

## **We Believe Part 14**

I said last fall as we began this series of messages that what we believe determines and effects how we live and how we act. It matters what we believe. **I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy, apostolic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Last Sunday we focused on the phrase, “He will come again to judge the living and the dead.” Specifically we talked about what the book of Revelation refers to as the Great White Throne judgement. This is the judgment of all the living and the dead who have rejected the salvation offered through Jesus Christ. Everyone whose name was not written in the book of life will be cast into hell and away from the presence of God. Because I believe judgement day is coming and that Jesus will judge the living and the dead, it affects the way I live. I don’t want to live and then die without Christ and without his forgiveness. I don’t want to die and go to hell. So I repented of my sins and asked Jesus to save me and forgive me. Because I have placed my faith in Christ as my Savior, I don’t have to fear judgment. My sins have been judged at the cross as Jesus bore the fury of God’s wrath and judgement in my place. My name is written in the book of life through my faith in Christ. The same can be said for you if you will repent of your sins and ask Jesus to be your Savior and Lord. Then you won’t have to worry about the Great White Throne judgement. Paul wrote, **“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:1** We will not be condemned and we don’t have to fear judgment.

There is however, a judgement that we as believers and followers of Christ will face. The bible refers to this as the judgement seat of Christ. **“So we make it our goal to please him....for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” 2 Corinthians 5:9-10**

The word for judgment seat is the Greek word *bema*. The *bema* was a raised platform where the judge sat to render his verdict or to judge a performance. You can still see the *bema*

standing in the ruins of Corinth. The athletes in the ancient Olympic games were familiar with this judgment seat because this was the place where the rewards were handed out. Paul is saying that's what the judgement seat of Christ is about. This is not the place for handing out punishment, but it is the place for handing out rewards.

This is a judgment of our works done after we are saved and become followers of Christ. The judgment seat of Christ is where we will give an accounting of what we've done as believers. The bible says, **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:8-10** We've been saved by grace. This is the gift of God and we cannot earn this. But after we are saved, notice we have been created in Christ to do good works. God has prepared in advance work for us to do and we will be judged on how faithful and obedient we were in doing those good works. How are we doing? Have we been good stewards of the gifts and talents God gave us? Have we treated others with the love of Christ? Have we made the things of God a priority in our life? Have we made obedience to God and His word the number one thing in our life? Have we brought others to Christ? The list can go on and on. The point is our works will be judged and rewards will be given. (If you are thinking it's too late for you, it's not. Start today, obeying God and doing what's right!)

Jesus spoke often of rewards. **“For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what he has done. Matthew 16:27.** When trials and persecution comes to the believer, Jesus said, **“Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...” Matthew 5:12** In the last chapter of the New Testament we hear Jesus telling us, **“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** There are more than 35 verses in the New Testament that speak of the reward that awaits those who faithfully serve the Lord. The idea of future reward is to serve as a motivating factor for all of us. Rewards will be given, but not everyone standing at the judgment seat of Christ will be receiving a reward. We don't want to live in such a way that in eternity we will be empty handed!

Once again, this judgement is not about salvation. Salvation is a free gift, but rewards come to those who have earned them. You have to qualify for a reward. You have to do something to receive a reward. I know we live in a culture that insists every child should get a

prize, every person gets an award so we don't bruise their ego or affect their psyche. "And here is the prize for coming in 373<sup>rd</sup> in the competition." Really? I get a trophy for last place? But the judgment seat of Christ is like the Great White Throne judgement in this sense - it is full of justice and truth. The motives and intentions of our heart will be open before Jesus as well. He won't be dragging up our past sins, those have already been forgiven and buried, but he will look at our motives. We did good works but with a wrong attitude, with pride and arrogance, and Jesus knows all about it. There will be no reward. He isn't handing out punishment. Remember the athletes at the *bema*, the losers weren't being punished for losing, they simply didn't get the reward for winning. He won't be trying to spare egos, he will be rewarding those who are truthfully deserving of reward.

Paul gives us insight into this judgment in 1 Corinthians 3. In this chapter Paul is talking about believers working for the Lord, laboring to build the kingdom. He writes, **"But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss, he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."** 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

At the judgement seat of Christ, the things we have done, the integrity we have built with will be revealed. The things we have done for Christ and the motivation behind it will be recognized. Our obedience, the way we persevered in spite of hardship or persecution, the way we gave out of our poverty or lack or out of our abundance, the faithful service in spite of no acclaim or recognition or earthly reward, those are things that will survive a test by fire. Those things are what Paul compares to the gold, silver, the costly stones. Those things are deserving of reward, however, our lack of discipline, disobedience, acts motivated out of greed or selfishness, laziness, good works done for our own recognition or acclaim, ignoring the commands of God and the needs of others, those are the things Paul said were like wood, hay and stubble. They won't survive the fire. Notice Paul says we will be saved because we placed our faith in Christ, but if we did little or nothing for Christ or his church, we will suffer loss. Our works will merit no reward. Can you imagine standing before Christ and giving an account of

your deeds as a Christian? You can't hide or spin this. You will have to be honest because he sees your motive and intentions. While others receive their rewards, we stand there empty handed. The regret is not that we have no reward, it's what that represents: we wasted our time, our life, the grace and blessings God gave us. We could have done so much more and now it is too late.

