

The JUDGMENT SEAT of  
**CHRIST**  
WILL YOU RECEIVE A CROWN?

Jon Redmond

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For the sake of clarity, all Scripture quotations and parenthesized Scripture references have been placed in italics.

## *Dedication*

This booklet is dedicated to the person who wants more than anything else to live a life that is pleasing to Jesus Christ. May what is written here inspire you in that pursuit, and may you one day hear Him say to you, “*Well done, good and faithful servant*” (*Matthew 25:21*).

This booklet is also dedicated to Dr. R.T. Kendall who pastored Westminster Chapel in London for twenty-five years. His clear teaching on the Judgment Seat of Christ greatly impacted my own life quite a few years ago. I sensed in him a man who lives his life with that future day of judgment in mind. It impacts his decision-making process, his attitude towards money, and his approach to ministry. The friendship that our family has been able to develop with him (and with his son, T.R.) has confirmed my observation that he longs for the approval of God more than the approval of people. When he stands before Jesus on Judgment Day, I believe he will fare well.

## *Introduction*

There are a lot of things that are important to us *now* that won't be important to us *in eternity*. When we stand before Jesus Christ at His Judgment Seat, it won't matter how popular we were on earth. Neither will it matter how successful, wealthy, or intelligent we were. On that day of judgment, the only thing that will matter is Jesus' assessment of us.

We spend so much of our time seeking the approval of others and fretting when we feel like we don't have it. On the day of judgment, though, the approval of others won't matter at all. The only thing that will matter then will be the approval of Jesus Himself. When we stand before Him face to face, His opinion of us is the only opinion that will count.

As Christians, we know that when we die we will go immediately to heaven. The Bible is clear on that. The apostle Paul put it this way: "*We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord*" (II Corinthians 5:8). What a comfort. We also know that there is coming a day when we will be judged by Jesus. The Bible is clear on that, too. Listen to these words: "*For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the*

*body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (II Corinthians 5:10, emphasis added).* There is a predetermined day, set in our future, when we will stand before Jesus Christ in judgment. I don’t know what the thought of that does to you, but it frightens me...in a healthy way. It convicts me. If you think seriously about it, the Judgment Seat of Christ will have the same effect on you. Paul referred to “*the terror of the Lord*” to describe the experience (*II Corinthians 5:11*). It will be a serious and holy occasion. How could any rationally-thinking person be flippant about it?

It seems to me that the Judgment Seat of Christ should be more to us, though, than just a future event. It should also be a highly-motivating, present-day reality. In other words, we should live our lives each day in the light of the judgment to come. The Judgment Seat of Christ should affect our decision-making process, our attitude towards money, our attitude towards other earthly things, how we respond to temptation, how we respond when people praise us, how we respond to criticism and rejection, and our motives for doing good things.

By making the Judgment Seat of Christ a part of our daily thinking, we are almost guaranteed to live a more Christ-like, Spirit-filled life. The event itself is in the *future*, but our awareness of

it could and should change everything about our lives in the *here* and *now*. It will help us to take the “long look” when we are tempted to seek and settle for short-term gratification. The way we live our lives has consequences in this life to be sure. But it will have even greater consequences at the Judgment Seat of Christ. So let’s spend our time and energy sowing good seeds, and let’s pray for a good harvest at the coming judgment.

### *The Judgment Seat of Christ*

The Bible says, “*It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*” (Hebrews 9:27). Make no mistake about it, judgment is in your future.

Perhaps the most well-known judgment mentioned in the Bible is the Great White Throne Judgment referred to in Revelation 20:11-15. This judgment will come at the very end of time. It is the judgment for unsaved people. They will be judged for their sins, which were never forgiven by God because they rejected Jesus Christ and His death on the cross as the payment for their sins. The unsaved will then be sentenced to an eternity in hell. It will be a horrifying judgment. You don’t want to be

there. It should be noted here that when unbelievers die today they go immediately to a place called, “*Hades*” (see *Luke 16:19-31*). Hades is a place of punishment, but it is not hell. Unbelievers will be sentenced to hell at the Great White Throne Judgment.

The judgment we are focusing on in this booklet is the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is a judgment for Christians. And the first thing we need to understand about this judgment is that it will not be a judgment of our sins. Our sins were placed on Jesus Christ when He died on the cross. He paid the price for our sins (see *II Corinthians 5:21*). So, at this judgment, we will not be judged and punished for our sins. Jesus took that judgment and punishment for us. God won’t judge the same sins twice. Jesus’ punishment was enough.

