

HEAVEN – Part Six
“What Did John See?” #3
Sermon – March 24, 2019

Last week we looked at the six main events that will occur in the end-times. They are:

RAPTURE
TRIBULATION
SECOND COMING
MILLENNIUM
GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT
NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

We have talked about the first four events last week but it would behoove us to do a little review before moving on to the last two events. The Rapture is an event that involves Christ and His church. To be raptured means “to be taken up”. The Rapture occurs when Christ comes in the clouds and the dead in Christ arise from their graves and we who are alive are taken up to the clouds; Both the believers who have died and those who are still alive when He comes will meet Christ in the air and be taken up to Heaven to be with Him forever. It is at this point when the dead in Christ will receive their resurrected bodies and the bodies of those of us who are still alive will also be changed into an immortal body.

The Tribulation is a seven year period of time when the wrath of God is poured out on the earth. It involves the rising of the Anti-Christ, a one-world government run by the beast and his prophet, and a seven-year treaty between Israel and the Anti-Christ. Mid way through the Tribulation the Anti-Christ breaks this treaty with Israel by setting himself up as God in the newly rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. This will usher in what is known as the time of Jacob’s troubles, for the Anti-Christ will wage war against Israel in hopes of destroying her forever. But God rescues Israel from the clutches of the Anti-Christ.

The Second Coming is when Jesus returns to earth and brings with Him the saints who had died and were raised from the dead as well as those who were alive at the time of the Rapture who met Him in the clouds when the Rapture occurred. All of these have been in Heaven with Jesus until the time of His Second Coming. The purpose for His Second coming is to put an end to the Tribulation, to seize the beast and the false prophet and throw them into the lake of fire, and to take hold of Satan and imprison him for a thousand years in an abyss so that he would not deceive the nations any longer. This is important because Christ is about to establish His rule over the peoples and nations of the earth. His rule over the earth is called the Millennium.

Millennium means “time”, “age”, or a “period of time”. The Bible tells us that the amount of time Jesus reigns on the earth is a thousand years. Which means the Millennium reign of Christ will last a thousand years. During the Millennium those who were in Heaven with Christ and returned to earth with him will also reign with him over the earth. They are joined by those who had been killed because of their faith in Christ who are also resurrected during this time and also reign with Him. Many believe the Old Testament saints are not resurrected until the Second Coming of Christ but whenever they are they will also reign with Christ. 2 Timothy confirms this.

2 TIMOTHY 2:11-12

“It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; If we endure, we will also reign with Him.”

But what does this reign consist of? What are we doing as part of our reigning with Christ? Paul tells us a little of this in 1 Corinthians. Jesus also spoke of it in Matthew.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:2-3

“Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?”

MATTHEW 25:23

“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’”

It would appear that some of the duties we will have as we reign with Christ will be to judge the angels and to be responsible for many things of which Christ will put us in charge. He may put us in charge of cities or countries, or workers or buildings, or finances, or the arts or construction or any number of things. Scripture does not specify. But I surmise that whatever we have been gifted with in our mortal life we will be even more gifted with in our immortal life, for all our inhibitions and limitations will be gone and we will be free to explore and be all that God originally created us to do and be. To be fair these things are not specifically mentioned as happening during the Millennium; but it would stand to reason that, if we are given these abilities, that they would manifest themselves during the thousand year reign as well as in future times.

Obviously there will be some struggles going on during the Millennium, for it is not yet the time when all tears will be wiped away. As we saw last week, those who survived the Tribulation will live out their natural lives during this time. Scripture also says that those who survived will also be required to go up from year to year to worship the Lord of Hosts and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. But some of the families of the earth will choose not to go up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. As a consequence, the Lord will not allow rain to fall on them and their land. This partial rebellion will grow until the thousand years are up and Satan is released from his prison. When this occurs he will deceive the nations and gather them together for war against the Lord and His anointed. But God will rain down fire from heaven and devour them all. The devil is then thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are also. There they will be tormented forever, never to deceive or influence any one ever again.

So the thousand year reign of Christ on this current earth is ended by the release of Satan from his prison, the deception of the nations, the gathering of them together to fight against and Lord, and the banishment of Satan to the lake of fire. The end of the Millennium ushers in the next event which is the Great White Throne Judgment which we will speak about today. We will speak about the new heavens and new earth next week.

GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

REVELATION 20:11-15

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened.”

We looked at this judgment a few weeks ago and saw that the unbelievers who died without faith in Christ were judged according to their deeds which were recorded in these books. But unbelievers are not the only ones who will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. The Scripture says:

1 CORINTHIANS 5:10

“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

This is why Jesus said, *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store 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).

Though last time we did not speak specifically of what awaits believers when they stand before the Throne of God we did speak in general terms. We know that no judgment awaits the believer when they stand before this Throne. We also know that believers will not be judged on the basis of their own deeds but rather on what Christ has done for them on their behalf. So why does Paul say all believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ?

