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When the Books Were Opened

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WHEN THE BOOKS WERE OPENED



WHEN THE BOOKS WERE OPENED

The Bible says quite plainly:

. . . IT IS APPOINTED UNTO MEN ONCE TO DIE, BUT AFTER THIS *THE JUDGMENT* (Heb. 9:27).

And again:

. . . (GOD) HATH APPOINTED A DAY, IN THE WHICH HE WILL JUDGE THE WORLD. . . (Acts 17:31).

This is the story of that Day - and how it affected one man and his friends.

* * * * *

The man's name was Joe Smith - an ordinary sort of person like yourself.

Joe Smith also lived in an ordinary sort of town - like yours. And in a neighborhood like thousands of others the country over.

For instance, down the street aways lived Mr. Andy Andrews, a balding middle-aged man who taught in the little college at the edge of town. Mr. Andrews didn't think much of religion and was

fond of saying, "Religion is a *crutch* - needed only by those who can't get along without it." And on the subject of eschatology the good teacher would snort and say, "The concept of a literal Judgment Day and a literal Heaven and Hell went out with the hoop skirt!" Mr. Andrews was very positive in his views.

Right next door to Mr. Andrews was Miss Brown, a sweet little spinster in her early sixties, who could have had her "pick of the crop" at one time, but she never found the right one. And now she spent her time giving herself to others. Anytime there was sickness or death or just trouble in general, you could count on Miss Brown being there. And with that pleasant, cheerful way of hers, everyone said, "Miss Brown is better than a whole drugstore full of medicine."

The only trouble was that this was Miss Brown's "religion." She didn't put much store by church-going and such. "Church-ianity," she called it. Occasionally some good-meaning person would try to talk to her about her soul and she would just smile that sweet smile of hers and say, "Now, honey, don't you worry about me. I'm alright. I surely do appreciate your concern, though." One just couldn't help loving Miss Brown.

Then right across the street from Joe Smith lived an old bachelor named Charlie Crane. Ev-

erybody called him "Brother" Charlie because that's what he liked to be called. He was a real church-goer and every conversation was sprinkled with scripture quotations. Sometimes it was "chimney-corner scripture," but that didn't matter. Hardly anyone ever knew the difference. When he could get anyone to listen, "Brother" Charlie's favorite sermon went something like this: "Honesty and sincerity, *those* are the important things. Yessir, just as long as a man is honest and sincere and lives by those things he believes is right, he's going to make it right through those pearly gates." And he would generally slap his thigh at this point and folks would nod in agreement.

Occasionally "Brother" Charlie talked to another of Joe's neighbors, who lived down the block in the other direction: A young married man named Dick Denison. Dick had the sweetest wife named Darlene and a little baby boy, who was the light of his life: Dick, Jr. The only thing that marred their married life was that Darlene was a Christian - a real Christian - while Dick was not. Dick went with her to services, but he just would not give in to commit his life to Christ. Funny thing though was that Dick would "argue" religion all day long. He could really tie "Brother" Charlie in knots on his "honesty-and-sincerity-are-enough" sermon.

But "Brother" Charlie always had the perfect

answer. The old man would hold himself as straight as he could, point a skinny finger at Dick, and say, "Then how come *you* ain't a Christian?" And there was not much Dick could say to that except drop his head.

There was also another young couple in Joe's neighborhood, although a little older than Dick and Darlene. Their names were Ed and Edith Estes. They were both supposed to be members of the church, but they didn't go now or take an active part. One of the big reasons was their little two-year-old girl: Evelyn. When Edith had been expecting, she hadn't felt much like going. And now she felt like it was just "too much trouble" to get herself and little Evie ready. Ed had thought some about going back by himself and being restored, but then he would rationalize and say, "I want to wait until Edith and I can go down the aisle *together* to rededicate our lives to God." So neither one of them took the first step.

