

Okay, would you stand as we read God's Word together. Open your Bible to 2 Corinthians 5, verses 9 to 11. If you're visiting, we're in a series on heaven called Life After Life. What's life after life going to look like? What are we going to look like? What are we going to do? We're trying to answer all those questions. We have looked at several subjects.

This morning, I want to begin a two part sermon on the doctrine of the judgment seat of Christ. Because when we get to heaven, our lives are going to come under review. Have you ever thought about that? Life after life begins with Jesus looking back on your life. On the basis of that, you and I will either win or lose certain rewards. This is a doctrine that's not too popular. It's one that's not preached too often, but any series on heaven cannot skip over the thought that in heaven, we're going to come under review.

Let me argue for it here from 2 Corinthians 5, verse 9. Listen to what Paul says. "Therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to him." That's Christ. Verse 10, "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 has been done, whether good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences." So reads God's Word, and you may be seated.

The story's told of an immigrant who enlisted in the United States Army during the second World War. Like many immigrants, English wasn't his first language, and he struggled with it a little bit. It made it challenging for him in the army. Inspection day was coming up, and his friends around him said, "You know what? General's going to visit. We're going to come under review and an inspection, and we want to help you. We don't want you to flunk this. He usually asks three questions from what we can tell, and he usually asks these three questions in a certain order. If we've got this right, the first question he'll ask you is, how long have you been in the army, to which you reply, two years. Then he's going to ask you how old you are, to which you reply 22 years. Then he's going to ask you have you been receiving good treatment and good food, and your answer is both. Did you get that?" He said, "Your answer in this order is two, 22, and both."

The inspection day comes, but the general didn't ask the questions in the order. He asked this guy who's struggling with English, he says, "First of all, I want to know how old you are," to which he replies two years old. The general looks at him. He says, "How long have you been in the army?" He says 22 years. The general is now getting angry. He says, "Hey, what do you take me for, an idiot or a fool?" to which he replied both.

Now, I think he flunked the inspection, and I think you and I would conclude that we wouldn't have wanted to have been standing in his shoes on that inspection day. Rather embarrassing. But I use that story simply to introduce to you the fact that according to the New Testament, there is coming an inspection day for the church. I don't know if you thought about that recently. I don't know if that has grabbed your attention any time in the recent past, but according to the text of scripture, there's coming a day when the church will come under review at the judgment seat of Christ.

According to prophetic scripture, following the removal of the church on Earth at the rapture, there will be a review of the church in heaven after the rapture. We find that here, don't we, in 2 Corinthians 5 verse 10. "For we must all," that's all of us who profess Jesus Christ, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive," by implication, "A reward for things done in the body," if they were good by implication.

In fact, there are other passages that address this issue. I'll just take you to one, Romans 14. The context of Romans 14 is areas of conscience for Christians over which there may be some differences, gray areas over food you can eat and festivals you can observe. Paul addresses that in his letter to the Romans. He's concerned that secondary issues become things of primary importance and divide the body of Christ. He addresses that issue.

In verse 10, he says this. "But why do you judge your brother, or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand," here we'll go, "Before the judgment seat of Christ." The exact same language out of 2 Corinthians 5 verse 10. Verse 12, "So then, each of us shall give an account of himself to God."

Have you thought about that recently, that you're going to stand before God and give an account of the days you've lived, the words you've spoken, the thoughts you've conceived, and the deeds you've done? That's a scary, sobering thought. "We shall each give an account of himself before God. Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve not to be a stumbling block or get in our brother's way."

After the rapture of the church, there will be the review of the church when we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. It's interesting. When James speaks of the Second Coming and the fact that the Lord's coming is at hand, he then goes on to say, "And the judge is at the door." Jesus is going to judge the church, our service, our stewardship. What a thought. Heaven is not a reward, but heaven will have rewards. Life on Earth now will determine aspects of life in heaven then. Think about that. What we do today lasts forever. We will give an account of this day in a future day, as with all our days. Life after life begins with Jesus looking back on our life, and that should be a sobering, sanctifying truth.