There’s an old story that beautifully illustrates this truth. David Jeremiah does such an excellent job of telling it that I simply want to print his words here: “In the days of the pioneers, when men saw that a prairie fire was coming, they would take a match and burn the designated area around them. Then they would take their stand in the burned area and be safe from the threatening fire. Even as the rush of

fire surged around them there was no fear, because fire had already passed over the place where they stood.” Jeremiah goes on to say: “When the judgment of God comes to sweep men into hell for eternity, one spot will be safe. Nearly two thousand years ago the wrath of God was poured out on Calvary. There, the Son of God took the wrath that should have fallen on us. Now if we take our stand by the cross, we are safe for time and eternity. The judgment has fallen and it never need fall again.”<sup>1</sup>

Isn't that a wonderful story? The fire can't come where the fire has already been. When Jesus died on the cross, He took the fire of God's judgment for all of my sins. He was punished for every sin I would ever commit. From the perspective of the cross, all of my sins were in the future because I hadn't even been born yet. But He knew that I would one day enter the world, and He knew that I would sin. So He lovingly took the punishment for all of my sins. Since I have repented of my sins, asked for Jesus' forgiveness, and trusted Him to save me, my sins are forgiven. They are gone. So are yours if you've ever received Christ. The Bible says that "*the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7). So, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, we won't be judged for



our sins at all. Jesus suffered that judgment for us on the cross.

The question, then, is this: *What kind of judgment will the Judgment Seat of Christ be?* Well, the short answer is that it will be a judgment of rewards. Jesus will reward us if we sought to live our lives for His glory and if we devoted our lives to serving Him the best we could.

The Bible says, “*For we shall all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ*” (Romans 14:10, *emphasis added*). Paul wrote those words to a group of Christians living in Rome, and they apply to every believer of every age. When we stand before Him, “*each of us shall give account of himself to God*” (Romans 14:12). We will have to give an account to God for how we lived our lives. Again, we will not be held accountable for our *sins*, but we will be held accountable for our *lives*. Did we spend our time on earth pleasing *ourselves*, or did we spend our time on earth pleasing *God*? That is the heart of what this judgment is all about.

We gain additional insights into the Judgment Seat of Christ in another one of Paul’s letters. Consider his words: “*For no other*

*foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (I Corinthians 3:11-15).*

The foundation of our lives is Jesus Christ. When we trusted Him to save us, He became our foundation. After salvation, though, we spend the remainder of our lives constructing a building...the building of our lives. Paul discussed the different types of materials with which we can build. Some of the materials are costly and durable. Some of the materials are cheap and temporary. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, Jesus will evaluate which materials we used. In essence, He will determine if our devotion *to* Him and our service *of* Him were genuine, heartfelt, and meaningful or if they were phony, perfunctory, and empty.

Notice the Bible says that the quality of our lives “*will be revealed by fire*” (*I Corinthians 3:13*). In the last book of the Bible, the apostle John described a vision he had of the risen Christ. In that vision, he saw the very eyes of Jesus. He observed that Jesus has “*eyes like a flame of fire*” (*Revelation 1:14*). At the Judgment Seat of Christ, Jesus will be able to discern between the authentic acts of worship and service that we offered to Him and the inauthentic. What was genuine will survive the fire of His gaze. What wasn’t genuine will go up in smoke.

Keep in mind that this is the Judgment Seat of Christ. Jesus holds this court. He Himself said, “*For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son*” (*John 5:22*). It is His eyes that will look *at* us and *through* us. No wonder the Bible says, “*All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account*” (*Hebrews 4:13*).

What specifically will His eyes see? Everything, of course, but He will be focusing on two things primarily. He will be able to see in an instant all the things we have ever done for Him and for others. And He will also be able to see the motives that inspired those actions. So

He will be judging us for our *actions* and for our *motives*.

If, in His all-seeing gaze and all-knowing mind, He judges us to have been faithful, He will reward us. Again, if we have been unfaithful, we won't be judged or punished for that. Those sins have already been forgiven. But neither will we be rewarded. So this judgment is a time when rewards will either be *given* to us or a time when rewards will be *withheld*.

What type of rewards will we potentially receive? The Bible says that “*crowns*” will be given to us if we have been faithful (*Revelation 4:10*).

## *We Will Be Rewarded With Crowns*

Perhaps you're thinking: “I don't care anything about receiving rewards when I get to heaven. I don't need a crown. I'll just be happy to be there.” Well, we'll all be happy to be there, but on this day of judgment, you'll feel differently about receiving a reward. As you wait for your name to be called so that you can stand before Jesus Himself, you'll want more

than anything for Him to say to you, “*Well done, good and faithful servant*” (Matthew 25:21). You’ll regret not living more fully committed to Him during your time on earth. What might not be all that important to you *now* will be extremely important to you *then*. Can you imagine how thrilled Jesus would be to give you a crown of some kind? And can you imagine how thrilled you would be to receive it? Why would you want to deprive Him and yourself of that joy?

The crowns we hope to receive are not for our own glory or pride. Pride isn’t allowed in heaven. We learned that lesson from Lucifer. When that beautiful angel became puffed up with pride, he got kicked out of heaven and became the devil himself (see *Isaiah 14:12-15*). God hates pride (see *Proverbs 6:16-17*). And He certainly won’t do anything to promote our pride. That’s not the purpose of these crowns. As we will see a little later, these crowns will actually become something we will use as an expression of worship before the Lord, but for now, I want you to think about the joy that you and Jesus would both experience if He sees fit to give you a crown. That would become the happiest moment of your entire existence.