There was one other couple that were Joe's neighbors that figure into our story. I wouldn't want to fail to tell you about them. This was the old couple that lived right next door to Joe: The Jim Jenkins. Everybody just called him "Old Jim," however, and her, "Mrs. Jim." Mrs. Jim was bedfast now and had been for years. Old Jim loved his wife very much, though, and managed to take care of her just fine. Both of them were members of the little church on the corner and

before Mrs. Jim had gotten sick, you could always see them going to church together for every service, rain or shine. Now Old Jim had to go alone, but he always went. He would make sure his wife had everything she needed, would lay her Bible in her lap, kiss her on the cheek, and would go out the door with a "I won't be long, honey."

Even though his wife now took a great deal of time, Old Jim still found time to help others. And he also found time to talk to others about the Jesus he loved. Some time or another, he and Mrs. Jim had talked to everybody in that neighborhood. As a result of their efforts, close to a dozen people had been immersed in the little church's baptistry.

These were Joe's friends and neighbors. As we said, just an ordinary neighborhood - no better and no worse than your own.

But now we come to the Day God appointed.

It just happened that there was a special service going on at the little church on the corner that day. Old Jim was there, along with Dick and Darlene Denison and Dick, Jr. Of course Mr. Andrews was home, as was Miss Brown, and Ed and Edith Estes and their little one. "Brother" Charlie was elsewhere. And Joe? Well, Joe was where he always was when there was a special service.

The Day of Judgment began with the coming of Christ:

BEHOLD, HE COMETH WITH CLOUDS: AND EVERY EYE SHALL SEE HIM. . . (Rev. 1:7).

FOR THE LORD HIMSELF SHALL DESCEND FROM HEAVEN WITH A SHOUT, WITH THE VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL, AND WITH THE TRUMP OF GOD . . . (I Thess. 4:16).

When that shout shook the neighborhood, Mr. Andrews ran out in the door and looked up. His mouth dropped open like his jaws had become unhinged. He didn't say a word.

Miss Brown could talk, however. She began to flutter her hands and to say, "Oh my, oh my."

Edith Estes had been rocking her little girl when it happened. When she heard the noise outside she set Evie down and ran to the door. Almost instantly she perceived what was happening and turned back. But she was too late. Evie was gone.

At the little church on the corner, the preacher had just concluded offering the invitation. The songleader had started the song:

There's a great day coming,
A great day coming . . .

Dick had been struggling with himself as usual. He knew he should go forward, but he just

couldn't get up the nerve to do it. He had even given some thought to pinching the baby so he would have to take it out. Just then the shout came and the roof of that little building was split right down the middle. Every uplifted startled face was bathed in the light from the glory above. From here and there in the congregation, people began to rise into the air. Up, up, they went, out through the flaw in the roof and up into the sky and into the presence of Jesus. Among them were Old Jim and Darlene Denison and Dick, Jr. Dick panicked. He began to shout to the ascending preacher, "Wait, wait, just a minute!" And he shouted at the ascending songleader, "Just one more verse!" But it was too late. The invitation was over forever.

In Mrs. Jim's little bedroom, the heavenly light suddenly shone all around her. She looked and said simply, "I was waiting for you, Jesus."

Those standing outside saw Old Jim reach out and catch her hand as they ascended and they went hand in hand to meet the Lord.

. . . AND THE DEAD IN CHRIST SHALL RISE FIRST: THEN WE WHICH ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN SHALL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM IN THE CLOUDS TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR" (I Thess. 4:16, 17).

What happened to Joe? Well, it happened to Joe just as you might expect.

After both the righteous dead and the righteous living had gone to meet the Lord, the sky gradually darkened and a period of great catastrophe began.

. . . THERE WAS A GREAT EARTHQUAKE . . . AND THE HEAVEN DEPARTED AS A SCROLL WHEN IT IS ROLLED TOGETHER; AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND ISLAND WERE MOVED OUT OF THEIR PLACES (Rev. 6:12-14).