You know, if you look at the Bible, the thought of rewards that await us for faithfulness and fruitfulness is very prominent. If you go back to Psalm 58 and verse 11, the Bible talks about the rewards of the righteous. If you go to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:11 to 12, Jesus says, "Look. They're going to revile you. They're going to persecute you. They're going to say all manner of evil against you. But you know what? Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven." Suffering, then glory. Cross bearing, crown wearing. This thought is throughout the Word of God.

In 2 John verse 8, where what we read. "Look to yourselves that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we might receive a full reward." That's how we should be operating every day looking to ourselves, managing our lives in the light of eternity, making sure that what we do, what we say, what we give ourselves to, what we run from all lead to us enjoying a full reward in heaven. Every day, we're winning or losing.

What about Revelation 22 verse 12? Jesus says, "I come quickly and my reward is with me." What's your reward going to be? What's my reward going to be? That's what I want to get into. That's what I want to talk about. This is a sobering, sanctifying truth. We need to redeem the time, for the day is evil. We need to understand what the will of God is for us and do it, because according to John, he that does the will of God endures forever.

Let's come and look at 2 Corinthians 5 verses 9 to 11. We'll begin to look at it today and we'll wrap it up next Sunday morning. Life after life begins with Jesus looking at our life. Here we have 2 Corinthians 5:9

to 11. "Therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to him, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

Let me put this text in its context before we look at it. You'll notice therefore. That points us back to the preceding verses. We looked actually at verses 1 through 8, didn't we, a few weeks ago. In these verses, Paul is addressing the issue, what happens to a Christian when they die? They're absent from the body and they're present with the Lord. They set aside this body that's like a tent that's worn down and has seen better days. They become naked in the sense that they're in heaven as a spirit without a body awaiting the resurrection, because Paul talks about being further closed. He addresses the issue, what happens to Christians when they die? The reality of the intermediate state and the promise of bodily resurrection.

That thought leads Paul to anticipate this event in the life of all Christians. Here I think is where the connection really is. He says, "Look. If a Christian dies, they're absent from the body and they're present with the Lord." Their life will have come to an end, and eternal life will have begun in its fullest manner. But he says this. I want you to be mindful that they will give an account for what they did in that body, how they lived their life.

Talking about the presence of God, the intermediate state, the future resurrection, the rapture, he associates that with an event associated with those events, and it is this, the judgment seat of Christ following the rapture of the church to heaven. He wants to remind them that what you do in your body is important. What you do with your body is important. Who you give your body to is important. Every day is precious, every failure serious, every missed opportunity grievous, every thought and act momentous. That's what the judgment seat of Christ communicates to you and me this morning.

You know, I was ministering a couple of years back, and in between some sessions I was sitting in the hotel room, and I was watching a sports channel, and it had a sports documentary on the 1976 Indiana basketball team. They were playing for the NCAA National Championship. By halftime, they were six points down against Michigan. They were without their best defensive player, Bobby Wilkinson. Things weren't looking good. The game was going in the wrong direction. Up until this point, they had had a perfect season. They'd never been beaten.

I was fascinated. It was a phenomenal documentary. Several of the players said that during the interview at halftime, Bobby Knight, the famous coach, famous for his rants and his raves, they went into the locker room expecting to be dressed down pretty severely. But Bobby Knight didn't do that, but he said to them, "Guys, we're throwing away a perfect season. We could go down in the history books." One of the players said that rallied them. They thought about that. They could go down in history as the team with the perfect season, perfect 76.

One of the players said this, "What the coach communicated was this, we had one shot at forever." That phrase just jumped out of the documentary at me, and it's never left me since. When I think of my life and I think of what lies ahead for me and for you when I stand before Christ, right now you and I have one shot at forever. Every day I live is important, momentous. Every thought that occupies my mind, every deed I put my hand to has eternal significance. They rallied. They went out and won in the second half, and there was this perfect 76.

