

The Next Life

Planning Your Eternal Reward

John 5:24

Introduction

Last week, we explored the biblical teaching that we will all give an account to God about how we lived our life on earth and whether we will appear in judgment at the Great White Throne Judgment or the Judgment Seat of Christ. At the end of this life, each of us will stand before Almighty God, and He will render a verdict that will impact us all eternity. Unbelievers will appear before the Great White Throne in judgments, and believers will appear before the Judgment seat of Christ.

Today, I want us to examine the Judgment Seat of Christ more fully. At the Bema, Jesus will call each of us before him to give an account of how we lived for him and what we did to tell others about Him.

Jesus said in John 5:24, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My Word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live."

(John 5:24-25 NKJV)

Every Christian will appear before Jesus—not for condemnation, but for reward. Christ will evaluate how well we managed his resources and invested them to advance God's love and purposes. Then Jesus will reward us with praise and assign us our mission in his eternal kingdom. It's amazing that many Christians will spend countless hours and investment planning for their future retirement in this life with no thought whatsoever about planning for their eternal future.

Next to gratitude for God's past grace, the New Testament emphasizes that a believer's knowledge of the Judgment Seat of Christ is the greatest motivation a Christian has for serving Jesus and living the Christian life now. Several dozen times, including every New Testament author, talks about the Bema, but no one talks about it more than Jesus, whose teachings are bookend statements about it.

In Matthew 6, Jesus said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21 NKJV)

In Revelation 22, Jesus says, "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work." (Revelation 22:12 NKJV)

Unfortunately, most American Christians are either ignorant or indifferent to this New Testament teaching. Many Christians don't prepare for the judgment because

someone has convinced them that it doesn't really matter – you'll find out when you get there – or they're just trying to scare you and put fear in your heart, so just ignore it. But if you think it's important to plan for the future in this life, why would you leave your eternal future life to chance?

First, let's look at some common objections to this teaching and how to face the challenges.

I. Facing The Challenges

Some say the teaching we must face God in judgment is only a fear-motivating tactic. If we were talking about the Great White Throne Judgment and eternal separation from God and all that is good, I would say there's good reason to be afraid! The fear of the Lord is a good thing! The fear that motivates you to do the right thing can't be bad for you! I have no problem with that kind of fear.

But we're talking about the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Bema. The Bema is about rewards! If you're afraid that God won't let you into heaven at the Judgment Seat of Christ or that it's a day of humiliation and God will sentence you to sweep the streets of heaven forever, forget about it! The Bema judgment is like the Olympic Games, where the judges give out rewards and medals to the overcomers.

The Judgment Seat of Christ is when we receive rewards for our service to Christ in this life! Jesus satisfied God's judgment and retribution on the Cross once and for all. Any view that tries to smuggle punitive judgment back into the Bema should be rejected emphatically. Heaven and hell are infinitely different. One is spent in God's absence, while the other is spent in God's presence. There's nothing carnal or wrong with wanting to please Christ and receive all the benefits and blessings he can give us.

1 John 2:28 says, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." (1 John 2:28 NKJV)

You may feel ashamed you didn't do more for Christ in this life, but that feeling is not condemnation from Christ. He will evaluate our work to see which deeds rise to the level of eternal reward. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is." (1 Corinthians 3:10-13 NKJV)

Don't waste your opportunities in this life to plan and prepare for your eternal life! Don't invest everything in this life which is going to be over in a few brief years.

Rather invest in your eternal life! Build a significant relationship with God and make sound investments in His kingdom.

Christians who are not concerned about their eternal future usually try to devalue its importance. There's a mock-humility that says, "I'll be satisfied with just being there in Heaven—I don't need anything else. – Just give me a cabin in the corner of glory!"

The judgment seat of Christ will be completely fair. The issue will not be how we compare to other people but how faithful we are with what God gave us. In Matthew, Christ gave the same reward to the man with five talents that he gave to the man with ten. Those who have charismatic personalities or excel in public life have no advantage over those who are less public and use their gifts in more behind-the-scenes ways. Those who had the privilege of growing up in healthy homes or coming to Christ early in life have no advantage over those who grew up in broken homes or came to Christ later in life. The issue is the same for everyone. How faithful have you been to serving Christ?

In the world rewards corrupt people all the time. People sabotage another's job to get a promotion; they steal secrets to be the first out with a product; they treat other people as an impersonal means to their end. And sadly, some Christians do the same thing. They view people as stepping stones to their goals or as competitors to be beaten.

The answer to selfish behavior is not to eliminate all rewards. Rewards are one of the most powerful motivators that exist, and God has instilled this in human hearts as a legitimate source of motivation for serving him. The key is to connect the rewards with proper behavior and motivation.

As Christians, we work to fulfill God's biblical requirements and receive our eternal rewards.

II. Fulfilling Biblical Requirements

John said in his Gospel, "God is Love!" However, Friedrich Nietzsche said, "God is dead!" What say you?

Authentic Christians experience God's love, learn his ways, and adopt His spirit for themselves. The Bible prescribes for us God's conditions for receiving His blessing and reward. These vital commands definitely affect us both naturally and eternally.