In Joe's home town, the houses were smashed, the streets buckled, the water mains broke and water squirted in every direction. On Main Street a great crack opened up and swallowed the whole downtown section. All the electric lines went down and the entire area was in darkness. The most terrible thing, though, was the cry that was torn from a thousand throats: "Oh God, oh God, oh God."

Throughout the world calamity reigned.

In the giant redwood forests the trees were felled like so many match sticks.

In Arizona, the earth groaned and expanded and the Grand Canyon closed like an obstinate mouth.

In the Western United States the earth shifted and with a great grinding noise the Rocky Mountains receded until the land was flat and it was as though the mountains had never been.

In New York City the skyscrapers tumbled and fell like a set of building blocks outgrown and now tossed aside.

In the Pacific Ocean, a tiny island named Japan sank into the boiling sea. And the sea was filled with little dots.

Then the earth began to be filled with gigantic cracks and fire and smoke poured forth. Water rushed in, to be dispelled again as great clouds of steam. Gas and molten rock began to ooze forth from the crevices. And then the earth caught on fire.

. . . THE DAY OF THE LORD WILL COME AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT; IN THE WHICH THE HEAVENS SHALL PASS WITH A GREAT NOISE, AND THE ELEMENTS SHALL MELT WITH FERVENT HEAT, THE EARTH ALSO AND THE WORKS THAT ARE THEREIN SHALL BE BURNED UP . . . (II Pet. 3:10).

The physical universe was now void of light except for one little speck - a world burning up. A tiny torch in memory of a world that had started with so much promise. But then that small spark dwindled and burned itself out.

Now all was darkness and silence. Joe had been launched, his friends had been launched, *all* had been launched - into eternity, into the presence of God, *into judgment*.

* * * * *

When Joe lifted up his eyes, he saw that he was in a vast throng of people. There were Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, Frenchmen, Egyptians, Germans, Dutch, Americans, Mexicans - peoples from every nation on the face of the earth. There were people there from the 20th Century, the 19th Century, the 15th, the 10th, and the 1st. There were people there from the 1st Century B. C., the 4th Century B. C., the 12th, the 28th, the 40th Century B. C.! Joe saw two he thought might be Adam and Eve but he could not know for sure.

As far as the eye could see were people. There were old people and young people, tall people and short people, fat and thin, rich and poor. There were bank presidents and ditch-diggers. There were rulers of nations and slaves. The Premier of Russia was there and the President of the United States. And Joe knew that the number of people went far beyond his vision . . . because present was *every* person who had ever lived upon the face of the earth!

FOR WE MUST ALL APPEAR BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST . . . (II Cor. 5:10).

Joe was there - and around him were his friends: Mr. Andrews, Miss Brown, "Brother" Charlie, Dick and Darlene Denison, Ed and Edith

Estes, Old Jim and Mrs. Jim — who, incidentally, could now stand straight and strong without support.

All present. All accounted for.

Now Joe became aware of the Throne rising majestically out of the midst of the crowd — rising so high its top was lost in the clouds. The glory of that Throne and its Occupant was so great that Joe had to lower his eyes.

Then every form prostrated itself and bowed before the Throne and worshipped Him that sat on it. Mr. Andrews, the teacher, started to bow but his knees were shaking so badly he simply collapsed into a quivering heap. It seemed to Joe that he kept saying, "I didn't mean it; really I didn't." And he kept muttering something about a "crutch."

FOR IT IS WRITTEN, AS I LIVE, SAITH THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL CONFESS GOD (Rom. 14:11).

And then the time had come. It would seem an impossible thing in so vast an assembly, but a hush fell. There was complete silence. It was as billions upon billions of breaths were held simultaneously. Every eye was on the Throne.

And then, at the Throne, there was movement.

From the midst came a Hand — and the Hand reached down and began to bring into view *the Books*.