## *When Will This Judgment Take Place?*

The exact timing of the Judgment Seat of Christ is not specifically spelled out for us in the Bible. Two valid options, though, seem to be possible. First, the Judgment Seat of Christ could take place immediately after our death. The context of II Corinthians 5 would lend itself to that interpretation. In verse 8 of that chapter, Paul talked about the fact that when we as Christians die, we go immediately to heaven. Two verses later, he described the Judgment Seat of Christ. From that passage alone, it would be easy to conclude that we will be judged immediately after we die. The problem with that interpretation, though, when the whole of Scripture is considered, is that such a view would mean that the Judgment Seat of Christ has been taking place nonstop for almost two-thousand years (since Jesus returned to heaven). That would mean that for all those years Jesus has been *judging* Christians. The Bible, though, explains that Jesus is currently *praying* for Christians. Consider this verse: “*Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them*” (Hebrews 7:25).

So the Bible clearly reveals that Jesus is presently *praying* for Christians who are on *earth*, not *judging* Christians who are already in *heaven*. That would lead us to conclude that the Judgment Seat of Christ will indeed take place after death, as Paul pointed out in II Corinthians 5, but not immediately after death. So when will it take place?

The second valid option for the exact timing of this judgment is immediately after the rapture of the church. When the bodies of Christians who have already died are resurrected and reunited with their living, eternal souls and when Christians who are still alive are instantaneously taken to heaven in this momentous event, we will be in heaven for seven years in our new, resurrected bodies while the Great Tribulation plays out on earth. It is during these seven years that I, and many others, believe the Judgment Seat of Christ will take place.<sup>2</sup> This is the time when we will be rewarded by Jesus. Even in Paul's description of this judgment, he says, "*we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ*" (II Corinthians 5:10, *emphasis added*). Notice he said "all." It seems to be an event that we will all go through together. We'll go through it individually, but we'll go through it during the same season of time. It will be

somewhat like getting your driver's license renewed. There is a large group of people in the building at the same time, but each person goes through the process individually.

In Revelation 19, we read about the "*Marriage Supper of the Lamb*" (v. 9, *emphasis added*). This is an experience that we will enjoy in heaven with Jesus *after* the rapture and *before* His second coming to earth (when we will return to earth with Him to enjoy His millennial reign). Before that meal, though, we will be judged. The Bible says that before we partake of the food at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb that we will be given rewards in heaven in the form of the actual clothing we will wear. Listen to these words: "*And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints*" (Revelation 19:8). I take it that this is all a part of the Judgment Seat of Christ. So the whole idea of this judgment seems to be an event that will take place in heaven *after* the rapture and *before* the second coming of Christ to earth...during that seven-year period of time.



## *What Will the Setting Be Like?*

In II Corinthians 5, Paul said, “*For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ*” (v. 10, *emphasis added*). The English words “Judgment Seat” come from the Greek word “bema” which John MacArthur points out was “an elevated platform where victorious athletes (e.g., during the Olympics) went to receive their crowns.”<sup>3</sup> MacArthur notes that “Corinth had such a platform where both athletic rewards and legal justice were dispensed (*see Acts 18:12-16*), so the Corinthians understood Paul’s reference.”<sup>4</sup> The “bema” served two purposes...one for giving out crowns to winning athletes and the other for making judgments on legal matters. What a clear picture of the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Let me say, parenthetically, that I have been to ancient Corinth, and I have stood before that platform. In my mind, as I stood there for several moments in silence, I thought about what it will be like to one day stand before the Lord in judgment. It was one of the most meaningful and soul-searching experiences of my entire life. Just thinking about standing face to face with Jesus is an emotionally-charged thought, and to

imagine that while standing at the actual “bema” in Corinth was even more so.

In first-century times, athletes stood before that platform to receive the victors’ crowns. One day, we will stand before a similar platform in heaven to receive the crowns that Jesus has in store for us. It almost makes me cry when I think about it. We’re going to see Jesus up close and personal. And He’s going to tell us what He thinks about how we spent our time on earth. That’s why I said earlier that everything we do in life should be done with that future day of judgment in mind.

We, like those first-century athletes, will receive crowns if we have been faithful. Interestingly enough, the Bible describes five different types of crowns that will be given out on this holy day of judgment. Let’s consider each crown now:

## *Five Crowns We Hope to Receive*

### *1. The Imperishable Crown*

The first crown mentioned in the New Testament is “the imperishable crown” which is

sometimes referred to as “the victor’s crown.” In describing this crown to the Christians in Corinth, Paul used a familiar athletic analogy to capture their attention. Listen to his words: *“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”* (I Corinthians 9:24-27).

