

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS: 4a  
The Incredible Journey  
Of The  
Church Age Believer

INTRO: We have begun phase 2 of the incredible journey of the Church age believer. We have said that phase 2 begins at the rapture of the Church. In our last message we looked at the timing of the rapture and saw that it is imminent. It could happen at any moment. Our question this morning is: What happens after the rapture? Phase two of the Pilgrim's Progress has begun and the believer has met Christ in the air, but what happens next? That is our topic this morning.

I have wondered sometimes, how long it will take us to reach the third heaven. Let us consider for a moment the distance involved. Dr. Harold Willmington writes: "Let us say the thickness of a sheet of paper represents the distance from the earth to the sun (some 93,000,000)...To represent the nearest star (4 1/2 Light Years away) we would need a 71-foot high stack of paper...To cover the diameter of our Milky Way Galaxy (100,000 Light Years) would require a 310 mile stack...To reach the edge of the known universe would demand a pile of paper sheets 31 million miles high!" (Basic Stages in the Book of Ages, pp. 14-15).

How long will it take? Well, it may only take a moment, I do not know. I do know where we are going and that is to the third heaven (read John 14:1-3). When Christ comes, we are going with Him to the place He has prepared for us. Are you ready to go? Oh, how sad it would be to hear this message and find we were not ready when He comes.

But our question this morning is, what happens after the rapture for those who were ready? I could give in much greater detail what happens to those who were not ready, than I can for those who are. But we are given some information on this. So let us begin at point B.

B. Continued in Heavenly Mansions

1. At the seat of Christ

The Bible teaches that all of mankind will be judged someday (Heb. 9:27). However, the of the saved and the unsaved is not the same. The righteous of the Church

age are judged after the rapture. The unrighteous are not judged until after the millennium.

Now, there are two types of . There is the legal type of where it is determined if the one judged is guilty or not and what punishment he will receive. We are all familiar with this type of punishment. But there is another type of judgement and this is the judgement used in athletics. Now these two judgements are as different as day and night. The one determines the degree of punishment to be given while the other determines the extent of rewards to be given. The one is for evildoers, the other is for well doers. The one we seek not to accumulate for, the other we seek to accumulate for as much as we can.

There are three future s. 1 There is the judgement seat of Christ where the beleiver of the present Church age is judged. In this judgement only the believer is judged. This is the topic of our message this morning because it will take place right after the rapture. 2 Then there is the judgement of the nations which takes place at the end of the tribulation (Matt. 25:31-46). In this judgement both believers and unbelievers will be judged, but only living people are judged in this judgement. 3 The last judgement is what is called the great white throne judgement. This is found in Rev. 20:11-14.

Now there is something very significant about all three of these judgements. NB First, judgement is never given to determine if one enters heaven or hell. Whether I go to heaven or to hell is determined not by judgement but by personal decision. This is very important because whether I go to heaven or not is not determined by the amount of good works or bad works one has done. It is determined by whether I have accepted Christ as my Saviour or not! Second, each one of these three judgements is based on individual works. These works do not determine one's destiny, rather they determine the amount of punishment for the wicked or the amount of rewards for the righteous. We will be looking at the last two judgements later. Now we turn our attention to the believer's judgement at the judgement seat of Christ.

a. The fact of this judgement

Now let us establish first from Scripture that there is in fact such a judgement. Our first passage is:

1) Romans 14:10-12

The context of this passage is weak and strong believers and how they treat each other in light of diets and days. It is ever the problem of weak believers to be judgemental about their stronger brothers in issues of conscience. Here Paul reminds these believers that we (Christians) will all stand before the judgement seat of Christ so we ought not to be judging our brothers.

When a believer lives in sin, that is an entirely different thing. Then judgement by the church becomes necessary. We have covered that in the series on Church discipline.

2) 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

Though this passage is specifically directed to ministers of the Gospel the teaching holds for all believers.

3) 2 Corinthians 5:10

Again, the context is that of believers and the fact is that we will all stand before the judgement seat of Christ to be judged by Him.

b. The people of this

When the Bible speaks of the judgement seat of Christ it never mentions non-believers. This is a judgement for believers. It is only right that believers should be judged for their works. Some believers give their life in service to God. Some lose their life in service to God. Some give very little of time or money or talent to the Lord. Would it seem fair that they would all receive the same at the judgement seat of Christ?

c. The basis of this judgement

The basis of this judgement is works. Again, let me remind you that we are not judged to see if we go to heaven. This is a judgement where our future rewards are based on our works of this life.

Notice in 1 Cor. 3:12-15 the occurrence of the word *work*. If the work is not a good work the fire will destroy it, if it is good it stands the test of the fire. We will see later what makes a work good or bad.

In 2 Cor. 10:5 we find again that the judgement is based on whether the work is good or bad.

#### 1) Good works

- Our testimony for Christ (Phil. 2:16)
- Our suffering for Christ (1 Pet. 4:13)
- Our faithfulness to Christ (Luke 12:42-43; Rev. 2:10)
- Our service for Christ (1 Cor. 3:8; Heb. 6:10)
- Our generosity for Christ (2 Cor. 9:6; 1 Tim. 6:17-19)
- Our exercise of spiritual gifts (Mat. 25:14-28; 1 Pet. 4:10)
- Our self-discipline (1 Cor. 9:24-25)
- Our leading souls to Christ (1 Thess. 2:19)

#### 2) Dead works

There are three kinds of works given in Scripture: good works, bad works and dead works. My once saved always saved friends teach that 1 Corinthians 3 speaks of bad works and that a Christ can live in sin and still go to heaven. I do not find that in the context of 1 Corinthians 3. What are dead works? Well, let us say I give money to the church to be seen by people. That is a dead work. It is not good. It is not evil. It is dead. The bad works section does not only include involvement in sin but service for Christ done for self glory (1 Cor. 3).