You know what? You and I need to rally ourselves. We need to get our lives together. We need to get going in the right direction, because Jesus is coming, and the judgment seat is coming, and he's going to review what we've done in our body, whether it was useful or useless. On the basis of that, eternal rewards will be determined. You say, "What are those rewards?" I say, "Come back next week. Hold that thought."

But look. Before we look at the text, I'm going to guess that for some of the young people here this morning and those who maybe haven't been as well taught as others, this may be a fresh doctrine. This may be something new to you. You've never heard of that before. For a few moments, I want to kind of introduce to you the doctrine of the judgment seat of Christ. I want to look at its theology, and then we'll look at this text, and we'll finish it next Sunday morning.

Let me introduce to you the idea of the judgment seat of Christ, and let me remind you, this is one of several judgments in the Bible. You may have fallen into the trap that many have of believing that, you know what, at the end of time there's one general judgment. The sheep are separated from the goats, the Christians from the non-Christians, the wicked from the righteous, and then you live happily ever after if you're saved and righteous. Well, as I read God's Word, I'm not sure it's as simple as that, and I would just commend this to your thinking, that there are several judgments in the Bible that happen at different times, and they're focused on different people, and they have different outcomes.

The one we're looking at is the judgment seat of Christ. I believe that's only for Christians. I believe it will take place in heaven and it will happen after the rapture. If you go to Daniel 12, verses 1 to 3, there's another judgment, the judgment of the Old Testament believers when they're resurrected and rewarded, and that happens I believe at the Second Coming of Christ after the tribulation and before the millennial kingdom. According to Revelation 20:4 to 6, there's the judgment of the tribulation believers, those who trusted Christ during the tribulation, most of which were martyred for the cause of the gospel. They are resurrected and rewarded. It's called the first resurrection at the end of the tribulation.

According to Ezekiel 20:34 to 38, you have the judgment of Jews living at the Second Coming who have survived the tribulation. They'll be judged at the Second Coming of Jesus. Those who are saved will enter the millennial kingdom, and those who are not will be lost and purged.

You know the famous Matthew 25:31 to 43, the separation of sheep and goats. If you study that carefully, I think that's Gentile nations living at the Second Coming. They will be judged immediately after the Second Coming, and those who are saved, the righteous will enter the millennial kingdom and the unrighteous cast into Hades.

Revelation 20:10 has a judgment of Satan and his fallen angels. If you read that carefully, Revelation 20:10, you're going to see that that takes place not at the rapture, not during the tribulation, not after the tribulation, not at the Second Coming, not during the millennium. It takes place at the end of the millennium, and they're cast into the lake of fire.

Then you have a final judgment, what's called the great white throne judgment. Revelation 20:11 to 15. I'll argue strongly, you can't compare what we're looking at in this text with that judgment. In fact, it says heaven and earth fled away. This is a judgment that takes place suspended in space, and it's the judgment of the wicked dead across all of history who will be raised. The books will be opened and they will be judged and sent to hell.

I just commend that for your thinking. It's easy to fall into the trap, you know, Jesus comes, there's one judgment, it all happens at the same time, it involves everybody. I would beg to differ. I just commend that to your thinking.

But let's come and look at the judgment seat of Christ. I'll say before we even begin to expound the text, I'm assuming some of you need to be introduced to this doctrine, and so I'm going to answer four questions quickly and then we'll move on to begin to expound the text. When we come to the text, we're going to see the ambition, the appearance, the award, and the appeal, but before then question number one, who? Who will be at the judgment seat of Christ? I've kind of already given that away. It's my conviction that it's for believers only, church age Christians. This is a family matter. This is not the great white throne. This is not the judgment of the Gentile nations in Matthew 24.

