

# What Counts!

by Erlo Stegen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of being accountable for our lives before God, highlighting the need for self-examination and repentance in light of the coming judgment day.*

**Duration:** 1:17:38

**Scripture:** Luke 2:1

**Topics:** "Eternal Reward"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of being aware that one day we will be held accountable for our thoughts, deeds, and entire lives. He acknowledges that we are all sinners and weak, but reminds us that God will judge us based on his expectations and his word. The preacher uses the example of Balcheza, who was intoxicated, to illustrate how we can also be under the influence of other negative emotions like jealousy and anger, leading us to say things we shouldn't. He warns that God records everything and judgment will come quickly upon those who repeatedly ignore his warnings. The sermon concludes with a call to prepare for the day of judgment by living according to God's standards and being obedient to his word.

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## Transcript

Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for a day like this one. When we remember you coming to this earth.

We pray, Lord, that you will speak to us. And give us a spirit hearts that will be at your feet. Lord, work in an amazing way in our hearts that they may be changed.

Amen. Read our text from Luke chapter 2, beginning from verse 1. And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.

So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. So it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

I was wondering what I should speak about this morning. There's so much that one could say and I even thought of continuing with the message that we had last night about Bethlehem. Because there's even so much more one could have said about that.

That's smallest among thousands of towns and villages in Judea. Then I thought I should speak about this particular portion, that it came to pass that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the world should be registered. We've spoken much about Caesar Augustus in this time.

He was king over a large portion of the earth at that time. He was there in his kingdom of Rome and there were other smaller kingdoms around there. It's an impression one can get.

But if one looks in the Greek, it looks like it was the whole world that was actually being registered at that time. So that decree went out from Caesar at that time that the whole world should be registered. And that everything should be registered and recorded.

Now you know and we know that if we read something in the Old Testament, it's the shadow of that which is to come in the New Testament. And even here I see this as a shadow of the great thing that is still to come. So he passed this law, sent to people all over the world saying that they should return to the town, to the place where they were born to be registered.

Not to be registered there where they were living at that time, but to go back to where they came from. Hold on to that. That's an important point and a great message.

Caesar was great. And being so great, he could pass this law that the whole world should be registered. We can use that word numbered as well.

But the day is soon coming when someone far, far greater than Caesar Augustus, not just from Rome, but from heaven, when the King of Kings will come and will bring us all to account to be numbered, to be registered. There are many things that were decreed in the Bible concerning this matter. So Jesus Christ will come and then everyone will be brought to account.

And everything will be called to account from the very beginning there where you started, where you were born from that time onwards. In the Old Testament in Daniel, we read about the King Belshazzar. He called together and got together all his important men, the leaders that were under him from all over the world, hundreds of thousands of people.

And he held a great feast. As you know, when there's a feast in the world today, anywhere, it doesn't go without alcohol. People say the wine has to flow.

It has to flow, it has to flow, it has to flow. And so it was at this feast as well. They drank their wine, their alcohol, until it affected their minds.

And eventually the King Belshazzar was in such a state that he got up and he said there are some golden vessels in the temple of the Lord and they should go and fetch those. And as you know, when you've had too much to drink, alcohol, most people then, their tongue gets very loose and they have courage which they didn't have before. And people speak a lot.

And many people even start speaking in a very spiritual way about the gospel and about the Lord when they intoxicate it. And so when the feast was at its height, everyone was extremely happy and celebrating. And the King was misusing and speaking lightly about the things of the temple of the Lord, the things of the Lord.

And as they were celebrating and mocking God, the palm of the hand appeared and wrote on the wall. And the writing that was written on the wall by this hand was, You are numbered. Remember I said, St. Augustus, it all should be numbered.

And God numbered Belshazzar. God has weighed you in his balances. He's numbered you and he's found you wanting.

You know how a balance works and which was used in the olden days. It was something that hung in the middle and it had weights on either side. You put a weight on the one side and put something on the other side.

And so it was Belshazzar's day to be numbered. And when he was numbered, he was found wanting. He was light.

God's side was heavier than his side. He didn't get to the right weight. He was too light.

You have been found wanting, it is said. So God in heaven had put him into his balances and he was found not to meet up to what God had expected of him. He didn't get to the right weight that God had set.

