

Afterlife — My Earthly Choices Make An Eternal Difference.

August 27, 2017

Good morning. If you are a visitor, it is great to have you. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. Please take out your notes. I want to begin with two questions. They are found on the top of your notes. Write down a simple “Yes” or “No” answer next to each one.

1. **In eternity, is there a difference between someone that comes to Christ as a young person versus a death-bed conversion experience as an old person?**
2. **If Jesus always forgives my sin, for eternity does it make a difference if I continue to sin?** We know that once we have trusted in Christ the eternal consequences of our sin are taken away. Is there any reason we shouldn't continue to sin and keep relying on Christ's abundant forgiveness? What do you think?

At the end of the message we will come back to these questions and we will see how you did with your answers.

At CrossWinds, we are in the fourth week of a series titled, Afterlife: What Does The Bible Say About Life After

Death? In previous weeks we looked at

what happens one minute after we die.

We also learned about the resurrection

body. Last week we looked at the

Millennium, which is the thousand year

reign of Christ on this earth talked about in Revelation 20. We learned there are



two resurrections of the dead. The first is at the beginning of the Millennium when Christ will return and raise all Christians from the dead. Jesus will also give us our eternal resurrection bodies at that time. We will reign and rule with him on this earth for a thousand years and into the new creation. Last week, we learned at the end of the Millennium when Satan will be defeated and thrown into the lake of fire where he will be tormented forever and ever. The lake of fire is also called hell.

At the end of the Millennium there will be a second resurrection when God will raise from the dead everyone that died apart from Christ. At that time, Jesus will judge everyone that died apart from Christ based on how he or she lived. At the beginning of the Millennium, Christians rose from the dead and were given their resurrection bodies. At the judgment of non-Christians, at the end of the Millennium, everyone else will be given an eternal resurrection body when they are judged, then thrown into the lake of fire forever. Living in the lake of fire forever in an indestructible body doesn't sound like fun, but that is what the Bible tells us will happen. I didn't write the book. I only read the book. Before we jump into this week's message, I want to take a few moments to review this second resurrection and judgment of non-Christians at the end of the Millennium. It is called the Great White Throne Judgment.

The Great White Throne Judgment

Last week, we learned the eternal punishment people will receive in the lake of fire is not one-size-fits-all. It will be a fair and just response to the sin in someone's life. It will never be too harsh or too lenient. While all punishment for sin is eternal, all punishment for sin will not be the same in the lake of fire. This is

why God will judge people before sending them there. That means the greater the sinner, the greater their level of eternal suffering in the lake of fire. Even if someone is not a Christian, it is always to their benefit to turn away from sin, because at the Great White Throne judgment, at the end of the Millennium before the new heavens and new earth, God will judge everyone's sin fairly and assign him or her to a degree of eternal, conscious, never-ending punishment that is a fair and just response to the sin in his or her life.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. Revelation 20:11–12 (ESV)

The good news of the Great White Throne judgment is nobody will get away with murder. Nobody will get away with a single lie, deceit or sin in his or her life. Justice will be complete, total and final.

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)

The other good news is that Christians will not be part of this judgment.

Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:12–15 (ESV)

As Christians, our names are written in the book of life. We are not part of this judgment.

Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Philippians 4:3 (ESV)

I love the way Paul said these ordinary, nameless women have their names written in the book of life, not because of what they did but because of what Jesus did, and they were trusting him to save them from their sin.

The great news is that God will be completely just in this judgment. Nobody will get away with murder, rape or deceit. The best news of all is that because of Jesus our names are written in the book of life. We will not be part of this judgment.

BUT... That doesn't mean our lives as Christians will escape serious review.

The Judgment Seat Of Christ

Just as there will be a judgment at the end of the Millennium of those who don't know Christ, there will be a judgment of Christians at the beginning of the Millennium. It will be called the Judgment Seat of Christ. The Great White Throne judgment at the end of the Millennium will be for those who died apart from the forgiveness of Christ and will be to determine the just, eternal punishment for their sin. The Judgment Seat of Christ will be for Christians. It will be at the beginning of the Millennium, and it will not be a judgment of our sin. It will be a judgment of the way we lived our lives to determine the extent of our eternal rewards.

