

# What will Jesus ask You at the Judgment Seat and What Answer will You give Him?

by Jeremy James



What will Jesus ask you at the Judgment Seat – the *Bema* – and what answer will you give him? This is a very simple question and one that ought to be of intense interest to all believers.

Can you answer it?

The Bible gives many clues as to what Jesus will ask. We will examine these clues in a moment, but first let us focus on just one question that he is almost certain to ask – "Did you tell people about me?"

Can a question be any simpler? But how many believers in our churches TODAY will be able to give a reply that will not fill them with shame?

Some readers may ask whether it will actually be possible to experience *shame* at the *Bema*, the Judgment Seat of Christ, especially as this is the judgment of the saved and not of the lost.

John gives us the answer:

**"And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."  
(1 John 2:28)**

In our present age, the age of the Laodicean church, this verse is almost entirely forgotten. Today's lukewarm believers simply fail to see that this incredible warning by John applies to every one of us. Remember, in his letter John is addressing, not a mixed audience, but believers only – "little children."

In this paper we will sound John's warning as loudly as we can.

## **The Reality of the *Bema* Rewards**

The appreciate the significance of this warning, we need to understand that Jesus intends to reward each and every believer at the *Bema* in proportion to their faithfulness.

But what exactly does that mean? Are we confusing faith with faithfulness?

As the Bible teaches, we are saved only by our faith in Christ. Faithfulness, on the other hand, is the expression of our loyalty and devotion to the one who saved us. Therefore everything, absolutely everything that we do after we are saved will be taken into account by Christ at the Judgment Seat.

We are told that it is the nature of God to judge:

**"But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD." (Jeremiah 9:24)**

The LORD **delights** in judgment! He delights also in righteousness and loving-kindness. Therefore the Judgment Seat will be a very special time in God's holy plan for mankind. The righteous will be rewarded for their service to His Son, in whom the Father delights to the uttermost. Not even the smallest thing that we did for Christ – in his name and for him alone – will be forgotten. Jesus himself emphasized the astounding generosity of our Father when he said:

**"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"  
(Matthew 7:11)**

Christ paid our sin debt for us. This means that everything we do for him and in his name thereafter, from the day of our salvation, will survive the Judgment Seat. The fire that tests our work will utterly consume everything else!



***Bema* from ancient Greece**

Remember how Paul referred to this fire:

**"Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 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. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." (1 Corinthians 3:12-15)**

This is not a fire that affects our salvation, but our works only! Our salvation is assured. You cannot stand before the *Bema* unless you are saved! Many believers have made the awful mistake of applying this verse to the salvation of souls, but it has NOTHING whatever to do with our salvation. As Paul clearly states, the fire pertains to our works *only*, for the purpose of determining our reward: "If any man's work abide [survive the fire]...he shall receive a reward."

The "wood, hay [and] stubble" are works that we performed for a worldly purpose, to advance our own cause in some manner. They were not done exclusively for the glory of our Redeemer.

In our fallen human condition it is not easy for us to gauge the exacting standard that Christ will use to assess our works, but we know that it will be one of perfect holiness. Indeed, we may rightly ask how any of our works could survive such an assessment!

### **The Greatness of the *Bema* Rewards**

Those that do survive, however, will be rewarded. We are not given details of what these rewards might be, but we know that they will completely surpass all our expectations. Our Father is rewarding us *through* His Son for service *in the name* of His Son. His love for His Son is boundless, of a magnitude and purity that our little minds cannot even begin to comprehend. Therefore all who have selflessly served His Son will be greatly rewarded.

As Scripture says:

**"For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him."  
(Isaiah 64:4)**

**"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)**

Dave Hunt was surprised that any believer should think about rewards since salvation itself – eternal life in the presence of Christ – is our "exceeding great reward," a glorious outcome that no man can measure and no-one deserves. And yet, for all that, we *are* asked by our Saviour to build up treasure in heaven!

