

Our Rewards in Heaven

I. What Will We Do for Eternity?

We are rapidly approaching the final closing minutes of the Church age before the return of Jesus Christ. For a period of seven years, during the time of the Tribulation, the earth will experience an intense outpouring of both the wrath of Satan and the wrath of God. During that time, there will also be a great outpouring of God's grace and great evangelism throughout the earth. But believers will not be on earth during that time.

The Bible says that we have not been appointed to wrath. This was the message from Paul to the Thessalonians. In fact, the Thessalonians believed they were actually going through the Tribulation in their day. Paul even had to write a second letter to admonish them that they were not in the Tribulation and that the Tribulation could not occur nor could Antichrist be revealed until the Church was removed from the earth.

However, because the Church will be removed from the earth for the seven-year period of the Tribulation does not mean believers will be doing nothing.

Some Christians are not looking forward to heaven because they cannot imagine being in a place for eternity without becoming bored. But boredom is of the flesh, not of the Spirit. It will be impossible to be bored in heaven. Every moment will be new and we will constantly be learning more about the Lord Jesus Christ, the grace and power of God for all of eternity. We will never learn all there is to be known. Every day in heaven will be wonderful, but heaven will begin for every believer by going before the Judgment Seat of Christ.

II. The Judgment Seat of Christ

While God will be dealing with the unbelieving masses on earth during the seven years of the Tribulation, He will also be dealing with the Church in heaven as they go through the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Judgment Seat of Christ is not a judgment of whether or not we go to heaven. That is a settled fact from the time we are born again. Once we are born again, things in life are progressive.

3 John

vs.2 *Beloved, I wish above all things thou mayest prosper and be in health as thy soul prospers.*

Sanctification is progressive. There is growth and maturity in the things of God. As this verse reveals, there is a prosperity of the soul that develops moment by moment, day by day, line upon line, precept upon precept. Everything in life comes one step at a time. Psalm 37 tells us the steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord. However, some Christians grow more rapidly than others. Some Christians do not have a desire to grow. They settle for just being born again and do nothing their entire Christian life except wait for the rapture of the Church or their death.

Some churches preach nothing but the new birth. Every sermon revolves around how to be saved. There is no teaching about the baptism in the Holy Spirit. There is no teaching of the Word to bring growth and maturity. Many Christians are satisfied to eek out an existence on the earth until Jesus returns. Will they go to heaven? Yes. But all they will do is go to heaven.

Romans 14

vs. 10 *But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought (tempt) thy brother? for we shall **all** stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*

Notice, this verse does not say “some” will stand before the judgment seat of Christ; it says “*all*.” The “all” who will stand before the judgment seat of Christ are all the believers of the Church age. Paul did not say, “All of us spiritual ones who have achieved super-spirituality and know the Lord more intimately will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The rest of you will just have to stay here for awhile.” No, Paul said, “...*we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*”

III. We Will All Give an Account Before God

Romans 14

vs. 11 *For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.*

vs. 12 *So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*

Notice, we do not give an account to each other. We give an account to the Lord. Our lives are lived before the Lord and ultimately we stand accountable to God, even when we sin. We may have harmed others but in actuality, we have sinned against God.

When David sinned against Uriah the Hittite and Bathsheba, he did not immediately repent. David had been out of fellowship with the Lord for a year when Nathan the prophet came to him and began to share the story of the ewe lamb. David had sinned, committed adultery, and had Bathsheba's husband, Uriah killed. Even though David was guilty of all of these sins, when Nathan confronted him with his sin, David's response was, "I have sinned against the Lord. Him and Him only have I sinned against." Immediately, David received forgiveness from God. It is important to note that David came to the realization that in sinning against Uriah and Bathsheba, he had sinned against God.

We do not have a right to judge one another. When we do, we are stepping into God's jurisdiction. We are to turn all judgment over to Him. Every believer will eventually stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5

vs. 9 *Wherefore we labour, that, whether present (alive) or absent (believers who have died) , we may be accepted of him.*

The word "accepted" means "well pleased." It is the same Greek word that appears in Hebrews 11:6, "For without faith it is impossible to **please** him."

vs. 10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*

Notice, verse 10 does not say, "some must appear"; it says "we must ALL appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

Christians do good things and Christians do bad things. Christians do things that are acceptable to God and they do things that are unacceptable to Him. But God's desire it that, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, we strive to live a life pleasing to Him and to do good works.

IV. The Rewards Seat

The “judgment seat of Christ” is the Greek word “bema.” The meaning of “bema” is not “judgment.” The definition is actually “rewards seat.” This was a seat used in the ancient world. The king would sit on the “bema”, which was a high, elevated type of throne. Military heroes and athletes would stand before the “bema” to receive a crown from the king for their achievement. Those who were not heroes were not judged at the “bema.” Neither were those athletes who did not come in first place in an athletic contest judged at the “bema.” The purpose was to reward those who had won a battle or a race.

