

CHAPTER 2

THE PURPOSE OF THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST AND HOW IT IS LIKELY TO OPERATE

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

James 2:12 (ESV)

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

James 3:1 (ESV)

“.....And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works”.

Revelation 2:23(b)

If you say, ‘But we knew nothing about this,’

does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?

Does not he who guards your life know it?

Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?

Proverbs 24:12 (NIV)

The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

2 Timothy 2:11-12 (ESV)

⁴⁸ He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. ⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me.”

John 12:48-50 (RSV)

*Behold, the LORD has proclaimed
to the end of the earth:*

Say to the daughter of Zion,

“Behold, your salvation comes;

behold, his reward is with him,

and his recompense before him.”

Isaiah 62:11 (RSV)

thrones were placed

and one that was ancient of days took his seat;

his raiment was white as snow,

and the hair of his head like pure wool;

his throne was fiery flames,

its wheels were burning fire.

¹⁰ *A stream of fire issued
and came forth from before him;
a thousand thousands served him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;
the court sat in judgment,
and the books were opened.*

Daniel 7:9-10 (RSV)

“But who can endure the day of his coming and who can stand when he appears?.....”

Malachi 3:2(a) (RSV)

Consider how overawed you will feel standing before Jesus Himself, the King of kings, having a one to one conversation about how you lived while on this Earth. He will give you His verdict on the things you did, and the things you failed to do. Imagine receiving His frank assessment of what you *actually* achieved alongside His explanation of what you were *meant* to achieve and *could have* achieved.

I fear that day because I know that although I have done some things quite well, there are many other situations which I did not handle well, and where I know I let Jesus down. Moreover there have been many opportunities to do good which I never took. And there are talents which I have not fully used or developed for Him. I know I have also wasted a lot of the time that He gave me, which He wanted me to use constructively.

I am not the only believer to fear God’s judgment. Even the Psalmist feared it, and that was not because he thought he was heading to the Great White Throne. He knew perfectly well that he wasn’t going to be condemned or go to Hell or the Lake of Fire. Nevertheless, he still feared being judged and he was right to do so:

¹²⁰ *My flesh trembles for fear of You,
And I am afraid of Your judgments.*

Psalms 119:120 (NASB)

Indeed, merely to stand in the physical presence of Jesus will be indescribably daunting. We will see Him as He really is, in all His glory. King David felt fear when he was in the presence of the LORD. The phrase “*the angel of the LORD*” occurs many times in the Bible. It is usually, though not always, a reference to God Himself. More precisely, it refers to Jesus, the Son of God, in a pre-appearance in bodily form during the centuries before His incarnation. So, when David saw the angel of the LORD, i.e. Jesus Himself, he was afraid and he had good reason to be:

And David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces.

1 Chronicles 21:16 (RSV)

²⁹ *For the tabernacle of the Lord, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time in the high place at Gibeon; ³⁰ but David could not go before it to inquire of God, for he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the Lord.*

1 Chronicles 21:29-30 (RSV)

Moses had a similar experience when he met the Angel of the LORD, face to face at the burning bush. Likewise, this was Jesus Himself in a pre-appearance. Remember, Moses was not an unbeliever who was about to be judged. He was not an enemy of God, and God was not his enemy either. Yet, Moses was afraid, and so much so that he hid his face and did not want to look at God.

Moses' reverent response gives us a very good indication of what it will be like to face Jesus at the judgment, even as a genuine believer and a faithful disciple. It is extremely unlikely that you are a better, more faithful person than Moses was. So, if he was awed, and frightened, by the experience of seeing God face to face, there is every reason to believe that we will be too:

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Mid'ian; and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Exodus 3:1-6 (RSV)

Likewise, as an old man on the island of Patmos, apostle John saw Jesus as He really is, in His glorified form. When he saw Him he fell on his face, terrified. John did so even though he knew Jesus well and had been his best friend during the years of His public ministry:

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; ¹⁴ his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; ¹⁶ in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. ¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

Revelation 1:12-18 (RSV)

Whichever judgment we eventually go to, either as a believer or an unbeliever, the real condition of our lives and characters will be revealed and dealt with. There will be a reckoning and even genuine and mature Christians will have to face up to the reality of what they were and how they lived in the years after their conversion. Everything will come out, even the things they kept hidden or which they thought God had not noticed:

¹² For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Hebrews 4:12-13 (NIV)

¹⁵ They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them ¹⁶ on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Romans 2:15-16 (RSV)

*..... and be sure your sin will find you out
Numbers 32:23 (RSV)*

"..... And all the churches shall know that I am he who searches mind and heart and I will give to each of you as your works deserve."