AND I SAW A GREAT WHITE THRONE, AND HIM THAT SAT ON IT, FROM WHOSE FACE THE EARTH AND THE HEAVEN FLED AWAY; AND THERE WAS FOUND NO PLACE FOR THEM. AND I SAW THE DEAD, SMALL AND GREAT, STAND BEFORE GOD; AND THE BOOKS WERE OPENED . . . (Rev. 20:11, 12).

When the first volumes were brought forward, it was almost an anti-climax. Every person who came from the 20th Century had seen those writings day in and day out: on coffee-tables, in bookshelves, on motel dressers, on hospital night-stands. They had almost become a part of the interior decoration! *But nevertheless they were still present.*

Even without the familiar black binding and the familiar gold edge and even at that distance, it was easy to tell that these were those writings that had made up the book they knew as *the Bible*.

JESUS CRIED AND SAID . . . HE THAT REJECTETH ME, AND RECEIVETH NOT MY WORDS, HATH ONE THAT JUDGETH HIM: THE WORD THAT I HAVE SPOKEN, THE SAME SHALL JUDGE HIM IN THE LAST DAY (John 12:44, 48).

No words of men were produced, just the Word of God.

The Hand was still moving. A large volume now came into sight — a huge worn book stained with celestial tears:

. . . AND ANOTHER BOOK WAS OPENED, WHICH IS THE BOOK OF LIFE (Rev. 20:12).

The cover flew back for just an instant and the crowd got a glimpse inside. Its pages were filled with *names*. Joe recognized some of them: Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, Paul. *This then was the record of the faithful*. And it seemed as if every heart was beating the same question: "Is-my-name-written-there? Is-my-name-written-there?"

Finally, the Hand slowly brought into view one last record — not so much a book as an extension of the Memory of God. And there was a gasp as the assembly saw it . . . *for it was the record of all their lives* — a record of *all* their thoughts, *all* their deeds, *all* their unguarded words. The good things *and* the bad, including every sin not removed by the blood of Christ.

. . . AND THE DEAD WERE JUDGED OUT OF THOSE THINGS WHICH WERE WRITTEN IN THE BOOKS, ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS (Rev. 20:12).

This record was also placed by the side of the Throne Occupant.

Everything was ready.

The Judging began.

In the life on earth there had been so much injustice. In the life on earth so often the wicked had prospered and the righteous had been persecuted. But now Justice was to be meted out. Now all wrongs were to be righted — and all scores eternally and righteously settled.

One by one the names were called. One by one each stepped forward. One by one each stood before God. One by one they watched as the word of God was compared with their record. One by one they saw the Book of life checked. One by one they went either to the right or to the left.

The wicked stood before God: The drunkards, the adulterers, the licentious, the murderers, the thieves. They went to the left for . . .

. . . THEY WHICH DO SUCH THINGS SHALL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD (Gal. 5:21cf).

The self-righteous stood before God . . . The truly righteous stood before God . . . And all were judged.

It was not so much a matter of determining innocence or guilt as it was a matter of showing

justice and passing sentence. Whatever the verdict, every person knew it was right.

And finally the time came for Joe's friends and neighbors to be judged.

Joe stood to one side and watched.

The Voice said: "Miss Brown. Miss Betty Brown."

Sweet little Miss Brown. Helpful little Miss Brown. *Unprepared little Miss Brown.*

Deep down in her heart Miss Brown had felt that when she stood before God, there would be a balance with scales. And her good works would be placed on one side and her bad works on the other. And everyone *knew* her good works far outweighed her bad.

But now she sees instead that *the teachings of God's Word* are to be compared with her life.

The Finger of God points to its teachings: Instead of trusting in her own goodness, she should have trusted in *Jesus* for salvation:

. . . IF YE BELIEVE NOT THAT I AM HE, YE SHALL DIE IN YOUR SINS. . . (and) WHITHER I GO, YE CANNOT COME (John 8:24, 21).