Remember, the Bible is clear we do not pay for our sin because Jesus paid in full for our sin.

**There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
Romans 8:1 (ESV)**

After we come to Christ we are either gaining or losing rewards from Christ based on how we live. We need to understand that God desires to reward us in eternity based on how we live as Christians.

We are saved by the grace of Jesus, but we are rewarded in eternity based on the works we have done. Let me say this again. *We are saved by grace. We are rewarded by works.* This is a major blind spot for many Christians. Most Christians believe they are saved by grace so it doesn't matter how we live once we come to Jesus because all of our sin is forgiven. It matters how Christians live. The choices we make in this life are either gaining or forfeiting eternal rewards that Jesus desires to give us.

Will there be tears at the judgment seat of Christ? I think there may be. When Christians gain a better understanding of the greatness of Christ's death for their sin plus they can see the greatness of the rewards Jesus wanted to give them but they forfeited by continuing to live in sin, I believe some Christians will cry. The Bible warns us against losing our eternal rewards because we continue in sin.

Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. 2 John 8 (ESV)

I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. Revelation 3:11 (ESV)

If it isn't for Christ wiping away our tears, we may continue to cry in eternity when we see the rewards we forfeited.

Lest you build up too much anxiety, understand Jesus' heart at this judgment. He will be like a father that can't wait to award his son after being out

of town. Since Jesus loves his kids, he can't wait to reward his kids for how they lived when he was gone.

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)

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, my life will be given a serious review.

The Judgment Seat of Christ is a prominent feature in the New Testament. Every single Christian will stand before Christ and give an account for all actions, words, thoughts, and even for the motives of their hearts. Christ will miss nothing.

Sometimes you will hear the Judgment Seat of Christ called the *bema*. That is because Paul likened it to the competitive sporting events in his day. After a sport contest in the ancient world, a dignitary sat on an elevated throne (called a *bema*) and gave rewards to the victors. Usually the reward was a wreath. It was known as the victor's crown. That crown was worn in public. People would look at the victors with admiration because they were winners.

In a similar way all Christians will stand before Jesus to be judged for our performance in the Christian life. Every single Christian will either suffer loss or reward depending on Christ's evaluation of how we ran the race of our faith. Remember the Judgment Seat of Christ has nothing to do with going to heaven. Heaven is secure by Christ's grace and salvation through Jesus. This judgment only deals with a reception or loss of rewards based on how one lived after becoming a Christian. We are saved by grace but we are rewarded by works.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. 2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)

All Christians will appear before Christ's judgment seat and they will either gain or lose rewards Christ wanted to give them based on how they lived.

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 (NIV84)

Paul said we are to live our Christian lives like we are athletes, not couch potatoes. We are not to float through life aimlessly. We are to run to win. We are to discipline ourselves to be all we can be for Christ and do all we can do for Christ. We know when we stand before Jesus we will receive rewards from Jesus based on how we lived. The rewards Christ will give us are not perishable wreaths but they will last forever.

When Paul said, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ," the word *appear* literally means to turn something inside out. It means to review something in the greatest depth so the review covers the inside, not just the outside of our lives. What will God evaluate and reward?

1. God will evaluate how we used our gifts and talents.

Each of us has gifts and talents given to us from God. Some of us are athletically gifted. Others are whizzes with number and finances. Still others of us are great with people. The question is, "What did we do with our gifts?" Did we use them only for our glory or did we leverage them for Christ and his glory in this world. On that day, God will evaluate us on what we did with our gifts.

2. Christ will evaluate what we did with the opportunities he provided.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

God constantly puts opportunities to do practical and spiritual good in the lives of others. Are we live, will we be the priest and the Levite in the Parable of the Good Samaritan? Will we just pass on the other side of the road whenever we see opportunities to do practical or spiritual good for others? God didn't save us to sit. He saved us to serve others.