He had been numbered. God had counted up all the things in his life and it didn't get to the right weight. In Revelation chapter 20 verse 12.

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God and books were opened. Those books where everything is numbered and everything is registered. And another book was opened which is the book of life.

And the dead were judged according to their works by the things which were written in the books. Are you conscious of the fact that every thought, every deed, every word is numbered, is registered in the books. God is jotting down everything.

And so there were books as well with names recorded. There were those books where people's names were recorded or were not recorded. Those that were recorded in the book of life, even they were given according to their deeds.

And so those that were not written in the book of life, they also were judged according to their deeds. Are you aware that everything you do, you say and even think, is registered in heaven. And so there is a day appointed by God where everything that has been registered and has been numbered, you will be brought to account for those things.

We've read in Revelation about that day when everyone, the living and the dead, who will then be raised, even if you've become dust, God will call you to account. He'll raise you up. So even people who have drowned, be it in a river or in the ocean and they've been eaten by sharks and everything, they will all be raised.

So when Jesus was born, everyone was numbered. And that's a reminder of that great day when everyone and everything will be numbered. And everything is recorded in those books.

There was a day when Jesus met with that Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. And as he sat there, he spoke to her and then said to her, go and call your husband. She said, I have no husband.

Jesus said, you say rightly that you have no husband, for you have never been married properly. No marriage was ever registered. Jesus said to her, go and call your husband, for you have never been married properly.

Then the Lord said, but I say to you, you've already had five husbands, and the one you're living with is not your own. Do you see how the Lord Jesus numbers everyone? He knows even how many you've had. Maybe you don't even know how many boyfriends you've had.

You don't know how many men you've slept with. But Jesus has numbered everyone. Hebrews 13 verse 4 Jesus says, and the Bible says that there's a day set aside where God will judge all those that are married to see whether their marriage bed is undefiled.

And God says, then I will judge you. It's a day I've set aside for all those that live immorally, loose lives, the prostitutes, God will call them to account. And the Lord Jesus goes on to say, even the idle words that you have spoken, you will be called to account for those.

And so as they... So as they were called to go back to where they came from, so God's going to go back in your life. He won't just look at where you are now. He'll go, He'll take you right back to the beginning.

Those things you've done in the past, that bush you come out of, that jungle, that mess, He'll go right back there and He'll call you to account. And then He will put you in the balances. He'll take all those things.

He'll take your life and put it in the balance to see whether you've achieved what He expected from you. And He'll judge you according to His standard, His word. And you can just take the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5, 6 and 7. And you just look and hear what He says there, where He says, you heard them say, yet I say this. And that's what He'll judge you according to. He'll take His word as the standard.

And then He will put that on the one side of the balance. He'll put you into the other side. And He'll want to see whether it balances or not.

One far greater than Caesar will come. And He will say, it was said that you shall not commit adultery. Yet I say, if you just look at a woman with lust in your eye, you've already committed adultery with her.

And you heard that it has been said of all that you shall not kill, not murder. Yet I say, if you get angry with your brother and you call him a fool or an idiot, you've already murdered him. You're guilty of his blood and you deserve hell.

And He says, if someone asks you to walk one mile, then walk two. If He asks you to walk a mile for Him, then don't be full of excuses and say, how can you expect this from me? You're unreasonable. But I'm tired.

Can't you see? I'm exhausted. I'm exhausted. Perhaps you were aware and you had heard about it that one day your thoughts, your deeds, your whole life, you'll be called to account for everything.

But today you are being reminded of that great day again. Now maybe you say, but yes, okay, I understand. But you must also understand I'm a sinner.

I'm just a human being. I'm weak. But in spite of what you say, God says He'll take what He expects, what His word says, He'll judge you according to that.

But today you are being reminded of that great day again. But you are being reminded of that great day again. Now Belshazzar, he was intoxicated.

He was under the influence of alcohol. But we can also be under the influence of other things. Maybe of jealousy or of anger.

And in our state, in that rage or in that jealous state and envy that we experience, we say things which we shouldn't say as well. And God records all that. We are influenced by different things, not only alcohol.

There are other things as well. And we drink because of it. And then we mock.

