

The Triumphant Epitaph of Paul, Part 3

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:8

Code: 55-26

INTRODUCTION

God's people are the recipients of His abundant grace. The culmination of that grace is His plan to reward those who love Him. That plan is mentioned throughout Scripture.

A. Genesis 15:1

God said to Abraham, "Your reward shall be very great. "

B. Luke 6:22-23

Christ said, "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. " Although believers must endure persecution in this life, God has prepared a great reward for them in heaven.

C. 1 Corinthians 2:9

God has prepared "things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man" for those who love Him (cf. Isa. 64:4) .

D. Ephesians 2:4-7

"God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) , and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. "

E. 1 Peter 1:3-5

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. "

F. Psalm 58:11

"Surely there is a reward for the righteous. "

G. Hebrews 11:6

God "is a rewarder of those who seek Him. "

H. Philippians 3:8, 14

Paul said, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. . . . I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. " Paul lived in light of his eternal reward.

I. Romans 8:18

Paul said, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. "

J. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

Paul also said that our "momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are

not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. " He eagerly anticipated his eternal glory in heaven. Second Timothy 4:8 is another place where we see Paul looking toward his future reward.

REVIEW

I. PAUL'S PRESENT LIFE (v. 6)

A. His Implicit Statement About Death (v. 6a)

B. His Explicit Statement About Death (v. 6b)

II. PAUL'S PAST LIFE (v. 7)

A. He Recognized the Spiritual Struggle (v. 7a)

B. He Recognized the Nobility of the Cause (v. 7a)

C. He Recognized the Need to Stay on Course (v. 7b)

D. He Recognized the Need to Treasure Time (v. 7b)

E. He Recognized the Fulfillment of a Sacred Trust (v. 7c)

LESSON

III. PAUL'S FUTURE LIFE (v. 8)

"In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. "

A. The Anticipation of His Reward

"In the future" is when Paul would receive his reward. When an athlete wins a fight or race, he looks forward to his trophy or reward. Similarly, Paul anticipated his eternal reward for finishing his spiritual race. The Greek verb translated "laid up" (Gk. , apokeimai) speaks of safely storing away or depositing something. The crown or wreath pictures an athletic award. Paul knew his reward was safely deposited in heaven (cf. 1 Tim. 6:19) .

B. The Honor of His Reward

The Greek term translated "crown" (Gk. , stephanos) refers to a wreath that was usually woven like a garland and placed on someone's head. In Matthew 27:29 it describes the crown of thorns placed on Christ's head. Back then a stephanos was worn for various reasons: it was worn by retiring civil magistrates in honor of their faithful service, it was worn at festivals as a sign of celebration and joy, and it was worn at pagan temples to honor the gods.

The most well known use of a stephanos was to reward an athlete for his victory in a contest. Paul used that analogy in 2 Timothy 2:5: "If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. " An athlete's wreath is perishable, but the one Christ will honor believers with is imperishable (1 Pet. 1:4) .

C. The Meaning of His Reward

Paul described the crown he would receive as "the crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8) . Some believe a righteous life is the basis of the reward. That interpretation is possible linguistically, but it contradicts what we know of Paul's humility.

I believe the crown is righteousness itself. The believer is considered righteous when he or she comes to Christ (Rom. 5:21) . Righteousness is also a practical part of Christian growth since we were freed from sin to become "slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:18) . But I believe the righteousness in 2 Timothy 4:8 refers to the perfect and eternal righteousness of heaven. God's Word speaks of it this way:

1. Romans 14:17--"The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

2. Galatians 5:5--"We through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. " Every true believer longs for perfect and eternal righteousness.

3. 2 Peter 3:13--"We are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. " In heaven there will be no sin (cf. Rev. 21:8, 27) .

4. James 1:12--"Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. " The crown of life is like the crown of righteousness, and all who love Christ will receive it.