The Olympic Games used to take place in Olympia, Greece. Another similar event, the Isthmian Games, occurred in Corinth. So the people there were very familiar with what was involved in preparing for these events. The training that preceded these games was intense to say the least. One source explains that athletes had to “provide proof” that they had trained for ten months prior to the athletic events, and they had to “exercise in the gymnasium” for the thirty days “before the games started” in order to compete.<sup>5</sup> The winner would receive a crown made of “a garland of flowers or a wreath of leaves” that would very quickly “wither away.”<sup>6</sup>

Paul was stressing two things here. First, he was contrasting the *perishable crowns* that winning athletes would receive with the *imperishable crowns* that victorious Christians will receive. The perishable crowns simply didn't last. The imperishable crowns will last for all eternity. Paul's logic is clear. He was saying that it is foolish to devote all of one's energies in pursuit of something that doesn't last and that it is wise to devote all of one's energies in pursuit of something that will last forever.

Second, Paul was comparing the discipline that must be present in both the athlete and the Christian. In order for either to receive a crown, much work must first be done. Crowns are never given to lazy individuals. Athletes have to put in the work, and so do Christians. The victorious Christian life is not to be experienced by the lazy, half-hearted believer.

Since we are saved by grace apart from any works of our own, sometimes we wrongly assume that there are no works involved in the Christian life. Such a warped theology would lead us to conclude that we don't really have any responsibilities at all in the Christian life. While it is true that salvation itself is a gift of grace which we receive by *faith alone in Christ alone*, there is much work to do *after* we get saved. That work is certainly not necessary to maintain

our salvation, but it is necessary if we are going to grow into the Christians whom God has saved us to be. The Christian life itself is not easy. It is hard work at times. That's why Paul said we are to "*fight the good fight of faith*" (*I Timothy 6:12*). The Christian life takes much effort and work if we are going to mature in it.

As I was contemplating that truth, I began thinking about some specific examples I could give of the type of effort that God expects us to put into our Christian lives. The following list is not exhaustive, but it is representative of the type of discipline and dedication that receiving the imperishable crown requires:

**a. *the daily discipline of Bible reading and prayer***

I can honestly say that I love to read my Bible. I really do. I enjoy praying, too. Prayer has a way of relaxing me. It gives me a chance to put my worries, concerns, and questions into God's hands. It also puts me in a position to hear from God when He speaks to me. I receive wisdom, gain fresh insights, and am even warned of impending danger when I pray.

I say all of that to say that I truly enjoy reading my Bible and talking to God. It's the most important part of my life, and yet,

sometimes it's not easy for me to read the Bible and pray. Sometimes there are other things I really need to do. Sometimes I'm tired. Sometimes I just don't feel like reading my Bible and praying. That, I have learned, is where discipline comes in. We have to make ourselves do it. It's a matter of having the right priorities in life. Spending time with God is more important than watching something on television or talking to a friend on the phone.

That doesn't mean we should read the Bible and pray all day long. We need to spend time with our families, we need to work, and we need to tend to our other responsibilities in life. We can't neglect those things in the name of having a quiet time. God wouldn't want that. But He does want us to carve out some time in our daily schedules to connect with Him. Sometimes it really takes discipline, but God will reward that...both *on earth* and *in heaven*.

**b. the completeness of our obedience**

It is important that we obey God...in both the large and seemingly small areas of life. The Bible says that "*to obey is better than sacrifice*" (*1 Samuel 15:22*). When we obey God, we prove that we love Him. Whether it's in the area of faithful church attendance, being baptized, tithing, or some other area, God expects us to do

what He has commanded us to do. He will reward us if we have been obedient.

***c. the extent to which we use our spiritual gifts***

God has given every believer at least one spiritual gift (*see I Corinthians 12:4-7*). And He expects us to use that gift, or those gifts, in service of Him. We don't have the privilege of just doing whatever we want to do with our lives. Instead, we have the responsibility to *discover* and then to *do* what God has called us to do. God calls some to be teachers, some doctors, some housewives, some painters, some plumbers, some preachers, some lawyers, and some coaches. Whatever our vocation, God has called each of us to use that platform as an opportunity to serve Him and help others. He expects us to use whatever gifts we have to build up His kingdom. Our jobs are not just for the purpose of making more and more money for ourselves; they are for the purpose of glorifying God.

***d. the purity of our lives***

It takes discipline to resist temptation. It's not easy to live a pure life. And let's be honest... none of us has done that perfectly. We have all sinned, and we continue to sin at times. We

won't be perfect until we get to heaven, but God expects us to pursue a life of purity. He knows that we're human and that we sometimes sin. The Bible says, "*For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust*" (Psalm 103:14). But when He looks down from heaven and sees us trying to live a life that pleases Him, He takes note of that. On Judgment Day, I'm convinced that He will commend every effort we've made to honor Him by pursuing purity.