And we even take lightly the things that are holy. And God spoke to Belshazzar. He says, Belshazzar, you have been weighed.

You've been put in the balances. You've been found wanting. You haven't lived according to what the Bible says you should live up to.

The Bible says if you make a promise, you must keep it. You promised to serve God, to live for Him. Woe to you if you don't keep that promise.

God will call you to account. He'll say, you first pay that promise. Pay that debt.

He will also reward you and give you according to the good you have done, but He'll also give you according to the evil that you have done. And He'll judge you for the evil you did, but He'll also judge you for the good that you did not do, which you should have done. You are guilty of that and He'll call you to pay that debt.

The Lord Jesus promises, He says, if you believe to Me, as the Scripture says, from your mouth you will be saved. So in those days, the decree went on. And the Lord said out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

And the Lord said, if you believe to Me, as the Scripture says, from your mouth you will be saved. And the Lord said, if you believe to Me, as the Scripture says, from your mouth you will be saved. So today also this decree has been called out, that soon that day is coming when you will be called to account for everything.

And He'll go right back to the beginning and He'll remind you of those things which you say and which you have forgotten. And He'll remind you of that woman that you had an affair with, or that girl, and you'll say, but I don't even remember, and He'll remind you of it. Well, if you meet Him and you haven't paid that debt.

And if you haven't settled something, today is the day that God is giving you to settle it. To come to Him with that sin, that debt that you have, and confess that sin, and leave it. And then He will register that you have been forgiven for that sin, and that sin has been dealt with and done away with.

The Lord Jesus says, no one lights a lamp and then puts it under the table, hides it there. No, you'll put it on top of the table, that it may give light to everyone in the room. And that they may all see it, and then they praise God because of you.

That means the people that you live together with, that are around you, and in whose company you are, and if they are in your company, do they say that this person's life shines? We are blessed by His life. Can

they see that light in you? In Corinthians it says, It says that before you partake of the Lord's Supper, Before you partake of that fruit of the vine, and that bread, you should first examine yourself, lest you should partake unworthily, and then it will be a curse to you. So now let's forget about Caesar Augustus who passed that decree that everyone in the world should be numbered.

Registered, numbered in the town where he was born. Right up to this time. And now let's just for a moment not just think about when the Lord Jesus will come from heaven on judgment day and judge everyone that's alive, believers and unbelievers.

Where he will mention a number and call you to account for everything. We are now in this interim period. We are being told about this great day that is coming.

So let us now In this time, for now, because in preparation for that, let us examine ourselves, search our hearts and our lives, test it, lest we partake of the Lord's Supper unworthily. The Bible says if we judge ourselves, we will not be judged. That you judge yourself according to God's word, that you test to see whether it is in accordance with God's word.

We spoke last night of Bethlehem, that small little village, the least of the villages. And we spoke about that's how God works. He doesn't want the great things and you to be great or haughty and God doesn't want you to be lowly and humble.

Maybe your attitude is, I'm the older one, I've been around for longer, I have more say than the others. You see, you're not on the track, you're off it. Saul, the first king of Israel, he was an amazing person.

He was taller than all the other people there. And Samuel came. He said, Saul, since you've become great in your own eyes, things have gone wrong in your life.

God gave him a new heart, a new spirit. He anointed him. He anointed him to be king.

But the day he saw himself as something in his own eyes and as great in his own eyes, things went wrong. And God took it away, his kingship. And he took a small insignificant boy who had been herding the sheep.

Samuel went to Jesse and he said, Jesse, have you got a son? Because God has sent me to anoint him as king of Israel. And Jesse called on his first son, a real strong man. And he looked the part and then Samuel said, well, let him walk before us.

And as he walked past, the Holy Spirit said to Samuel, that's not the man. He said, I'm the oldest in the family. I'm the heir here.

And as he went past, God just said, no, no. And then he said, Jesse, do you have another son? He said, yes, I do. He also appeared before Samuel and the Lord said, no, it's not that one.

The third, the fourth, the fifth, one after the other, they appeared before Samuel. One after the other, they were put onto the balances and they were found wanting. And eventually Samuel said, well, is that all of them? Is there not another one? And then the father said, oh yes, there is another one, the youngest one.

