

Conscience, Record and Judgment

by John Hames

The sermon explores the critical roles of conscience, personal records, and the certainty of divine judgment in the lives of individuals.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 12:14, Matthew 12:36, Matthew 25:31, John 19:22, Acts 24:16, Romans 2:16, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Hebrews 9:27, Revelation 20:12, Revelation 20:15

Topics: "Moral Conscience", "Final Judgment"

Description

John Hames preaches on the importance of conscience, record, and judgment as highlighted in Acts 24:16, St. John 19:22, and Ecclesiastes 12:14. He emphasizes how conscience, as the voice of God in the soul, plays a crucial role in guiding our moral character and decisions. Hames delves into the biblical examples of King Herod and Pontius Pilate, showcasing how their awakened consciences influenced their actions and ultimately led to judgment. He warns about the significance of our life's record, which will be revealed at the final Judgment, stressing the need for a life that reflects Jesus and prepares for eternity.

Transcript

Now while everybody prays, I shall invite your prayerful attention to three passages of Scripture:

Acts 24:16 - "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."

St. John 19:22 - "Pilate answered, what I have written I have written."

Eccl. 12:14 - "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

My subject for this hour is "Conscience, Record and Judgment." Conscience and Record are like two index fingers pointing toward yonder Judgment, where our lives will be unfolded like an open book.

Man is the only being that has that wonderful faculty known as conscience. Conscience is that power that lifts us a million leagues above the brute life. The word conscience is not found in the Old Testament; it is a New Testament word. It is the region of our higher and spiritual nature.

There is so much so-called religion in these last days that is merely emotional and sentimental, which never stirs nor awakens the higher spiritual nature where conscience has its seat and throne. That is why

we have so many so-called revivals and shams today; conscience has never been awakened.

There are a number of definitions for conscience, such as:

- * The voice of God in the soul
- * A living witness
- * God's umpire
- * That which decides moral character as to one's own actions
- * That which condemns the wrong and approves the rights

But let it be understood that the foregoing definitions of conscience hold true only of a conscience that has not been violated, stifled, hardened or seared.

At no time is an unenlightened conscience a safe guide. It is only as it is quickened and enlightened that it is safe to follow. The burden of this hour, and my purpose in this passage, is to show you the power of an awakened conscience. I call your attention to two Bible scenes recorded in the New Testament.

The first is the flash of an awakened conscience seen in the life of King Herod. The alarm bells were turned on three different times in his life. The first awakening took place under the ministry of that fearless preacher, the fore-runner, path blazer, wilderness prophet, John the Baptist. Had you been living in those days, you would have seen great multitudes making their way to the wilderness to hear the great truths as they fell like lightning bolts. All roads in those days led the people to the wilderness to hear the fiery prophet with a burning message. The rich and the poor alike were held spellbound by the eloquence of this forceful preacher. Herod the King hears of this great man, and he goes out to the big meeting.

I can see him now as he comes in his splendor and glory, riding in a royal chariot, drawn by two snowy white horses. Seated by the side of this unclean king is another man's wife. No doubt, some of the brethren call John the Baptist's attention to him, and say, "Brother, yonder comes Herod the King; give us one of your best sermons today. Haven't you got a sermon on love? You have preached on repentance until we all are nearly dead with conviction." John the Baptist looks the king over, cries out and says, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." My, my, meeting is out! Herod goes back in a rage, and finally has John the Baptist put in prison. But that does not ease his conscience. The original brings out the thought, as Moffatt renders it, that John kept saying, "It is not lawful to have her." It was Conscience, the voice of God in the soul, crying out against the awful sin of adultery. Before any man can take the other fellow's wife and get by with it, he must drown the voice of Conscience.

The second time we see the alarm bells turned in to awaken Herod was on his birthday. The daughter of Herodias danced before the king, no doubt a lewd dance, but it so pleased him that he promised with an oath, to give her whatever she asked for. She, being instructed by her wicked, ungodly mother (whom John the Baptist rebuked for living a double life), asked for the head of John the Baptist. We are told that the king was sorrowful. Why? Conscience was troubling him. Brother, that is something you cannot get away from.