3. Christ will evaluate the way we handled temptation.

We will also be evaluated by Christ on how we handled temptation. Does Christ forgive us of sin? Yes. Christ completely forgives our sin. But when we turn away from sin, Christ promises to reward us in eternity for saying "No" to sin and "Yes" to holiness. The reward Christ desires to give us in eternity for saying "No" to sin contains far more joy than any temporary empty pleasure sin could offer.

Every time we say "No" to sin, we are saying "Yes" to greater joy. Every time we choose to keep our mouths shut and not spread gossip, we are saying "Yes" to an eternal reward from God that is far more tasty than that juicy tidbit of slander. Every time we say "No" to a few minutes of hidden lustful pleasure on our smartphones, we are saying "Yes" to far greater joy that comes as a reward from Christ that will last for all of eternity.

When we stand before Christ, Paul said we will literally be turned inside out when Christ evaluates us. He will evaluate us on the inside.

4. Christ will evaluate our thought lives.

I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds." Jeremiah 17:10 (ESV)

Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the

purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God. 1 Corinthians 4:5 (ESV)

This is incredibly convicting. What thoughts do you allow to flow through your mind? Are they lustful? Christ will review and evaluate them. Are they hateful? Christ will review them. Are they disrespectful to others? One day we will give an answer to Christ for the thoughts we allowed our minds to chew on. We will either forfeit or gain rewards from Christ according to how we think.

5. Christ will evaluate our careless words.

I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak... Matthew 12:36 (ESV)

We will give an answer for every careless word we spoke when we were annoyed or irritated. Even if our careless words were not spoken in public but in the privacy of our own homes, if we tore down people with hurtful or mocking words, we are still accountable for those words. While the people we are speaking about may not be in our homes, Christ is in our homes. One day we will answer to him for those careless words.

6. Christ will evaluate the way we used our time.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5:15–16 (ESV)

Life is short. It goes by quickly. We will give an answer to Christ for how we use our time. Teenagers, there is nothing wrong with video games, but after a while you need to ask if that is the best use of your time? What will Christ say about too much time in front of the game system? Those who are retired, there is nothing wrong with the golf course, but too much golf may not be the best use of your time.

One day each of us will stand before Christ and he will evaluate how we used our time in this life. In this life when it comes to Christ, do we run to win, or do we waste our time?

7. Christ will evaluate us graciously.

Thankfully, while God will judge everything about our Christian lives, he will also judge us graciously. Remember, God has no pent-up anger against us either for our carnality or our selfishness. All of God's anger for our sin was completely absorbed by Jesus. The Judgment Seat of Christ is because God does more than completely save us. Out of his goodness, he also desires to reward us.

Maybe the best way to think of this is a father that has to be away from home on business for a month. He asks his son to mow the lawn every weekend when he is gone. He promises that as a reward on the weekend he comes back he will take his son for a ride in a plane on the Saturday morning he comes back, and they will spend the morning together flying in the sky.

The father returns from his business trip to find the lawn knee high. His son never mowed it once. Who is sad? The son is sad because he won't be going for a ride in the plane. The father is also sad because he so much wanted to reward his son with a gift.

The prospect of eternal rewards is a legitimate reason to serve Christ.

I know some of you feel uneasy about this. Many people think we should serve Christ simply out of gratitude for what he has done. If that is you, you are right. We should serve Christ out of gratitude for all he has done. Our God is

such a good God that he doesn't want us to just serving him out of gratitude. He also desires to motivate us to serve him through the prospect of rewards.

If you think about this, it isn't a bad idea. God built us to be motivated by rewards. Think of all the training, sweat and tears that goes into getting the reward of the Vince Lombardi trophy in the NFL. Football players are motivated to do their best not simply out of gratitude for the game but out of the prospect of a reward. How do businesses motivate their salesmen? Salesmen don't sell cars simply out of gratitude for a job. Salesmen are motivated to sell because of the prospect of a reward. The best salesman of the year gets an all-expense paid trip to Hawaii. Salesmen work harder when they are working for a reward. We have much greater rewards offered to us than an all-expense paid trip to Hawaii. We have rewards that come to us from the hand of Christ, and the joy of those rewards lasts for eternity.