To understand why we need to determine what the word judgement means. The Greek word for judgment can mean many things such as a separation, a selection, an opinion, a decision, or a sentence of condemnation. Since Romans 8:1 says, *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* the word judgment as applied to the believer cannot involve a sentence of condemnation. It could, however, involve a separation or selection. It could also involve an opinion or decision.

MATTHEW 25:31-34, 41, 46

“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and He will put the sheep in His right, and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels’ ...These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

This Scripture shows that there will be a separation of believers from unbelievers when we all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Believers will be welcomed into the kingdom of God while unbelievers will be thrown outside the kingdom and cast into the eternal lake of fire. But something else happens before the judgment seat. Books are opened. As we saw a few weeks ago, there is no hope to be found in these books for the unbeliever, but the believer does have hope because the name of all believers in Christ will be found written in the Lamb’s book of life guaranteeing the believer’s entry into Heaven.

However, there are other books which are opened and these other books contain the deeds of everyone who ever lived. Although believers will not be judged on their deeds, the rewards which they may or may not receive will be the criteria on which their rewards will be based. So judgments in the sense of rendering opinions and decisions will be made regarding the believer when analyzing the deeds they did on earth.

REVELATION 22: 12-11

“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what He has done.”

MATTHEW 16:27

“For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of the Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds.”

So the Lord Jesus Himself will do the rewarding and He will tailor each person's reward to what they specifically have done. Obviously not everything we do will be rewarded. For instance, our sinful deeds, though forgiven, will not gain us a heavenly reward. Likewise our evil thoughts, even if they remain vocally unexpressed, are not worthy of a reward. So what kind of things does Scripture say we can do that will gain us a reward?

First of all let me say that there is one reward which every believer will receive regardless of what they may have done and that is eternal life. This reward is not granted because of something we have done; rather it is the free gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9) which comes as a result of our belief. This is the point of the parable of the workers who were hired to tend the vineyard at different times of the day. When the work was completed all received the same reward in spite of the amount of time they spent working in the vineyard. Every believer will receive the reward of eternal life because they placed their faith in Christ to save them from their sins; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one eternal reward.

However, there are different rewards for every believer beyond their salvation. We previously spoke of the reward of being put in charge of many things because of our faithful service to God on earth. But there are other rewards. For instance, Scripture speaks of rewards which are waiting to be given to people for specific reasons. These rewards are known as crowns.

According to Pastor David Jeremiah there are at least five crowns clearly cited in Scripture that will be awarded in Heaven. The first is the Victor's Crown, This crown will be awarded for self-discipline (1 Corinthians 9:25-27). The second is the Crown of Rejoicing which will be given to those who have led others to Christ (1 Thessalonians 2:19). The third is the Crown of Righteousness which will be given to those who have a longing for the Lord Jesus and eagerly look for His return (2 Timothy 4:8). The fourth is the Crown of Life, placed upon those who have endured and triumphed over trial, temptation, and persecution, even to the point of martyrdom (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10). The fifth is the Crown of Glory, awarded to the faithful shepherds of the people of God and to Christian leaders (1 Peter 5:4).

Although there are many people who will receive each of these crowns, they appear to be given to specific groups of people for specific things they did while on earth. For instance, you may be eligible to receive the Crown of rejoicing if you have ever led anyone to Christ. If you have been a faithful shepherd of God's people, whether as a pastor, bible study leader, Sunday school teacher or some other form of service to the people of God, you may be eligible for the Crown of Glory. Now I am not saying that if you led one or two people to Christ that your crown will be equal to Billy Graham's crown or that my crown will be equal to Jonathan Edwards or Martin Luther's, but what I am saying is that crowns await those who spend their life in service to the King no matter what form it may take.

Crowns are not by any means the only rewards that will be distributed in Heaven. But what is interesting is that, whether it be a crown or some other prize, it appears each believer's reward will be tailored to Him and given to Him personally by Jesus. I believe that other rewards that are given will also be tailored to the individual. Here's why.

MATTHEW 19:27-39

“Peter said to (Jesus), ‘Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us? And Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sister or father or mother, or children or farms for my name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.’ ”

We see from the words of Jesus that the reward the twelve disciples will receive is specific to

them. They will sit upon twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. We will not receive that reward. However, if any of us have had to leave our homes or relatives in order to follow Jesus then we are among those whom Jesus says will receive many times as much. It may be that Jesus is referring to many more relatives in heaven than we have lost on earth for when he was told his mother and brothers were waiting for him His reply was, *“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?”* He then points to His disciples and says, *“Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother”* (Matthew 12:46-50). We may have many more mothers and brothers and sisters waiting for us in heaven than we have had to leave behind on earth.

Besides relatives Jesus may also be implying we will inherit much more property in heaven than we have left behind on earth. After all He did say He was preparing a place for us in Heaven; and heaven is far more beautiful and expansive than homes we leave behind on earth. Ultimately whether it is family or homes or property does not matter. What matters is that there are rewards of some sort awaiting those who have left family and property behind in order to follow Jesus.

According to Jesus there are also rewards awaiting those who have been persecuted or insulted because of their faith, those who give to the poor or needy in secret, those who pray without parading themselves before others, and those who fast without putting on a gloomy face.