Distance has nothing to do with conscience. A guilty conscience will follow you to the uttermost parts of the earth and still condemn you. Years have nothing to do with conscience. The brothers of Joseph sold

him into slavery, and lied to their old father about him. Years roll by; let us see what happens. The sons of Jacob go down to Egypt to buy corn, the governor talks in a rough, harsh voice to them, and when they leave his presence they say, "We are very guilty concerning our brother." Who said anything about Joseph? That slumbering conscience that had been lulled to sleep for twenty years awakened, and turned on the alarm bells.

The last time we see conscience troubling Herod was when he heard of the fame of Jesus. He cried out and said, "This is John the Baptist, risen from the dead." Although he professed not to believe in the resurrection of the dead, conscience got the best of him. After this, conscience seems to bother him no more, because he crossed the deadline.

In the second Bible scene, we see conscience doing its work as a faithful witness in the life of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Conscience turned on the alarm bells when Pilate looked into the face of the Son of God, no doubt, for the first time in his life. The blood-thirsty mob, with a backslidden church, a fallen preacher, found Jesus at midnight in the garden, in prayer, sweating great drops of blood. They arrested Him, led Him bound and fettered, to the hall of the Jewish Sanhedrin. He was arraigned first before the white-headed High Priest Annas, then to his son-in-law Caiaphas. In spite of the fact that nothing was found against Him, both Annas and Caiaphas found Him guilty. During the night the prisoner was brutally mistreated. They spat on His face, indicating He was vile. They slapped Him with their hands and clenched fists, smote Him with rods, and crowned Him with thorns. With matted hair, bleeding face, He was led to Pilate. One glimpse of that thorn-crowned brow smites him with conviction. We are told that he sought to let Jesus go, but that the bloodthirsty mob yelled like demons for His blood, and cried, "Crucify Him!" Right in the midst of this awful scene, a servant rushes into the court with a note from Pilate's wife, in which she says, "Have thou nothing to do with this just Man." Again conscience smites him. An awful struggle is going on in his breast.

Pilate, in order to silence the voice of conscience, turns Jesus over to Herod. The old, cunning fox sends Him back to Pilate. Now a real battle goes on, in which Conscience cries out, "Have thou nothing to do with this just Man." In order to try and appease the wrath of the bloodthirsty mob, Pilate takes Jesus into the judgment hall and scourges Him. He brings Him back with lacerated back, and bloody robe as the blood oozes from the fresh wounds. But again the mob cries, "Crucify Him!" Conscience once more warns, checks and threatens but not so loud, as its voice has been choked and smothered. The last scene we witness is the cowardly Governor taking a basin of water and trying to wash his hands of the blood of Jesus. But all the waters that have ever fallen, or ever will fall, can never wash the guilt of a condemning conscience away.

I am not through with Pontius Pilate. What finally became of him? We are told that in three years from the time of the crucifixion, he is an exile, and still brooding over that awful scene that took place in the judgment hall. He sees that thorn-crowned brow, the matted hair and bleeding face...conscience turns into remorse, his guilty soul is lashed as with a stinging scorpion, until he goes mad with remorse and shame. Leaping from the window of a third story prison, he tries to drown out its voice in death, only to meet an outraged conscience in another world.

Suppose we take a trip to Hell! As we stand on the brink of damnation, midst the wailing of the damned and shouts of tormenting devils, I see a form in a bending attitude. It is Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, trying to wash his hands of the guilt of Jesus' death. I look again, and I see poor Judas Iscariot as he drags his lost soul through the ashes of Hell, crying, "I have betrayed innocent blood." Friends,

unconfessed sins never die. They will cross continents and face you in the dying hour, and dog your lost soul throughout all eternity.

Some years ago, we heard a leading evangelist tell that while he was preaching in a large city church (made up mostly of worldly rich members) The Spirit came on him in an unusual way. He dropped his index finger on a banker's wife, and cried out, "God knows you, woman!" At once she fainted and fell in the aisle. Believe me, there was some excitement in that big, proud, worldly church. Ladies from the choir were gathering around her, calling for water and fans, but the evangelist made them all sit down and leave her alone. Finally, when she regained consciousness, she called for her husband, and confessed to being untrue to him.

Some time ago in one of the northern camps, after we had preached on the Judgment, awful conviction was settling down on the people. A very prominent lady worker in the camp said to us, "May I see you a moment, and have a personal talk with you?" After an awful struggle, she finally said, "Must I go home and confess to my husband?" I answered that I did not know, but asked her had she sinned against her husband. She said that she had. Then I said, "I think you owe him a confession." It seemed that she would die right there under conviction, but she obeyed God and conscience, and won out.

