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The Judgment Seat of Christ Or, Will There Be Any Stars In My Crown?

"We shall all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ"
(Romans 14:10).

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11-23-98

Preface

Salvation is a free gift from God, which is accepted by simple faith. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). Our gratitude for this "So Great Salvation" (Hebrews 2:3) results in a "faith which worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6). And, since "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward His name" (Hebrews 6:10), He has appointed a time that "we must all appear before the Judgment Seat [Greek, Bema] of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad [worthless]" (2Corinthians 5:10).

This Judgment Seat of Christ is also commonly known as the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ, where the Saints' works will be judged to determine the nature of their Heavenly reward-- without any mention of punishment for already penitently confessed, Divinely forgiven, and Providentially forgotten sins. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 8:12). "Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back" (Isaiah 38:17).

True Saints Persevere To The End

There is such a thing as the Perseverance of the Saints, that is, that the True Saints must and will continue in a righteous walk until the end. The LORD Jesus said, "And ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22). Perhaps some are unaware of our necessity to cooperate in our own perseverance in faith, holiness, and righteousness; for, it's necessity can be clearly seen in the Epistle to the Hebrews. "But Christ as a Son over His own house; whose house are we, **if** we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Hebrews 3:6). These Primitive Christians needed encouragement to persevere, though they had "not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin" (12:4). "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end" (3:14).

Notice how God's faithfulness is foundational to anyone who desires to obey the command to "hold the fort". "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for He is faithful that promised;)" (Hebrews 10:23). Though love for Christ is the primary motivation for all Christian action, it is also appropriate to note that our future Heavenly reward will be for the works that we

performed because of our confidence in God. "Cast not away therefore your Confidence, which hath great recompence of reward" (10:35). The Blessed Assurance of the True Saints is that no man shall "pluck [us] out of [our Saviour's] hand" (John 10:28), and that we need not live in fear of **not** persevering to the end. "38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him. 39 But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:38-39).

Let no mistake be made that any Saint's perseverance in holiness can be a tribute to man; instead, our perseverance is a testimony to the God that sustains and empowers by His grace. For "by the grace of God I am what I am" (1Corinthians 15:10). **It will be seen in Heaven that though our willing cooperation in our own perseverance was absolutely necessary, it was God's faithfulness that made it all possible.** "Faithful is He that calleth you, Who also will do it" (1Thessalonians 5:24). By then it will be obvious how valuable the "Exceeding Great And Precious Promises" (2Peter 1:4) were in securing our sanctification and our final perseverance. "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). Our cooperation in our perseverance will then seem as natural as Scripture is plain. "20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, 21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our LORD Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 20-21).

What Is The Judgment Seat of Christ?

First, the LORD Jesus Christ is the Judge of All the Earth (Genesis 18:25), since He has been given **all** authority or power. "All power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). It is extremely certain that the LORD Jesus will be the Judge seated upon the throne. "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22). Jesus must be the Judge of All, if **all** will bow to Him and confess that He is LORD. "10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11).

Second, the Judgment Seat of Christ refers specifically to God's judgment and rewarding of the Saints, while the White Throne Judgment refers to the punishment of all sinners. "For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad [worthless]" (2Corinthians 5:10). Between these two events all mankind will be judged, then we will be rewarded or punished accordingly. "11 And I saw a Great White Throne, and Him that sat on it, from Whose face the earth and the Heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:11-12).

Third, the determination of which of the two judgments-- Bema Seat for the Saints or White Throne for the sinner-- in which you will be judged is based upon whether or not

you died in your sins. "I [Jesus] said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that **I am** He, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). When we confess our sins to God, it not only demonstrates that He is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1John 1:9), but it also explains why "if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1Corinthians 11:31). Again, with promises such as Psalm 119:9-11, no Saint ever needs to fear dying in his sins. "9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word. 10 With my whole heart have I sought Thee: O let me not wander from Thy Commandments. 11 Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Psalm 119:9-11).

Finally, the nature of the judgment at the Judgment Seat of Christ for the Saints is a testing by fire. "11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

The precious substances of "gold, silver, precious stones" (3:12) will survive the test "by fire" (3:13). These precious substances represent all the profitable or rewardable works committed by the Saints. "9 I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit, Whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool: His Throne was like the fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire. 10 A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him: thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened" (Daniel 7:9-10). Whatever abides the discerning, fiery judgment of the Judge of All the Earth will be rewarded. "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward" (1Corinthians 3:14).

"Wood, hay, [and] stubble" (1Corinthians 3:12) are the sinfully "bad" or worthless works (2Corinthians 5:10) committed by the Saint during his lifetime. Though those "bad" works (5:10) have been confessed by us and cleansed by the LORD Jesus' atoning work on Calvary, the Bema Seat Judgment's purpose is to give judgment as to what is worthy of reward for the Saints, and **not** what is worthy of punishment. "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (1Corinthians 3:13). Even if the Saint suffers a loss of reward by this Judgment; still, he is not being punished or to be punished. "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (3:15).

