

23. The Rewards of Heaven

Revelation 22:1-21.

Those of you who enjoy the stories of people of faith in the Old Testament can empathize with them in their sins, doubts, and mistakes. These were the great heroes of the Old Testament who were made of flesh and blood like us. They had the same hopes, passions, and weaknesses. We read of Joseph who, in his younger years, bred intense jealousy in his brothers by wearing the coat of many colors and by sharing his dreams that his brothers would one day bow down to him.

We also read of King David in his adultery and of Jacob in his deceit. Even Moses, the prophet and deliverer, murdered an Egyptian and became a shepherd, looking after his father-in-law's sheep for forty years in the desert. When God called him to shepherd God's people out of the slavery of Egypt, he made five excuses as to why he was not God's man for the job (Exodus 3:4-14; 4:13-16).

All of us can look back on our sins and failures and receive hope from the many godly people in the Old Testament who somehow fell short and lacked faith in various situations. Their defeat and ours cause us to stop and consider the grace of God! Although these individuals were not perfect, they are remembered in Scripture to this day as God's men and women of faith. In this study, we will read of the great and precious rewards held in store for us and for all of God's people who have gone before us. What are these rewards?

The Yearning for God's Face

After bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt, we don't know how old Moses was when he stood before the Lord on Mount Sinai, but he was well into his eighties, a time when many people may yearn for a quiet life. Moses still had a passion within his soul. By the time he came to Mount Sinai with the children of Israel, his journey with the Lord had been magnificent, but there was still something he desired for himself. Being very vulnerable to the Lord, he expressed the longing of his heart, and I hope that it is yours, also, i.e., the urge to behold the glory of God:

¹⁸Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." ¹⁹And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." ²¹Then the Lord said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²²When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen" (Exodus 33:18-23).

No one in their sinfulness can behold God's glory and His face. What's needed is an impartation of the righteousness of the One who makes us worthy and holy by grace alone. In this last chapter of the Book of Revelation, we read of the fulfillment of the longing of the child of God, not only to see the glory of God but also the face of the Lord. God promised Israel's prophets: "And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth

of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 40:5). Jesus also talked about His coming in glory: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne” (Matthew 25:31). The longing of humankind to see the glory of God will be realized, and those who love Him shall behold His wonderful face and be with Him and serve Him. Let’s read the first part of the twenty-second chapter of Revelation, a continuation of the description of the New Jerusalem:

¹Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever (Revelation 22:1-5).

First, in this passage and the end part of the last chapter, what things will or will not be found in the New Jerusalem? Secondly, what does reigning forever mean to you (v. 5)?

The river of God, i.e., the water of life, will flow from the throne of God down the street of the city (v. 1). Although I believe there will be a literal river flowing that will bring new life and living fish in the Dead Sea into which it flows (Ezekiel 47:7-10), I think that this river could illustrate the outflow of the Spirit of God in and through the Bride of Christ. The river of God speaks of great joy in the Holy Spirit and the overflowing of sheer happiness of those who will be a part of the City of God. When Jesus conversed with the Samaritan woman at the well of Samaria, He spoke of the water of life that He wished to give to her: “If you knew the gift of God and who is asking you for a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” (John 4:10).

The Lord Jesus also spoke about those thirsting for God would have a river flowing in and through him: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said: ‘Streams of living water will flow from within him’ ” (John 7:37-38. Emphasis mine). To a person living in the dry climate of the Middle East who has never known what it is like to have piped water to every house as we have in the West, a river that is crystal clear is like a dream come true: “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells” (Psalm 46:4).

Will it be boring to live in eternity? Some people think so. Some laugh at the idea of biblical heaven; they think of heaven as people sitting on clouds and strumming harps for eternity. Sadly, many people's concepts of eternity or heaven have been formed by popular culture, pictures, or movies, which have no basis in Scripture. Instead, we read of the Tree of Life (v. 2) yielding new fruit each month, perhaps an expression of the great variety of life in the New Jerusalem. The tree of life is a promise given to believers: “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7). The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (v. 2). The question arises as to what will be the need for healing in the New Jerusalem because we will be in our eternal bodies, and there will be no sickness. The

Greek word translated "healing" is *therapeia*, from which we get the English word *therapeutic*. In our view, God is saying that the leaves of the tree will promote and enhance our lives in that eternal city.

In the beginning book of Genesis, God told Adam that he could eat from every tree in the Garden of Eden but not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). All that changed when mankind was separated from God because of their sinful condition. When Adam and Eve chose to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil instead of trusting in God and His goodness, they were barred from eating the tree of life. Had they partaken of that fruit, their sinful condition would have lasted forever (Genesis 3:22-23). In this last chapter of the Book of Revelation, we see the Tree of Life restored for humanity. God restores His original promise!

When sin entered the world, there also came a curse on the ground:

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, "You must not eat from it," **Cursed** is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. **It will produce thorns** and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field (Genesis 3:17).

