

01 – WHY REWARDS?

- ✓ Recently, I taught a series called “Identity”. In that series, we looked at 56 things that became yours the moment you received Christ. (In that series, I referred to those 56 things as “gifts”. You didn’t earn them. You didn’t work for them. You received them ... just because you’re in the family. They were gifts.)
- ✓ In this series, I want to talk about “rewards”. Rewards are different than gifts, in that, rewards are earned. (You don’t get them for just being a Christian.) You have to do something in order to receive a reward.

The Judgment Seat of Christ

- ✓ It’s impossible to discuss rewards without bringing up the Judgment Seat of Christ. (I know that makes some people nervous. But, if they’re nervous, they’re probably picturing the wrong thing.)
- ✓ So, let’s do a test. When I say the words “Judgment Seat”, what image comes to mind? If you’re like a lot of folks, you probably pictured a courtroom scene. (You may have seen a judge, a jury, lawyers, etc.). But that’s not the picture the Bible is trying to portray.
- ✓ The word “judgment”, in this context, is actually borrowed from the ancient Olympics. In large Olympic arenas, there was a raised seat on which the judge of the contest sat. (It was called the “Bema Seat” or the “Reward Seat”.) At the close of the Games, the winners would assemble before the Bema to receive their prize. That’s the picture Paul wanted to “paint”!
- ✓ In the Bible, the Christian life is described as a race. You start “running” when you get saved, and you stop “running” when you die, or get Raptured. When it’s all said and done, you’ll stand before the Bema to be rewarded for your faithful service. (The Judgment Seat of Christ is not a terrifying thing to dread. It has the potential of being the greatest day of your life!)

Facts About the Judgment Seat of Christ

1. It’s for Believers Only

- ✓ There are no unbelievers at this judgment. (Unbelievers have their own judgment, 1,007 years later, called “the Great White Throne Judgment”. You don’t want to be at that one!) The Judgment Seat of Christ is for believers only. If you’re saved, you’ll be there. (Nobody’s getting out of this.)

2. It Takes Place Immediately Following the Rapture

- ✓ At the Rapture, the dead in Christ are raised, and the living saints are “caught up”. From there, we’re taken immediately to the Judgment Seat of Christ. (Jesus confirms timeline in Luke 14. We’re rewarded immediately after the Rapture-Resurrection.)

Luke 14:13-14 – “Then he turned to the host. “The next time you put on a dinner, don’t just invite your friends and family and rich neighbors, the kind of people who will return the favor. Invite some people who never get invited out, invite the poor, the lame, the crippled and the blind. You’ll be blessed, because they have no way to repay you, but you will be rewarded ... (when?) ... at the resurrection of the just.”

3. The Judgment Seat of Christ Has Nothing to Do with Salvation

- ✓ You don’t appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ to find out whether you’re going to Heaven or Hell. That was determined while you were on earth (by what you did with Jesus.) Salvation can’t be gained or lost at this judgment.

4. It Has Nothing to Do with Your Sin

- ✓ The sins you committed before you got saved were washed away by the Blood (Rev. 1:5). (So, they’re gone!) The sins you committed as a Christian were forgiven when you confessed them. (So, they’re gone, too – 1 John 1:9). That only leaves the sins you didn’t confess.
- ✓ Now, what about your unconfessed sins? They’ll be burned up

when the fire descends on your foundation. (We'll talk about that later.) So, sin is not the issue. If this judgment isn't about sin, then what's it for?

5. It's a Judgment of Your Works to Determine Rewards

- ✓ Some might say, 'Why do Christians put so much emphasis on rewards? Shouldn't we be serving Jesus because we love Him – *without* needing a reward?' That sounds commendable; maybe even spiritual! It's just not biblical!

Rewards Were God's Idea

a. God Is a Rewarder by Nature

Hebrews 11:6 – “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that **He is a rewarder** ...” (NKJV)

- ✓ Notice how that's phrased. God is a rewarder! (Rewarding isn't something God *does*. It's part of who He *is*!)

b. God Thinks Rewards Are a Legitimate Motivation

- ✓ The Bible mentions rewards 79 times, and *always* in a positive light. Paul mentions rewards repeatedly.

1 Corinthians 9:24 – “Don't you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way to **win the prize**.” (HCSB)

Philippians 3:14 – “I run straight toward the goal to **win the prize**.” (GW)

- ✓ Paul kept the prize in front of him (like the proverbial “carrot”). It motivated him! Near the end of his life, he wrote:

2 Tim. 4:7-8 – “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my 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.”

- ✓ It wasn't just *Paul* who had his eyes on the prize! Moses was *also* motivated by rewards.

Hebrews 11:25-26 – “(Moses) chose to be mistreated with God's people instead of having the temporary pleasures of sin. He thought that the abuses he suffered for Christ were more valuable than the treasures of Egypt, since **he was looking forward to the reward**.” (CEB)

- ✓ Paul looked for the *prize*. Moses looked for the *reward*. And Jesus went to the Cross “for the joy that was set before Him” (Heb 12:2). Even Jesus had a “carrot” before His eyes! (Surely, you're not going to tell me that you're more spiritual than Jesus!)

c. Rewards Are God's Way of Honoring Obedience

John 12:26 – “If anyone serves me, him my Father will honor.” (NKJV)
One way He honors them is with rewards.

d. Rewards Are the Way God Says “Thank You”

1 Peter 2:18-19 – “Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unreasonable. For this is **thankworthy** ...” (KJV)

- ✓ Or literally, “**worthy of thanks** from God”. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, God says, “Thank you” for all the times we represented Him well. And He passes out rewards. So, **rewards are not a bad thing!**

“Maybe they're not bad. They just don't matter to me!”

- ✓ I have two responses to that. First, if rewards matter to God, then they *should* matter to you. Secondly, if you knew what they were, they *would* matter to you! (This next point might change your mind.)

e. Heaven Is Not the Same for Everybody

- ✓ Some Christians expect Heaven to be the same for everyone ... because, after all, “God's fair”.

- ✓ To this generation, “fair” means “everybody gets the same thing”. In grade school, they think everyone should get a trophy, no matter how they placed in the race. But that’s a warped idea of fairness. Let me illustrate: Take two men from the same hometown.
- ✓ The first gets saved but lives his entire life for himself. He *seldom* goes to church, and he *never* gives. His Bible sits in a closet collecting dust. His motto in life is: “See how close you can get to the ‘edge’ and still make it into Heaven”.
- ✓ The second man gets saved and sells out 100% to Jesus. He serves faithfully in his local church. Eventually, he feels the call of God on his life. So he goes to Bible College, graduates, and then serves on the mission field for 30 years. He loses two of his children to disease, but he remains faithful. Finally, both he and his wife are martyred.
- ✓ Coincidentally, the two men show up in Heaven at the same time, so they’re given the “tour” together. They’re shown their mansions, and they’re identical. They get the same *rewards*, the same *robe*, the same *crowns*, and they have the same amount of *authority* in the Millennium. Let me ask you: Is *that* fair? Certainly not!
- ✓ Fairness doesn’t mean “everyone gets the same thing”. It means “everyone gets what they deserve”. The guy who lived for himself deserves one thing, and the man who sacrificed his entire life for the Gospel deserves another.
- ✓ There *will* be differences in Heaven – but they’re due to *rewards*. (We all get the same *gifts*. But our rewards will differ.)