This same thought may be found in the Book of Nehemiah. The great leader had worked tirelessly, against much internal opposition, to reform the administration of the Temple. When finally he had carried out his purpose, he prayed to God:

**"Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof." (Nehemiah 13:14)**

Then, after giving further details of the reforms he had instituted, he concluded:

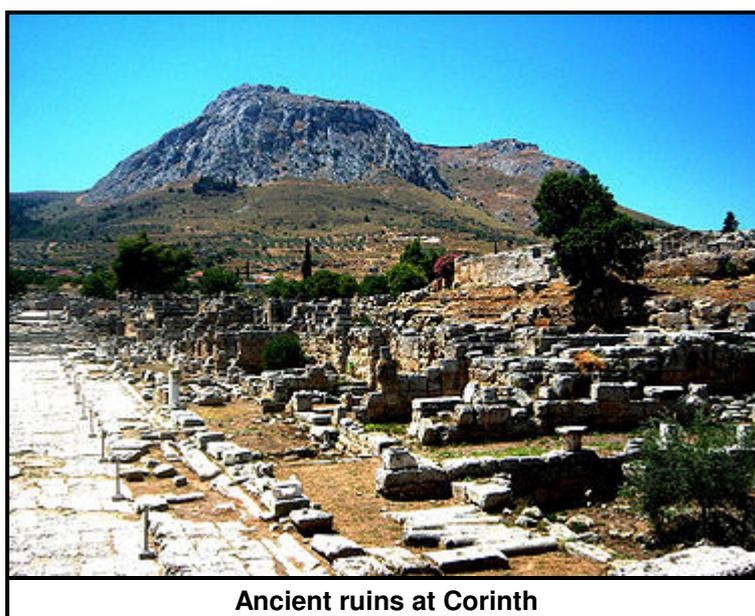
**" Remember me, O my God, for good." (Nehemiah 13:31)**

Paul also referred several times to the rewards or "crowns" that accrue to those who persist in the face of difficulties and hardship in their service to Christ:

**"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 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." (1 Corinthians 9:24-25)**

**"I have fought a good fight, I have finished [the] course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown 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."  
(2 Timothy 4:7-8)**

His analogy here is with the *Bema* or judgment seat of the Isthmian Games, which would have been familiar to his original readers. The Games were held in the city of Corinth every two years. A participant was required to undergo rigorous training and self-discipline over a period of months, in conformity with the rules and precepts of his pagan religion. Should he fail to meet these requirements, he could be disqualified by the judges at the *Bema*, even if he won the race. All being well, he was awarded the most prestigious honor, a laurel wreath.



**Ancient ruins at Corinth**

The verse from 2 Timothy (cited above) would suggest that all believers are expected to receive "a crown of righteousness." On the other hand, the possibility that a believer could falter in his walk with Christ, and thereby lose his crown, is mentioned in the Book of Revelation:

**"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast,  
that no man take thy crown." (Revelation 3:11)**

Clearly the believer is meant to aim for rewards in heaven, over and above the inexpressible gift of salvation. Jesus even referred to the privilege and opportunity – "blessed are ye" – to earn such rewards:

**"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you,  
and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.  
Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven:  
for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."  
(Matthew 5:11-12)**

### **Rewards of different degrees**

Jesus referred to heavenly rewards far more than many professing Christians seem to realize. Even the Apostles spent time among themselves discussing which of them would be 'greater' in the kingdom of heaven. It is significant that, when James and John asked to be seated in glory at his right hand and his left, the Lord replied that this was not his to give:

**"But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give;  
but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared." (Mark 10:4)**

This would indicate that, not only will believers receive rewards of differing degrees, depending on their faithfulness here on earth, but that these rewards will be objectively determined. As Luke noted, "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34).

It also helps to explain what Jesus meant by a statement that is often repeated in our churches today:

**"But many that are first shall be last; and the last first." (Mark 10:31)**

This, too, is a reference to the *Bema*, where saints who are highly esteemed by worldly standards will be assigned a relatively 'lowly' position in eternity. In fact, the Judgment Seat of Christ will determine permanently the place of every saved individual in the heavenly kingdom. As James and John recognized, some of the saints will be 'closer' than others to Christ in the eternal state. Jesus himself referred to this in the Book of Revelation:

**"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of  
my God, and he shall go no more out:" (Revelation 3:12)**

Alas, this truth is barely understood in our churches today. Even though Jesus asked us to build up "treasure" in heaven, many believers seem indifferent to his request.

Yes, all who are born-again are saved and will enter heaven, but not all will enjoy the same reward. And, yes, all who are saved will be filled to capacity, but not all will share the same capacity. Scripture strongly suggests that our faithfulness to Christ while here on earth will have a direct bearing on our ability or capacity in eternity to share in his glory.

