

# God's Eternal Rewards and Why we Should Seek Them

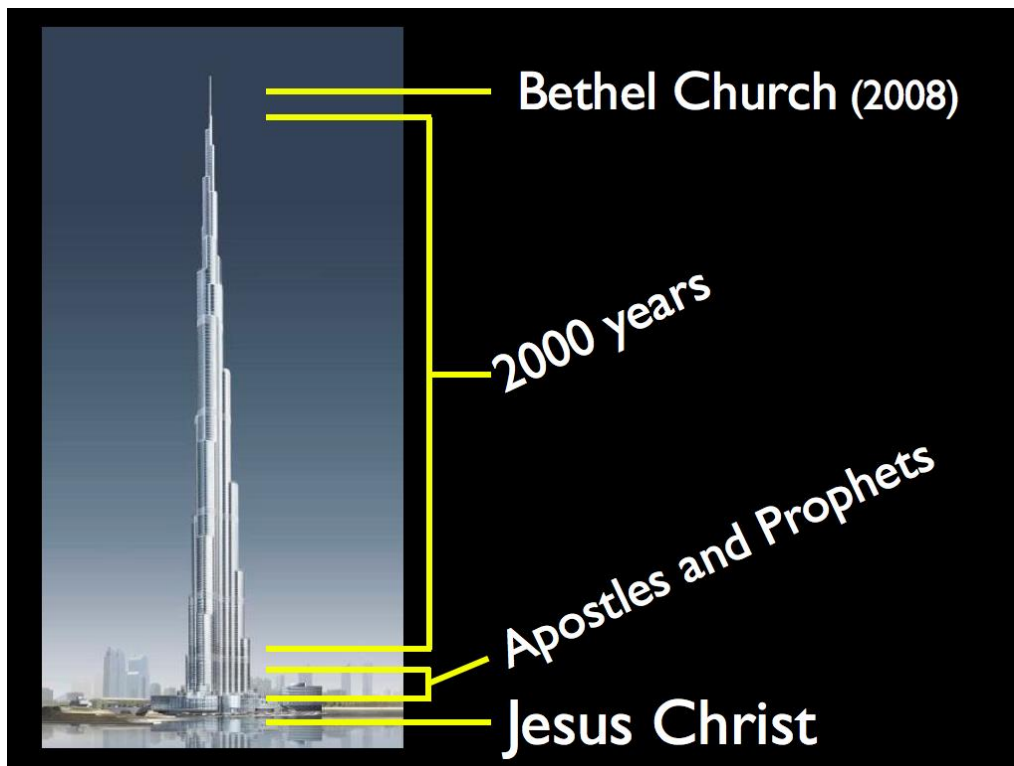
## 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

**Broadcast Dates: April 26 & 29, 2024**  
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We have a lot to talk about today and part of the reason we do is that for the last month we have taken a hiatus from our series in 1 Corinthians while we celebrated the birth of Jesus. Today we get back to it but our memories are likely a little foggy. So let's do a quick review of our last message in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 where Paul says this -

*According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)*

Paul uses the metaphor of the construction of a building as a picture of what God is doing to build his church. We used the graphic below as a picture of what he is saying.



The church is precious because it has a precious foundation, Jesus Christ, who was the Son of God and Savior and what He did in His death and resurrection is the foundation of the superstructure. Upon that foundation is the ministry and teachings of the Apostles. These are found for us in the Bible. For 2000 years God's people have been evangelizing and

discipling and adding levels to the building. All Christians are workers on the building; the issue is whether we are good ones or not and what is the quality of our work.

This passage and many others teach us that Jesus is going to judge the quality of our work someday. That is the purging fire described here. This is not a moral judgment ending in heaven or hell. Romans 8:1 and other passages make it clear that we are saved by faith in Christ; there is no condemnation for Christians. This is a judgment of commendation or lack of commendation.

What better way to find out the quality of work than to see if it endures. Remember this picture of the lonely house that survived Hurricane Ike?



None of the other houses survived. In the end, how do you know which house had a good foundation, quality materials, quality workmanship? The one that endured. Our lives will be judged by Christ in what is known as the "bema seat judgment" or the "judgment seat of Christ." His perfect knowledge and justice will evaluate the quality of our service to Him and to His church and to His people. Gold, silver, and precious stones represent the *quality, sacrifice, and stewardship* we offered to Him. Wood, hay and stubble represent those aspects of our life that had no eternal value. They burn up, don't last and are not rewarded. Verse 14 says *some will receive a reward*. Verse 15 says *some will suffer a loss of reward*.