Concern that his readers would obtain a "full reward" (2John 8) is a sobering reason why the Apostle John wrote his Second Epistle to the "elect lady and her children" (v. 1). He is especially jealous for the defense of the doctrines of Christ against the lies of deceivers and antichrists, who attempt to rob the Saints of their rewards. "7 For many deceivers are

entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. 8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" (2John 7-8). Our LORD is also desirous that we obtain a "full reward" (v. 8). "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Revelation 3:11).

What Are The Rewards For The Saints?

May it be forever remembered that the LORD Jesus Christ is Himself the Believers' reward. "After these things the Word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy Shield, and thy Exceeding Great Reward" (Genesis 15:1). Similarly, the Saints before the Tribulation Week look forward to the Blessed Hope of the Pre-Tribulational Rapture, but it is with the knowledge that the LORD Jesus Christ is Himself our Blessed Hope. "Looking for that Blessed Hope, and the glorious appearing of the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Though Jesus is our Reward and Blessed Hope, there still will be a Pre-Tribulational Rapture and rewards for His Saints. "And, behold, I come quickly; and My Reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12).

Which rewards can we identify from Scripture? "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy Crown" (Revelation 3:11). Let us be diligent with whatever fleeting moments that we have left to gather our Rewards for the Master. **For what is the grand design and purpose of our gathering of rewards? It is that along with the 24 Elders, we may be able to "10 cast [our] crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O LORD, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created"** (Revelation 4:10-11).

Five different crowns can be identified from Scripture: (1) the Incorruptible Crown, (2) the Crown of Rejoicing, (3) the Crown of Righteousness, (4) the Crown of Life, and (5) the Crown of Glory. With this limited definition of rewards, we can get a small idea of how the LORD will reward His own. "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1Corinthians 2:9).

First, the Incorruptible Crown. This is the Worker's Crown. "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an Incorruptible" (1Corinthians 9:25). We can be certain that this Incorruptible Crown is not a reference to salvation, because salvation is "not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:9). Unwearied faithfulness is always praiseworthy. "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9). Remember, we labor not for the reward, but because of **love** for our Master. "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our LORD Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father" (1Thessalonians 1:3).

Labor for the Master in any lawful fashion is a candidate for the Incorruptible Crown. "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient [profitable]: all things are

lawful for me, but all things edify not" (1Corinthians 10:23). Ask the LORD for His direction, then perform your labor as unto the LORD. "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the LORD, and not unto men" (Colossians 3:23). The concept that "full-time Christian workers", i.e., pastors, evangelists, missionaries, etc., are alone doing the LORD's work is entirely false. **Any** Saint who faithfully and honestly labors to supply his own temporal needs-- and that of his family-- does the LORD's work. "Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands" (1Thessalonians 4:11). Also, "if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1Timothy 5:8).

Second, the Crown of Rejoicing. This is the Soul Winner's Crown. "For what is our hope, or joy, or Crown of Rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our LORD Jesus Christ at His Coming?" (1Thessalonians 2:19). The Apostle Paul understood the necessity of bringing men to Christ. "Knowing therefore the terror of the LORD, we persuade men" (2Corinthians 5:11). Not only our speech but our example of life is to be our vehicle to win souls for the LORD Jesus Christ, for "he that winneth souls is wise" (Proverbs 11:30). Again, we may have labored, and others have "watered; but God gave the increase" (1Corinthians 3:6).

It is difficult to picture ourselves preaching like the Apostle Peter to the multitude saved at Pentecost, or speaking like the Apostle Paul to the Athenians on Mars Hill, or testifying like Martin Luther before the Diet of Worms, or directing the convicted sinners like Charles G. Finney in young America, or urging the London masses like C. H. Spurgeon; but, whatever we do to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to bring men to Christ is part of the Soul Winner's Crown. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of Incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1Peter 1:23).

Possibly, one of the most complete descriptions of a soul winner's experience is that of Philip the Evangelist leading the Ethiopian eunuch to the LORD. This is a case in point of how to win a Soul Winner's Crown. "29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. [A soul winner must be led by the Spirit.] 30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? 31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. 32 The place of the Scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before His shearer, so opened He not His mouth: 33 In His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth. 34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

"35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. [A soul winner uses the Scriptures to point people to Christ.] 36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son

of God. [A soul winner invites people to make an open decision of faith in the LORD.] 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. 39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the LORD caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:29-39).

Third, the Crown of Righteousness. This is the Watcher's Crown. "Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the LORD, the Righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2Timothy 4:8). Not all Christians have been properly taught to watch and wait for the soon coming of the LORD Jesus Christ, but "unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Hebrews 9:28). I believe that the intercession of the Brethren for their honest but ignorant Spiritual siblings will cause all those who are walking without known sin to be ready for events such as the Pre-Tribulational Rapture. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the Law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

At first, it may seem contradictory for the Saints to be so Heavenly minded that they may not give a great deal of attention to the matters that the world finds so important, i.e., building up one's house, socializing, pleasure seeking, planning and preparing to make one's financial situation in life more certain and easy; but, the Saints will attend to all other things in proportion to watching and waiting for the LORD's return as the LORD providentially allows. "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the Day of God [literally, **hastening** the coming of the day of God], wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" (2Peter 3:12).