Now, here's my reasoning. Notice this. "Therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to him." Trace the personal pronoun that in in the plural form we, and consistently, exclusively in 2 Corinthians 5 it is dealing with Christians. It's Christians, like the Corinthians who are described as those sanctified in Jesus Christ at the beginning of the letter. It is those who will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

It's interesting. If you go to 1 Corinthians 3, I think roughly verses 12 to 15, you have another angle on the judgment seat of Christ. Christ is likened to a foundation, and we're encouraged to build on him, and we're encouraged to build on him with gold, and silver, and precious stones. That is to build a quality life that reflects his glory.

Here's what we read concerning our lives built on Jesus Christ. Verse 13, "Each one's work will become clear." Notice, "For the Day," capital D. That's the day of the rapture, the snatching away of the church, the Second Coming of Christ for his people. "For the Day will declare it, because it will reveal by fire and the fire will test each one's work of what sort it is. If anyone's works which he has built on endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved."

Notice the word. Everybody at this judgment will be judged, and there'll be degrees of reward, but no one will be lost. Reward will be lost, but they themselves will be saved. This is a judgment concerning the saved and the quality of their lives.

One other argument may be 1 Corinthians 6 verse 2. Listen to this. "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?" See, when we come back with Jesus Christ, we'll be part of God's judgment on the world. We'll be part of an army without any weapons, because Jesus will speak a word and the nations will be destroyed, but we'll be part of that judgment.

I want you to notice by implication we're not going to be judged with the world. We're going to judge the world. For us to return with Jesus to judge the world, we ourselves will already need to have been in heaven and the church itself will already have been judged.

Who? believers only. When? After the rapture. It's the conviction of this church that church aged Christians will not go through the tribulation, that there will be a rapture, a snatching away of God's people prior to those events. Immediately after that, Christians will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ.

I'll give you two verses I think argue that, the association with the snatching away of the church or the removal of the church from the earth. Paul's speaking about how Christians can judge each other. Some were even judging him, and he says, Look. It really doesn't bother me that you judge me. I hardly judge myself, because I'm going to wait for Christ to judge me." He says this in verse 5. "Therefore, judge nothing before the time until the Lord comes who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness."

When will the judgment of Christians take place? When will the motives of the heart be revealed? When the Lord comes. A similar thought in James chapter 5 verse 9. I quoted it. "The Lord's coming is at hand. The judge is at the door." The Lord's coming involves a judgment on the church. Who? Believers only. When? When Jesus returns for the church.

I'd make another argument for that, by the way. If you go into Revelation chapter 19, you'll find the church already in heaven and the church is called what's called the marriage supper of the Lamb. I'm going to preach a whole sermon of that in this series. That's one of the things that happens in heaven. We'll get there, but let's just in a sense jump ahead. We read in verse 7, "Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give glory. For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has been made ready, and the herd has been granted to be a red and fine linen, clean and bright, for the linen is the righteous actions of the saints." Whatever the saints are wearing, it seems to convey that it reflects their faithful service, their actions during life. The church has been purified in red, and now the church is ready to return with Christ.

Who? When? Where? I think you already know the answer to that. If this is a judgment of Christians only associated with the return of Jesus Christ for the church, then where is in heaven. Because we saw in John 14 verses 1 to 6 Jesus is gone, and he's going to return and receive us unto himself, and we're going to be taken to the Father's house, the New Jerusalem that will descend from heaven at the end of history. We're going to be in heaven for the wedding supper of the Lamb. We're going to be in the Father's house, and my assumption is that the judgment seat of Christ will take place in heaven following the rapture.

Who? When? Where? What? What's it going to involve? Because right now, I would assume some of you are going, "Hey, this is sitting uneasy with me, Pastor, because I've heard this repeatedly that, you know what, if we're in Christ, there's therefore now no condemnation. I thought we were skipping the judgment." Well, we are in terms of the judgment of sin, in terms of the great white throne, in terms of the great tribulation.