In the Old Testament, the Law of God proclaimed a curse over any man who would not obey God's Word (Deuteronomy 28:15). This curse continued through the Old Testament, with most translations of the English Bible having the last word in the last book, the Book of Malachi, finishing with the word "*curse*." The answer for the curse opens in the Gospel of Matthew with the birth of the Deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul the Apostle wrote, "For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law'" (Galatians 3:10). The Jewish leaders said to Nicodemus, "No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law--there is a curse on them" (John 7:49). Jesus did away with this curse on the cross. He wore the symbol of the curse, the thorns of the curse, upon His head as he died, saying, "It is Finished" (John 19:30).

Revelation 22 says, "No longer will there be any curse" (v. 3), neither on the ground nor on mankind in the New Heaven and Earth. In the last book of the Bible, we see humanity not only living in the presence of God, viewing His face and seeing His glory, but also the way is open to the Tree of Life (v. 2). Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14), but now, with the presence of the Lord on earth, those who the Lord cleanses, i.e., the Bride of Christ, will be able to see God's face (v. 4).

John and the Angel

⁶The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place." ⁷Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.' ⁸I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. ⁹But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with

you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!” ¹⁰Then he told me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near. ¹¹Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy” (Revelation 22:6-11).

After the angel proclaims that the words spoken are true, the Lord now declares a blessing (v. 7). To whom does this blessing extend? Why does the angel correct John for his reaction to these words?

In verse seven, we find the sixth of seven *blessings* in the Book of Revelation (1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 22:14). We say it a lot among the family of God, but what does it mean to be blessed? The person who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book is to be blessed or specially favored or spiritually prosperous. So, what does the word *keep* mean? The Greek word (*tērōn*) was translated into English as the word used for the *keep* of a castle, i.e., the place where the occupants of a besieged city could run if the enemy overran the walls. The *keep* was an inner, strong tower or defensive position that preserved and guarded the occupants against all harm. We are to watch over the words of the prophecy of this book and guard and keep them intact for generations to come so that the generation that experiences the prophecies will have light to know what's happening and cleave to the Lord.

More than five hundred years before Christ, the prophecies of the end-times that Daniel wrote were sealed until the time of the end: “But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge” (Daniel 12:4). Now, however, the angel tells John the Apostle to open the words to those who would take warning and share God’s Words of prophecy: “¹⁰Then he told me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near.’”

What do you think it means not to seal up the words of prophecy in this book? What would be the reason for these words being sealed up or not clearly explained in our day?

Is it ever too late to respond to the warnings of verse 11? What will it take for a man who has done wrong all his life to turn and become holy?

While we still have breath, it is never too late to reverse the choices we have made. Repentance is always an option as long as a person is alive. People have a choice. Regardless of an individual’s response, the word must go out. The invitation must be made.

His Reward is With Him

¹²“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. ¹³I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. ¹⁴“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. ¹⁵Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. ¹⁶“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give

you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star” (Revelation 22:12-16).

In chapter twenty-two, the Lord says the exact words three times: "I am coming soon" (vs. 7, 12, 20). Why do you think the Lord needs to repeat and emphasize these words to His servants?

The Lord reminds His people that He will come with rewards for those who give of themselves for His kingdom purposes (v. 12). He wanted us to be aware of the reality of His coming and to be mindful of the Great Commission at hand. Today is the day of salvation! This truth should motivate us to extend the invitation of the Father to as many as possible!

Jesus spoke a parable to remind His servants that he will reward those who are faithful when He returns. In the Parable of the Ten Minas in Luke 19:11-27, Jesus spoke of a man of noble birth who leaves to be appointed king and then returns. He calls ten servants and gives each one a mina, i.e., an amount of money equivalent to three months' wages, telling them “to put this money to work” (Luke 19:13).

The Noble Master did not set one of them over another. He left them to sort out the details themselves as to how to put the Master's money to work to bring the most significant return on the Lord's capital. It does not rest on the pastor or the evangelist to get the Gospel to all nations. All Christians will be held to account and rewarded for what they do with the Master's resources. The Master (in this story, the nobleman) entrusted the same amount to each with no instruction. He gave them complete freedom to do what each determined the best way to put his money to work. The grant of money was a test by the Master. We must be aware of this test and realize that God is watching how faithful we are with what He has given us.

So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God (Romans 14:12).

Every Christian has a responsibility to promote and increase God's kingdom in any way they can. We cannot keep it to ourselves. The Greek word translated with the phrase “put this money to work” (NIV) or “occupy” (KJV) is *pragmateuomai*. It means to do business, invest, or trade, intending to bring a return on the investment. We get the English word *pragmatic* from this Greek word. To be pragmatic means to deal sensibly and realistically with something. We are to think through ways we can pragmatically invest our resources in such a way as to get the maximum return for the Kingdom of God.

When we believe the Gospel and receive the grace of Christ into our lives, we are to employ our time, talents, and abilities to share with others what has changed our lives. We are to do what we can to give it away to others. When Christ returns at the Second Coming, His reward will be with Him, and He will reward each person for their faithfulness toward His Kingdom. The Parable of the Ten Minas illustrates that we all have the same amount of time and energy as one another. We might not all have the same gifts, but God's people will share the plunder of the enemy's camp equally between those who fought in the battle, wherever and however they served.