5. 1 Peter 5:4--"When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. " The crown of glory is like the crown of righteousness and is also promised to every believer. Christ will reward all believers in heaven with eternal righteousness, life, and glory. Such righteousness means the absence of sin, defeat, and death. Paul's greatest battle came not from false teachers or Satan, but his own sinful nature (Rom. 7:5-25) . He was weary from fighting his own fallenness and longed for absolute and perfect righteousness.

D. The Descriptions of His Reward

God's Word describes the perfect righteousness of heaven as: being with Christ (Phil. 1:23) , seeing God (Matt. 5:8) , beholding the glory of Christ (John 17:24) , being glorified with Christ (Rom. 8:17) , reigning with Christ forever (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 22:5) , being joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17) , inheriting all things (Col. 1:12; Rev. 21:7) , shining as the stars (Dan. 12:3) , enjoying everlasting light (Isa. 60:19) , entering the joy of the Lord (Matt. 25:21) , enjoying eternal rest (Heb. 4:9) , entering the fullness of joy (Ps. 16:11) , receiving the prize of our high calling (Phil. 3:14) , possessing treasure in heaven (Matt. 19:21) , and benefiting from an eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17) .

E. The Reasons for His Reward

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16) shows that all believers receive the reward of eternal righteousness. Some of the laborers worked many hours, but others worked just one hour. At the end of the day the landowner paid all the laborers the same wage. No matter what our service is, how long we work, or how hard we work, in the end we all receive the same wage of eternal life and righteousness.

Although 2 Timothy 4:8 refers to the general reward of perfect righteousness for all believers in heaven, God's Word also speaks about additional rewards we receive for our service and faithfulness to Christ.

1. His service to Christ

a) Romans 14:10-12--"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' [Isa. 45:23]. So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God. " God will evaluate our service to Him and reward us accordingly. b) 2 Corinthians 5:10--"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. " The Greek term translated "bad" (phaulos) refers to something that is worthless, not sinful. Judgment of our sins is not in view here, for there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1) . Christ has put away our sins forever. Nevertheless, Christ will evaluate our ministry to see what was valuable or worthless. c) 1 Corinthians 3:12-15--"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, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself 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. "Wood, hay, and straw represent that which is meaningless spiritually, while gold, silver, and precious stones represent what is truly useful in the advancement of God's kingdom. The worth of our service will become evident at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Wood, hay, and straw will burn up, but gold, silver, and precious stones will remain. Whatever remains will be the basis of our special reward, but whatever burns up will be forever lost to us. I believe these special rewards relate to the capacity and nature of our eternal service. We all will have the crown of eternal righteousness, but each of us will do different things (cf. Rev. 22:3) .

2. His faithfulness to Christ

Scripture teaches that the sphere and nature of our service, authority, and co-regency with Christ throughout eternity is determined by the faithfulness of our service here on earth.

a) Matthew 25:14-30--The person who was faithful in managing a few talents was entrusted with managing even more. Similarly, if we are faithful in serving the Lord here, we will receive greater responsibility in eternity. b) Luke 12:42-44--Christ said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. " If we are faithful in ministry, our authority and responsibilities will be greater when He returns. c) 2 John 1:8--"Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. " The greatest joy for the believer both here and in eternity is to serve Christ. How we serve Christ now is vital: it determines our capacity to serve Him in heaven. d) Revelation 3:11--Christ said, "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown. " We are to be faithful and not lose our reward because of sin. e) Revelation 2:26--Christ also said, "He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations. " He who obeys Christ will reign with Him. f) Luke 19:11-27--Since his servants managed his money wisely, a nobleman gave them authority over cities. Similarly, our authority in heaven is directly proportional to how well we make use of the gifts God has given us in advancing His kingdom.

F. The Reception of His Reward

Paul longed to receive his crown of eternal righteousness from "the Lord, the righteous Judge" (2 Tim. 4:8; cf. v. 1) . Christ knows the value or inferiority of our service because His judgment is perfect. Christ will "award" (Gk. , apodidomi) or recompense us with the general reward of eternal righteousness and Christlikeness, and any specific reward for our faithful service.