John 5:24, "If we believe in Jesus Christ, we pass from life onto death and will not commend a judgment," but here you are, Pastor, talking about judgment. But listen. I'm not talking about judgment on your sin. I'm talking about judgment on your service. That's what's going to be focused on at the judgment seat of Christ. I mean that's what 1 Corinthians 3:12 to 15 says. The kind of work we did is going to be looked at. Is it gold, silver, precious stones, or is it wood, hay, and stubble? What we did in the body, it says here good or bad, the better translation in the Greek useful are useless, that's what's going to be looked at. The stewardship of our lives, the things we did with what God gave us, and the motives with which we served him. That's going to be looked at, and on the basis of that, eternal reward is going to be determined.

Now, listen. I didn't say eternal destiny. That's already determined by either you have faith in Jesus Christ or you haven't. If you're in the Son, then you've got life, and if you're not in the Son, you don't have life and you'd better get saved soon, even today. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm not talking

about eternal destiny. Heaven is not a reward for anything you and I do. When I get to heaven, it'll be on the basis of the merit of another, the righteousness of Christ given to me, his death on my behalf.

I want to be clear about that. The goal of this judgment is not to determine who enters the kingdom of God, but it is to determine the authority or status that we have within the kingdom. Have you ever thought about that? The rapture isn't mere escape. The rapture immediately leads us to an encounter with the Lord of the church, who left us to do his will, gave us the Holy Spirit and gifts, gave us money and resources to accomplish his will, and the issue is did we do it? That's what's going to be looked at. Did we present our bodies as a living sacrifice? Did we prove what was that good and acceptable will of God? That's what's going to come under scrutiny. Faith in Christ gets us to heaven, but works produced by faith determine what we get after we get to heaven.

As we said, the Bible talks about the rewards of the righteous. Jesus said, "Great will your reward be in heaven. Behold, I come quickly and my reward is with you." Are you anticipating what the rewards will be? Are you working day in and day out to indeed have a full reward? I'm telling you, this doctrine needs to be preached more than it's being preached. That's why I deliberately decided just to take two Sundays. I want to stir you up. I want to make you think about this doctrine. Life after life begins with Christ looking at your life.

Now, there will be no condemnation for our sins, because in fact in this very chapter, wonderfully right, chapter 5 of 2 Corinthians verse 19, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed us with the word of reconciliation." We rejoice in the fact that he was made sin for us, and God will not punish our sin in us because that sin was punished in Christ. There is no condemnation, but listen. No condemnation of our sins is not the same as no examination of our works. You must distinguish those two things. This is a judgment not of our sin, but of our service.

Look. By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, it is that which reserves us our place in heaven, but I do want to say that faith alone does not guarantee an abundant entrance into heaven, because listen to Peter. In 2 Peter chapter 1, listen to this. "Giving all diligence, add to your faith." Now, it's faith alone in Christ that will save you. It's faith alone in Christ that will secure your place in heaven, just like the thief. He had nothing to offer, "Lord, remember me." "Today you'll be in paradise."

Now, he didn't get to live this, but you and I do. Now that we're saved, having put our faith in Jesus Christ, what are we to do? We're to add to our faith. We're to add works. You see, the biblical formula of salvation is not faith plus works equals salvation. The biblical formula of salvation is faith equals salvation plus works. Faith produces works, and it's on the basis of those works you and I will be rewarded.

I think Peter's arguing this. Listen to him. "Add to your faith virtue; to your virtue. Knowledge; to knowledge, self-control; to self-control, perseverance; to perseverance, godliness; to godliness, brotherly kindness; to brotherly kindness, love. For these things are yours and abound. You will neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never stumble. For so," listen, "An entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom."