So what is clear is that in our eternal dwelling on the new earth, it's not the same for everybody. Some will be richly rewarded and enjoy that honor forever and some will not receive any reward at all.

This is a critical truth. If I live today merely for today, then someday I'll count myself a fool. That is true every day of this brief and passing life I have. The same is true for you. I just

don't think most Christians think about it that much, which explains a lot of the lukewarm laziness in the American church. What we call mediocrity now we will call stupidity on the other side of the judgment seat of Christ. We will cry out, "If only I had realized the opportunity! What a fool I have been!"

So toward the goal of us living these days in a way that when we are dead, we'll be glad that we did, we're going to spend this week and next on the judgment seat of Christ and the motivation of living wisely for eternal rewards. *The question most of you are thinking is...*

## **What are These Eternal Rewards?**

Scripture uses several words to describe them -

### **Reward/inheritance**

- *Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven... (Luke 6:22-23, emphasis added)*
- *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:6, emphasis added)*
- *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. (Colossians 3:23-24, emphasis added)*
- *[Moses] considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. (Hebrews 11:26, emphasis added)*
- *To an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. (1 Peter 1:4, emphasis added)*
- *Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. (2 John 8, emphasis added)*
- *"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. (Revelation 22:12, NIV, emphasis added)*

This last verse is nearly the last thing Jesus says to us in Scripture. Might that not mean it's something to pay attention to? God puts a promised reward before us as a motivation to serve Him. We also see that the basis for reward is what we do for Him in this life.

### **Crowns**

Here are some examples:

- *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12, emphasis added)*
- *Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day... (2 Timothy 4:8, emphasis added)*
- *And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:4, emphasis added)*
- *Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2:10b, emphasis added)*

If you've heard teaching on this, you have probably heard about these crowns. I don't know about you but the thought of wearing a real crown with jewels is not that exciting to me. I don't know that I want to wear a crown for all eternity. This is how the image is perhaps unhelpful to us in our culture because we don't get what it meant in the biblical culture. In the culture of the Bible, to have a crown was very desirable, not because of the crown itself,

but the honor that went with it. Crowns had three primary functions: *Consecration* – the Old Testament priests had a crown. It set them apart for their holy duties; *Coronation* – they put a crown on a new king; and *Exaltation* – the winner of athletic contests or the hero of the war would receive a crown. (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia)

### **Crown – A state of honor or blessing for those who wore them (*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*)**

Receiving a crown wasn't about the value of the crown itself but was about the honor and blessing that came with possessing it. Listen to how Christ is described...*His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.* (Revelation 19:12, NIV) On his head are many crowns? Were they stacked like Tupperware? How do you get more than one crown on your head? It's imagery. To have many crowns is to have multiplied honor and blessing. These crowns are symbolic of the honor and blessing Christ will give to his faithful servants.

The other mistake people make about these crowns and rewards unfortunately comes from one of my favorite songs, *Holy, Holy, Holy. Holy, Holy, Holy! All the saints adore thee, casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea.* You'll hear this sometimes from people, *I just can't wait to throw my crowns at his feet.* I get them, but I don't keep them anyway. They are sincere but they are sincerely wrong. The idea comes from Revelation 4:10 where it says whenever God is praised by the angels, the 24 elders around the throne fall in worship and cast their crowns before the throne of God in worship.

I don't know what happens there. Here's what I do know. There is no passage that says we give our crowns back to God and the imagery misses the point anyway. I don't think we are given literal, metallic sit-on-your-head crowns. Christ gives honor and blessing and distinction, like a crown, to those servants who have earned it. Perhaps Thursday night's College National Championship football game is helpful where the Florida Gators were crowned National Champions. I watched the post-game; I didn't see anyone wearing a literal crown. Their crowning was the honor they received.

### **Treasure/Riches**

- *"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. (Matthew 6:19-20, emphasis added)*
- *But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:20-21, emphasis added)*
- *They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:18-19, emphasis added)*

Treasure doesn't mean money. There will be no money as we know it and we will someday laugh and grieve at how important it was to us in this life. Real treasure is the fullness of knowing Christ. I believe the treasure Christ will give is deepness of fellowship with Him, richness of joy in Him, and fullness of divine experience, which will be the real treasure of heaven. Psalm 16:11 says, *in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.* So as we start pulling this together, the Bible over and over again places before God's people God's promise to reward any and all faithful service, sacrifice and stewardship.