The Finger of God continues to move. That faith in Jesus should have been expressed in repentance and baptism:

THEN PETER SAID UNTO THEM, REPENT, AND BE BAPTIZED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS, AND YE SHALL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST (Acts 2:38).

The record of Miss Brown's life showed no such trust and obedience. And then it seemed to Joe that a Voice spoke from the Throne:

O Miss Brown, Miss Brown . . . HOW OFTEN WOULD I HAVE GATHERED (you unto myself), EVEN AS A HEN GATHERETH HER CHICKENS UNDER HER WING, AND YE WOULD NOT . . . (Matt. 23:37).

As little Miss Brown went to the left, Joe thought he heard her say, "I tried to save myself; I tried to save myself."

The Voice spoke again:

"Charlie Crane."

As the judging had progressed, Joe had cast a few glances in "Brother" Charlie's direction. As it became more and more apparent that it *did* make a difference what one believed and what one did, Charlie had become more and more nervous.

And now he stepped forward with a shaky step; but with a defiant look.

He waited stoically while the comparison was

made; he knew what would be found. When it was finished, he said (with a quivering voice that lacked real conviction): "But, Lord, you know I belonged to a church. And, Lord, you know I prayed to you. And remember, Lord, all the good works I did in my church!"

But it really was no use. Almost before he received the answer, he, too, went to the left.

NOT EVERY ONE THAT SAITH UNTO ME, LORD, LORD, SHALL ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: BUT HE THAT DOETH THE WILL OF MY FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN. MANY WILL SAY TO ME IN THAT DAY, LORD, LORD, HAVE WE NOT PROPHESED IN THY NAME? AND IN THY NAME HAVE CAST OUT DEVILS? AND IN THY NAME HAVE DONE MANY WONDERFUL WORKS? AND THEN WILL I PROFESS UNTO THEM, I NEVER KNEW YOU: DEPART FROM ME, YE THAT WORK INIQUITY (Matt. 7:21-23).

For some time Joe had been standing close to the Estes'. As the time neared for his name to be called, Ed finally cleared his throat and spoke to Joe for the first time: "I'm more fortunate than most," he said. "I had a godly mother that taught me the will of God, so I was baptized into Christ at the age of twelve — and I've been a member of the Lord's church ever since." Joe thought to himself: "He sounds to me like he is trying to convince *himself* instead of *me*."

His thoughts were interrupted when the Voice said: "Ed Estes."

The comparison began. As Ed had said, the record showed that he *had* trusted in Christ, he *had* been baptized, and there had been genuine love in his heart as he had done so. But the comparison did not end there. The Finger continued to move and Ed turned pale. It seems that there were certain responsibilities *after* becoming a Christian:

Attend faithfully (Heb. 10:25).

Live the Christian life (Rom. 12:1, 2).

Use one's talents in the service of the Lord (Matt. 25:14-30; I Cor. 15:58).

Grow in grace and knowledge (II Pet. 3:18; II Tim. 2:15).

Teach and save others (Matt. 28:18-20).

The record of Ed's life showed neither a compliance with Christ's will nor repentance over his failures. Somewhere along the line, the affairs of this life had crowded out the spark of love.

The Book of life was opened. There *was* a space where his name had been, but now there was only a blot.

. . . WHOSOEVER HATH SINNED AGAINST

ME, HIM WILL I *BLOT OUT* OF MY BOOK (Ex. 32:33).

The Finger pointed to the left.

It was then Edith's turn. She did not pay too much attention to the proceedings, but from time to time she would hold her arms as if she were cradling a baby and a tear would trickle down her cheek. When the comparison was complete, she asked just one question: "Where's my baby?" And the Voice gently replied: "We will take care of her."

. . . OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD (Mark 10:14).

Used as an excuse — and now gone forever.

