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God's Tests

By David Servant

NINETEEN

When the Beginning Ends

In every believer's life, there are three days that stand out above all others: the day of one's birth, the day of one's new birth, and the day of one's judgment. Of those three, one's day of judgment is by far the most significant. That day is what gives meaning to the other two.

The foremost significance of your birth was that it set in motion a life that would one day be judged by God. The foremost significance of your new birth was that it marked the beginning of a new life and lifestyle, which, if continued, (see Col. 1:23) would result in inheriting eternal life at your judgment.

Think about how significant every person's day of judgment will be. Those who rejected Jesus Christ as their Lord will on that day be banished to hell, irreversibly. Unlike any previous day—from the day of birth to the day of death—the Day of Judgment ends all opportunity for a sinner to repent.

This life serves as a test for every one of us. God gives us a lifetime to make an eternal decision. Will we repent and believe in Jesus, or will we continue in willful unbelief? Will we make Jesus our Lord, or will we continue to serve self and Satan? Our decision will determine if we perish in hell or live forever in God's kingdom.

The Christian's Judgment

The believer, unlike the unbeliever, has passed God's initial test. That does not mean, however, that he will not be further tested. On the contrary, he will be repeatedly tested in order to determine if he will continue in faith and prove himself worthy of greater blessings and responsibilities.

God will, of course, entrust more to a consecrated believer than to one who is less committed. This fact will never be more apparent than when we stand before God's judgment seat. There, every believer will be recompensed for his works and will receive his position in God's kingdom. We are indeed saved by grace, but we will be judged and rewarded according to our works. This is what the Bible teaches. Consider these three scriptures:

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.” So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God (Rom. 14:10-12).

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God (1 Cor. 4:5).

Many Christians unfortunately think that when they die, they’ll just go to heaven and move into their mansion. Then, once they’ve settled in, will stroll over to where God lives and stop in for a little chat. They don’t realize that they are going to have to first stand before His judgment seat and give an account of themselves.

That won’t be a judgment to determine salvation or damnation—it will be a judgment to determine rewards. Each of us will receive praise or reprimand, reward or loss, exaltation or humiliation, all depending on what we did as believers. Some will be called least, and some will be called great (see Matt. 5:19). Those who can be trusted with much will be entrusted with much, and those who can only be trusted with little will be entrusted with little (see Matt. 25:21, 23).

God’s Eternal Purpose

I hope you see that God has had an eternal purpose from the beginning. Paul wrote, “This was in accordance with the *eternal purpose* which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11, emphasis added). He has been working since before the creation of the world to bring His plan to pass. That plan included our adoption into His family and our perfection in Christ:

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself (Eph. 1:4-5a).

Some have, unfortunately, twisted scriptures like these to make them say that God has predestined some to be saved and some to be damned. Yet we must be careful that we don’t ignore the hundreds of other scriptures that make it clear that we are free moral agents who have been given the right to receive or reject Jesus. Thus, when Paul says that *we* have been chosen and predestined, he can only be referring to *we* who have chosen to repent and believe in Jesus. God has chosen to make holy all of those who would make a choice themselves. God has predestined to adopt those who would believe in Jesus.

God’s eternal plan was to have an eternal family—free moral agents who would choose to love and serve Him—children who would be holy and blameless. Thus, of necessity, all free

moral agents would have to be tested in order to determine who would be qualified to live in His kingdom forever and, among those who qualified, who would be trusted with greater or lesser responsibilities in that future kingdom.

Questions About Rewards

In this regard, let's consider a familiar parable of Jesus, one that He spoke a few days before His death:

He said therefore, "A certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business with this until I come back.' But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'

"And it came about that when he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him in order that he might know what business they had done. And the first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.' And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.'

"And another came, saying, 'Master, behold your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow.' He said to him, 'By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down, and reaping what I did not sow? Then why did you not put the money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?' And he said to the bystanders, 'Take the mina away from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' And they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas already.'

"I tell you, that to everyone who has shall more be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here, and slay them in my presence" (Luke 19:12-27).

For the most part, the meaning of this parable is clear. Jesus is obviously the nobleman who received a distant kingdom for Himself. Those of us who have chosen to serve Him are comparable to the slaves who were each given some money by which they were tested. The money can only represent the gifts, abilities and opportunities that we are given with which to serve our Lord. The citizens who hated the nobleman represent unbelievers.