1. The time

We will receive our rewards "on that day" (2 Tim. 4:8; cf. 1:12, 18) , a reference to the Judgment Seat of Christ. I believe that will occur in heaven right after the rapture of the church. Before that time believers have eternal righteousness, life, and glory, but not in its fullness. That's because their bodies have not yet been glorified. While those in heaven are already serving and reigning with Christ in some way, the fullest and final expression of it awaits the Lord's return for His church. At that time Christ will settle His accounts and reward His faithful servants.

a) 1 Corinthians 4:5--"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. "b) Revelation 22:12--Christ said, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me. "c) 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17--"The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. "d) Luke 14:14--Christ said, "You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. " When our bodies are resurrected and glorified, we will express eternal righteousness in its fullness. e) 1 Thessalonians 2:19--Paul asked, "Who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?" The crown of Paul's ministry and the supreme joy of his life was knowing he would see believers he had nurtured present at Christ's return. That's when both soul and body will join in fully expressing eternal righteousness and Christlikeness.

2. The people

The reward of eternal righteousness is for Paul and "all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8) . The verb's perfect tense speaks of a continual love, thus "all" refers to all believers. The greatest mark of a true believer is his or her love for God.

a) John 5:42--Christ characterized unbelievers this way: "You do not have the love of God in

yourselves. "b) John 14:21, 23--Christ said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him. . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him. " In regeneration God enables us to love Him. c) Romans 5:5--"The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. "d) 1 John 4:7--"Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. "e) Philippians 3:20--Paul said, "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. " Because we love Christ, we eagerly look for His return. f) 1 Corinthians 16:22--"If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. " Only believers love the Lord.

Do you love Christ? Do you show it by delighting in and obeying God's Word? If so, you'll receive an eternal reward of perfect righteousness in eternity. You can enhance and enrich that eternal reward by faithfully serving Christ now. That's why Paul said, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve" (Col. 3:23-24) . By loving and serving Christ with all your heart, you'll enjoy eternity as Christ expresses back to you His gratitude for your service. He will do so by enhancing your service and responsibility beyond what you can imagine! You'll know the fullness of eternal joy as you serve the One who gave Himself for you.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is the culmination of God's grace?
2. How does 1 Peter 1:4 describe our inheritance?
3. What is our "momentary, light affliction" producing (2 Cor. 4:17)?
4. What was Paul looking toward in 2 Timothy 4:8?
5. What does "laid up" mean in verse 8? How does that apply to our eternal reward?
6. What does "the crown of righteousness" refer to in verse 8?
7. How does God's Word describe our reward?
8. What is not in view at the Judgment Seat of Christ? Why (Rom. 8:1)?
9. What does 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 teach?
10. What do our special rewards relate to?
11. What does Matthew 25:14-30 teach?
12. When will we receive our reward of righteousness?
13. What was the supreme joy of Paul's life? Why?
14. Whom does "all" refer to in 2 Timothy 4:8?
15. What is the greatest mark of a true believer? Support your answer with Scripture.
16. How can you enhance and enrich your eternal reward (Col. 3:23-24)?

Pondering the Principles

1. God's Word gives us a glimpse of what our eternal reward will be like:
We will be like Christ: "We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is (1 John 3:2) .
We will enjoy endless companionship with Christ: As Jesus Himself said, "I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3) .
We will enjoy complete health: Our "perishable body . . . is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power" (1 Cor. 15:42-43) .
We will enjoy unending happiness: God "shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain" (Rev. 21:4) .
We will worship God forever: The apostle John said, "I heard, as it were, a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God'" (Rev.

19:1) .

All those blessings await the believer. If you are not a believer, allow God's kindness to lead you to repentance (Rom. 2:4) . If you are, prayerfully offer praise and thanksgiving to God for providing such eternal glory.

2. Paul's anticipation of his eternal reward affected his conduct in this life. Look up the following verses to see how you should be living in light of eternity:

Philippians 2:14-16

Colossians 3:2-5, 8-9, 12-17

1 Thessalonians 5:6-8, 11

2 Thessalonians 2:14-15

2 Peter 3:11, 14

1 John 3:2-3

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