Ed had waited for Edith and now they went together to the left. As they walked away, Joe saw Ed turn to Edith, and searching for some small comfort, say, "But sweetheart, at least don't you appreciate the fact that I didn't go back to the church without you. I *waited* on you." And Edith turned away her face in disgust.

There will be no love in hell.

Joe watched them all. He saw Mr. Andrews judged. He saw Darlene Denison go to the right to join Dick, Jr., while Dick, Sr., went to the left. And he saw the Nail-scarred Hands reach down from the Throne and encircle Old Jim and Mrs. Jim while the Voice said:

. . . WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT; THOU HAST BEEN FAITHFUL OVER A FEW THINGS, I WILL MAKE THEE RULER OVER MANY THINGS: ENTER THOU INTO THE JOY OF THY LORD (Matt. 25:23).

And finally the judging was completed.

From above came a shaft of golden light and the sound of singing and in the distance was the shimmering shape of a beautiful city. And turning to those on His right, the Figure on the Throne said:

. . . COME, YE BLESSED OF MY FATHER, INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD (Matt. 25:34).

Hand in hand, arm in arm, those on the right ascended toward the gates of pearl, the streets of gold, the water of life. And the angels shouted as they came near and the gates were thrown wide and they were ushered into glory!

The Figure on the Throne then turned to those on the left.

God had not intended it should end this way. The place to which these were to be sent was originally designed only for the archenemy of God - Satan himself. But a sinful world had, by and large, persisted in following Satan instead of God. That same world had resisted God's over-

tured of love and the sacrifice of Christ. There was really no other choice; God by His very nature could not co-exist with sin. In reality these had sentenced *themselves* a long time ago . . .

And He said unto them:

. . . DEPART FROM ME, YE CURSED, INTO EVERLASTING FIRE, PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS (Matt. 25:41).

The huge throng moved to the vast yawning pit that opened before them. From it came the smell of sulphur and the smoke of a million fires. With heads down and with stumbling gait the masses fell over the edge. Some fell with a muffled cry, but most fell silently into the darkness. Some tried to cling to the edge before the massed bodies forced them to lose their grip. But most went over without a struggle.

Just before the last individual fell, it seemed that these words hung for a moment in the air:

AND WHOSOEVER WAS NOT FOUND WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF LIFE WAS CAST INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE (Rev. 20:15).

The mouth of the pit was then closed. The uplifted faces caught their last and only glimpse of the face of God. And then the darkness closed in. Eternal darkness.

The Figure on the Throne closed the Books that

had been opened, and almost like a sigh, the words came:

. . . IT IS DONE . . . (Eze. 39:8).

Mr. Andrews had been judged. And Miss Brown. And Charlie Crane. And Dick and Darlene Denison. And Ed and Edith Estes. And Old Jim and Mrs. Jim.

The Judgment Day was now over.

Eternity stretched before.

* * * * *

What's that you ask? What happened to Joe? Wasn't he judged? Yes, Joe was judged. Yes, the word of God was compared with his life and the Book of life was checked as the final authority. And what was the result? Only *you* — and God — can answer that question.

You see, Joe is YOU. It was YOUR name Joe heard as he stood in that throng. It was YOUR sins he heard read from the record. It was YOUR heart that jumped to his throat as the comparison was made. It was YOUR fate he received as he was sent to the right or to the left.

Let me then put the question back to you: What *did* happen to Joe *when the books were opened?*

Search your heart today. Are you willing to leave the record in heaven exactly as it now stands? Would you be willing to face it TODAY as it is? Or are there some CHANGES you would like to make? In that Day many would give all they ever possessed just to make ONE SMALL CHANGE — but then it will be too late. But TODAY you can trust in Jesus Christ and submit to His will, and thus have changed, not just one small part of the record, but the WHOLE THING — washed and made clean by the blood of Jesus Christ!

Beloved, *think, think*. If you need to come

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Published & Distributed by
CHRISTIAN PUBLISHING CO.
214 Lake Highlands Village
Dallas 18, Texas