MATTHEW 5:11-12

“Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

MATTHEW 6:3-4, 6

“When you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you... When you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

MATTHEW 6:17-18

“When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”

Jesus also speaks of a prophet’s reward and the reward of the righteous,

MATTHEW 10:41

“Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward.”

What is a prophet’s reward or a righteous person’s reward? We don’t know since Jesus never defined them. But whatever they are they must be good, for prophets did much for others in the name of the Father. They not only proclaimed God’s word of encouragement and warning, they also raised people from the dead, caused the rain to stop falling, healed the sick, supplied a means for a poor widow to provide for herself, made bitter waters sweet, and many other things. Just this list alone makes it seem that their reward will be great in heaven. So perhaps Jesus is telling us that whatever they receive we too may receive simply because we welcomed a prophet and a righteous man into our homes. Even if it was far less than Elijah or Elisha or Moses received, it would still seem to be a glorious reward.

There are also degrees of rewards. In the parable of the talents Jesus gives greater rewards to those

who did greater things with what was given to them. This indicates that God will grant greater or lesser rewards to us than others depending on what we did with the gifts and calling we received while on earth. The more we do with what we are given the more we will receive. The less we do the less we will receive. So even though we may receive a reward in heaven, the reward we receive may be less than someone else who did more with what God entrusted to them than we did. Paul describes this defining process in 1 Corinthians.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:12-15

"Now if any man builds on the foundation (of Jesus Christ) with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work..

"If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

The work which each of us does on earth will be tested in heaven before the throne of God. The quality and value of our work will not be based on our own interpretation of quality or value. It will be based on heaven's value system. Every person's work done on earth will go through a purifying fire which will determine whether it is worthy of a reward.

The fact that rewards will be given to believers is an undeniable fact of Scripture. What these specific rewards will be, how many rewards there are, and what type or quality they possess is not fully revealed. We will simply have to wait till we appear before the Great White Throne to understand fully what these rewards are. In the meantime we should pay heed to the word of Jesus in John 9.

JOHN 9:4-5

"We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming when no man can work."

Jesus asks us to do the works of God while we still can, while it is still day. These are the works that will receive a reward. Jesus spoke these words to His disciples knowing that His time on earth and His ability to do the works of God would soon be cut short by His impending death. So when Jesus saw the man born blind he used this man as an opportunity to show how to do the works of God. What He did was a little unusual. He began by spitting on the ground and making clay of the spittle. Then He applied the clay to the man's eyes. After applying the clay He instructed the man to go wash in the pool of Siloam which he did. After he had washed the man came back seeing.

There are three things worthy of notice in this story as it relates to rewards. The first is that opportunities arise during our everyday lives to do the works of God. Jesus and His disciples were passing by on their way to another location when they spotted this man. Jesus then placed more value on healing this man than He did on any agenda which He and the disciples may have had in place at the time. God will place ministry opportunities in our way but we must be aware of them and take the time to be used by God in that opportune moment.

The second is that when doing the works of God we must sometimes get creative in order to do what God requires. Certainly making clay out of spittle is unusual and highly creative if not downright unsanitary. But it was the exact right thing to do for that blind man. We need to be open to creative solutions to unusual circumstances. What God asks us to do may be beyond our comfort zone or our experience but if we remain open to His leading we may get as creative as Jesus and perhaps do as much

good for others as He did.

The third thing we see is that there was something necessary for the man to do in order to receive the fullness of what God had in store for him. When we minister to others the actions we take are important but the actions those we are ministering to are equally important. If they are not willing to take the next step in the process of healing they may never receive the fullness of the gift God has for them. Their response is not our responsibility. Our only responsibility is to do that which God requires of us.

The man born blind was willing to have spittle and mud placed upon his eyes. But he was also willing to go wash in the pool of Siloam as instructed. What would have happened if he had not gone and washed there? We do not know but it would appear that his healing was a two-step process. If he had refused the second step perhaps he would not have received his sight. In the same manner, those to whom we minister are responsible for following up on our ministry to them. We must be willing to minister but the will of those we minister to must also must be involved in the process of healing.

In light of what Jesus says about doing the works of the Father we can see that the day has ended and the night has come in several countries around the world so that many cannot openly do the works of the Father. Even here in America we see restrictions being placed on Christians on what they can or cannot do or say. Thankfully these restrictions are not yet widespread so that we still have the light of day in which to do the works of our heavenly Father. But let us do so quickly and earnestly for the night is coming even here in America when no man will be able to work the works of the Father out in the open.

The works of the Father which we do will result in a reward every time we do them. Whether we will receive a crown or a simple reward does not matter. What does matter is that the works we do are not burned up as they pass through the fire of purification. What each believer wants is to be present with the Lord in heaven. But we also want rewards; not for ourselves, but so that we can lay them down before the feet of Jesus in gratitude for all He has done for us.

REVELATION 4:9-11

“And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever,...

“and (they) will cast their crowns before the throne saying, ‘Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.’”

Amen!

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