He's out in the fields looking after the sheep. He wasn't even numbered. He had been forgotten.

He's the least of them all. He's out there looking after the sheep. And as Samuel was called to appear before Samuel, as he appeared, the Lord said, this is the one.

And Samuel said, God does not see as man sees. He does not look at the outer appearance of the man. He looks at the state of the heart.

And this young boy's heart was according to God's heart and he was beloved of God and chosen of God for that. God looks at the heart, dear friend, that heart that's hidden away from everyone. What is it like? And it's then that the Lord said, this is the one.

He's out there looking after the sheep. He's the least of them all. He's out there looking after the sheep.

And it's that heart which is the fountain out of which all your thoughts are born. And those good thoughts, but also those evil thoughts of stealing and those murderous thoughts, those come out of the heart. That's where they are born.

That's God's scale. He doesn't look at your height or your breadth or whatever outward appearance. He looks at your heart and He weighs that to see whether it's up to standard or not.

And so I'm calling out today that the day of judgment is coming where we will all be judged. And we'll be given according to our deeds. And God will go back to your childhood.

You young person, God will judge whether your obedience has been according to His word. Were you obedient to your parents as you should have been? As a teenager, were you living according to God's standard? Were you an example to older and younger people? And Paul even said to Timothy, don't hold back because of your youth, but set an example in purity and word and in deed. Be an example to everyone.

Now you young person, are you an example to everyone? Do they read the Bible in your life? The Bible says that your life is a letter written for everyone to read. So your life is being recorded in heaven, your life is being read by others, but at the same time God is also writing His laws into your hearts. There are people who cannot read and write.

They can't read a book, but there is a book that they can read. And that's your life. And everyone reads this book, this letter.

I'm a white man, but there's no black man that cannot read this letter. So no matter what background you are from, what language you speak or what culture you've had or have, but everyone reads you. I wonder what people read in your life.

If you would have had to... If you would have had to appear unexpectedly before Samuel, what would he have seen? What would have been seen in your life? With your hairstyle or the dress that you're wearing, the way you are, would it have displayed the world or not? So if you are called to appear, will you weigh up or not just by the way you're dressed? You girl, what is your dress like? Are your dresses low cut or maybe short or expose all different parts of your body? What does your dress say about you? You want everyone to look at you, especially the boys. That's the way you dress and you act to catch their attention. And then when you are raped, then it's terrible it seems, yet you're the one that invited them.

And then when you are raped, then it's terrible it seems, yet you're the one that invited them. So the Bible says much to a young person, a child, how it should live. It says how a teenager should live.

It also says how you should live in purity and what kind of a life you should live. Now when you are measured up against that standard, how do you stand up to it? Now we all, also the young person, must remember that we are betrothed to Christ. So we are set aside for him as his bride.

Are we faithful to the bridegroom or not? And then the young couple, how do you stand up to it? And then the young couples, newly married, what brought you together? Was it just the outer appearance, the will of the man, just the will of the flesh, or was it the will of God that brought you together? Was it the will of God that brought you together? And then God speaks to the older people. Maybe you've been, you're older already, but God reminds you of that first love. He takes you back there.

And He says, remember that first love where nothing was too much for you. Everything was just wonderful about it. Is that first love still there? And then it's said of women who are married, and they lament and say, you were so wonderful when you first arrived.

You were such a beautiful young bride. But now that you've got used to your husband, you even kick him. And that's the first love.

And that's the problem with us people. We get used to things. When we first experience it, it's wonderful, it's glorious.

After a while we get tired of it, like the children of Israel in the desert. When they got men for the first time, they rejoiced. It was the greatest miracle for them.

It didn't take long, and they complained about it. Like some people, they come here to Siza Bantu. They are overwhelmed.

They just find everything so wonderful. And then they even say they are called to stay here and work here. And then they hear for a few years, and then they start criticizing.

This is wrong. That's not right. And they even go and eventually go somewhere else.

They forget about their calling and the promise that they made to God. Yet God will call you to account for all those things. Just take Ephesians 5. Read it.

And you'll see what the Lord says about the wife. That she should be subject to her husband as the church is to Christ. Is that your life? That she should be subject to her husband as the church is to Christ.