This principle is illustrated by King David's sharing of the plunder of the Amalekite camp between those who fought the battle and those guarding their stores at the rear (1 Samuel 30:21-25). Jesus said similar when He stated:

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. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward (Matthew 10:41-42).

How do we interpret what the Lord is saying? I believe that we share and share alike in the rewards that a body of people have together labored for Christ. If a local church sends a missionary or evangelist to another nation, then all who prayed, worked, and invested their resources will share in the reward of their endeavor together.

Blessed Are Those Who Wash Their Robes

The Lord then says to all believers, “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city” (v. 14).

Only those who have washed their robes (v. 14) will go through the gates of the city. What does it mean to wash one's robes?

The washing of robes is a metaphor or figure of speech for purification from uncleanness. For all who would go up to the Temple of God for the three feasts of the Lord, they would first dip themselves in the *Mikvah*, the bath of cleansing. The Lord illustrated this need for cleansing as He washed the feet of His disciples that night in the Upper Room before His arrest. When Peter objected to the Lord's humility of washing His disciple's feet, Jesus replied, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me” (John 10:8). Peter replied with a desire for the Lord to wash his hands and head as well. Jesus replied, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean, And you are clean, but not everyone of you” [speaking of Judas] (John 13:10). Those who repent of sin and receive the forgiveness of God are seen as having bathed and been cleansed to enter the New Jerusalem.

¹⁷The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

¹⁸I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. ¹⁹And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

²⁰He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. ²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen (Revelation 22:17-21).

In vs. 18-19, what does it mean to take away or add to the prophecies of the Book of Revelation? Why has God spoken such a strong penalty as the plagues befalling a person changing these words?

Who are those referred to as the Spirit and the bride of verse seventeen? What does it mean for the thirsty to receive the free gift of the water of life?

The Holy Spirit and the Bride of Christ invite those with an inner thirst to know God and be cleansed from guilt and habitual sin. Eternity with God is open to all and offered as a free gift of the water of life (v. 17). Do not let the enemy deceive you into thinking that you should leave this gift on the table and not receive it. A gift is not something that your own goodness can earn; otherwise, it would no longer be a gift. God's desire is for each of us to receive the free pardon for sin, which Christ purchased for us by His death on the cross. Christ came to pay the penalty for all of us. None of us deserve what God is freely giving. God has also made the receiving of this gift so easy for even a young child to receive. "How do I give myself to Christ?" you may ask. "How do I receive this gift of God?"

Although eternal life is free, it is not cheap. It cost Jesus His life. If we want to receive this gift, we have to be willing to turn our back on everything we know to be wrong. These are the things that do us harm and lead to "death" (Romans 6:23). Turning away from them is what the Bible calls *repentance* (literally changing our minds). We accept the gift of God through repentance and faith in what Christ has accomplished for us as a substitute on the cross.

What is faith in Christ? John G. Paton (1824-1907), a Scot from Dumfriesshire, traveled to New Hebrides (a group of islands in the Southwest Pacific) to tell the tribal people about Jesus. The islanders were cannibals, and his life was in constant danger. Paton decided to translate John's Gospel but found no word in their language for "belief" or "trust." Nobody trusted anybody else.

Eventually, Paton hit upon the way to find the word for which he was looking. When his native servant came in, Paton raised both feet off the floor, sat back in his chair, and asked, "What am I doing now?" In reply, the servant used a word meaning, "To lean your whole weight upon." This word was the expression Paton used.¹ Faith is leaning your whole weight upon Jesus and what He has done for us at the cross. Jesus took all our wrongdoing upon Himself. This sacrificial death of the Messiah was prophesied in the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Written hundreds of years beforehand, the prophet foresaw what "the suffering servant" would do for us and said: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him [that is, Jesus] the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). If you would like to receive this free gift spoken by the Lord, sincerely pray the below prayer.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I am sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life. (Take a few moments to ask His forgiveness for anything in particular that is on your conscience.) Please forgive me. I now turn from everything that I know is wrong. Thank You that You sent Your Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for me so that I could be forgiven and set free. From now on, I will follow and obey Him as my Lord. Thank You that You now offer me this gift of forgiveness and the gift of Your Spirit. I now receive that gift. Please come into my life; I want to be with You forever. I ask these things in the name and authority of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen!

¹ <https://www.amazon.com/John-G-Paton-Autobiography-Missionary/dp/1848712766>

If you are blessed to know that you are a child of God and have received His Gift of Eternal Life, extend the invitation to others! The Holy Spirit and the Bride work together. You do not need to carry this message alone. The Spirit of God is leading each of us to send out His invitation. The Holy Spirit will lead us and go before us to convict people of their need of a Savior. We do not need to worry about our inadequacies or lack of concise words to deliver the message. The Word of God is living and will bring about the results. Those who are thirsty will drink. Now is the time to be at work while it is the day! Let him who is thirsty, come!

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