Oh, folks! You will never get an experience that abides over a stinging conscience. There is no such thing as vital Christianity without a quickened, live conscience. Believe me, if we had more preaching of the Finney type that appeals to men's consciences and wills, instead of their emotions, we would have converts that would stick from January to January.

This brings us up to the second part of our theme, namely: "Record." "What I have written I have written." These words with their gripping, forceful meaning were uttered by Pontius Pilate in answer to the question raised concerning the title he wrote and put on the Cross: "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." When the chief priests saw it they said, "Write not the King of the Jews, but that he said, 'I am the King of the Jews'." Then Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written." My record is as much a part of me as my conscience is. I cannot get away from it. It is that something that will follow a person into eternity.

Just a few years ago, a beautiful young woman sang for a phonograph record company. Shortly after this she died, but her voice went right on. At her funeral a machine was placed at the head of the grave, and while her body was being lowered in the grave, some friends started the machine with this special record on, and she sang at her own funeral. But long before the talking machine and wax record were invented, God was making a record of human lives.

Think of the records some people are making. Don't forget, God is keeping books, and at the Judgment our lives will be revealed for a whole universe to see. The Judgment is going to be an awful scene, when the record of each life is opened.

What about your record as a father? Come, answer the question now. Would you be willing for your boy to follow in your footsteps? Does your life tell for Jesus, or is it a blight to the home?

How about your record as a mother? Come on mother, answer the question. If that worldly, unsaved daughter of yours was to die right now while I am speaking, could God hold you blameless at the Judgment?

In a great testimony meeting, sometime ago, among the number who testified, was a middle-aged man. He arose, emotion rested on his face, and told the following: "Friends, you know I am rated as the richest man in our county, but I would gladly give every dollar I have, if I could call back part of my life. Two years ago, I was called to the bedside of our eldest son, who was yet in his teens, and was dying. When I bent over him and asked him if he knew he was dying, he looked up and began to cry, saying, 'Papa, I cannot die, I cannot die, I don't want to die, I am unprepared to die. Papa, pray for me.' I said, 'Son, your father does not know how to pray.' I had to stand by his dying bed and hear him cry to the last, 'I am unprepared to die.' Friends, I am saved now, but my boy is gone." Oh! the record of that day...

Finally, I call your attention to the last part of my subject, "the Judgment." The longer I live and travel up and down this country, the more I am convinced that there must be a Judgment.

The Judgment is a day when God is going to examine every spiritual fig tree. He is going to show up the pure gold of a man's life. The Bible calls the Judgment, a Great Day. In conclusion, let us notice why it is a Great Day.

First, it is great because everybody is going to be there. The time is coming when God is going to speak to the dust of Adam, and his body will get up from its long sleep. Mother Eve will join him, and all the sleeping dead will come forth, and go marching off to the Judgment. Don't forget you are going to be in that procession.

Second, it is great because the secrets of all hearts will be disclosed in that day. For six thousand years man has been trying to cover up sin, but the time is coming when God is going to uncover every secret sin of the ages. In that day, the sea is going to become sick to its stomach, and vomit up its dead. Every pond, pool or old well that holds the body of some strangled infant, will give up its dead...who may point their bony fingers in some of your faces. God is going to shake this old world, rip her open with earthquakes...the sun will be blown out, stars will fall, the moon is going to become as blood; the Heavens are going to roll together. Amidst the rolling Heavens, falling stars, blown out sun, bleeding moon, reeling earth and opening graves, the Judge is going to descend, and before Him will gather all nations, great and small, and the records will be opened.

Third, it is going to be a great day because Jesus is to be the Judge. Now He will be your Saviour, now He is a merciful High Priest. His five bleeding wounds plead for you. This is a day of opportunities, mourner's benches, revival meetings, with a pleading Holy Ghost. But in that day, He will be a Judge. Mercy will be over, probation will be ended. You may cry, "Come back, Holy Spirit!", "Come back, opportunities!"... but that day is final, and forever what is done is done. When once the Judge utters those awful words, "Depart from me," it will echo through your lost soul throughout the cycles of eternity.

If you will make your way to Him now, while the Spirit is pleading and Christ is interceding, in that day of all days, He will be your Friend. Will you do it now?

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