*e. the way we treat our enemies*

It's not always easy to forgive others. It's not easy to be kind to people who have been unkind to you. It takes discipline and dedication to speak highly of someone who has spoken lowly of you. It's harder than lifting weights. It's more challenging than running five miles. But it touches the heart of God when we try to take the high road when our fallen, fleshly natures want to take the low road. When we take the high road, though, by walking in love and extending kindness to those who have been unkind to us, God sees that. And He takes note. One day, He will reward us for being committed enough to Him to demonstrate His unconditional love to others.

These are the types of things that we have to be willing to do if we want to receive the



imperishable crown. It takes discipline and dedication, but the eternal reward will be worth it all.

## 2. *The Crown of Rejoicing*

The second crown mentioned in the New Testament is “the crown of rejoicing” which is sometimes referred to as “the soul-winner’s crown.” Listen to how Paul described the people living in Thessalonica who had come to faith in Christ through his ministry: *“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?” (I Thessalonians 2:19).* Paul referred to these Christians *themselves* as his crown.

When you consider the imagery, it is as though Paul was saying that at the Judgment Seat of Christ these people themselves will actually be presented to him. It is as though Jesus will one day say to Paul, “These are the people whom you led to trust Me as their Savior and Lord.” The people themselves are the crowns. No wonder the Bible says that *“he who wins souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30).*

Jesus expects us to share our faith with others. The Great Commission expresses the very heart of Jesus. Hear His words: *“All*

*authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).*

Are you a soul winner? Have you ever led another person to Christ? There’s no joy quite like that...for the soul winner, for the person who gets saved, and “*in the presence of the angels of God*” (Luke 15:10). The crown of rejoicing is appropriately named because when someone gets saved, much rejoicing takes place!

We might be tempted to think that ministry such as this is reserved for pastors, missionaries, and church staff members. Well, that would be wrong. While it is true that those of us in those positions should certainly be soul winners, the truth is that God expects all of His children to be about the business of sharing their faith.

If you have ever been saved yourself, you can do this. All you have to do is share with another person how Jesus has changed your life. You could tell them about the peace you have in knowing that you’re going to heaven when you die. You could share with them the relief you have in knowing that your sins are forgiven.

The best way to be a soul winner is to simply walk with Jesus each day, asking Him to bring somebody across your path who needs to be saved. Just walk with God and let others see Jesus in you. Don't preach to them. Just talk naturally to them...about sports, family, the weather, etc. Then, at the right time, say something like this: "You know, Jesus changed my life. He has given me peace in my heart. He has given me assurance that my sins are forgiven. He has given me confidence that when I die I'm going to heaven. I used to have *none* of that, but now I have *all* of that." That's a powerful testimony. That resonates with people. It's real. Many times, when you tell someone something like that they will say, "I wish I had that. How could that happen to me?" And there you have it...an open door to share the gospel.

At this point, all you need to do is briefly (and I mean briefly) share the basic truths of the gospel: "God loves us and wants to have a personal relationship with us. The problem is that we have all sinned and that our sins have put a barrier between us and God. Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins and break down that barrier. If we will ask Him to forgive us, turn away from our sins, ask Jesus to come into our hearts, and trust Him to do it then we will be saved." That's it. That's the gospel. You could then ask them if they would like to ask Jesus to

come into their heart. You should offer to help them pray that prayer. If they say, “Yes,” just help them to ask Jesus to save them. There are no certain words you have to use. Pray a very simple, heart-felt prayer, one phrase at a time, asking them to repeat the phrases after you.

Other than seeing Jesus Himself and being reunited with our family members, I can’t imagine anything better than getting to heaven and seeing those people whom we helped get there. They will be our crowns...our crowns of rejoicing. We will rejoice, along with them, that God used us to lead them to Christ during our time on earth.

### **3. The Crown of Righteousness**

The third crown mentioned in the New Testament is “the crown of righteousness.” Paul wrote about this crown in the last letter he ever penned. He wasn’t far from his own execution. Let’s consider what he said: *“Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (II Timothy 4:8).*

As Paul thought about his own impending death, he turned his attention to heaven. And he

described one of the crowns he knew he would receive...the crown of righteousness.

This particular crown is not given to those who *do* something, but to those who *look forward* to something. This crown is given to those who look forward to the return of Christ. This demonstrates the tender heart of Jesus. When He looks into a human heart and sees a strong love for Him and a desire for His return, He is so touched by that desire that He will one day reward it openly in heaven by giving a special crown.

Paul lived with an anticipation of the Lord's return. He truly expected Jesus to return in his lifetime. He thought he would be living when the rapture of the church took place. He said so himself. Consider these words: "*Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord*" (I Thessalonians 4:17). He so anticipated the appearing of Christ that it changed everything about his life. Was Paul wrong? Not at all. Jesus could have returned in his lifetime, and Paul was right to live with that anticipation.

I don't think most of us live with an eager anticipation of the Lord's return. We believe He will return. We know He could appear at any

moment. But I'm just not convinced that most Christians actually long for that event to happen.