The more we drink of his cup while we are here, the greater will be our capacity in eternity to proclaim his glory.

### **The Crowns of Rejoicing, Righteousness, Life and Glory**

Perhaps the rewards in eternity that are most clearly identified in Scripture are the crowns mentioned in the epistles of Peter, James and Paul, respectively, and by Christ himself in the Book of Revelation. The "incorruptible crown" in 1 Corinthians 9:25 may not refer to a specific type of crown but to the all-important fact that each and every crown will endure forever. Given that the crowns are eternal they ought to be highly esteemed and earnestly sought by all believers.

While there may be more than four types of crown, it is notable that the four mentioned in Scripture appear to relate to the four main 'categories' of Christian service:

#### **The Crown of Rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19) – Soul winners**

This crown relates to the joy that the saints experience when lost souls find the Lord.

#### **The Crown of Righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8) – Exemplary saints**

This crown relates to the steadfast faithfulness of saints who live daily in the joyful expectation of the imminent return of Christ.

#### **The Crown of Life (James 1:12) – Martyrs**

This crown relates to the patient endurance of the saints, who are not deterred or dismayed by their trials or sufferings, even to the point of martyrdom.

#### **The Crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:4) – Shepherds**

This crown appears to have special application to preachers, pastors and missionaries who devote their lives to serving the flock.



**Path in Galilee**

Naturally, given that Scripture says very little about the crowns, these 'definitions' are indicative only, but they should help to highlight their importance for all believers.

The Greek *stephanos* (translated into English by the word 'crown') was the laurel wreath, the "corruptible crown" awarded to each of the winners at the Isthmian Games. Paul used it as a metaphor to emphasize the discipline, dedication and self-denial that would be required of all believers who sought to obtain an "incorruptible" crown at the Judgment Seat of Christ. His choice of imagery, which evoked both the enthusiasm of the Games and the distinctive honor bestowed on the victor, was no doubt intended to instil a similar ambition in the hearts of believers.

We know that such an ambition is seemly and becoming in all believers, not only because Paul urged his readers to think in these terms, but because he also gave a robust account of his own service to Christ and stated with certainty that a crown of righteousness would be given to him at the Judgment Seat:

**"I have fought a good fight, I have finished [the] course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown 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."  
(2 Timothy 4:7-8)**

### **Christ will come with his rewards**

As the Word of God says, the crowns will be awarded to "all them that love his appearing," who live daily in the joyful expectation of his Second Coming. Christ even specified a close connection between his second coming and the receipt of rewards:

**"And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." (Revelation 22:12)**

There is a sense that Christ will take joy in giving these rewards. This is even more apparent when one realizes that, at his Second Coming, he will judge believers *only*. The judgment of the lost, the great White Throne judgment, will not take place until after the Millennium. Thus the rewards that Christ is referring to in Revelation 22:12 are exclusively those of the saints.

We even get a glimpse in Scripture of the joy that Christ will experience when he welcomes believers into the heavenly realm. As Stephen is about to be executed by stoning in Acts chapter 7, he exclaims:

**"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." (Acts 7:56)**

While Scripture normally states that Jesus is *seated* at the right hand of God, here it records that he is *standing* to receive Stephen.

## **Rewards are given by Grace**

Lest we assume that rewards at the *Bema* will be based in some way on our own righteousness, or that we will have earned them in the same way that a laborer earns his wages, let us remind ourselves that no saint has any righteousness of his own. We also need to remind ourselves that God is not indebted to anyone. So, even though we speak of "rewards," we must take care not to think of them as payment for services rendered. Yes, they are related to our service to Christ during our lifetime, but they are not to be seen as compensatory – God is not indebted to us. Rather, rewards are given by grace and grace alone. God *chooses* to reward the believer for his faithfulness. It is His boundless generosity that makes it possible; it is His grace that enables us to serve Him faithfully; and it is His righteous judgment at the *Bema* that allows us to receive what He, our saviour, has earned on our behalf.