Revelation 2:23 (b) (RSV)

Every real Christian must give Jesus an exhaustive account of his life from conversion onwards. Nobody can avoid or escape this appraisal except, of course, by going to the Great White Throne Judgment instead. But that will be infinitely more terrifying. Therefore we ought to be thinking seriously about it now and trying to get ready for it. Instead, few Christians ever give any thought to the Judgment at all. Doesn't that complacency seem peculiar to you?

It would appear that the Judgment Seat of Christ will be conducted publicly, not in private

If you knew that the British Prime Minister, or the President of the United States was going to call you in to his office for an appraisal, wouldn't it concern you? Wouldn't you want to thoroughly prepare yourself? Yet, very few Christians are concerned, or even aware, that this face to face appraisal with Jesus is coming. When we appear before Him He will openly reveal and assess many secret things, including the innermost motives of our hearts.

Moreover, if that was not alarming enough, the clear implication is that this exposing process will actually be done *publicly, not in private*. Everything will, of course, be revealed to Jesus and to ourselves, but it seems clear that others will hear as well. Perhaps everybody will hear. Consider these passages:

So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.

Matthew 10:26 (ESV)

For nothing is hid that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light.

Luke 8:17 (RSV)

In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."² Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.³ Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.

Luke 12:1-3 (ESV)

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

1 Corinthians 4:5 (NIV)

Some might argue that these passages are referring only to the judgment of the *unsaved* at the Great White Throne. However, that argument cannot stand up. The final verse in the above series of verses makes that clear. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:5 that after this judgment, at which the secret motives and hidden events are exposed, each person will receive his *praise* from God.

That point alone shows that Paul is also referring to the Judgment Seat of Christ, since nobody is going to be praised or rewarded at all at the Great White Throne Judgment. Every person who goes to that judgment will be eternally condemned. Therefore Paul cannot be referring to the Great White Throne judgment.

So, this element of public exposure will be a part of our own judgment, even if we are believers. We might hope that those secret deeds and motives will not be exposed to other people and will be kept private, between ourselves and Jesus. We would all obviously prefer that. However the verses we have just seen appear to make it clear that it will be public.

At the very least, there is no biblical basis for saying that Jesus will keep the interview entirely private between you and Him. The Bible does not say that it will be private. On the contrary, what the Bible does say on this subject clearly suggests that it will be public. Moreover, it contains a large number of precedents in which we see Jesus saying things publicly, even when criticising people.

For example, Jesus' comments, even His rebukes, were not kept on a private, one to one, basis when He dictated His seven letters to the churches in Turkey in the Book of Revelation. What He had to say to each of them was also made known to each of the other churches. And all seven letters were then put in the Bible for all of us to see over the last 2000 years. Likewise, the sins and foolish remarks or mistakes of the apostles were recorded in the Bible for the whole world to see.

Note also this next passage from Matthew, from which we see that the Queen of the South (the Queen of Sheba) and also the people of Nineveh, will be able to witness the judgment of the people who lived in Israel in the first century, i.e. those who did not accept Jesus. But they lived about 1000 years after the Queen of Sheba's lifetime and many centuries after the Ninevites were around:

⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴² The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

Matthew 12:41-42 (NASB)

Jesus is implying that the Day of Judgment for those unbelieving Jews from the first century will be sufficiently public to enable the people of Nineveh and the Queen Sheba to be aware of what is said and done to them at the Great White Throne. The men of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba repented and believed, whereas many of those who heard Jesus in person did not.

So, the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites will be in a position to express a view as to the faults and failings of those first century Jewish people. In that case, they must be made aware of sufficient information to enable them to form a view about the lives of those people. If so, that must imply that at least the Great White Throne Judgment is conducted in public. Otherwise, how could they acquire such information? But what about the Judgment Seat of Christ? Can we be sure that that too will be conducted in public?