Faithfulness is God's measuring stick of success, and He requires that quality in all his servants. A faithful Christian is trustworthy and reliable. Faithful people are loyal, conscientious, devoted, and truthful. To adequately plan for your eternal reward, you must demonstrate faithfulness to God! You must be zealous in your devotion to God. You must work at being honest and truthful in every endeavor.

God doesn't leave us clueless about what He expects from us in this life as we prepare for eternity. Right off the bat, He tells us his expectations in Ten Commandments. In Matthew 22, when asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" Jesus said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is *the first and great commandment*. And *the second is* like it: 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40 NKJV)

What disciplines can I develop to help me learn to demonstrate my love for God and plan for my eternal reward? First, create a habit of going to worship God!

In Israel, even today, everything shuts down at dusk on Friday night in honor of the 4th commandment – Keep the sabbath holy! This practice has kept Jews monotheistic for centuries! Most Jews believe it is their duty to worship God! Of course, there are Jews that are just as worldly as pagans – but they are not in the majority.

Christians ought to exceed this example! We know who the real Messiah is, Jesus! We should come faithfully and regularly to worship Him! Being a Christian does not exempt us from worship! – unless we're not planning on any eternal reward.

Another biblical discipline that will help you plan for eternity is tithing and investing financially in the work of Christ. We live in a city of insurance companies. Many people in this life take out a life insurance policy to ensure that their plans for the future can be achieved through those loved ones they leave behind should they die. While you are living, you make regular payments on your life insurance policy that you get no benefit for until you die. Most will say that's responsible planning for the end of life situations.

But what about your eternal future? What future rewards do you expect to receive? Tithing is like paying that insurance premium weekly, monthly, or quarterly. You do it because there's a reward at the end! Guess what happens when you don't pay your insurance premiums? They cancel your policy, and there goes your future reward! Don't cheat yourself out of a future reward just because you think you can't afford to pay the premium now! You need to take tithing seriously!

There are many ways to store up treasures in heaven, but let me mention one more; Teaching the ways of the Lord to your family. Deuteronomy 6 is often called the pivotal passage of the Bible because on it hinges the teaching about God that is to be passed from one generation to the next. It says, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." (Deuteronomy 6:4-7 NKJV)

Obviously, you cannot teach what you do not know or practice! Many parents' teaching method is, "Do what I say, not what I do," which usually ends in disaster. Don't tell your children how to live the Christian life; teach them and model for them a life of faithfulness to Christ. If worship and tithing and putting Christ first in your life isn't important to you, what are you teaching your children?

Now, if you don't love God and haven't given your heart to Jesus, then there's no point in tithing, going to church, or telling anyone else the ways of God. Because where you're going, there won't be any rewards to receive! You need to get off that road and take the road that leads to eternal reward!

But I imagine that at the Judgment seat of Christ, the subject of worship, and tithing, and teaching the next generation will come up!

III. Achieving Heavenly Crowns

Finally, what do we do with our rewards once we have achieved our heavenly crowns? The crowns we receive from Christ are meant to recognize and acclaim throughout Heaven that we are His and that He is overjoyed that we are His body!

The New Testament speaks of Jesus awarding us crowns for four specific areas.

In 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul says, "For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy." (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 NKJV)

The "you" refers to the people in Thessalonica that Paul led to Christ. They will constitute a basis for his reward when Christ returns.

Secondly, Christ will reward you for being an example that helps other Christians to grow spiritually. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*. And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable *crown*. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NKJV)

When you invest in other Christians by expressing interest in them and modeling your spiritual gifts and faithful service to them, you are storing up faithful crowns that will eternally exalt Christ. As you exercise servant-leadership in your home and in the church, God will reward it richly.

Thirdly, every bit of Christian training you undergo to become a quality worker for Christ will pay off eternally! Becoming a student of the Word, a disciplined person of prayer, and a dedication to Christlike character is a great way to receive a crown. If

this kind of rigorous training is worth it, even in a small way, for an athletic reward, how much more is it for spiritual training?

In a fallen world, no one avoids suffering. Christians and non-Christians are suffering in our world today. With material wealth, you can avoid a lot of suffering and accumulate a lot of creature comforts. But scripture reminds us repeatedly that radical commitment to Christ will result in added suffering.

But suffering for Christ in this life means rewards in the next life! Christ does not promise us ease in this life, but He does promise to reward us in the next life for enduring suffering in our service to him. James 1:12 says, "Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." ([James 1:12 NKJV](#))

We live in a culture that feels that there is virtually nothing worth suffering for. Many have never learned to regard anything to be of greater value than their aversion to pain. The minute they feel a hint of pain or discomfort, they run to be coddled and comforted by the pharmaceutical gods. It is a horrible, self-protective, soul-destroying way of life!

Jesus says his purpose of salvation is worth suffering for, and he will reward those who do so.

Conclusion

Serving Christ is the most important job in the universe!! It demands the most from us and results in the greatest reward! If you have an informed and persistent trust in God's promises about eternal life, your heart and lifestyle will be transformed. Every one of us will appear before Jesus—not for condemnation, but for reward. Christ will evaluate how well we managed and invested his resources to advance God's love and purposes. Then Jesus will reward us with praise and assign us our mission in his eternal kingdom. Don't short-change yourself by only investing in this life; start planning now for your eternal rewards! And since community with God and others is the *destiny* we were created for, we should prioritize community with God and other believers *now*.