I Corinthians 3

- vs. 12 *Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;*
- vs. 13 *Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.*
- vs. 14 *If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.*
- vs. 15 *If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.*

Some will stand before the judgment seat of Christ with only wood, hay, and stubble. Others will have gold, silver, and precious stones. Verse 13 tells us that fire will try every man’s work. It does not try the man because he was tried when he was born again. The fire will try our works.

After the fire consumes any works that were not of God, we will be rewarded for whatever good works remain. Anything burned up will be counted as lost. We will be rewarded with gold, silver, and precious stones for our good works.

Many ask, “What if I get to heaven and don’t have any good works?” Verse 15 tells us that our works will be burned up but we will be saved. The foundation of Jesus Christ in our lives cannot be burned up, but God does not want us to barely make it to heaven with no rewards. He wants us to live an abundant life on earth and to receive overwhelming blessings in heaven as well!

V. From the Rewards of Life to the Rewards of Eternity

There are different types of grace. There is convicting grace that causes us to realize our need for a Savior. There is quickening grace, which is the grace that brought salvation when we received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. There is living grace. Until the day we die, living grace is upon our lives. When we die, dying grace takes us from this natural life into eternity. Dying grace brings us from the rewards of life to the rewards of eternity; from the abundant life on earth to the life we will spend with Him forever!

VI. Salvation is Not a Reward

Salvation is not a reward; it is a gift. We cannot earn salvation; it was purchased by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The gift of salvation was given to us regardless of the type of sin committed, the background we have come from, or how spiritually dead we are. God offers us eternal life. We cannot quicken ourselves or give ourselves eternal life. It is a free gift of God.

Once we receive the gift of eternal life, God wants us to live for Him. He has given us the power and tools necessary to live our lives for Him and there are also rewards for living for Him.

He has given us the gift of eternal life, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of healing. Beyond His gifts, He offers us rewards in heaven for the good works we have done in this life.

VII. Rewards Can be Lost

Not only can rewards be gained, they can be lost. Living for the Lord causes gain to come into our lives, but turning from Him causes loss.

Second John, verse 8 reveals that we are able to lose our rewards.

2 John

vs. 8 *Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.*

VIII. Crowns Speak of Rewards

Revelation 3

vs. 11 *Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*

The crown mentioned in verse 11 represents rewards. The crown is not a reference to salvation, because again, salvation is a gift. Crowns in the Word of God speak of rewards. But as pointed out in this verse and also in 2 John, verse 8, rewards can be lost. Rewards are lost by esteeming the opinions of the world and being immersed in the things of this world. By walking with God we have much to gain in this life and even more to gain in eternity.

IX. An Abundant Entrance

First Corinthians 15 reveals that no two believers will be alike in heaven. Although we will appear as we did on earth because our bodies will be resurrected, our resurrection bodies will contain varying levels of glory.

I Corinthians 15

vs. 41 *There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory.*

vs. 42 *So also is the resurrection of the dead...*

When we receive our resurrection bodies, some will shine like the sun, some like the moon, and some like the stars, differing in brilliance and magnitude. No two believers will shine the same in heaven, however the potential is available to shine like the sun.

2 Peter 1

vs. 11 *For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

vs. 12 *Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always into remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.*

Verse 11 tells us we can have an *abundant entrance* into heaven. We can come to heaven with many rewards that withstand the test of fire. We can shine like the sun, but it is all potential. Whatever God offers us we can receive. We need to set our mark high. We should not settle for second or third best. We should not settle for the lie, "Well, at least I'm going to heaven!"

Maybe you *are* going to heaven, but who wants to live with hell on earth in the meantime? Determine to live for the Lord so you will have an abundant entrance.

X. Crowns

There are two Greek words found in the Word of God for “crowns.” Again, eternal life is not seen as a crown, but it is what gets us to heaven to receive the crowns. Crowns are a type of reward. Some believers will have no crowns in heaven. They will have a white robe, a palm leaf in their hand to wave, and will stand before the Lord all day praising and worshiping Him. That will be wonderful. However, throughout the Word of God we are told that the believers who learn to rule with Jesus Christ in the natural life will also rule and reign with Him throughout eternity. Not all believers will rule and reign with Him, but we have been given the potential to do so.

A. Diadema: The Crown for the King

The Greek word “diadema” is where we get the English word “diadem.” Only a king wore this type of crown. In the Bible, “diadema” is not used in reference to the crowns believers will receive; it is only used in reference to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 19

vs. 12 *His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns...*

Jesus will return on a white horse and on His head will be many crowns. Verse 12 is the only time the word is used in reference to Jesus Christ. It is never used in reference to the Church.