I heard a story many years ago about the old Puritans who longed for the return of Christ. They truly desired for Christ to appear and take them home. When they woke up in the morning, they would look out their bedroom window, up towards the sky, and say, "Maybe today, Lord. Maybe today." Then they would work in the fields and work in the house all day long. Before getting into bed at night, they would go back to that same bedroom window and look up at that same sky, this time draped in darkness, and say, "Maybe tonight, Lord. Maybe tonight."

That story has always inspired me. Those old Puritans woke up with the return of Christ on their minds, and they went to bed longing for it, too. No doubt they thought about it all day long.

While that story inspires me, it greatly touches the heart of Jesus. He loves it when a Christian truly longs for Him to return more than they want any earthly dream to come to pass.

Do you ever think about the return of Christ? Do you long to see it happen? Does it keep you living a pure, productive, and fruitful life?

If you don't ever really think about it, let me give you an assignment. Before you go to bed tonight, look out one of the windows of your house. Look up into the night sky. Imagine for a moment what it would be like if Jesus appeared in that sky and took you to heaven in an instant. No more sickness and no more pain. No more sadness and no more tears. No more separation. You would be reunited with those who have already gone to heaven, and you would see Jesus face to face. As you think about all of that, breathe this little prayer: "Maybe tonight, Lord. Maybe tonight." Then do the same thing when you wake up in the morning.

If you'll develop a habit of doing that, you'll develop a true love, a real longing for His appearing. And at the Judgment Seat of Christ, you'll receive a very special crown.

#### **4. The Crown of Life**

The fourth crown mentioned in the New Testament is "the crown of life." We read about it in The Epistle of James and again in Revelation. Let's think about both passages. James described it this way: "*Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him*" (James 1:12). The word "temptation" in this

context actually means “trials.”<sup>7</sup> James was saying that if we will endure the trials of life that God will give us the crown of life. James teaches us that our motivation for enduring the trials of life is our love for God. If we truly love Him, we will persevere when life gets tough.

I mentioned Dr. R.T. Kendall on the dedication page of this booklet. Years ago, I heard him say that sometimes God allows us to go through unpleasant and even painful experiences in life. When that happens, he explained, we need to “dignify the trial” as best as we can. I had never heard that expression before. It was new to me. He was saying that whatever challenge, setback, or disappointment a Christian may face can actually become an opportunity to honor God by responding in the appropriate manner. He explained that we “dignify the trials” of life by seeing God’s hand in them, by seeing them as a test of our faith, and by viewing them as occasions to remain faithful to God and loving towards others...even towards those who may have caused our trial. If we choose to complain, blame somebody else, hold a grudge, become bitter, and get angry then we are not “dignifying the trial.” Neither are we “dignifying the trial” if we lose our faith, stop serving God, or fall into a season of sin. We “dignify the trial” by staying in faith, by maintaining a positive attitude, and by knowing



that God has a good purpose in mind behind the particular trial He has allowed us to face.

In Revelation, Jesus was addressing a group of Christians who were about to endure a time of great persecution because of their faith in Him. He encouraged them to remain faithful, and He referred to the crown of life as a motivating reason to do so. These were His words: *“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life”* (Revelation 2:10). Notice that He expected them to be faithful “until death,” but that He also said the trial itself would only last “ten days” indicating that the trial would be “brief.”<sup>8</sup> In the grand scheme of eternity, all of our trials are actually brief even though they don’t seem that way now. Again, though, by keeping a heavenly perspective on earthly trials, we are much better equipped to endure them. This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote these words: *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18). Paul encouraged the Christians in Rome to take the “long look” when they were forced to endure suffering in this life. And part of that “long look” includes thinking

about the crown of life that awaits us in heaven if we will only “dignify the trials” we face along the way.

I have no idea what trial you may be facing at this time, but I know this: *Your trial may be a blessing in disguise.* It’s a blessing in the sense that it gives you an opportunity to trust God in ways that you otherwise wouldn’t have to trust Him. And it gives you an opportunity to express unconditional love to those who have hurt you and caused you much pain.

When the Lord rewards those who have endured some of life’s greatest trials, perhaps He will say: “You never gave up. You didn’t quit. You kept on keeping on. You continued to trust Me when nothing made sense. And you continued to serve Me when it was no longer easy to do so. You were faithful all the way. I’m so proud of you. Here’s a special crown just for you.” Just the thought of hearing those or similar words coming from the lips of Jesus should be enough to inspire us to “dignify the trial” that is currently ours.

## 5. *The Crown of Glory*

The fifth crown mentioned in the New Testament is “the crown of glory.” Let’s read how Peter described this crown: “*The elders*

*who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords 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 does not fade away” (I Peter 5:1-4).* Clearly, in this context, Peter was describing the role of pastors and church leaders. He was saying that if they are faithful to shepherd their flocks that one day they will receive this particular crown. This is both a *comforting* and *convicting* passage to those of us involved in Christian ministry. It is a reminder that what God has called us to do is serious business and that it indeed has eternal consequences...for *others* and for *us*.