We used to have a plaque that hung in the hallway at my parent's house that read, **"Only one life twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."** That's a simple way of reminding us the stuff we spend a lifetime focused on and sacrificing for will be forgotten. It merits nothing. Only what's done for Christ will last. Only those things done in obedience and faith will survive the fire and count for eternity.

Since we are going to stand before Jesus and give an account to him of the life we've lived and the works we've done since we came to know him as our Savior and Lord, maybe we should have an idea of what he is looking for! In Matthew 25 Jesus told the parable of the talents. Three men are given various amounts of money by their master and when he returned, he called them in to assess their stewardship of his resources. Two of the men heard this happy report, **"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"**

#### **Matthew 25:23**

It appears two obvious things he is looking for is goodness and faithfulness. Goodness in the sense of a pure heart, living a holy life, living a life that is pleasing to Christ and obedient to God's word. And faithful, refusing to quit, to give up, regardless of how difficult it may be to serve Jesus and do the right thing. And what caused such good and faithful service? I think the answer is, they loved their master and desired to please him above all else. John said **"We love Him because He first loved us."** **1 John 4:19.** He loved us and gave himself for us. We should desire to please the Lord and to be good and faithful in all we do for him.

What is the criteria for reward at the judgment seat of Christ? Surrender and obedience to Christ. I quoted earlier from Matthew 16. Jesus said, **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels and then he**

**will reward each person according to what he has done.” Matthew 16:24-27**

Deny yourself and make following Jesus and obeying him the guiding force and focus of your life. Sacrifices made in this life for Christ may not profit you much here, but a day of reward is coming. Surrender your life to Christ and obey Him and when you stand at the judgement seat of Christ someday you will hear him say, “well done, good and faithful servant.”

What is the criteria for reward at the judgement seat of Christ? The list can go on and on. Living a spiritually disciplined life, a holy life, serving others with the gifts God has given you. Being a good steward of your resources: gifts, time, talent, money, ability. He will judge your work, your effort, your faithfulness, your life, your motives and rewards will be given. How will you do?

When describing rewards, the bible sometimes refers to them as crowns. Let me wrap this up by just mentioning some of the crowns to which the bible refers. **The victor’s crown.** The apostle Paul wrote, **“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” 1 Corinthians 9:24-25**

There is a reward, a victor’s crown that Jesus will present, but it goes to those who run in such a way as to get the prize. It means strict training, Paul said. It means discipline of our spirit, discipline of our flesh. An athlete says no to things he knows will affect his performance and keep him from winning the prize and getting the reward. Paul tells us we need to live like this, saying no to things that keep us from winning the prize and gaining the reward the Lord has prepared. Want to win the victor’s crown? Run like it. Train like it. Commit to doing what it takes, sacrificing whatever you have to sacrifice to win the prize!

**The crown of righteousness.** Paul wrote, **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” 2 Timothy 4:7-8**

There is a crown given to all who have kept their eyes upon Jesus and not allowed their focus to become too earthbound. Too many have lost sight of Jesus, of the promise of his return. Too many have become caught up in the things of this world. We long for money, fame, power and position and we’ve stopped longing for Jesus and for his return. It is the hope in Christ and

his return that causes us to order our lives in light of his promise. John the apostle wrote, “...we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” 1 John 3:2-3. He is coming and because we know that, we make the effort to keep our hearts and our hands and our lives pure and pleasing to him. We long for him and for his appearing, and in light of that, we live a holy life so we can receive that crown of righteousness when he returns. There is....

**The crown of rejoicing.** This is the soul winners crown. Paul wrote, “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?” 1 Thessalonians 2:19. The cause for rejoicing in heaven is not receiving a reward, but being in the presence of the Lord and seeing others there because of your testimony, your giving, your personal witness, your faithfulness and obedience. There is...

**The crown of life.** This reward is reserved for those who persevere through tests and trials and hardship, who refuse to quit and remain faithful to the point of death. In the book of Revelation we hear Jesus telling the church, “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.” Revelation 2:10

James wrote, “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” James 1:12

Suffering, tested and tried, persecuted, wanting to just throw in the towel and give up, but remember, there is a crown of life that will be awarded to all who persevere. Don't give up. Don't give in. Remain faithful, even to the point of death. It will be worth it all!

**The crown of glory.** This is a crown reserved for those pastors and elders who have faithfully shepherded the flock of God, the church. Peter wrote, “Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” 1 Peter 5:2-4

What happens after our works are tried by fire and the crowns and rewards are given out? John tells us. “The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and

**worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things and by your will they were created and have their being.’” Revelation 4:10-11**

A day is coming when all of us will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and rewards will be given. Crowns will be handed out and when that day comes, we don't want to be empty handed. We want to have a crown, not to wear or to show to others, but to lay at his feet. We want to be able to say, “You saved me and I can never repay you, but I worked and did my best to live a life that would bring honor and glory to you. You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power and here is the crown you've given me. I don't deserve it but you do!”

I don't want to have to look back at my life and think, “I could have done so much for Jesus but I wasted my life, my time and my talents on foolish things and now I stand here empty handed. Saved by his grace, but nothing to present to him to show what I did with the grace and forgiveness he showed to me.” Regret is unbecoming to a child of God. **Make your life count for Jesus and for eternity!** Live your life so you will have few regrets. Let's live in such a way that we can win the prize and receive the reward he has prepared for us. Build with gold and silver and not wood, hay and stubble that can't survive the test of fire. **Fix your eyes on Jesus and live with eternity in view!**