...(Moses) choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Hebrews 11:25–26 (ESV)

Moses chose to be mistreated with the people of Israel rather than to enjoy the sinful pleasures offered to him as the son of the Pharaoh, not because he didn't love pleasure but because he was looking forward to greater pleasure, his eternal reward. He said "No" to sin for the greater pleasure of his eternal rewards from God.

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great... Luke 6:35 (ESV)

Each of us have people in life that hurt us. They lie about us. They say hateful words to us and about us. Every one of us has those kinds of people in

our lives that make our skin crawl to be around them. Jesus said, “Love those enemies. Do good to those enemies. Expect nothing in return.” Even when you do them good, expect to receive hate and not thanks for what you have done. You say, “What’s in it for me? Why should I go out of my way to love my enemies when it is pointless?”

If we go out of our way to love our enemies, God promises to reward us in eternity for loving them. Your enemies may not love you back, but God will reward you back.

What do eternal rewards look like?

In the first century culture, the reward for victory given from the judgment seat was a wreath. What do God’s rewards look like?

1. We will have crowns.

Probably the most common reference to God’s rewards in Scripture are crowns. For example, the Bible talks about the crown of life, the crown of faithfulness and the crown of righteousness as some of the possible rewards given to us by God based on how we live. Clearly, we see we will have some kind of permanent visible rewards given us based on how we lived. The best way I can analogize this is to think about the military. As you progress in the military, you are given rewards you wear on your uniform. High-ranking generals have all kinds of stars and stripes as visible reminders of their rewards. As Christians we will have all kinds of crowns in eternity that are visible reminders of our eternal rewards.

God will reward us with more than visible honor for all of eternity.

2. We will gain what we lost for the sake of Christ.

Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.” Matthew 19:28–29 (ESV)

Following Christ means sacrifice. For some of you, your children are missionaries in a foreign land. They are bringing Jesus to a people who haven’t heard of him. You are sacrificing time with your children and grandchildren for the sake of the gospel. They are sacrificing time with their parents and grandparents. While you lose the joy of that family time now, as a reward for that sacrifice, Christ desires to repay you a hundred-fold in eternity.

Some people have left behind possessions, lucrative careers or businesses for the sake of making Christ’s name famous. God promises to repay them a hundred-fold for their sacrifice.

One observation we can make from this is the incredible generosity of our God. He doesn’t just pay us back for our sacrifices in this life but he super-over-compensates and pays us back a hundredfold when he desires to reward us. Our God is that good.

3. We will obtain greater glory.

Earlier in our studies of the afterlife we learned that in heaven, we will have a degree of glory about us. We don’t know if we will literally shine like Jesus, but we will have a degree of glory. Look what Paul said will influence the amount of glory that radiates from us for all eternity.

The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are God’s children. And if children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ) – if

indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that our present sufferings cannot even be compared to the glory that will be revealed to us. Romans 8:16–18 (NET)

Paul said the greater the suffering we are willing to endure for Christ, the greater the glory we will partake of from Christ. Christ has supreme glory in heaven because he paid the supreme sacrifice of suffering to take away our sins. If God in his sovereignty puts us in a position where obedience to Christ leads us to suffer for Christ, embrace that suffering joyfully knowing that the more we suffer well for Christ, the more glory we will obtain for all of eternity making us a little more like Christ.

4. We gain greater rulership from Christ.

In Luke 19, Jesus tell us the parable of the minas. In this parable a master entrusts his servants with money while he is gone to make a return on his investment. This parable is meant to teach us about the kingdom of God. It parallels how God will reward us based on investments he makes in us.

The first came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.' And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.'... 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. Luke 19:16-19, 26 (ESV)

If we are faithful with the money, gifts, talents and time God entrusts into our lives today, God promises much greater responsibilities of leadership in eternity. Last week, we learned that during the Millennium and into the new heavens and earth Christians will rule with Christ and under Christ. How much rulership we have on that day will be determined by how we live with what Christ has entrusted into our lives today.