The history of the church reveals that men have always been troubled by works. In the false doctrines of the Roman Catholic church, professing believers are expected to earn their salvation, thus rejecting the all-sufficiency of what Jesus achieved for us on Calvary. The Reformation theologians, however, in rejecting this false doctrine went too far and neglected the intrinsic value of good works in the sight of God. They rightly taught that salvation is by faith alone and that there is not a single thing that any man can do to "earn" it, but they overlooked the *sanctifying* power of good works. If the Roman Catholic church confused justification with sanctification, and thereby corrupted the true meaning of justification, the Reformation theologians – in their eagerness to highlight the true meaning of justification – lost sight of sanctification and its role in preparing the Bride for the coming of Christ.



## **The Basis for Rewards**

The service we render unto Christ is grounded in our spiritual disposition, our faithfulness, and our intentions. This means we ought to delight in the things that are pleasing to God. After all, how can we serve Him if we do not know instinctively what is pleasing to Him?

We must love the things that God loves and hate the things that God hates. Alas, this is not a popular teaching in the church today. Christians are mistakenly reluctant to hate anything, even though the Word of God specifically commands that we should hate evil:

**"Ye that love the LORD, hate evil" (Psalm 97:10)**

**"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil" (Proverbs 8:13)**

**"Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate" (Amos 5:15)**

**"Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." (Romans 12:9)**

The Laodicean church is characterized to a large extent by its indifferent attitude to evil and by its willingness to tolerate in its midst deeds and practices which we know are abhorrent in the sight of God. Scripture gives us a special insight into this in the case of Lot. Genesis records that he lived in Sodom, seemingly for many years, in the midst of a people whose moral conduct was despicable. It does not state why he continued to live in that awful city or what action he took to protect himself and his family. However, the Word of God tells us (toward the end of the Bible) that Lot actually grieved and suffered inwardly from the spiritual depravity that he saw around him:

**"And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation [conduct] of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)" (2 Peter 2:7-8)**



The same spiritual principle is vividly enunciated in Ezekiel. The prophet was taken "in the visions of God" to Jerusalem, just a few years before the destruction of the city by the Babylonians in 586 BC. In it he is shown the paganism and idolatrous practices that were then endemic across the city. The Lord revealed to Ezekiel that, because of their appalling wickedness, both the city and its inhabitants would be destroyed. However, the faithful few who grieved over the spiritual condition of the city would be spared:

**"And the LORD said unto him [the avenging angel], Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof... Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark" (Ezekiel 9:4)**

We can see from this that our faithfulness, and thus our rewards, will be evaluated, not only by what we labored to accomplish for Christ here on earth, but by our heartfelt devotion to the precepts and commands of Scripture, to the purity of the Gospel, and to the spiritual integrity of the visible church.

### **The Eternal State**

Once we enter the eternal state and receive our glorified bodies, we will lose our sin nature – completely and permanently. This means that we will dwell thereafter in a state of moral perfection, loving and rejoicing in righteousness for its own sake and desiring only what is pleasing to God. Our every thought and action thereafter will reflect and express nothing but the glory of God and the bounty of Christ.

The glory we express in eternity will in turn be determined by our spiritual capacity, and this will be determined forever, righteously and perfectly, at the *Bema*.

Paul refers to this in striking terms in his first letter to the Corinthians. In doing so he draws on an image that the Word of God already used in Daniel:

**"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life... And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Daniel 12:2-3)**

This passage refers to the "brightness" of the saints in their resurrected bodies, some of whom will "shine as the brightness of the firmament" – the sky or possibly the sun – while others will display in eternity the brightness of a star.

Paul develops on this by revealing that as one heavenly body differs from another in brightness, so shall the saints differ from one another in their radiance. All will magnify the LORD through the splendour and purity of their heavenly bodies, but some will have the "glory of the sun" or the "glory of the moon," while others will have the "glory of the stars" -

**"There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. 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. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."  
(1 Corinthians 15:40-44)**

When he speaks of our natural body being replaced by a spiritual body at the time of our resurrection (or rapture), he is in both cases referring to a *physical* body. Many believers mistakenly assume that the "spiritual body" to which he refers is an ethereal entity, akin perhaps to the body of an angel. But this is not the case. Our resurrected bodies will be glorified physical bodies, just like the glorified physical body of our Saviour, the first fruits of the resurrection.

### **Believers need to appreciate the opportunity at hand!**

In light of all this, there can be no doubt that the *Bema*, the Judgment Seat of Christ, ought to be of great personal interest to ALL believers! Its 'verdict' – if that is the right word – will have enduring implications for each of us in eternity.