Why would the LORD give such a special reward to those that "love His appearing" (2Timothy 4:8)? The LORD Jesus knows that those who truly look for Him will walk sanctified and holy. "11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, **what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and Godliness**, 12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the Day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" (2Peter 3:11-12). Beside all this, how can we calculate the good of all the prayers that have been made that truly mean what they say when they pray that phrase from the LORD's Prayer-- "Thy Kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10)? It would seem that those who would receive this Crown of Righteousness would be best fitted to do all the monumental work of advancing the cause of the LORD Jesus Christ in this world.

Fourth, the Crown of Life. This is the Martyr's Crown. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a Crown of Life" (Revelation 2:10). Not all of the Saints die a martyr's death, but all of us are required to live a crucified life. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Though the LORD Jesus specifically mentions being "faithful unto death" (Revelation 2:10) to these Christians of the Church of Smyrna, He also uses the words "suffer", "tribulation", and "faithful". Certainly, these three words are critical to receiving the Crown of Life.

When James gave instructions on Practical Christian Living, he told us how to receive the Crown of Life. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the Crown of Life, which the LORD hath promised to them that love Him" (James 1:12). In this instance, no particular mention is made of Christian Martyrdom, but the words "endureth temptation" and "tried" give us a good idea of how we are expected to win this Crown. We will always do well to remember the Words of our LORD concerning our testing for the Crown of Life. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

So, not all who receive the Crown of Life will be Martyrs, but all who will win that Crown must be sufferers. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Living and suffering for the LORD Jesus should be the rule and not the exception for the Saints. "Yea, and all that will live Godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2Timothy 3:12). Grace to suffer for the LORD is available to all who will pray. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). But, why have we all been given the opportunity to win the Crown of Life? Since suffering sanctifies us, we all may have ample opportunity to win this Crown. "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Philippians 1:29). "8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my LORD: for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ... 10 That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death" (3:8,10).

Before leaving this discussion of the Crown of Life, special mention needs to be made about a prophet's reward. "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward" (Matthew 10:41). Since God's ancient and modern prophets have always been the occasion for suffering and persecution, those that heed their message most often will suffer the same persecution. But, note that the LORD Jesus makes special mention of our receiving a Prophet's Reward for "he that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet" (10:41). Again, perhaps this reward is connected to the Crown of Life because of its association with persecution and suffering. "11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12).

And, for those Saints who have had to endure physical suffering-- not necessarily because of their Christian testimony-- but because of Divinely allowed infirmity or illness, this Crown of Life is also and perhaps especially for you. "12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12-13). If we would but suffer in a Christ-like way, this Crown is especially ours. "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (4:16).

Fifth, the Crown of Glory. This is the Shepherd's Crown. "And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:4). Pastors are to be shepherds to God's people. "And I will give you pastors according to Mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jeremiah 3:15). The Apostle Peter was specially taught by the LORD the need of the shepherd to feed the Saints. "16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? He saith unto Him, Yea, LORD; Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed My sheep. 17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me? And he said unto Him, LORD, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed My sheep" (John 21:16-17).

Though pastors are specially fitted to shepherd the sheep in a local assembly, all those who assist in caring for the Sheep may also participate in this Crown. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" (1 Peter 5:2). When God's people can be lovingly cared for and edified by all the Spiritual gifts of the Body of Christ, then the Sheep will be properly shepherded. "28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? 30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? 31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way [which is love]" (1 Corinthians 12:28-31).

But, Will There Be Any Stars In My Crown?

Eliza E. Hewitt (1851-1920) wrote the words to a hymn, "Will There Be Any Stars In My Crown?", that reflects on not only the Saints eternal, Heavenly joy, but the joy of "living gems at His feet to lay down". This is with the understanding that the starry gems are the souls that have been won to the LORD. "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3). Even Abraham was shown that his heritage would be blessed as "the stars" for his faith and obedience to God. "And He brought him [Abram] forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be" (Genesis 15:5).

The words to the hymn, "Will There Be Any Stars In My Crown?":

I am thinking today of that beautiful land
I shall reach when the sun goeth down;
When through wonderful grace by my Savior I stand,
Will there be any stars in my crown?

Refrain: Will there be any stars, any stars in my crown
When at evening the sun goeth down?
When I wake with the blessed in the mansions of rest
Will there be any stars in my crown?

In the strength of the Lord let me labor and pray,
Let me watch as a winner of souls,
That bright stars may be mine in the glorious day,
When His praise like the sea billow rolls.

Refrain : Will there be any stars, any stars in my crown
When at evening the sun goeth down?
When I wake with the blessed in the mansions of rest
Will there be any stars in my crown?

O what joy it will be when His face I behold,
Living gems at his feet to lay down!
It would sweeten my bliss in the city of gold,
Should there be any stars in my crown.

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Conclusion

We are those servants to whom the LORD has delivered His goods and have been told to occupy until He returns. "And He called His ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13). May we be able to say what the Apostle Paul said: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2Timothy 4:7).

May God give you much to lay down before the feet of our LORD and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen, and Amen.