

Should We Care About Heavenly Rewards?

HEAVEN #4 – Pastor Gary Combs – May 5, 2024 – 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

INTRO: Good morning church! We're continuing our 6-week sermon series entitled: "HEAVEN: It's Better Than You Ever Imagined." In today's sermon, we will be asking, "Should We Care About Heavenly Rewards?"

Vision: But before we begin, I want to celebrate a couple of things that God did last week. First, I want to share what God did at our Eastgate women's retreat last week. Around 60 attended and 4 women committed their lives to follow Jesus! That's worth celebrating!



Next, I want to share the story on these Nike high-tops! Last week, we concluded our 4-night Citywide Prayer Rally on Wednesday night at Eastgate. Around 330 or more from various



churches attended our last night. We had around 500-600 who attended at least one of the nights. The Rally was put together by 8 pastors who are committed to collaborating together to make sure every man, woman, and child in Wilson has repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the gospel. The name of our group is Christ Together for Wilson. On the last night, Pastor Sherman, who I always tell that I wish I was as cool as him with his tennis shoes that always match his clothes... Well, he surprised me with these Nike's!

Trans: Now, back to our sermon series on heaven. We learned in our first sermon, "Why Focus On Heaven," that God's Word calls us to "Seek and set our hearts and minds on the things of heaven." Then we talked about "What's Heaven Like?" and we learned that believers in heaven are: With Christ, Fully Conscious, Actively Engaged, and Eagerly Waiting. Last week, we asked, "Will We Know One Another in Heaven?" And we learned that "Yes," we will know and recognize one another in heaven.

We've been receiving more questions from many of you on heaven. Several have asked "Will there be animals in heaven?" One little girl said, "I know when Jesus returns He will be riding a "white horse" (Rev. 19:11), so there must be horses in heaven. And if they're horses, surely there must be dogs." She may have a point. There may be horses and dogs, but I'm not so sure about cats! But seriously, I'm unsure whether animals are in Present Heaven, but I'm certain there will be animals in the final New Heavens and New Earth. But more about that in a later sermon. Now, let's consider today's question: "Should We Care About Heavenly Rewards?"

Need: A lot of Christians get nervous about this topic of heavenly rewards. They are confused about the importance of living a life of faithful obedience to God in this life. They mistakenly claim, "My good works mean nothing to God." It's true that we are saved by grace apart from works. We can't earn salvation. We can't work and earn eternal life and heaven. We can only receive the free gift of salvation by faith. That's true. But heavenly rewards... Well...

"The Bible indicates that all believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of their lives. It's critical to understand that this judgment is a judgment of works, not of faith. Our works do not affect our salvation, but they do affect our reward. Rewards are about our work for God, empowered by his Spirit. Rewards are conditional, dependent on our faithfulness." — Randy Alcorn, *HEAVEN*, p.84.

Trans: So, let's look to the Scriptures to see what the Bible says about heavenly rewards.

BODY: In the apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he told them to take care to live faithfully for Christ for it would determine their heavenly reward. We can take care to live faithfully for Christ knowing that it determines our heavenly reward. Why should we take care concerning our heavenly rewards? The text gives three reasons why we should care about heavenly rewards.

Today's text: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 (ESV) ¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹ For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Should We Care About Heavenly Rewards?

HEAVEN #4 – Pastor Gary Combs – May 5, 2024 – 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

WHY CARE ABOUT HEAVENLY REWARDS?

1. Because our earthly works will be revealed by Christ.

EXP: (10-13) Notice the 3 “if-then” statements, the first being in v.12-13. Paul says that we must take care to live faithfully for Christ because our earthly works “will be revealed by fire” (13). Paul is talking to believers who already have a “foundation” (10, 11, 12, 14), “which is Jesus Christ” (11). What they are building on it will be revealed on the “Day” (13), which is when believers will stand before the Bema Seat of Christ. There are two judgment seats in heaven. One for believers and one for unbelievers.

The “judgement seat” (“βῆμα, *bēma*) of Christ is for the commendation of believers. (Most believe this takes place right after the rapture, but it may also occur as each believer arrives in heaven)

2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (“*Evil*” better as “worthless”)

The “Great White Throne” is for the condemnation of unbelievers. (Most believe this takes place at the end of Christ’s millennial reign)

Revelation 20:11-15 (ESV) Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life... And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

“Take care” (10) (βλέπω, *blepō*, PAM) - Lit., “to see, behold.” To take heed, take care, to weigh carefully, to direct the mind to a thing. Take care how you live for Christ for all will be revealed at His bema seat.

“Gold...straw” (12) - The 1st “if.” Gold, silver and precious stones are purified and revealed by fire, but “wood, hay and straw” are burned up. These “building materials” symbolize our life’s works.

“Each one’s work” (13) - Every believer, individually will have their works tested by a fiery-like judgment.

“Manifest” (13) (φανέρως, *phaneros*) - apparent, manifest, evident, known.

“Day” (13) - The Day of Christ’s rapture of the Church.

“Disclose” (13) (δηλώω, *dēloō*) - to declare, make manifest, to make known, to show.

“Revealed” (13) (ἀποκαλύπτω, *apokalypō*) - to uncover, lay open what has been veiled or covered up.

“Fire will test” (13) (πῦρ δοκιμάσει, *pyr dokimasei*) - to test, examine, prove (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), especially as in metals— this is called “fire assaying,” to test and determine purity.

ARG: Jesus said that everything we have done will be made known.

Luke 8:17 (ESV) For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.

Believer’s “deeds” will “follow them” into heaven. (As Maximus said, “What we do in life echoes in eternity.”)