I want to enter abundantly into the everlasting kingdom. I want to have all that God's got for me and Christ has purchased for me, and so should you. We'll get to this in a moment. You need to be spiritually ambitious, and that's what we're dealing with here. Paul never considered works unnecessary. Works are an evidence of faith, and those works will be subject to scrutiny at the judgment seat of Christ. After that scrutiny, a determination will be made as regarding kingdom rewards and kingdom responsibilities. It's not an issue of admittance. It's an issue of recompense. I think that's so motivating.

I hope you don't have some kind of sterile, flawed idea about heaven. What you do now will determine what you do then. You can't be sitting on your hands. You've got to determine what the will of God is and do it, because the fashion of this world is passing away, and he that does the will of God endures forever.

You know what? I've just been reading something of the life of a great saint of God known as Bishop Lightfoot. Let me tell you a little bit about him. He was a bishop in the Church of England. He stayed a bachelor his whole life. He helped in the translation of the Revised Standard Version, which is the basis of the ESV that many of you use today. He wrote several commentaries that pastors still use on Philippians and Colossians.

He was a wonderful man of God, and because he was a bachelor and because the Bible encourages this, he gave part of his life to young men and he created what was called a brotherhood. He selected some young man that he would train for the ministry, and they had breakfast with him five days a week. He would assign them tasks in his diocese. He would have them tell him what they're doing, and he would evaluate their ministry. Whatever he did, they did. In fact, one of them said, "We read, we worked because he read and he worked." He would have them in his home often. They were this brotherhood, and then he got them ready for ordination.

Here's what's interesting. Just before their ordination, he would say this to them, and listen to these words, very challenging words that you and I need to hear. Here's what he would say. "Forget me. Forget the ordination. Forget what's going to happen tomorrow. Forget the human questioner. Transport yourself in thought from the initial to the final inquiry, the great day of inquisition, the supreme moment of Revelation." He's talking about the judgment seat of Christ. He's talking about what Paul's talking about in 1 Corinthians 3 when the day will declare what our work's like and 1 Corinthians 4 when the hidden things of the heart will be revealed.

He says, "Guys, think about the great day of inquisition, the supreme moment of Revelation, the chief shepherd, the universal Bishop of souls. He's the questioner. The wilt thou of the ordination day will be an exchange for the hath thou of judgment day." That's powerful, challenging to me and any of our pastors who have gone through ordination. Are we keeping our ordination vows? What will the wilt thou be, and will it be hast thou and have thou?

We have one short life to make an impact for eternity, and not just with ordained ministers. Every Christian that sits on a church pew should spend their days thinking about that great day of inquisition, when Jesus the questioner will ask us, "Hast thou? Have you done the will of God? Have you cared for the dying and rescued the perishing? Have you served the body, helping it grow up into full stature in Jesus Christ? Have you raised your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord? Have you brought your tithes and offerings into my house? Hast thou?"

Now, let's come and look at the text. That's the theology that I wanted to make you aware of, but what about the text? Just one thought this morning for the time that remains, what we call the ambition. The ambition. Paul is picking up in verse 9 on previous verses. "Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to him." Paul's telling us, "Look, I have a burning ambition, and it's this, to please Christ." See, in verse 8, he has talked about his preferred pleasure. Given a choice, here's what he says. "We are confident, yes well pleased, rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." You can be in this state in your body and absent from the Lord, but given a choice, Paul says what? "I want to be absent from the body and present with the Lord." It's the same language as Philippians 1. I'd rather be with the Lord, which is far better. That's his preferred preference and pleasure.

Paul delights in Christ, and therefore he wants the fullest experience of Christ in heaven. Since that's Paul's happy goal, it should come as no surprise to find him dominated, driven, and defined by the thought of pleasing Christ in all things at all times. That's his ambition. That's his aim. That's what drives him. Isn't that what ambition is? Don't we all have ambitions? But this is the one that should be overarching. This is the one that should give shape to every other ambition. This is the mother of all ambitions. Whatever I do, I want to do it in a way that pleases God. I want to be the best for Jesus Christ.