But, as David Jeremiah points out, the crown of glory is not necessarily just for faithful pastors and ministers. He explains it this way: “I don’t believe you have to be an official pastor on staff at a church to receive this crown. You might be the shepherd of a small group. Your flock might be your family and your children. It might be your Sunday School class or small group. The Lord often gives us responsibility for the spiritual well-being and nurture of others,

and what an opportunity to serve Him!”<sup>9</sup> I agree with him on that.

I encourage you to do two things so that you might receive this crown one day. First, *identify your flock*. It may be your family...it certainly begins there. If you're a parent, your children will follow your lead. Your flock may also include a class you teach or a congregation you lead. It could even be your co-workers at work or your friends at school. Identify your flock.

Second, *invest in your flock*. Invest your time, your energy, and your presence. Think of how shepherds lead their flocks. They lead them to the “*green pastures*” and “*still waters*” (*Psalm 23:2*). We are supposed to lead our flocks to the Lord for forgiveness, cleansing, and salvation. The greatest thing a parent can do is to lead their child to Christ.

Not only do shepherds *lead* their flocks, but they also *feed* their flocks. They feed them so they can be healthy and strong. We are to feed our flocks the very words of God. We shouldn't force-feed them. Instead, we should feed them lovingly and naturally.

And then, like a faithful shepherd, we are to *protect* our flocks. In a home setting, parents are supposed to protect their children from anything

and everything that could corrupt or harm them. In a church setting, a pastor is supposed to protect the people from unbiblical theology, misplaced priorities, and misguided zeal.

Jesus is the ultimate Shepherd. He's our example. We can only properly lead others as we seek to closely follow Him. So become a good *follower*, and you'll be a good *leader*.

Seek to lead, first and foremost, by example. Lead out of who you are. Make sure your heart is right, and when you mess up, apologize. Be honest and be real. Be faithful to your flock. The crown of glory awaits you if you will be.

### *Our Motives Matter*

As we think about the things we are required to do if we hope to receive these crowns at the Judgment Seat of Christ, it is imperative that we remember that God is not only looking at our *actions*, but He's also looking at our *motives*. Paul explained it this way: "*For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ*" (*II Corinthians 5:10, emphasis added*). The word "appear" literally means "be revealed."<sup>10</sup> Think about that. When we stand before Jesus, we will be revealed for who we really are. In that moment, we will be revealed for what Jesus

*knew* about us all along, not for what others *thought* about us. We can fool people, but we can never fool Jesus. The Bible says, “*And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account*” (Hebrews 4:13).

One of the primary things that will be revealed is our motives. God is interested not just in *what* we do but also in *why* we do it. I can tell you that for me, as a minister, this convicts me. In my profession, I spend a lot of time doing “good” things. It’s good to study. It’s good to preach. It’s good to share your faith. It’s good to write a little booklet like this. It’s good to visit someone in the hospital. It’s good to help those who have pressing needs. It’s good to officiate weddings and preach funerals. But here’s the question: What’s my motive? Do I do these types of things because I’m expected to do them? Do I do them to gain favor from those whom I seek to help? Do I preach a sermon to boost my own ego? Why do I do what I do? It will all come out on Judgment Day.

Hopefully, my motive for ministry is not to please or impress others, but to please and honor God. Everything I do should be done for the sole purpose of pleasing and honoring Him. The same is true for you.

I want to refer to Dr. Kendall one more time. His life verse is John 5:44. That verse says: “*How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?*” Jesus spoke those words to those who were more interested in receiving honor from people than they were in receiving honor from God. They were more interested in gaining the approval of others than in gaining the approval of God. How sad. How prideful. How short-sighted.

We should spend our lives seeking the honor that comes from God. If it has been *His* approval we have been seeking then we will be rewarded on Judgment Day. If, though, we have been more concerned with impressing others than in honoring God then we will forfeit those rewards.

Let me say it as plainly as I can: God is not impressed with our résumés, accomplishments, degrees, civic recognitions, circle of friends, or the size of our business, bank account, or church. God is interested in our hearts. Do we long to please Him above anything and everything else?

In order to receive a crown at the Judgment Seat of Christ, we have to make sure that our motives are pure and that our hearts are right. It makes me want to pray the prayer that David prayed: “*Search me, O God, and know my*

*heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24).* We would be wise to pray that prayer often. Perhaps the most important three words of this entire booklet are these words: *Our motives matter.*

## *What Will We Do With Our Crowns?*

If we receive one or more of these crowns, what will we do with them? Well, I can tell you what we won't do. We won't compare our crowns with the crowns of others. That would only promote competition, jealousy, and resentment...and those things aren't allowed in heaven. Neither will we strut around heaven showing them off to others. That would only promote pride...and pride certainly isn't allowed in heaven. Then what will we do with our crowns?