By way of analogy, we can point to a passage from the Old Testament where God reveals, through the prophet Nathan, how He will deal publicly with the sins committed privately by King David. This refers to David's adultery with Bathsheba and how he subsequently tried to cover up his sin. He even had Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, killed. Nathan sets out the various punishments that God will bring on David and he ends by stating that, whereas the sins were done in private, what God will do in response to those sins will be *done in public*:

⁹ Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uri'ah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uri'ah the Hittite to be your wife.' ¹¹ Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ¹² For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.'"

2 Samuel 12:9-12 (RSV)

Perhaps the clearest, and most troubling passage of all is the one from Luke 12 which we saw above, where Jesus Himself is speaking. Note also that He is not speaking to, or about, *unbelievers*. He is speaking to *His own disciples* and He is talking about what will happen to *them*, not just to others. If

so, He must be referring to the Judgment Seat of Christ, not the Great White Throne. We shall examine the passage again, together with verse one which sets the context and which makes it clear that Jesus was speaking to His own disciples as well as to the crowd.

Having said that, many of them in that crowd, and perhaps most of them, believed in Him. So they too were going to the Judgment Seat, not the Great White Throne. Even so, Jesus makes it plain that their judgment will still be conducted in public:

¹In the meantime, when so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they trod upon one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ²Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ³Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.

Luke 12:1-3 (RSV)

Some people recoil from the idea of there being any kind of public judgment at which other people will get to know what Jesus says about us and hear His rebukes and criticisms. They feel that God would never operate in that way and that it is even contrary to His nature to do anything which might embarrass us. But what evidence or authority can anybody bring forward in support of that assertion? I don't know of any.

In fact, if anything, the Bible itself suggests the very opposite. I am not referring to any express quotation on this point. I mean the general way that people are written about in the Bible, and how their sins and motives are revealed, not as an exception, but as a matter of course. Have you not noticed how brutally frank it is on so many occasions? The Bible regularly tells us about mistakes, sins, bad attitudes and bad motives of numerous people. It does so even with the great spiritual heroes of the Old and New Testaments.

For example, the life story of King David is told very frankly, warts and all. There is no apparent concern for how David might feel to have all believers worldwide for over 3000 years reading all about his sins and failings. The same is true of apostle Peter, Samson, Solomon, King Saul and most of the other Kings of both Israel and Judah. Even with the best of them, their dirty linen is washed in public within the pages of the Bible.

God was clearly willing to take that approach with them, such that for centuries afterwards people would know highly sensitive personal information about them. Therefore why should we assume that what Jesus has to say to us will be given in private where nobody else will ever hear? Surely the burden of proof is on those who do *not* believe that the judgments will be public to prove their case. So far, I have never even heard any persuasive evidence for that, let alone proof.

Looking at this from another direction, if the judgments are *not* going to be conducted in public then how could there be any meaningful recognition or *vindication* for those whom God wants to *honour*? We know that Jesus will vindicate all those who have been victims of lies, false accusations, misjudgments and miscarriages of justice. It is His nature to do so, but He has also promised expressly that He will:

***For the Lord will vindicate his people
and have compassion on his servants.
Psalm 135:14 (ESV)***

Surely, therefore, the good things that are said and the praise and vindication etc will have to be said in public. Otherwise, nobody would be able to hear any of it. But if we can find it easy enough to believe that our rewards and congratulations will be given out publicly, then why do so many of us refuse to believe that the *rebukes* will be equally public?

But what about the fact, as we saw earlier, that God forgives our sins, forgets them and removes them from us as far as the East is from the West? If He does all of that, how can Jesus rebuke or even criticise any of us for anything? Wouldn't anything that warrants rebuke or criticism have been a sin? If so, wouldn't it be treated as being off limits, because it has been paid for by His atoning death and then washed away and forgotten by God? We need to meet this objection head on because it creates a good deal of confusion.

The point is that what is removed from us and forgotten about is the *guilt* of our sin and the *penalty* it brings. All of that is certainly paid for by Jesus' death and taken away from us. So, Jesus will not raise with us our sins as such. That is He will not concern Himself with our sins, transgressions or iniquities *in their capacity as sins*. Neither will He attribute any guilt to us or seek to impose any penalty on us for those sins. In that sense they will be forgotten, because they will not count against us for either guilt or punishment and we are not subject to God's wrath as we would, otherwise, have been.