Listen to John Stott. "Ambition concerns our goals in life and our incentives pursuing them. A person's ambition is what makes him tick. It uncovers the mainspring of his actions, the secret motivation." So Paul bares his heart. You want to know what gets me up in the morning? You want to know what drives me through the day? You want to know what my last thought is as I put my head on the pillow? Did I please God today? If Jesus Christ was to come and I stand before the judgment seat of Christ, will I hear the, "Well done," or will I hear, "What were you doing?" or will I hear, "What didn't you do?"

You know what? It says in Hebrews 11 verse 5, "And Enoch had this testimony that he pleased God." That's what we're shooting for, folks. We get one shot at forever. The thing that will determine our abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom is, have we this testimony that we pleased God? Are you driven by this? Is this your ambition?

I like the story of the the Irishman who was in England and he was listening to an English politician ranting on in a long speech, and during it he said, "I was born an Englishman, I have lived as an Englishman, and I hope to die as an Englishman," to which the Irishman turned his neighbor and said, "Has the man no ambitions at all?" I hope you've got ambitions, you know, but make sure that your ambition fits with this ambition, to be found pleasing.

Let me run down a list of things that I think will help you to that end, and we'll wrap this up and pick it up next Sunday morning. I was just thinking about this. What about Hebrews 11 verse 6? "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." You want to please God? Exercise some faith. Depend on God for something big. Trust him for that which you're fearful of. Exercise some faith. Move forward. Trust God. Believe his words. Embrace his promises. Not only exercise faith, but surrender your life.

What about Romans 12 verses 1 to 2? You know that passage. Paul has given us a treatise on the greatness of God's salvation and what Christ has achieved on our behalf, and he moves now to the implication, "Therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God in the light of the gospel, present your body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God." If you have an NIV, "Pleasing to God." You want to please God?

Begin every day on your knees and pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven." Give your body, your soul, your strength, and your mind to the things of God.

What about obeying parents? That's probably where we start in life. Colossians 3 verse 20, what does Paul say? "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord." You know what? God's son pleased his father. Hebrews says, "By obedience, Jesus Christ showed himself to be God's son." At his baptism, as he submitted himself to the path to the cross, the Father said, "This is my son. In him I'm well pleased." Do you please your parents? Are you a blessing or a heartache? Do you readily obey them? Do you honor them, even if you're now a young adult and out of the home or about to go out of the home? That's what pleases God.

Helping others pleases God. Philippians 4 verse 18, listen what Paul says concerning the gift that came to him from the Philippines, brought by Epaphroditus. He says, "You know what? That's a sweet-smelling aroma. It's an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God." When you meet someone's need, when you weep with those that weep, God's pleased with that.

Tell you another thing God's pleased with, when you're sensitive to the needs of others. Back to Romans 14, where we read earlier about the judgment seat of Christ, in areas where Christians differ, issues of conscience. Paul warns us to be sensitive to one another. You may think you're right, and you may think the other person's wrong, but you know what? Think well of the brother. Don't judge him. Don't look down on him with contempt." Romans 14:18 says this, "For he who serves Christ in these matters is acceptable to God, or pleasing to God."

Learning God's ways. That's Ephesians 5:10 where we read these words. "Find out what is acceptable to the Lord, or pleasing to the Lord. Find out what's pleasing to the Lord." He's given you a whole book that tells you the things that please him. Find out what God's will is. It's not a secret. The Bible tells you how you ought to live your life, the priorities that ought to govern your life. You need to study the Word of God so that you might know the will of God. Find out what pleases God. Are you pursuing that? Are you in a home group? Are you in a small group? Are you in a discipleship relationship? You're in our men's ministry or women's ministry? Are you in our leadership track if you're young man aspiring to know God's will? Find it out.

What about God-centered prayer? God-centered prayer. Colossians 1 verse 10, Paul's praying for the Colossians. Notice his language. He says this in verse 10. "I pray that you might walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might." That which pleases God is a prayer about pleasing God.