It is interesting to note that in Revelation chapters 12, when Satan comes to overthrow all the world systems and bring in Antichrist, he rises from the bottomless pit wearing many crowns. The same word “diadema” is used. Satan will try to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ, but the good news is he will be overthrown and the rightful owner of the crowns will return to rule and reign.

We can be a “king of kings” but we will never be “*the* King of kings.”

B. Stephanos: The Believer's Crown

There are many crowns mentioned in the Bible for the believer and in every instance, the Greek word “stephanos” is used. As previously mentioned, this was a victory wreath given by the king to the athlete or military hero who qualified. The *stephanos* indicated they were a leader of others, a leader of leaders, a king of kings.

2 Timothy 2

vs. 4 *No man that warreth entageleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

vs. 5 *And if a man also strive for this masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.*

The word “crown” in verse 5 is again, the Greek word “stephanos.”

I Corinthians 9

vs. 24 *Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*

vs. 25 *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

Again, the word “crown” is “stephanos.”

There is a difference between the crown given for military bravery and the crown given for athletic heroism. In the military, soldiers fight an enemy. In athletics, individuals are in competition for a prize. We will be rewarded for two things in heaven. We will be rewarded for opposing and resisting every work of Satan. We will also be rewarded for finishing our course and running the race for the prize that is set before us—Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Every believer can cross the finish line!

XI. Types of Crowns

A. A Crown of Life

James 1

vs. 12 *Blessed is the man who endures temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive a crown of life, which the Lord has promised them that love him.*

Believers will receive crowns, but unbelievers will not. The one who sends temptations is Satan.

vs. 13 *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.*

The whole essence of James, chapter 1, verses 1 through 12, is that we are in a constant battle against Satan. We are in a daily struggle against his demonic forces. God has already promised us the victory. We are in a war against Satan. He is in opposition to us and we are in opposition against him. The good news is we are on the winning side! We stand in a place between the victory of the resurrection and the victory of His return!

Revelation 2

vs. 10 *Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown (stephanos) of life.*

We will receive crowns for daily victories against the enemy.

B. The Crown of Righteousness

2 Timothy 4

vs. 7 *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*

vs. 8 *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown (stephanos) of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

The “righteous judge” wears the diadem, but the entire body of Christ is running a race and those who cross the finish line receives the crown of righteousness.

C. The Morning Star

There is one crown mentioned in the Word of God not every Christian will receive. It is called “the morning star.”

Revelation 2

vs. 26 *And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:*

vs. 27 *And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.*

vs. 28 *And I will give him the morning star.*

This is a reference to Jesus in resurrection, in glory, power, and majesty. This verse is saying that there is a group of Christians who will rule and reign with Him in the same power and majesty. The same phrase is used in Revelation 22, where Jesus is called “*the bright and morning star.*”

Revelation 22

vs. 16 *I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.*

We can receive military rewards for withstanding the enemy, athletic rewards for finishing the race set before us, and we can also receive “*the morning star.*” This reward is dealing with those who will be ruling and reigning with Jesus over nations throughout the millennial reign. I believe this is a reference to a small group of believers in Revelation called “the four and twenty elders.” Those who sit with Him on the throne will have crowns, robes, and scepters. They are a contrast to the great multitudes in heaven who are on a sea of glass. There will be varying levels of rewards in heaven, but we should strive for the reward called “*the morning star.*”

D. The Crown of Glory

I Peter 5

vs. 4 *And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*

From verse 1 through verse 4, Peter is addressing pastors. There is a crown reserved for pastors called the “crown of glory.”

Philippians 4

vs. 1 *Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.*

The congregation is a pastor's crown until he gets to heaven. There has always been a remnant that are committed to the things of God, disciples who follow after the Lord, the church within the church. Jesus had the twelve and within the twelve, He had the three. The same is true of the local church. There is a core of those who are truly committed to the things of God. In this verse Paul is telling the people, "*You form a crown (stephanos) over my head.*" One day, pastors will receive a physical crown for the spiritual crown of the faithful in their congregations on earth.

I Thessalonians 2

vs. 19 *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?*

Believers who follow the Lord and hunger and thirst for the things of God, are a crown called a "*crown of rejoicing,*" another reference to the crowns pastors will receive in heaven.

XII. Life is Good, Heaven is Better

We may experience good things in this life, but they cannot be compared to what God has for us in heaven. One day very soon, He will open to us His exceeding glory...His riches in glory. God has vaults to open in heaven with things that we will be unable to receive until we have our resurrection bodies. His riches in glory will far surpass anything we ever received in this life. This life is good, but heaven will far surpass anything we receive on earth!