However, the purpose and rationale of the Judgment Seat of Christ has nothing to do with any of that. So, if Jesus raises with us some character fault or something that we did, or failed to do, which displeased Him, then there would be no inconsistency. He would be raising such matters not because they were to *sins* as such, but because they are the *factual back drop to His assessment of us*. They would need to be spoken to in order to make it possible for Him to explain the conclusions He has reached about the *fruit* we produced, the *faithfulness* we showed and so on.

How could Jesus meaningfully discuss our performance, faithfulness, productivity, courage, loyalty, obedience, etc if He could not mention any of the ways in which we failed Him, disobeyed Him or ignored Him? All of those things may have been sins, transgressions or iniquity, but they would also have a direct and material bearing on His assessment of our characters and of the way we used the time and gifts which He gave us. Thus they would have to be raised so that Jesus can tell us why He chose not to give us some particular reward, role or position and why He gave us lesser rewards, or no rewards, instead.

Despite His awesome power, Jesus will conduct the judgment in His capacity as a man, and as one who understands our frailty and the difficulties we faced

Some people are casual and unconcerned about the prospect of facing Jesus at the Judgment Seat and we have seen how wrong that attitude is. However, a smaller number make the opposite error and cannot see any scope for Jesus to praise or reward them. They may imagine Him as a harsh, intolerant and overly demanding Judge who expects perfection from everyone and has no understanding of our weakness, or of the pressures we faced.

But that is not how He is. He has been a human being *and He still is*. He has also faced all the same pressures we face. He therefore knows what it is to be weak, lonely, isolated, tempted, afraid, hungry, poor, homeless, abused and so on. He also knows what it is to feel weakness:

He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.
Hebrews 5:2 (RSV)

Strictly speaking, the verse quoted above, and the one set out below, have to do with how Jesus operates *now in His role as High Priest*. He intercedes for us to God, prays for us, and acts as our advocate to God when Satan accuses us. In all of that He bears in mind what He has learned from His own experiences living among us as one of us and knowing what it is to be weak and to suffer. However, these verses will surely also have a bearing on how Jesus will operate *in His capacity as our Judge*. When He performs that role we can be equally confident that He will bear in mind all those same points and mitigating factors:

⁷*In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear.* ⁸*Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered;*

Hebrews 5:7-8 (RSV)

Therefore that minority of people who worry about the Judgment Seat and who can only see their own inadequacies and faults, and how they have failed, may be in for a surprise. They will discover just how understanding Jesus is of the pressures and difficulties we faced and of how hard it is to be a disciple in this sinful, hostile world.

You also need to realise that your whole life is being recorded, as if it was on video. Let that affect how you live now

Imagine that you knew that you were being filmed by a CCTV camera during a football match or public demonstration and that it will pick up everything you do and say. You would not be likely to steal or break a window or assault someone. You would hold back from doing anything wrong, even if you had intended to. Only a fool would break the law while being filmed, because they would inevitably be seen and then punished later.

Even if you could get away with it for a while, the police would be knocking on your door in the next few days. You would then have your actions replayed on screen in front of a judge or magistrates. The only thing that might tempt you to go ahead and commit the crime is the hope that perhaps the CCTV isn't working, or that it is only a dummy camera, or that maybe nobody will ever bother to look at it.

But what if there was no doubt about it whatsoever? What if it was a complete certainty that nothing would go unrecorded or unwatched? Then surely you would behave differently? But that is exactly the position we are all in. God sees and hears everything and He misses nothing at all, even if it may seem that He is not reacting to our sin at the moment. Whether we are a Christian or a non-Christian, we will all have to answer one day for everything we say, do and think. Therefore we need to live every moment of our lives in the certain knowledge that from the moment of our conversion onwards:

- a) it is all being watched and recorded by God
- b) it is going to be replayed and commented on at the Judgment
- c) very probably that Judgment will be done publicly, such that many other people, and perhaps everyone, will see it
- d) if we are a *non*-Christian then what has been recorded about us will be the basis for our condemnation and eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire. But if we are a real Christian then the record of what we have done will lead to public recognition and praise and the receiving of rewards. Alternatively, it will lead to an equally public rebuke and loss of rewards.
- e) Moreover, any such rebuke, demotion, loss of rewards, or loss of status, could quite properly be classified as *punishment*. That is the case even though none of those things involve *condemnation*. Indeed, how could such sanctions *not* be classified as punishments? To refuse to use that word to refer to the sanctions that will be applied to us would be an argument over little more than semantics. By any reasonable definition those things are punishments. (See chapter five for a fuller discussion of this question of whether there will be any kind of 'punishment' for real Christians)

We see a small illustration of this principle of the judgment (and punishment) of a believer in the life of a man called Gehazi. He was the servant of the prophet Elisha. Moreover he continued to work

for Elisha, after the incident described below, and even after God punished him for it. He did something dishonest because he mistakenly thought that he could get away with it.