Revelation 14:13 (ESV) And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”

ILL: Have you ever looked at an ad for something, say a pair of pants or a something random like a beach chair and the next time you open Facebook, all these ads for pants and beach chairs appear? Companies like Facebook, Google, and others know a lot about us. They store a lot of data about each of us. But that’s nothing compared to what God knows about us. For He knows all our deeds and motives.

1 Corinthians 4:5 (NIV) Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

APP: Believer, we will all appear before the Bema Seat of Christ where He will reveal and test our works.

Should We Care About Heavenly Rewards?

HEAVEN #4 – Pastor Gary Combs – May 5, 2024 – 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

2. Because our faithful works will be rewarded by Christ.

EXP: (14) Now let's look at the 2nd "if" statement. "If the work... survives" the test of fire, "he will receive a reward." Gold, silver, and precious stones will survive, but wood, hay, and straw will not.

"Work" (13,14,15, 4X) (ἔργον, *ergon*) - work, deeds, labor, an act or deed done.

"Reward" (14) (μισθός, *misthos*) - reward, wages, the fruit naturally resulting from toils and endeavors.

ARG: Jesus promises to reward believers according to their work.

Revelation 22:12 (NKJV) "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."

There are at least 5 "crowns" rewarded to believers in heaven...

1. Crown of Righteousness

2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NKJV) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the **crown of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

2. Crown of Soul-winning (Rejoicing)

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 (NLT) After all, what gives us hope and joy, and what will be our proud reward and **crown** as we stand before our Lord Jesus when he returns? It is you! Yes, you are our pride and joy.

3. Crown of Life

James 1:12 (NKJV) Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the **crown of life** which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

4. The Imperishable Crown

1 Corinthians 9:24-25 (NKJV) Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate [disciplined] in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an **imperishable crown**.

5. Crown of Glory

1 Peter 5:1-4 (NLT) ...As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a **crown of never-ending glory and honor**.

But you ask, what will we do with them? Cast them before Jesus' throne!

Revelation 4:10-11 (ESV) ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ¹¹ "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

ILL: But you say, wouldn't be more fair if everyone got a participation trophy? Let's say you got up every morning at 5AM from the time you were 8 years old to swim and every day after school you were back in the pool training, all with a dream and goal of competing for a gold medal in the Olympics. And let's say that you finally qualify at age 21 to compete after a lifetime of work. And let's say you actually come in first. But as you go to stand on the platform you find out that the Olympic Committee has changed the rules and decided that everyone gets a medal, no gold, no silver, no bronze, just a pretty medal made of wood. Would that seem fair? Would that be just?

APP: Believer, when you "build" on the foundation of your salvation in Christ faithfully, you will receive heavenly rewards, you will receive a crown! Organize your life in such a way that you seek the things of heaven!

Should We Care About Heavenly Rewards?

HEAVEN #4 – Pastor Gary Combs – May 5, 2024 – 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

3. Because our worthless works will be removed by Christ.

EXP: (15) Finally, we're at the last "if" in our text today. "If anyone's work is burned up." This person will "suffer loss." Loss of what? Not salvation: "He himself will be saved." Loss of what? What he could've had, namely heavenly rewards. He's still "saved." He still gets eternal life and heaven. But "only as through fire."

"Burned up" (15) (κατακαίω, *katakaiō*) - to burn up (to the ground), utterly consumed by fire.

"Suffer loss" (15) (ζημιόω, *zēmioō*) - to experience detriment: receive damage, loss, to suffer loss.

"Saved" (15) (σώζω, *sōzō*) - to save, keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction.

ARG: John warned that believers should "watch" themselves that they not "lose" a "full reward."

2 John 8 Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.

Paul "disciplined" himself to run life's race in view of receiving an "eternal prize."

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (NLT) ²⁴ Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! ²⁵ All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. ²⁶ So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. ²⁷ I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

Jesus warned us not to treasure things that will not last, but to "lay up treasure in heaven."

Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV) ¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

ILL: Former seminary professor and president of Dallas Theological Seminary, the late John Walvoord, encourages us to think about the judgment seat of Christ like a commencement ceremony:

"Some students graduate with honors or high honors, and others receive rewards for distinctive achievements. However, the overwhelming emotion of all the graduates is the joy of receiving the diploma after years of sacrifice and study; every graduate receives a diploma and thus experiences joy and fulfillment. On the one hand, the seriousness of the judgment seat of Christ should be considered; on the other hand, all believers can rejoice in the marvelous grace of God that will enable them all to be in heaven even though they are imperfect in this life." — John Walvoord,

APP: Believer, your salvation is secure in the work of Christ Jesus on the cross. Salvation is received by grace through faith. But you will suffer the loss of heavenly rewards if you build your life with worthless things.

CONCLUSION: Remember, there are two judgment seats. Some Day believers will stand before the Bema seat of Christ. He will judge the building materials we have used to build upon our salvation in Him. If we have lived with eternity in mind, building with gold, silver, and precious stones, faithfully living for Him, we will receive heavenly reward. But if we have invested our lives in earthly things made of wood, hay, and straw, we will suffer the loss of reward. We'll still have Jesus, and eternal life in heaven, but we won't have a crown to cast at His feet like graduates throwing the caps in the air in victory at graduation day in heaven!

And some Day, after the Millennial reign of Christ, unbelievers will appear before the Great White Throne. The Lamb's Book of Life will be opened. And those who have not received Jesus as Lord and Savior, whose name is not written in the Book of Life, will be condemned to the Lake of Fire.

Therefore, as the Word says, "Take care" how you build, how you live your life. For eternity matters.

Let's pray.