It is hard to believe that the church today is giving this matter so little attention. If there is a gaping hole in modern theology, this is it.

The Word of God speaks of rewards and crowns for a reason. We ought therefore to pay the greatest attention to what Scripture is telling us about the *Bema*. How very different our lives would be if we truly understood it.

Our heavenly Father wants us to shine as brightly as possible in eternity for the glory of His wonderful Son.

Now we can begin to understand what John meant by our shame when he said:

**"And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."  
(1 John 2:28)**

Our wonderful Savior will not rebuke us at the *Bema* since our sin debt was paid in full on Calvary – both confessed and unconfessed sin – and we are no longer under condemnation. Such is the power of his blood! Nor are we amenable to further moral improvement since, in our glorified state, we will already enjoy the moral and spiritual perfection that Christ earned for each one of us on Calvary. So to what do we attribute the moment of shame to which John is referring?

As we stand before Christ and hear his gentle assessment of our faithfulness, we will realize what an astonishing series of precious opportunities our sojourn on earth had been and, very possibly, how little use we made of them. More often than not, when we could have been serving Christ and seeking his holy will, we were pursuing our own carnal interests. In doing so we allowed an opportunity to pass, never to return. The wood, hay and stubble, which we valued so highly at the time, will be consumed by fire. We will realize how great a reward we *would* have received had we been a little less carnal and a lot more devoted to the things of God.

In the Book of Revelation, John says on two occasions, "...and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes..." (7:17 and 21:4). He may possibly be referring, not only to the termination of pain and tribulation here on earth, but also to the moment at the *Bema* when a saint recognizes, with tears in his eyes, the countless opportunities that he chose to ignore – and the reward in heaven which he lost as a result. After all, it is principally at the *Bema* that Christ will be personally close enough to each one of us to reach over and wipe away our tears.

For years I have carried vividly the memory of an incident that took place at a junior chess tournament in Belgium in 1973. The event had been advertised without reference to prizes or awards for the best performers. The representatives from each country, it seemed, were content simply to enjoy the honor of participating. After the final round had been played, we were led to a special room where an amazing assortment of gifts and prizes was on display. Not only would every participant receive a prize, but some would be going home with more than they could carry. As I gazed at the tables laden with all these goodies, the tournament director came over and told me a story from the previous year's event. The Hungarian candidate had been one of the very best junior chess players in Europe, a real talent, and much had been expected of him. But to the disappointment of the organizers, he turned out to be somewhat lazy and was content to draw several games with much weaker players. At the end of the tournament, when he entered the 'special room', his jaw dropped and his eyes filled with tears. Immediately he realized how foolish he had been. Overcome by shame, he knew that, with just a little more effort, he could have won first prize and gone home with a carload of goodies, some of which were unobtainable in his native country.

### **The Three Parables**

We'll now examine the three parables by Jesus that relate to the Judgment Seat, namely the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, the parable of the talents, and the parable of the pounds.

The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard is fairly straightforward. As we know, the laborers who were hired early in the morning and worked through the heat of the day were given exactly the same reward as those who were hired in the late afternoon and worked for a much shorter period. The reward in question, for all who enter the "vineyard" (the invisible church), is everlasting life. All are saved who believe in Christ and his work on Calvary, regardless of whether they came to Him in their childhood or in advanced old age. It makes no difference. The reward in each case is the same, everlasting life.



**Vineyard at Lachish, Israel**

In the Parable of the Talents, the faithful servant who received five talents made good use of them during his master's absence and earned five talents more, while the faithful servant who received two talents made two talents more. Each received the same reward for their faithfulness, being made "ruler over many things." However, the unfaithful ("wicked and slothful") servant who received one talent did not even bother to invest it but hid it in the ground. In judgment his master declared, "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 25:30)

The parable is telling us that, on his return, Christ will judge each one of us in accordance with our faithfulness. Those who are lost will be neither able nor willing to render any service whatever, while those who are saved and who serve faithfully, making the best use of their respective talents, will receive the same reward.

The Parable of the Pounds should not be confused with the Parable of the Talents, even though they look similar. As he departed on a journey, the master gave a pound to each of his ten servants. On his return, one of the servants had increased or "gained by trading" a further ten pounds, while another had increased his by five. The former received ten cities as a reward and the latter five. However, one of the servants (described as a "wicked servant"), stored the pound in a napkin and did nothing with it. The master commanded, "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me." (Luke 19:27) It would appear that this wicked servant was numbered among the master's enemies and slain.

