

007: Your Coming Verdict

(based on Ch. 6 from The End of the Pilgrimage)

What do most Christians think about future judgment?

- I read a statement recently on a Bible question-and-answer website that represents the naive understanding of orthodox Christianity.
- “God will judge everyone, both believers and non-believers. The non-believers will be cast into the lake of fire, but the believers are saved and will go to heaven. Although we are saved, we will be judged, not to determine if we’ll go to heaven, but to determine how many rewards we’ll get. God will determine how many rewards to give us in heaven, and what position we’ll have in heaven. But we will all be in the presence of God, and we’ll all be happy.”

Here’s another similar statement taken from a dispensationalist newsletter:

- “In heaven, the redeemed will be equal in Christ. All our tears and infirmities will be gone. All of us will have a heavenly mansion. We will all possess a body like Christ’s body. We will all finally be able to gaze upon the face of God in all His fullness. Each one of us will possess these gifts and so much more.”
- In essence, these statements are saying we’ll all live happily-ever-after in Heaven with Jesus.
- Everything will be hunky-dory.
- No mention is made of the possibility of a negative verdict at the Judgment Seat and no mention is made of how our lifestyle in the coming kingdom of Christ will be contingent on how we live our lives in this present world.

With theology like this, where’s the motivation to deny self, take up your cross, and follow Him?

- Discipleship is painful.
- Why bother to pay the price of discipleship if everyone is going to receive the same and be treated the same in the age to come?
- Does not this kind of theology subtly condone licentious living?
- Is it any wonder, then, that twenty-first century Christians don’t have a fear of God?
- Is it any wonder that Christians live for self and that they are full of the world?
- After all, if there are no serious consequences, why emphasize discipleship?
- If we’re all going to enjoy the blessings of Heaven rather equally, why bother?

No one would articulate it that way, of course, but that’s the bottom line.

- When the seriousness of the Judgment Seat is downplayed, everyone expects to be rewarded.
- Everyone thinks they will have a mansion.
- Nothing could be further from the truth.
- A Southern Gospel quartet song says, “I’m gonna wear a robe and a crown.”
- maybe, but that’s not guaranteed – you must qualify
- it’s fun, toe-tapping song, but the theology is all wrong
- by the way, that’s true of a great deal of our Christian music, including many of the classic hymns
- pretty music, bad theology

Unfortunately, many Christians assume that all born-again believers will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ some more, some less.

- Oh, there may be a moment of regret or agony, but it will not be ongoing and will be quickly forgotten.
- They arrive at this conclusion in spite of the clear language of Scripture. (1 Cor. 3:13-15)
- **1 Cor. 3:13** 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.
- **1 Cor. 3:14** If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward.
- **1 Cor. 3:15** If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

The mistake often made is interpreting the phrase suffer loss as "not receiving as many positive rewards as someone else."

- The interpretation is based on the assumption that, since believers are positionally righteous, our sins can never be judged and, therefore, nothing of a serious negative nature will be dealt with at the Judgment Seat.
- According to this popular view, the Bema will essentially be an awards ceremony for dispensing trophies.
- Is that accurate?
- "Suffering loss" at the Judgment Seat is not merely receiving fewer positive rewards; it is the idea of being recompensed for the wrong one has done.
- It is a setback, a payback of negative reward.
- In fact, the two words in English, suffer loss, are actually one word in Greek, and the word means "to injure, to experience detriment; to be cast away, to receive damage" (Strong).

Heb. 10:29 uses the word "punishment" to describe the negative reward, and Strong says punishment is penalty.

- That's a radically different understanding than what many Christians have about the Judgment Seat.
- Perhaps there will be shock and surprise for many at the rapture.
- The Scriptures very clearly confirm the prospect of negative reward at the Judgment Seat.
- listen to Col. 3:23-25
- **Col. 3:23** And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,
- **Col. 3:24** knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.
- **Col. 3:25** But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

In addition to the prospect of a negative reward, this passage in Col. 3 indicates that another possibility at the Judgment Seat will be ...

- receiving the "reward of the inheritance," which is positive.
- The point, as we learned in the previous studies, is that inheriting millennial blessings is not automatic.
- Incidentally, the fact that God shows no respect of persons does not mean all will receive the same recompense.
- Rather, it means all will be recompensed accordingly.
- God does not play politics.

Jesus shared a parable with His disciples, illustrating the truth of positive or negative reward for believers.

