

Reward or Loss? (Part 1)

Many Christians believe that all born-again believers will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ – some more, some less. They arrive at that conclusion in spite of the clear language in passages such as [1 Cor. 3:13-15](#):

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. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

The mistake often made is defining “suffer loss” as merely a loss of rewards. The interpretation is based on an assumption that since believers are positionally righteous, their sins will never be judged and, therefore, the Judgment Seat will be more of an awards ceremony. Is that accurate?

While the *spirit* of every believer *has been saved* and declared righteous, the best that can be said of the *soul* in this life is that it *is being saved*, to the extent the believer submits to spiritual growth. The process is called sanctification (in the progressive sense). Because of the positional work of God in the *spirit* of a saved man, he will not be judged for his sins, per se. Those sins have already been judged at Calvary. Hallelujah! However, an account will be given as to how the *soul* progressed in sanctification throughout life. Outright rebellious and even indifferent servants of Christ who are not able to give a good stewardship account to their Master will be punished. Thus, at the Judgment Seat there is the possibility of reward (in varying degrees) or punishment (in varying degrees).

The idea of suffering loss is not only missing out on receiving rewards. It is a setback, a punishment. 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's)*. That's a radically different understanding than what many Christians have about the Judgment Seat. Perhaps there will be shock and surprise at the rapture.

[Colossians 3:23-25](#) also confirms the prospect of punishment at the Judgment Seat.

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

This passage clearly confirms that “suffering loss” at the Judgment Seat is

not merely receiving less rewards; it is the idea of being recompensed for the wrong one has done. While specific sins will not be judged, lifestyle will be judged, and that includes philosophy of life, motives, fruitfulness, faithfulness, etc. In contrast, the passage above indicates that another possibility at the Judgment Seat is receiving *the reward of the inheritance*. In other words, inheriting millennial blessings is not automatic.

Jesus shared a parable with His disciples, illustrating the possibility of reward or punishment for believers. In this article we will examine the potential for reward. In Part 2, we will look at the prospect of punishment.

Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. ([Luke 12:41-44](#))

Why does Jesus use parables? To reveal truth about the kingdom to those who are ready and eager to receive it, and to conceal truth about the kingdom from those who are blind and hard-hearted. The disciples are 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. Because Jesus is speaking in parables, we know He is not addressing the apostate religious leaders. Furthermore, because Jesus is speaking in parables, we know He is not giving the Gospel, for Jesus would never conceal the Gospel!

In His answer, it becomes obvious that Jesus is speaking to His disciples (the twelve). In fact, the reader is explicitly told this in [Luke 12:1,22](#). 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 to discipleship. 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 a 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 contained in the verses above, it is important to first grasp the context that prompts Peter to ask his question. The immediate context is [Luke 12:31-40](#). I will not quote the entire passage here, for sake of space considerations, but at the center of Christ's teaching is His desire that we be like something. What does He want us to be like?

And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. ([Luke 12:36](#))

Using an earthly illustration to make a spiritual application (the essence of

parables), Jesus 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 says, *blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching (v.37)*. Jesus wants us (saved people) to be like servants eagerly awaiting their Lord's return. This parable cannot be referring to lost people, because lost people are not awaiting their Lord's return; that is only true of saved people.

According to v.31, He wants us to be seeking His millennial kingdom. According to v.32, He wants us to be conscious that the glorious millennial kingdom is, indeed, coming. According to vs. 33, He 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, according to v.35, Jesus wants our loins to be girded about and our lights burning (a reference to the parable of the ten virgins in [Matt. 25](#)). In a spiritual sense, Jesus wants His disciples to be detached from earth, not ashamed at the rapture, ready to meet Jesus at His 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 unsaved people. Rather, Satan, the god of this world, is the master of lost folks. Indeed, a lost 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 born-again children of God. Jesus promises we will be blessed (v.37) if we are faithfully awaiting His return. In fact, He promises to gird himself and serve His faithful servants!

How does a faithful servant act? As a steward of Christ on earth, he manages his affairs obediently. He serves God faithfully (i.e., full of faith). He does not live like the rich fool – see the parable in [Luke 12:16-21](#) (incidentally, this parable refers to believers). The faithful servant does not become consumed with the things of the here and now. He does not look at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen. His life is about seeking first the kingdom of God. He bears fruit. He does not live unto himself, but unto Him who died for him. This Christian is a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God. He has counted the cost and paid the price of discipleship.

On the contrary, the return of Christ (i.e., the rapture) will come as a thief in the night for those who are not ready, those who have lived for self.

And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. ([Luke 12:39](#))

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!

And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. ([Luke 12:42-44](#))

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 the Millennium. That is not true of unfaithful servants.

Every child of God ought to take heed to the warning of Christ in v.40, *Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.* 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, the punishment for unfaithfulness is overwhelming. We will explore that in Part 2.