The incident began when Elisha healed a Syrian General called Naaman who had leprosy. Naaman wanted to give Elisha a financial reward for what he had done, but he refused to accept anything. However his servant, Gehazi, saw his chance and was tempted to get that money for himself. He therefore ran after Naaman and lied to him, saying that Elisha had changed his mind and would accept a gift after all:

¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. ¹⁵ Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant." ¹⁶ But he said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none." And he urged him to take it, but he refused.

2 Kings 5:14-16 (ESV)

¹⁹ He said to him, "Go in peace." But when Naaman had gone from him a short distance, ²⁰ Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "See, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian, in not accepting from his hand what he brought. As the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him." ²¹ So Gehazi followed Naaman. And when Naaman saw someone running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him and said, "Is all well?" ²² And he said, "All is well. My master has sent me to say, 'There have just now come to me from the hill country of Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing.'" ²³ And Naaman said, "Be pleased to accept two talents." And he urged him and tied up two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of clothing, and laid them on two of his servants. And they carried them before Gehazi. ²⁴ And when he came to the hill, he took them from their hand and put them in the house, and he sent the men away, and they departed.

2 Kings 5:19-24 (ESV)

But Gehazi didn't actually get away with anything. The whole incident had been revealed to the prophet Elisha and, of course, God had seen it all too. Therefore, when Gehazi got back to the house, he had Elisha waiting for him and there was a confrontation:

²⁵ When he went in and stood before his master, Elisha asked him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" "Your servant didn't go anywhere," Gehazi answered. ²⁶ But Elisha said to him, "Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money or to accept clothes—or olive groves and vineyards, or flocks and herds, or male and female slaves? ²⁷ Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever." Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and his skin was leprous—it had become as white as snow.

2 Kings 5:25-27 (NIV)

On this occasion God moved immediately to judge and punish Gehazi, by giving him leprosy. Perhaps God chose to be particularly swift and severe with Gehazi because he was in a very privileged position. He knew Elisha personally and therefore must also have had a very good knowledge of the Scriptures. Presumably that made him more accountable than most of us are. I don't know. The reasons are not stated. God doesn't usually judge people so quickly. Normally His judgment comes later in our lives, or else after death. But whenever it may be, we can be sure that judgment of one kind or another will inevitably come at some point.

The Judgment Seat of Christ will take place in Heaven. It will happen after the rapture of the Church, but before all real believers return to the Earth, in their resurrection bodies, to take up the roles and positions assigned to them. Surely it would be strange for Jesus to allocate very different roles to

each of us and to give us particular ranks, positions, and job titles, without ever explaining *why* He has made those decisions and assessments.

He will want to tell us what factors, good or bad, caused Him to select for us the role/position/title etc that we are given. So He will need to speak to explain His decisions. But it would surely be a strange appraisal if it did not contain anything negative or critical? How could He even announce, let alone explain, His widely differing assessments and choices about each of us if He limited Himself only to praising and rewarding us and was not willing to say anything critical?

The *sins and transgressions* which have been confessed in this life will not be brought up or rebuked at the Judgment Seat. But they will not be any basis for rewards either.

If we have confessed a sin or transgression in this life then we can be sure that we will receive God's forgiveness for it. He has promised to do so. Therefore it will not be held against us in terms of guilt. He will take away the penalty of our sin and also remove the unrighteousness from us:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9 (ESV)

Not only does God cleanse us from that sin, He even goes so far as to *forget it completely*. That is He no longer holds it against us:

"I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.
Isaiah 43:25 (RSV)

For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."
Hebrews 8:12 (RSV)

The writer to the Hebrews also confirms this:

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."
Hebrews 10:17 (ESV)

If God forgets our sins, washes them away and removes them from us then, logically, it surely follows that *Jesus will not raise those sins with us again at the Judgment Seat, or rebuke us for them*. If He did, then what the Bible says about God forgiving and forgetting our sins would make no sense.