- We will first examine the parable, then the application.
- it is found in Luke 12:35-36, 41
- **Luke 12:35-36** Let your waist be girded and *your* lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that

when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately.

- **Luke 12:41** Then Peter said to Him, “Lord, do You speak this parable *only* to us, or to all *people*?”
- Jesus often spoke in parables to reveal truth about the kingdom to those who were ready and eager to receive it, and to conceal truth about the kingdom from those who were blind and hard-hearted.
- The disciples were in the former group, and the Pharisees and chief priests in the latter.
- Thus, we have part of the answer to Peter’s question in his question.

From Christ’s answer, it becomes obvious that He was speaking primarily to His disciples.

- In fact, the reader is explicitly told this in the context of Luke 12 (vs. 1, 22)
- By extension, Jesus is speaking to all saved people, and that includes us.
- His will is that all saved people go all the way through in discipleship and be rewarded in the judgment.
- Keep in mind that disciples are not merely saved people.
- Disciples are saved people who have chosen to follow Jesus, no matter what the cost.
- To that end, Jesus shares this parable to motivate us to live in such a manner that we will be able to give a good account to Him one day in the future.

In order to understand the parable, it is important to first grasp the main point of Christ’s teaching

- He wants us to be like servants who are awaiting their Lord’s return, ready to open the door immediately when He knocks.
- In the next verse, He calls those servants blessed.

- This parable cannot be referring to unsaved people, because unbelievers would not be pictured as awaiting their Lord’s return; that is only true of saved people.
- In what respect are servants of Christ to be awaiting His return?
- Jesus does not leave us wondering.
- He makes it clear in the context
- We must consider the context:
- I will read Luke 12:31-35

Luke 12:31 But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.

- **Luke 12:32** Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.
- **Luke 12:33** Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys.
- **Luke 12:34** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
- **Luke 12:35** Let your waist be girded and *your* lamps burning;

Jesus wants His servants to be seeking His coming kingdom diligently, knowing that His desire is to give it to us.

- Giving us the kingdom is a concept that will be explained in a later study.
- Furthermore, Christ wants us not to have the focus that this world is our home, but rather that we are mere pilgrims on Earth, awaiting our heavenly home.
- The way multitudes of Christians live, it is obvious they do not have this focus.
- They are attached to the here and now and spend their money on material things rather than eternal causes.

- Finally, Jesus wants our loins to be girded about and our lights burning (undoubtedly a reference to the parable of the ten virgins in Matt. 25).
- In a spiritual sense, Jesus wants His disciples to be detached from the world, not ashamed at the rapture, ready to meet Him at the Judgment Seat.
- Are you truly ready to give a good account?

It is obvious throughout the parable that Jesus is speaking to saved people because He repeatedly refers to servants and their lord (master).

- Christ is not the Lord of unregenerate people.
- Rather, Satan, the god of this world, is their master.
- In fact, an unsaved person can never make Christ the Lord of his life.
- Saved people, on the other hand, are servants of Christ by default, so this parable applies to all who are children of God.
- Jesus promises we will be blessed if we are faithfully awaiting His return.
- In fact, He promises to gird Himself and serve His faithful servants! (listen to Luke 12:37-38)
- **Luke 12:37** Blessed *are* those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to *eat*, and will come and serve them.
- **Luke 12:38** And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find *them* so, blessed are those servants.

what a humble and gracious Master we serve!

- How, then, does a faithful servant act?
- by preparing for the Master's return by being a wise steward and managing the Master's affairs obediently

and responsibly, and by serving the Master faithfully (i.e., full of faith).

- Prepared believers do not live like the rich fool, consumed with the here and now
- The faithful servant does not look at things that are seen, but at things that are not seen (2 Cor. 4:18).
- The life of a servant is about seeking first the kingdom of God and bearing fruit.
- A servant does not live for self, but for Jesus
- This Christian is a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God. They have counted the cost and paid the price of discipleship.

In contrast, the return of Christ will come as a thief in the night for those who are not ready, those who have lived for self. (listen to Luke 12:39-40)

- **Luke 12:39** But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.
- **Luke 12:40** Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."
- While unfaithful Christians will be shocked at Christ's return, those who are faithful servants will be expecting His "knock" at their door, so to speak.
- The parable is clear (in later verses) that the unfaithful will be punished while the faithful will be handsomely rewarded. The reward for faithfulness is more than we could imagine!

listen to vs. 42-44

- **Luke 12:42** And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* master will make ruler over

his household, to give *them their* portion of food in due season?

