their lives) are quite put out when those who were hired late in the day (those who have a late-in-life conversion) receive the same pay (reward).

I have sometimes noticed that the predominant attitude toward a death-bed conversion is often more disdain than the rejoicing it should be! If we will allow the Spirit to speak to us and, if we will soften our hearts, we will soon realize this whole matter is far beyond our limited understanding. Only God can appropriately factor in length of service, gifting, opportunities, family circumstances, and so on. One thing we can count on—He will judge in perfect fairness. I suggest we stay away from any potential discipline by presumptuously assuming any of His prerogative. I rejoice in the narrative regarding the *thief-on-the-cross* for it makes it clear it is never too late to change your mind about who Jesus is! (Luke 23:39-f)

The Concept of Crowns

The concept of eternal rewards is explained obliquely via the concept of *crowns*. (There are other ways as well, such as: reigning, certain clothing, *taking charge*, and so on.) I don't think we are meant to have the specifics, but rather are to simply focus upon the desirability of receiving rewards from the hand of our Savior. Let's take a brief look at what the Scripture has to say about at least a few of the crowns available to the believer:

The Victor's Crown: This passage talks about an imperishable crown for those who win the race:

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. Now everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we do it for an imperishable crown. I Corinthians 9:24-25

The passage goes on to reveal that winning the race is the living of a disciplined life; which in the context, Paul describes as not just being a "proclaimer of the Word," but also a doer. His encouragement to the Corinthian believers ends with the concept of *disqualification*. Many have said that this supports the concept that one can lose their salvation. I hope you immediately see that what can be lost is the reward at the Bema-seat Judgment. And so, what Paul is encouraging all of us to do is to finish *strong* in *our* Christian Life!



The Martyr's Crown: This encouragement to persevere through persecution was given to the Church in Smyrna—and it fact has great applicability to many Christians around the world right now:

“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, I will give you the crown of life.”

Revelation 2:10

What can Christians who face persecution know for sure? God will reward them for their faithfulness!

The Elder's Crown: This is a special crown (reward) for those who are called to shepherd God's people, and I think it very likely extends to those whom God has called to a number of leadership roles within the Church.

“To the elders among you. . . Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly; not for dishonest gain, but eagerly; not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” Peter 5:1-4



The Crown of Righteousness: This is my favorite, for it does not depend upon special gifting or circumstances.

But instead, it is related to a response to the truth of God's certain return that every Christian can choose to have.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

II Timothy 4:8

Specifically, speaking to “love His appearing!” In part, I take this to be the idea of ordering one's life around the reality of the coming evaluation of our lives following the model of Titus, Chapter 2:

. . . denying ungodliness and worldly lusts. . . living upright and godly lives in the midst of this present age looking for the Blessed Hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. . .

Notice how this hope, this longing, has the effect of both purifying one's life and prompting endurance.

Crown of Rejoicing. This is the disciple-maker's crown. I learned many years ago that there are two things we come in contact with every day that last forever—people and the Word of God.

For what is our hope, our joy, our crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.

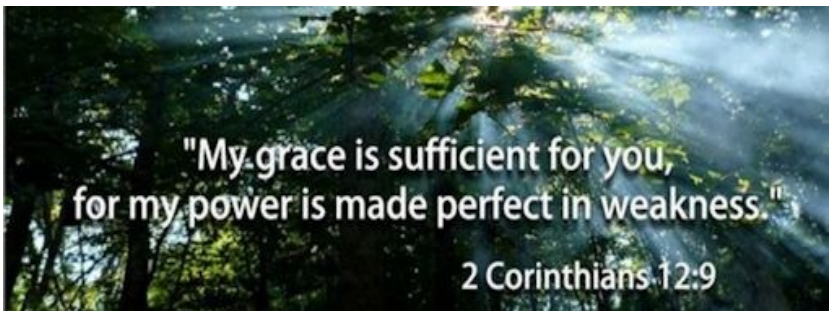
1Thessalonians 2:19-20

The ultimate way we can value people, who are made in the image and likeness of God, is to hold out to them the Word of life that they might become part of the family of God. It is those saved individuals in which we will be able to rejoice in the presence of our Lord at His coming!

God's Viewpoint

Now the above emphasis on rewards naturally tends to lead to a kind of misunderstanding that I want to nip before it takes hold. Specifically, the attitude that we are "saved by grace," BUT judged (rewarded) by works. This, in turn, is typically communicated in a host of spoken and unspoken ways, such as, "So get out there and get to work! Earn those crowns! By the way, the Nominating Committee is about to begin its work, so be sure to volunteer!"

Do you really think this is the correct application of what I am trying to teach you? Of course not. I think it is very important that we don't head off in the wrong direction in our thinking with respect to rewards; and I know it is so easy to do so. There are so many things which can result in a distortion of the truth. And if we do get caught up in trying to *force out* works, for some, the pressure is going to lead to discouragement over their failures. For others, their work is going to result in a kind of self-righteousness over their assumed successes. We must absolutely guard against both scenarios. So let me show you my understanding of God's intent in revealing to us the coming reality of the Bema Seat Judgment, and why I think it is essential that it be correctly understood by every Christian.



Bema Seat Judgement

A proper understanding of the Bema Seat Judgment is meant to cause sober reflection, profound amazement, and active engagement!