Notice that the two faithful slaves were praised and then rewarded with greater responsibilities. They were to rule over a certain number of cities. The Bible teaches that we will rule and reign with Christ during His Millennial reign, so this parable correlates perfectly with that truth (see 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27; 5:10; 20:6). Our position of authority in God's kingdom will be determined by our faithfulness during this life.

Commentators debate if the unfaithful servant in this parable represents one who was at first a faithful believer who became unfaithful or one who was never saved. Regardless of the answer to that question, several points have been well served: God will reward us if we are faithful; those rewards will include promotion to positions of authority in God's future kingdom. And obviously, if rewards are going to be passed out, then the faithfulness of believers is being tested now.

What Will Be Rewarded?

Every good deed that we do and in obedience to the written Word of God or His Holy Spirit and for the right motive will be rewarded. Jesus warned that good deeds done for the wrong motives will not be rewarded by our Heavenly Father:

Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you (Matt. 6:1-6, 16-18).

We can't be certain of the motives of others, but we can check our own motives by doing deeds that no one but the Lord will know about.

The apostle Paul had some important insight about the kinds of deeds that will be rewarded when we stand before the Lord:

For we [Paul and Apollos] are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God which was given me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it [Apollos]. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for *the day will show it, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire* (1 Cor. 3:9-15, emphasis added).

Notice that Paul listed six materials that represent the potential quality of our good works: gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw. Obviously, three are very valuable and three are not nearly as valuable. And three are combustible and three are non-combustible.

One day, Paul indicated, every believer's works will be tested by "going through a fire." Although the fire of which Paul wrote may be figurative, I like to imagine a big furnace with a conveyor belt passing through it. I imagine every Christian loading his or her works on one side of the furnace and then walking around to the other side to wait and see what survives the fire. Each Christian's works may well look the same going into the fire—his prayers, his offerings, his deeds of kindness, his sacrifices, the persecutions he endured, and so forth, although every Christian will have different amounts of each.

The fire, however, will burn everything that was done for the wrong motive, as well as everything that was not done in obedience to God's Word or the Holy Spirit.

Now imagine a successful (but selfishly motivated) preacher bringing his works to the judgment seat. He loads his works on the conveyor belt, and then saunters to the other side of the furnace to proudly wait for his reward. Imagine his surprise when all that comes through is a small pile of ashes. "Lord, what about all my sermons? What about that church that I built? What about the books that I wrote, and the crusades I preached?" The Lord replies, "You did it all to be seen by men, and much of what you taught in your books and sermons was unscriptural or only human wisdom."

Now imagine a little old lady who shyly approaches the judgment furnace. She places her seemingly small works on the conveyor belt and meekly shuffles to the other side to wait and see what might survive the powerful fire. Imagine her shock to see, pouring from the furnace, piles of diamonds and rubies along with bars of gold and silver. "Lord, what did I do to deserve all that?" The Lord replies, "You faithfully taught the children's Sunday School class for 36 years. You were a secret prayer warrior. You did just what I called you to do. I'm going to put you in charge of ruling ten cities."

At that judgment seat, we will better grasp Jesus' warnings, "The last shall be first, and the first last" (Matt. 20:16), and "From everyone who has been given much shall much be required" (Luke 12:48).

Even "small deeds" will be rewarded then. As Jesus said, "Whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward" (Matt. 10:42).

Some Seats Are Already Reserved

Some future seats of authority during Christ's millennial reign are apparently already reserved. Jesus said to His twelve disciples:

Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life (Matt. 19:28-29).

So the twelve will have jurisdiction over the twelve tribes of Israel during the Millennium. Anyone who has sacrificed anything for Jesus' sake will be repaid in that age many times over by comparison to his sacrifice.

Thy Kingdom Come

God once said to Daniel, as recorded in the final verse of the book that bears his name: “But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again to *your allotted portion at the end of the age*” (Dan. 12:13). Just like Daniel, your divine destiny will ultimately be realized in the future kingdom. What we do now, in this life, will have eternal ramifications. There is, therefore, nothing more important than passing our tests by trusting and obeying God.

Will you fulfill your divine destiny?

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil (Ecc. 12:13-14).