- **Luke 12:43** Blessed *is* that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.
- **Luke 12:44** Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.
- The faithful steward is rewarded, for his works are deemed to be of the caliber of gold, silver, and precious stones.
- He will hear, Well done, good and faithful servant.
- He will rule and reign with Christ in His coming kingdom. That is not true of unfaithful servants.

Every child of God ought to take heed to the warning of Christ in v. 40:

- “You also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”
- Are you doing what the Master expects of you?
- Are you depending on the Spirit of God for living the Christ life of victory?
- One day you will give an account.
- While the reward for faithfulness is unfathomable (in a positive sense), the reward for unfaithfulness is overwhelming (in a negative sense).

After describing the wonderful blessings given for faithfulness, Jesus then turns our attention to the aspect of negative recompense for unfaithful servants.

- listen to what Jesus says in vs. 45-48 of our text
- **Luke 12:45** But if that servant says in his heart, “My master is delaying his coming,” and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk,

- **Luke 12:46** the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him*, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the unbelievers.
- **Luke 12:47** And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*.
- **Luke 12:48** But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

When considering the dramatic application of the parable, we need to be aware of three important facts.

- First, parables are intended to be metaphorical in nature.
- Some Christians react rather violently to the prospect of a child of God being cut asunder or beaten with many stripes, concluding that such harsh treatment could never be the lot of a saved person.
- Thus, they instantly assume the unfaithful servants in the parable must be referring to those who are unsaved.
- As we shall see, the entire parable applies to the saved, and one of the keys to interpretation is understanding that parabolic language is figurative.
- Second, throughout the parable Jesus repeatedly refers to that servant and his lord (master)
- The Lord is obviously Christ and the servant is a saved person.
- Unsaved people are never referred to as servants of Christ.

Third, the repeated use of the phrase “that servant” clearly indicates that Jesus is not referring to four different people (one saved, three unsaved, or some other combination).

- Instead, this is one — and only one — servant, who has four possible lifestyle choices and, consequently, four possible rewards at the Judgment Seat.
- we already looked at the first possible lifestyle choice, and that is preparedness – remaining faithful to Jesus in discipleship
- The second possible lifestyle a Christian can choose is rebellion to the Lord in some degree.
- In this particular parable Jesus describes an extreme servant who mistreats those under his care (beats them) and indulges himself (becomes drunken).
- The parable is clear that this servant behaves thusly because he rationalizes, “My lord delays His coming.”
- In other words, he is not convinced that Jesus is coming any time soon.
- He doesn’t take seriously the eternal realm.
- He is more focused on the here and now.
- of course, we could just as easily use the pronoun SHE, for this applies to women as well

Some may wonder, “How could this be a Christian?”

- No Christian would do this kind of thing!”
- Oh really? Do you know any Christians that get drunk or abuse drugs?
- Do you know any Christians who are abusive?
- Do you know any Christians who live in adultery?
- Do you know any Christians who have major outbursts of anger?
- Do you know any Christians who, because of continued selfishness, have destroyed their marriage and family?
- Do you know any Christians who live like the devil?

- Do you know any Christians that deny their Lord? In a Bible sense, think Lot, think Peter, think Ananias and Sapphira, to name a few.

Yes, even Christians can live carnally for a period of time or even a lifetime.

- Passages like Rom. 7 and the books of 1 Cor. and Heb. demonstrate the possibility.
- That is why God disciplines His children who are living rebelliously.
- Whom the Lord loves He chastens, Heb. 12:6.
- Incidentally, those being disciplined do not always respond favorably – and so we are given strong warnings in Heb. 12:25, See that you do not refuse Him who speaks.
- and Heb. 12:29, Our God is a consuming fire.
- If God disciplines and judges now, why wouldn’t He do so at the Judgment Seat, of all places?
- Judgment begins at the house of God, 1 Pet. 4:17.
- Indeed, the very idea of a Judgment Seat suggests that some do not live as they should on Earth and so will give an account to Jesus for their misbehavior

How do we explain the awful punishment of the rebellious servant, who is cut asunder?

- Remember, this is a parable.
- God doesn’t literally hack him in pieces.
- If this punishment were literal, it would be inconsistent with the crime of abusiveness and drunkenness.
- It would not be an eye-for-an-eye type of punishment
- Cut asunder comes from the Greek word *dichotomeo*, from which we get our English word dichotomy.
- It is the idea of dividing something into two equal parts.