#### 3) Evil works

I do not find anywhere in all the Bible, what the Lord will do with the Church age believer who has unconfessed sin in his life. If you can help me out with that, I would certainly appreciate it. Let me simply say this: No believer should have unconfessed sin in their lives. Is there something in my life this morning that I know has not been taken care of? Now is the time to take care of it.

d. The purpose of this judgement

The purpose of this judgement is to reward believers for their sacrifice and service. Let me stress again that it is not to determine if one goes to heaven. The purpose of the bema judgement, or the judgement seat of Christ is to reward the believer for faithful service.

e. The results of this judgement

Well it only stands to reason that if the purpose of this judgement is to determine the rewards of the believer that the results will be that many will be rewarded for their life for the Lord.

Let me ask a question here: Should we serve the Lord because we are going to receive rewards? Now let me tell you what you are thinking: You are thinking we should not. Am I correct? Turn with me to Matthew 6, the words of our Lord Himself in verses 19-20. Here is a command of Scripture. Lay up treasures in heaven! How do we do that? By earning rewards! If you faithfully serve in SS, youth work, etc... there will be rewards in heaven for service.

Let me remind us as well from 1 Corinthians 3 that we can lose the rewards we have earned.

1) Rewards will be given according to our works

One of the rewards the believer will receive is the crown. The NT Scriptures speak of five different crowns for believers. It is noteworthy that there are two different kinds

of crowns spoken of in the NT. There is the diadem crown. That is the crown of a sovereign, such as a king or queen. But the believer's crown is called a *stephanos*. This is the crown of the winner in an olympic event.

The believer's crown will not be corruptible but nor will it be a diadem crown. It will be a crown given as a reward for service. There are various crowns mentioned in Scripture.

-Crown of life (Jms. 1:12; Rev. 2:10)

The faithful life will result in receiving the crown of life. This is a crown, I believe, every believer will have. In order to go to heaven one must be called, chosen and faithful (Rev. 17:14).

-Crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8)

On numerous occasions Jesus warned his disciples to watch for you know neither the day or the hour of the coming of the Son of Man. Those who have done this in life and have longed for His appearing will receive a special reward, the crown of righteousness.

-Incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:25)

J. Oswald Sanders, a man I have heard speak on a number of occasions and from whom Radio Bible Class printed the booklet, *Just Before Heaven* says that the Olympic event Paul is speaking about in 1 Cor. 9:24-27 is the pentathlon. This is an event that included five sports. According to Encyclopedia Britannica these were: a 200 yard race, long jump, discus throw, javelin throw and a wrestling match between the top two of the four other events.

Paul is writing to the Corinthians. Corinth is very close to where the original Olympics took place. Paul informs them that these Olympic competitors were temperate in all things to win a corruptible crown but we run and fight for an incorruptible crown.

It is interesting that the crowns mentioned in each of these passages is not a diadem crown as we would imagine. You may be imagining a crown of gold and studded with precious stones. However the word for crown in each instance here is the Greek word *stephanos*. We get the name Stephen from this type of crown. The crowns that were won at the Olympics were *stephanos* crowns not diadem crowns. The *stephanos* crown was a garland of leaves fashioned into a head piece. It was truly a corruptible crown. In a few days the glory of that crown was gone.

The Crown of rejoicing: 1 Thessalonians 2:19 speaks of the crown of rejoicing. This is the crown of the soul winner. The Thessalonians were converted under Paul and he said they would be his crown of rejoicing when the Lord returns.

Crown of glory: 1 Peter 5:1-4. In this passage Peter speaks to shepherds or pastors and encourages them to shepherd the flock as overseers:

- not by constraint
- not for dishonest gain
- not as being lords over the people under their care
- rather they are to lead by example. That is the true meaning of a shepherd.

Peter says that those who serve in this way will receive a crown of glory that does not fade away.

Here on earth when people win in the Olympics it is often cause for pride of person or country. How different is the picture in heaven after Christians receive their crowns (See Rev. 4:9-11).

In concluding this section on crowns we need to note that it seems from Scripture that a person could earn a crown in this life and lose it by disobedience in this life. 1 Cor. 3:15 warns

that some will suffer loss at this judgement  
(See also 2 Jn. 1:8; Rev. 3:11; Col. 2:18).

2) Responsibilities will be according to our  
works

In Luke 19:11-27 we have a parable of servants who are given certain amounts of money with which they are to work until their master returns. The one who was given five talents of money gained five more by the time his lord returned (Matt. 25:20). His lord said, "Well done thou good and faithful servant; you were faithful over few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." Now you might say, What will he rule over? Well, stay with us in this series and we will find out later.

In the parable in Luke one who had been given two talents gained two more and he was made ruler over many things as well. Last He came to the servant who had received one talent and had gained none. This parable does not teach salvation by works, it teaches that real faith is active faith and active faith will be rewarded.

CONCL: Have you considered your life in light of the judgement seat of Christ? Some of us may enter heaven but it may be yet so as by fire. F.B. Meyer has said, "Thousands of Christians are like water-logged vessels. They cannot sink; but they are so saturated with inconsistencies, and worldliness, and permitted evil, that they can only be towed with difficulty into the celestial port."

This morning is a time of evaluation. Am I living in anything I should not be living in? Is there unconfessed sin in my life? Am I doing the work in Christian service I should be doing? Let us take stock of our lives this morning, realizing that some day I must give account for every thought, word or action. Every smell smelled. Every sound heard. Every sight seen. And now let me give this wonderful word that takes care of all wrong doing: repentance, a change of mind.