I said earlier that we will use them as an expression of worship. But what did I mean by that? Well, in the last book of the Bible, we read these powerful and moving words: *“The twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne”*



(*Revelation 4:10*). Bible scholars tell us that the twenty-four elders represent those of us who have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup> They represent all Christians from every generation. So when the apostle John had this vision of the twenty-four elders casting their crowns at Jesus' feet, he was actually having a vision of *us* doing that. That's precisely what we will do with the crowns that Jesus presents to us. We will humbly, gratefully, and worshipfully give them back to Him. They will be our gifts to Him. We will return to Him in worship what He has generously given to us at His Judgment Seat.

### *Two Closing Thoughts*

First, as we think about our own impure motives and our many shortcomings, sins, and failures, it's easy to conclude that we won't receive any crown at all. But remember this: *Even at His Judgment Seat, Jesus will still be Jesus...full of grace and mercy.* Even as He reviews our lives and reveals our motives, He will judge us with grace and mercy. If He didn't, none of us would receive any reward at all because the Bible says that "*all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags*" (*Isaiah 64:6*). Even at our best, we're sinful creatures. I find tremendous comfort in knowing that Jesus

will judge me with grace and mercy. I trust His *tenderness* more than I would ever trust my own *worthiness*. If I receive any of the five crowns mentioned in the New Testament, it will be because of God's amazing grace. Even in judgment, He will give us what we never could have earned on our own. His mercies will never cease...not even at the Judgment Seat.

Second, I encourage you to pursue *Jesus* even more than you pursue the *crowns*. If we will seek Him with all of our hearts, we'll be much more likely to receive the crowns than if we only seek the crowns themselves. That's a basic principle of Scripture. Jesus said it this way: "*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*" (Matthew 6:33). So seek Jesus. Pursue Him. Obey Him. The rewards will naturally follow.

## *Conclusion*

As we come to the end of our time together, let me ask you a direct question: Has there ever been a time in your life when you sensed the Spirit of God convicting you of your sins and when you asked for forgiveness, mercy, and salvation? Have you ever asked Jesus to save you? If not, let me say that you're not currently

heading to the Judgment Seat of Christ. Instead, you're on your way to the Great White Throne Judgment. There, you will be judged for your sins and sentenced to an eternity in hell. You don't want to experience that. That's so unnecessary in light of what Jesus has done for us. I encourage you to change roads. Take the narrow gate that leads to life everlasting and to heaven itself. Ask Jesus to save you. Pray this prayer now:

*“Dear Jesus,*

*I'm heading in the wrong direction. I'm lost without You. I need to be saved.*

*I believe You died on the cross to pay for my sins and that You rose again conquering death, hell, and the grave. I ask You now to come into my heart, forgive my sins, and make me a Christian. I ask You to save me, and I trust You to do it. Welcome to my heart, Jesus. Begin now to make me the person You want me to be.*

*In Your Name I Pray,  
Amen.”*

Friend, if you prayed that prayer, God just answered it. The Bible says, *“For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved”*

(*Romans 10:13*). And that word “whoever” includes you!

I encourage you to share your decision with a friend and then to make it public in a good Bible-believing church as soon as possible. That’s your next step.

I also encourage you to make Jesus Christ the focus of your life. Let Him be at the center of everything you do, and let the things the crowns represent determine the priorities of your life. The crowns tell us what Jesus values. They give us fresh insights into His heart. For example, the imperishable crown tells us that Jesus values spiritual discipline and dedication, so be disciplined and dedicated. The crown of rejoicing tells us that Jesus values the salvation of human souls, so be a soul winner. The crown of righteousness tells us that Jesus values a strong desire for His return, so long for His appearing. The crown of life tells us that Jesus values perseverance in the midst of adversity, so persevere. And the crown of glory tells us that Jesus values those who lovingly shepherd others, so be a good shepherd. Again, the things the crowns represent should determine the priorities of our lives. I challenge you to make them *your priorities*. Build your life around them. On Judgment Day, you’ll be glad!

I look forward to seeing you in heaven. I pray that by His grace and mercy we will fare well at the Judgment Seat of Christ. If we do, not only will we be happy, but so will Jesus. And, if you think about it, that's really all that matters...bringing honor and glory to the One we love most.

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<sup>1</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Book of Signs*, W Publishing Group, Nashville, 2019, p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 2005, p. 1629.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> *The Moody Bible Commentary*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2014, p. 1788.

<sup>6</sup> William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1995, p. 1779.

<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur, p. 1882.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 1997.

<sup>9</sup> David Jeremiah, p. 214.

<sup>10</sup> W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1985, p. 32.

<sup>11</sup> John MacArthur, p. 2002.

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## *Booklets by Jon Redmond*

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## *Jon Redmond*

Jon Redmond is the associate pastor of the First Baptist Church in Pasadena, Texas. He has served on the church staff at First Baptist since 1995.

A graduate of Baylor University (B.A.), Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (D.Min.), Jon's desire is to lead people to trust Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord and to help them grow in their relationship with Him.