- This appears to be a metaphor for the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, severely rebuking the rebellious servant.
- In Rev. 19:15 we are told that from the mouth of the Lord Jesus comes a sharp sword.
- In other words, His words cut and divide and separate.

In Heb. 4:12 we learn:

- **Heb. 4:12** For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
- Why would God want to divide asunder one of His rebellious children in this manner?
- Think of it. The spirit of even a rebellious child of God is righteous because Jesus resides there.
- But the soul (mind, will, emotions) of a saint who is not submitting to ongoing sanctification is far from righteous.
- Perhaps Jesus — through strong rebuke — divides apart the righteous spirit from the corrupt soul in order to fully make manifest to His rebellious child the awfulness of his heart.

1 Cor. 3:13 each one's work will become clear;

- **1 Cor. 4:5** The Lord ... will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts.
- Imagine the horror of standing at the Judgment Seat and hearing Jesus, the living Word of God, divide between your soul and spirit so you can see your innermost being.
- You will no longer cling to the argument that since you are saved, justified, and positionally righteous you should not, therefore, be judged.

- For your soul will be exposed independently of the spirit, and all of your behavioral corruption will be made manifest.
- Then imagine the awfulness of the verdict as the fire of God's judgment burns away all that is corrupt, leaving nothing.
- If that were all of the punishment, it would be horrid enough, but that is not all.

The rebellious servant is also appointed his portion with the unbelievers, Luke 12:46.

- This punishment, at face value, has prompted many an unwitting interpreter — despite the many textual evidences to the contrary — to conclude that the rebellious servant is consigned to an eternity in Hell.
- But the passage does not say that.
- In fact, the word translated UNBELIEVERS here is often translated FAITHLESS elsewhere in the New Testament.
- So it doesn't have to mean an unsaved person.
- It can legitimately refer to an unbelieving Christian — or we could say, an unbelieving believer — and context determines the usage.
- When Jesus met Thomas on the day of his resurrection, and Thomas doubted, Jesus used this very Greek word to describe Thomas, calling him faithless, John 20:27, in the sense of lacking faith.

In the context of Luke 12, we must interpret this usage as an unbelieving Christian; in other words, a Christian who is not depending on God for victory.

- this one is faithless, like Thomas, living in defeat.
- Saved, but not trusting God to live a holy life.

- Thus, this believer's life is displeasing to the Master, which means that recompense will follow at the Judgment Seat.
- This servant is the opposite of the faithFUL servant
- Incidentally, the faithLESS servant is appointed a portion.
- A portion is an allotment or share.
- Unlike the faithFUL servant, who receives blessing and ruling and reigning with Christ ...
- the portion of the faithLESS servant is no opportunity to rule or reign, a very mundane form of existence in the kingdom, and no blessing.

In addition, according to the parallel passage in Matt 24:51, the rebellious servant's punishment results in weeping and gnashing of teeth

- Unfortunately, many Bible teachers have relegated that phrase to suffering in Hell.
- However, in oriental thinking, gnashing of teeth is simply conscious regret.
- That's all it means!
- A person could gnash his teeth because he is in Hell, and consciously regretting it, or a person could gnash his teeth because he receives punishment at the Judgment Seat, and it affects his existence in the coming kingdom, and he consciously regrets it!
- It is unwise to let a phrase determine the interpretation of an entire passage.
- Rather, one should let the passage dictate the way the phrase is being used.

Imagine being harshly rebuked by Jesus at the Judgment Seat, seeing your soul for what it really is, not receiving any rewards ...

- and having to live in a realm of the kingdom without an inheritance, frequently weeping and regretting the fact that you did not live for God in this life.
- This is serious!
- It would be worse than Isaiah crying, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips (Isa. 6:5).
- It would be worse than Peter crying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord (Luke 5:8).
- It would be worse than Job crying, I abhor myself, (Job 42:6)

Perhaps you are relieved that your lifestyle is not represented by the rebellious servant ...

- but are you acting as an indifferent servant, focusing on self and forgetting about the return of Christ and the world to come?
- According to v. 47 in Luke 12, this servant knows His Lord's will but does not live accordingly.
- I personally think this servant describes the vast majority of western Christianity.
- We know what God expects of us.
- We are well-instructed in the Word of God.
- But many dispensational Christians have been taught that the Judgment Seat will involve a few moments of pain, then it will be over and all will be joyful in the kingdom to come.
- Not so!