Isn't that how we see it in the prayer of Solomon back in 1 Kings chapter 3? He's a newly minted king. The weight of the kingdom is on his shoulders. He's not sure he's up for the task, and so he prays that God would give him wisdom. He feels like a little child in the face of all he's responsible for, and he just asks for wisdom, and God says, "You know what, Solomon? Others would have asked for riches, and power, and significance, and health. You didn't, and because you didn't ask for those things, I'm going to give you wisdom and those things."

See, the prayers that begin in heaven, as Adrian Rogers said, they're the prayers that get to heaven. Prayer is not about getting our will done in heaven. Prayer is about getting God's will done on Earth.

Then just finally, Galatians 1 verse 10. Galatians 1 verse 10. I'll tell you another thing that pleases God is when you're willing to displease men for his glory. Galatians 1 verse 10, "For do I now persuade men or God, or do I seek to please men? For if I pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ." That's why the Bible says too by the way when all men speak well of you, you might want to take a look at yourself. Because typically if you're living for Jesus Christ, and you're swimming upstream, and you're going against the traffic of a godless society, you're going to lose friends and influence.

You want to please God? It might involve displeasing your boss, your girlfriend, your boyfriend, the students in your university. It might mean you're on your own, but that's okay. It's hard to go through that stuff. But if you've got an eternal perspective, you'll stay the course, because you've only got one shot at forever.

As the team comes up, let me give you a quote from David Brainerd that kind of summarizes what we've been talking about. Young men, you need to read his story if you get an opportunity. Contagious love for God in a world without love for God. He was living during the early part of the 18th century, dedicating himself to missionary work amongst the native Indians of New England. He famously wrote a journal where you hear the longings of his heart, the Diary of David Brainerd. In fact, that was used in the life of Jim Elliot, who was martyred among the Auca Indians, and in the life of John and Betty Stam, who were also martyred in China.

He contracted tuberculosis. 29 years of age, life's over. But as he's dying, he reveals his passion. And this is the way you want to live, and this is the way you want to die, because when you're about to die, the judgment seat of Christ isn't too far away. Here's what Brainerd says to his friends gathered around his deathbed. "My heaven is to please God, and glorify him, and give all to him, and be wholly devoted to his glory. This is the heaven I long for. This is my religion, and that is my happiness. I do not go to heaven to be advanced, but to give honor to God. All my desire is to glorify God. I see nothing else in the world that can yield any satisfaction besides living to God, pleasing him, and doing his will."

That ought to be our religion. While he didn't go to heaven to be advanced, if that's the way he lived, in heaven he would advance, because the things in the body will be judged, and on the basis of that rewards will be determined.

Father, we thank you for your Word this morning challenging, gripping, for some of us new, even troubling, upsetting. We pray that we would be sanctified by your Word this morning, the thought of the imminent return of Jesus Christ for the church and the immediate review of the church in heaven. We thank you our salvation is secure, but we can lose rewards by the way we live. We can be ashamed at his coming according to 1 John 2:28. We want to be able to look in your face, not at our feet in embarrassment.

Lord, the sun is setting and the days are falling fast off our calendars. To be honest, we've got caught up in the fashion of this world. We've got caught up in the things that are seen and not unseen, the temporal not the eternal, and we haven't thought long and hard recently about one life to live twill soon be past. Only what's done for Jesus will last. We please ourselves. We come to church when it suits us, when it's convenient. We give you the crumbs off our table. We don't serve. We don't speak for Jesus Christ and evangelism.

Lord, we've got a short time to make up a lot of stuff. Give us grace to do it. Help us to live with eternity in mind. Help us to realize that life after life begins with Christ looking at our life. Help us, therefore, to redeem the time, understand what the will of God is, and do it, because the fashion of this world is passing away, but he that does the will of God will endure forever. We ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.