How can I gain eternal rewards?

As we go into this week, it is my hope that each of us lives to gain the maximum reward we can obtain when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ. It is my prayer we wouldn't forfeit any of the joyful awards that could be ours because of our sin. Here is a list of practical ways to gain great eternal rewards.

1. Financial generosity in the name of Christ.

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. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19–21 (ESV)

Whenever we express financial generosity in the name of Christ, we do not lose that money, we relocate that money from earth to heaven. We relocate it in a place where it cannot be taken by thieves. It cannot be destroyed. It cannot lose value. God promises to reward us in heaven based on our financial generosity toward the things of Christ on earth.

I cannot put enough stress on the importance of being a generous giver. As Paul said, "If you want to love Jesus more, give more. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Most Christians practice tithing, which is giving 10 percent of your income to God. A tithe is a good floor for generosity. It is not a ceiling to limit generosity. I know some of you think you can't afford to tithe. The truth is you can't afford not to tithe. God is in charge of your finances. When we tithe, it teaches us to trust in God to provide for our needs. You will be shocked to see how God meets your needs. The best part of tithing is Jesus said we never lose the money. We merely relocate that money to heaven.

2. Practical care for those in need.

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just. Luke 14:13–14 (ESV)

Every time we give to those in need, especially those who cannot repay us, we earn eternal rewards. What greater motivation is there for visiting nursing homes, the jail, orphans and helping unwed mothers? God promises to reward us when we care for those who cannot repay us.

3. Joyful acceptance of God-ordained suffering.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:6–7 (ESV)

Sometimes we find ourselves in a situation where we suffer. We didn't bring the trial into our lives, but it really stinks. It could be a physical trial of poor health. It could be a relational trial because your spouse left you alone. It could be a financial trial where you lose your job. Peter said in all these trials God is testing our faith to prove it is genuine. If you have fake faith, you will fall away from Christ in a trial. If you have genuine faith, you will cling closer to Christ in the trial. In your trial are you clinging to Christ or cursing Christ? Christ promises to reward us if we suffer well.

4. Hearty work at my vocation.

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. You are serving the Lord Christ. Colossians 3:23–24 (ESV)

Whatever you do for work, work hard at your job. Don't fritter your time away. Don't give a half-hearted effort on the job. Even if you don't think your

earthly boss is paying you well, know your heavenly boss will pay you well. You will receive a reward for how you work not just from your earthly boss but you will also receive a reward from your heavenly boss for working well. Take pride in your work and have a job well-done. God will reward you forever for your work.

5. Every good thing we do will be rewarded by God.

...knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. Ephesians 6:8 (ESV)

Every good thing we do we will receive back from the Lord. Jesus will find every last thing in our lives for which he can reward us, and he will reward us for all of eternity.

Conclusion

There are two main things we learned:

1. **We are saved by grace but we will be rewarded by works.** Christians are not to be couch potatoes. We are not saved to sit. We are saved to serve. Jesus is so incredibly gracious that he wants to reward us for how we serve after we are saved. He can't wait to reward us for how we live.
1. **The person you are today will determine the rewards you will receive tomorrow.** Live full-throttle for Jesus today in preparation for the day we will stand before him and be rewarded by him.

Let's look at the questions we started with this morning.

1. **Will it make a difference in eternity if you come a Christ as a young man compared a death-bed conversion experience as an old man?** Yes! A young man has a lifetime to earn eternal rewards from Christ. Those with a death-bed conversion experience will be in heaven by God's grace through

Christ but they have no chance to earn rewards from Christ. Both are saved only by grace, but the young man has the opportunity to also be rewarded for his works.

2. **If Jesus forgives me of my sin, does it matter if I continue to sin?** Yes, it matters. While our sin is forgiven by Christ, continuing in sin forfeits the rewards Christ desires to give us at his judgment seat.



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