Part of understanding why is to understand that for every truth we can uncover from the Scriptures, there is a right interpretation and many wrong—but typically a common wrong. Let me walk you through this:

Saved by Grace. Correctly understanding this, doesn't guarantee we understand the rest!

- **Right:** God does the work of salvation, and we, although undeserving, accept it by faith.
- **Wrong:** God does the work of salvation, but we have to first be sincere, repent of ever sinning again, and so on.

Judged by Works. This is the point at which the Bema Seat Judgment comes into focus.

- **Right:**

We are his workmanship. . . created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10

Work out your salvation. . . for it is God who works to will and to do His good pleasure. Philippians 2:13

- **Wrong:** Get to work, start squeezing out those good deeds, get on the *works* treadmill. Doesn't matter what you do, just do it with a good heart and sincerity.

In the power of _____ .

- **Right:**

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13

**I have been crucified with Christ, I no longer live,
nevertheless Christ lives in me. . .** Galatians 2:20

Lord, when did I feed you, clothe you, . . .
Matthew 25:44

I find this last passage particularly challenging, as it presents a certain *humble unawareness* of doing things that might be of note to the Lord.

- **Wrong:** That I might have an eternal home in the finest part of the New Jerusalem.

Look at the whole string again:

- **Saved by grace**
- **Judged by works**—that have been done in accordance with the express purposes of God.
- **In the power of the Spirit and Christ within**—with an expectation that His intentions will be accomplished for the purpose of giving Him the glory.



And did you discern that every single part of this is grace—just like our salvation. God provides what we need at each part in order to bring glory to Himself. We must understand this way of doing things on God's part.

Here is how you can tell whether or not it has:

- If you are so overwhelmed by the work to do that it is keeping you from spending time with Him and allowing Him to sort out priorities—then you don't yet have it. In fact, as a church fellowship, here is our arrangement: if you ever feel overwhelmed by the demands of ministry, come and see me, and we will take it to the Lord and let Him straighten it out.

- If you are exhausted by the works you think you should be doing—then you are not doing them in His strength. Perhaps you are doing more than He wants—just like gathering more manna than is needed for the day.
- If you are boastful about the works you accomplish—doing them for men to see—then you have your reward and should expect nothing additional.
- If you are thinking ahead to what you are going to do with those crowns and you are looking forward to receiving them—like bringing a report card to your parents—then perhaps you have taken on a judgment that rightly belongs to another time and another place!

Now do you see why I said, the Bema Seat judgment should cause **sober reflection, profound amazement,** and **active engagement!**

The Rapture

Now let's return to our discussion of the major parts of a Jewish wedding. Recall that the selection of the bride and the betrothal have already happened. Next on the schedule is the *presentation of the bride*! We are literally waiting for the Father to say, "Son, go and get your bride!"

At that appointed time in the Father's plan, the Son of God will gather His Church to Himself, and an event we call the Rapture will occur.

This brings us back to Revelation Chapter 19.

And to her (the Bride of Christ) it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Revelation 19:8

Where did this fine white linen come from? Why as the righteous acts of the saints. It is that which has been approved by the Son at His Bema Seat.

The Second Coming

Heaven is open—who or what is coming?

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. . . And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

Revelation 19:11-14

Why is the Son of God returning to reign with, among others, His raptured and “crowned” Church in His train? At this point, we know that the wedding feast has begun in heaven with the resurrected church. However, a traditional wedding feast would often go on for a week, maybe as many as two weeks, or even longer for a wealthy family.

Given that the cattle on a thousand hills belong to our God and that the work of Christ brought peace to Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:11-18), many suggest that



the wedding feast, which originally begins with the Bride of Christ, will continue and encompass the unfaithful wife, Israel—now reconciled to her Messiah.

This means the Wedding Feast will spill over into the Millennial Kingdom bringing both the Church and Israel together under the umbrella of the joyous occasion of the Wedding Supper. With such a gracious God—this seems entirely possible. We know that, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be there and we should have a sense of great expectation for the others of all ages with whom we are going to celebrate the reign and rule of our King.

In Closing

In closing, during the course of our studies we have talked about two judgments: the Great White Throne, where those who have rejected or pushed aside Christ and His offer of salvation will have the opportunity to make a vain case for why they are “qualified” to enter heaven on their own merits. Despite the bluster of some—this is not a situation that should cause hope or confidence in anyone, for who can stand acceptable before a holy God? Then there is also the judgment that all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ will face at the Bema Seat of Christ. Our lives will be closely scrutinized by none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself!

So, the question for each of us is, “Which judgment are you going to experience?” We actually get to choose now, by means of our response to Christ.

Each judgment, of course, has its own natural follow-on consequence. From the Great White Throne there are the eternal regrets associated with eternity in the Lake of Fire. On the other hand, from the Bema Seat comes participation in the Wedding Supper of the Lamb. Again—we get to choose! That’s why God has laid this all out for us—that it would prompt us to carefully consider and correctly choose. Let me close with Scripture from Revelation 22:17:

And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, come. . . whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

We take this water when we trust in who Jesus is—the Son of God who came to save—and what He has done—died in our place that we might receive forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and the very righteousness of Christ. We need all these to qualify us for eternity with Him and in the presence of the Father. Won’t you make sure of your future by trusting him right now in the quietness of your own soul.



Publications written and produced by

Vistoso Community Church

1200 E. Rancho Vistoso Blvd., Oro Valley, AZ 85755 ☎ 520 825-0652

Website: www.vistoso.org