Is that your life? A new husband. What does God say about you and expect of you? He says you shall love your wife, and you shall sanctify her by the washing of the Word. You shall sanctify her.

And that's the love you should show towards her. Is that your life? Are you up to standard according to God's Word? Is that your life? If not, you need to repent today. And don't say, oh no, I got converted in 1980 or 1970.

I also accepted that many years ago. No, I want to know whether today you are living according to that standard. Will you pass God's test? And if you fall short, if you fall short in any aspect, then repent today.

That if the son says today, if today would be judgment day, that you will meet it having sorted out your life with God. Now I don't know whether I am living according to God's Word or not, but I am living according to God's Word. Now I am speaking to people who have hearts of stone, of rock, where nothing penetrates.

You need to be told again and again and again, but nothing happens. But the Bible says judgment will come quickly upon those who don't listen. Who are told again and again and again and they just don't respond.

So in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. And so today we are announcing again that a day is coming where all will be numbered before God. Dear friends, if all the things in your life are registered right now, will you be found perfect in God's sight? Will everything be according to the scripture? Or will there be things, no, this is next to the road, this isn't the right thing, this is next to it, close to it, but it's not the real thing.

For you there is only one thing to do, to repent now. And your repentance should go deeper than what it was in the beginning. Otherwise there is no future for you.

Because even if you did good at that time, but that's been erased by all what you've been up to subsequently. The Bible says that if a person has lived an evil, wicked life, but at the end he repents, turns from his wicked ways, God will forgive him. And take away all the guilt that he had.

But the Bible also says that if the righteous at the end of his life should turn away from his righteousness and turn to evil, live a wicked life, those righteous deeds he's done will not help him in any way. That's not what I say, that's what the Bible says. So you should judge yourself according to God's word, according to His standard.

If you do that, then you will not be judged. And so the first time the Lord Jesus came, He came in the form of a man. When He came, everyone was numbered, it was all registered.

And it was so done, it so happened, so that He would be born in Bethlehem, so that God's word would go into fulfillment. Had it not happened, then God's word would have been a book of lies. He should be born in Nazareth.

God has spoken many things to you. Does it go into fulfillment in your life? Is everything to what it is? You are not a book of lies, you are a life of lies. Not true, you're a hypocrite, calling yourself a Christian.

But these un-Christlike things, what they do, they do in your life. So children, have you heard? You young people, you young married people, and you older people, and you widows, are you a true widow? According to the Bible, those that are found to be in prayer all the time, or are you those that are burning with lust, and are just after men? So as Jesus, when He came, it was a time when everything was numbered and registered. So it is when Jesus comes, things are numbered, they are registered.

So when He comes again, everything will once again be numbered. So when He comes again, everything will once again be numbered and registered. You'll be called to account for everything.

I'm just sorry that I cannot describe it properly, and I wish I could describe to you what that one day will be like. It will be like more than 10,000 years, just one day. I haven't got that vocabulary, I don't know that language that can explain to you what it will be like.

I've just touched the front of the garment. That day will be red hot, and get ready for that day, and live accordingly to what God says to His people. Let's bow our heads and pray.

Lord, we've heard how when you came into this world, how you moved Caesar Augustus' heart, that he should call a census where everyone should go back to where he comes from, or she comes from, and be registered there, even back to there where their ancestors came from. Now Lord, work in our hearts that we will test and search ourselves and judge ourselves as we should. Amen.

So go now and digest what you've heard. The Bible is the mirror. You need to look into it and see whether your life is reflected in His word.

So you need to even go back and go back to your roots. You were born, I was born as a German. German background, culture, you as an Englishman, or as Zulu, or whatever you are.

Go back and even test that to see whether it is according to God's word. If it's not, then it needs to be dealt with. And I cannot say, and I cannot say, well I'm a German.

That's just the way we are. That's our culture. And a Zulu can't say, well that's the Zulu culture.

That's the way we are. No. It has to be in accordance with God's word.

Let's pray. Lord, please through your Holy Spirit, make alive your word in our hearts. Lord, work in an amazing way.

Do that miracle that we will be changed to live according to your word. Lord, help us that your word may be alive in our hearts and do a deep work in us. Amen.

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