Those who do not have an eternal focus will be beaten with many stripes.

- Again, this is a parable; the stripes are figurative.
- In Heb. 12 we are told whom the Lord loves He scourges.
- Have you ever been literally flogged by God?

- No, scourging is a metaphor for God's divine discipline in your life.
- He sends appropriate punishments when you are living unto yourself, in order that He might get your attention and turn your heart completely to Him.
- Sometimes those punishments continue on for a lengthy period of time, perhaps even years.
- The punishments dispensed at the Judgment Seat are even more consequential, the results lasting throughout the millennial kingdom age

Are you indifferent to your Lord's return?

- Are you living for yourself? Are you materialistic?
- Are you bearing fruit for the Master?
- Have you left your first love?
- Do you have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof?
- Will you be punished at His Judgment Seat?
- ask yourself these haunting questions and be honest with the answers

We find one final type of servant in v. 48 of our text

- This servant is also beaten, but not as intensely as the indifferent servant, because this servant is ignorant.
- I personally do not think this last punishment will apply to anyone listening to this study.
- Because you have been warned.
- Indeed, I think the church in the western world has largely been warned, even if it has unwittingly arrived at incorrect interpretations of many passages, such as this very parable.
- To whom much is given, much is required.

- If anything, I suppose this last type of servant would apply to those reared in a context where they had no access to biblical teaching.
- Perhaps this would apply to those overseas who get saved but have little opportunity for discipleship.
- Maybe they don't even have their own copy of the Bible.
- I cannot fathom that ignorance will be a valid excuse for western Christians at the Judgment Seat.

Will your reward at the Judgment Seat be positive or negative?

- If negative, do you realize what that means?
- It means forfeiture of kingdom inheritance.
- It means you will not take full possession of the glories and blessings of the kingdom as you could have.
- Though you will be in the kingdom as a child of God, your portion will be among the faithless.
- It means you will not glow with the brightness of the Savior.
- It's time that Christians awake to righteousness! Jesus is coming soon!

Some like to dismiss this passage as referring to the Jews exclusively, and claim it has no bearing on New Testament Christians.

- Unfortunately, they do that with many passages in the Gospels (inconsistently), insisting that the pre-cross era of Christ was a different dispensation and, therefore, not applicable to the church.
- Does this mean the Gospels are merely history books with no practical application for New Testament believers?
- God forbid! Jesus said, The law and the prophets were until John, Luke 16:16.

- He did not say the era of law would end abruptly at the cross. While we recognize the importance of dispensations, it is possible to press them too hard, so that dispensationalism (as a system) may be guilty of putting the Scriptures in a box that God never intended.

In response to this Jewish-only hermeneutic (system of interpretation), I will give two key responses.

- First, when the Jewish leadership rejected the kingdom offer, Jesus took the kingdom from national Israel and gave it to another nation bearing the fruits of it, Matt. 21:43.
- We recognize the other “nation” to be the predominantly Gentile church of Jesus Christ
- Thus, the qualifications for kingdom entrance given to the Jews in the Gospels are also for the saints of the church age.

Second, since the Jewish leadership apostatized, Jesus turned to His disciples — those who had chosen to follow Him no matter the cost.

- With them He continued teaching about the kingdom
- While those disciples were Jewish, they were also Christians.
- In fact, these original men chosen by Jesus became the foundation of the local church, according to Eph. 2:20, and they will sit on twelve thrones in the kingdom (Matt. 19:28).
- As Christians, Jewish or not — it would make sense for Jesus to instruct them about the rapture, the Judgment Seat of Christ, and the coming kingdom.
- That being the case, I would submit that Jesus’ teaching in the Gospels is for our admonition as much as it was for the first century Jewish believers.

The traditional understanding of the Judgment Seat of Christ assumes only one basic verdict for all saints: positive reward (in some measure).

- The Bema is viewed as an awards podium, where everyone will supposedly get trophies or crowns – as a very minimum, a participation trophy
- However, the Scriptures actually teach the prospect of two possible verdicts:
- positive reward for the faithful or negative reward for the unfaithful, depending on one’s service to the Master.
- The Scriptures sometimes refer to negative reward as suffering loss, recompense, or simply punishment.
- Are you ready for YOUR coming verdict?
- I challenge you to Think on these things!