## What Criteria Earn Reward/Commendation From Christ?

Even asking this question might be troubling because we rightly emphasize that salvation is entirely by grace and is not earned. That is a very precious truth to us. So are these in contradiction - Salvation by grace apart from human effort and eternal rewards based on human effort? Don't be confused!

Here is a safe place to land, the Bible teaches both and when we neglect either we do damage to the gospel. When salvation by grace alone is turned into a works-based salvation then we have fundamentally changed the gospel into a gospel that is no gospel and will not save us. At the same time, when we ignore all the exhortations to live today wisely for eternal reward we end up living a risk-free, comfort-loving, consumer kind of Christianity. I'm in it for what it provides in this life. "Your best life now" mentality. The eternal problem is that kind of life will not translate into eternal reward and leads to superficial and shallow living in this life. Salvation by grace and reward by effort are both true and precious. My attempt to bring them together is that all is of God and from God and the desire to serve God or sacrifice for Him is a fruit of His grace in my life. It is I who actually serve and sacrifice, but I love Him and serve because He first loved me (1 John 4:19).

So what are some of the criteria that Christ's rewards are based on? (These are taken from the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 951-2)

- **Enduring temptation** – James 1:12
- **Diligently seeking God** – Hebrews 11:6
- **Motivated by God's praise, not man's** – Matthew 6:5-6; 1 Corinthians 4:5
- **Dying for Christ** – Revelation 2:10
- **Degree of Sacrifice** – Matthew 19:29
- **Faithfully doing God's will and longing for Christ's return** - 2 Timothy 4:8
- **Acts of kindness** – Galatians 6:10
- **Hospitality (cups of cold water)** – Matthew 10:40-42
- **Faithfulness in service** – 1 Corinthians 4:2; Matthew 25:14ff.
- **Stewardship of the abilities and opportunities God gave us** – Matthew 25:14ff.; Mark 12:41ff.

All of these are put into the divine formula for reward. What is plain is that salvation and eternal life are the same for all Christians, but the rewards and honor enjoyed for eternity depend on the service we offer Christ.

What we should be asking ourselves as we look at this list is, *How will I be evaluated? What will Christ say to me?* Take another look. Go slow. This many not seem that important to you right now, but I guarantee you, someday nothing will be more important.

These measures of success are so different than ours. We measure people by outward kinds of things; peoples' impressions of us, the appearance of spirituality, the size of our responsibilities, what we discern as spiritual fruit. Judgment day will be a shocking day. This is what Jesus meant when He said, someday the last shall be first and the first shall be last (Matthew 19:30). Those that were apparently somebody(s) in the kingdom of God will be the least. And many who were perceived as being least or insignificant, yet served Christ sacrificially and faithfully, will for eternity be "first."

## The Point? *Don't Waste Your life!*

Friends, please listen to me. I want to be a pastor who prepares you for eternity. Very soon we all will be dead. The issues of the week weighing you down or discouraging you won't



really matter then. It'll all be done. Then what? Then we stand before Him, Christ in all His divine glory.

Think of it. What is He going to ask us? Scripture clues us in. *Describe for me how you served me in your life. What will you say? I gave you many opportunities to tell others about me. Tell me each one and what you did. Please list for me the sacrifices you made for my sake and tell me what you gave up do it. Tell me every time you truly died to yourself to serve me. Give me as many examples as you can where you did what you did because you loved me more than yourself.*

How will we answer Him? Will we have anything to say? Will what we say pass through the fire of His evaluation as gold, silver, and precious stones or will our choices prove in the end, to be wood, hay, and stubble?

I don't know if I have ever or will ever preach a message that if heard, could have a more dramatic transformation on our church. Imagine a couple thousand people living for eternity – old people, new people – wanting to please Christ and receive His commendation and reward. It is this truth that sends us across the street with love and compassion to our neighbors. It motivates us to serve inconveniently knowing it will be richly rewarded. The trials we treasure are the ones that hurt the most because they are an opportunity to be faithful and look forward to our reward.

When the promises of reward are truly believed and appropriated, they will produce a radical kind of faith and service for Christ. This is what sends Christians to hard places; this is what empowers Christians to obey when it will cost them something. This was a motivation that encouraged Jesus in His Cross to bear: *who for the joy set before Him endured the Cross, despising its shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* (Hebrews 12:2). *All of the light and momentary trials are achieving for us a glory that far outweighs them all.* (2 Cor. 4:17). We both believe that, and offer God service, sacrifice, and stewardship, or we don't. For those that do, someday we will struggle to fathom the generosity of our Savior when He lavishes us with His reward. He is a very generous King.

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