Starting from the same set of circumstances, some saints achieve more than others through earnest application. This parable teaches that saints with broadly equal ability will nonetheless be rewarded in proportion to their diligence.

Thus the three parables together reveal that

1. All who are saved have received everlasting life, while the lost will be cast into outer darkness.
2. All who make full use of their talents and abilities will receive the same reward for their faithfulness.
3. All who possess similar talents and abilities will be rewarded in proportion to their diligence.

In the Song of Moses, we read: "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment" (Deuteronomy 32:4). God delights in judgment; His work is perfect and His ways are just. We also read that He is "a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). He will not overlook even the simplest act of service in the name of His wonderful Son. As Christ said:

**"And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." (Matthew 10:42)**

Given the attention that Jesus gave in his teachings to the Judgment Seat and the basis on which rewards will be made, it is clearly something that we are all meant to understand and apply in our lives. In three of the Gospel accounts, he reminded his disciples that, depending on how we spend our lives here on earth, we will "have treasure in heaven."

He also referred to the relative fruitfulness of true believers:

**"But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."  
(Matthew 13:23)**

To the church of Thyatira he said:

**"I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first."  
(Revelation 2:19)**

Clearly, by referring to works twice in the same sentence, along with charity and service (both of which also imply good works), Jesus is revealing how much they please him (The same word for 'works' in Greek, *ergon*, is used each time). He underlined this further by adding, "and I will give unto every one of you according to your works (*ergon*)."

Lest we interpret "works" too narrowly, the Holy Spirit tells us that Anna, despite her advanced old age, served God night and day through prayer and fasting:

**"And there was one Anna, a prophetess...And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day."  
(Luke 2:36-37)**

At the Judgment Seat the Lord will reveal all the good things that we did, even those long hidden in obscurity ("hidden things of darkness"), and the many good intentions ("counsels of the heart") which may not necessarily have produced the fruit we had been hoping for:

**"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God." (1 Corinthians 4:5)**

How wonderful to know that, in the fullness of time, "every man [shall] have praise of God."

As sincere followers of Christ we should yearn to hear those precious words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

The LORD expects us to make the most of our opportunities while here on earth. Even a seemingly unregenerate person like Joash, king of Israel, was upbraided when he came to visit Elisha on his death bed. The aged prophet set him two simple tasks. The second required that he take a handful of arrows and strike them firmly against the ground. The king struck the ground three times with the arrows, but Elisha was angry with him:

**"And the man of God was wroth [angry] with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice." (2 Kings 13:19)**

Paul also cautioned believers to "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2:12). The Lord will hold us accountable for all that we did after we were saved. By "working out" our salvation, Paul is referring, not to works that earn salvation – since this is impossible – but to our faithfulness and diligence after we are saved: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48).

## **Conclusion**

Many Christians today are remarkably indifferent to the wealth of opportunities that they have to serve Christ. They don't seem to see the spiritual riches that are embedded in each passing day. Their pastors should be exhorting them to make the best possible use of every additional hour that the LORD has provided. Alas, as Christ observed in the Book of Revelation, the Laodicean church has little enthusiasm for the Gospel. Many professing Christians would appear to see their salvation as little more than 'a ticket to heaven'. One wonders how many are truly saved.

Perhaps if there was a greater general awareness within the church of the rewards that the Lord intends to make at the *Bema* – and the possibility that many believers will be disappointed to see how little they *actually* did to serve their Saviour – the situation would be very different.

I was saved at age 52, a little over six years ago, but I have yet to hear even ONE believer speak personally about the Judgment Seat of Christ and the rewards that our Saviour will graciously bestow on faithful believers.

Please remind our brothers and sisters in Christ that they WILL be asked to give an account of themselves at the *Bema*.

Remind them, too, that our Saviour is likely to ask each one of us a very simple question: "Did you tell people about me?"

In closing, I would like to recommend a fine book on this important subject: *The Judgment Seat of Christ: A Biblical and Theological Study* by Samuel Hoyt (2011).

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**For further information visit: [www.zephaniah.eu](http://www.zephaniah.eu)**

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