That is a powerful argument for us keeping short accounts with God. It would seem that we can get things dealt with now, and put out of the way, such that there is then no need for Jesus to rebuke us at the Judgment Seat, or even to mention those things at all, because we have already raised them with Him voluntarily.

Imagine a situation at school or work where you have caused a problem or damage of some kind. What if you were to write a letter of apology to the Headmaster or to your Managing Director owning up to the mistake, taking full responsibility, apologizing for it and perhaps asking for further guidance or training to help you avoid any recurrence of that misconduct in future.

Let's also imagine that the Headmaster/Managing Director had already been planning to call you in for a meeting at which he would have questioned, rebuked, and even disciplined you. But then he gets your letter of apology, which was sent to him *on your own initiative, without him having to raise it with you first*. Would you agree that the arrival of that letter would completely change the atmosphere, tone and content of that meeting when it later takes place?

The Headmaster/Managing Director might have been intending to give you a rough time in order to wake you up and get you to realise how much harm you had caused and how foolishly/recklessly/selfishly you behaved. But when he sees your letter, demonstrating sincere self-examination, an awareness of your faults, and a real determination to take advice and to change, he will entirely alter his plans. The whole agenda for that meeting is likely to be rearranged.

Instead of needing to tell you off, he can simply offer you advice on how to improve. Instead of having to convince you of your blameworthiness by presenting you with evidence of your wrongdoing, he can dispense with all of that, because you have already freely admitted it. The meeting could even end up as an encouraging pep-talk rather than a cross-examination or a disciplinary hearing.

That is a reasonably accurate analogy for how our voluntary confessing of our sins to God here and now, can alter the tone and content of our meeting with Jesus at the Judgment Seat. Why would He want, or need, to rebuke you for something that you have already admitted and apologised for? Indeed, it was you who ‘reported’ it to Him of your own free will. You may even have gone further and asked for His help to change your future conduct, not just His forgiveness for your past behaviour.

Jesus can therefore afford to handle you very differently. He might well leave rebuke and correction off the agenda entirely, on the basis that that your confession, or ‘letter of apology’, has said it all, such that He can consider the matter closed.

We should therefore go to God daily to confess, and repent of, every sin that we know about. However, this ongoing, daily confession and cleansing by God must not be confused with the total, once and for all, across the board, forgiveness that we receive, all in one go, when we are born again, i.e. when we are *justified*. That overall forgiveness which happens at our conversion applies to *all our sins*, past, present and future. Please refer to Book One for a full explanation of justification.

The confession spoken of in 1 John 1:9, is aimed at people who are *already saved* (i.e. justified). Thus they have already been forgiven in that general sense. But John is still urging them to confess their sins, day by day, in order to maintain close fellowship with one another and with God. That is another reason why confessing our sins regularly is so important. It restores and maintains intimacy between us and God and also between us and other people.

However, as we have just seen, the confession described in 1 John 1: 9 also has relevance beyond the immediate daily context. It is not solely about maintaining personal intimacy with God day by day, by regular, ongoing repentance. It seems clear that the extent to which we have voluntarily confessed our sins now, during this life, even after we become believers, will also have a major bearing on *how Jesus deals with us at the Judgment Seat*. In particular it will affect the degree to which He will find it necessary to raise matters with us, or even to rebuke us.

So, if our sins are confessed and dealt with now, because we voluntarily raise them ourselves, then there is good reason to think that they need not feature in His future assessment of us. At least, any critical comments that He does make to us on that Day would not be about *those things which we have already confessed* to God and which He has therefore dealt with.

In relation to such things as those, we will be shown mercy. A major part of that mercy is that it seems very probable that Jesus will see no need to raise those matters with us Himself. However, He *would have needed to do so* if we had not freely confessed them beforehand:

***Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,
but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.
Proverbs 28:13 (ESV)***

Here is an example of King David engaging in confession of the type we are speaking of. Note that he is doing this after he has *already been saved*, not in order to become saved. Indeed, he is actually saying these things while He is reigning as God's anointed King of Israel, writing large portions of the Bible, and being described as “*a man after [God's] own heart.*” Thus there is no possibility of him being classified as an unsaved person who is in the process of being converted. Yet, despite all that, look at how David speaks of his own sin and how important confession is to him:

³*For when I kept silent,
my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.*

⁴*For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.*

⁵*I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.*

Psalm 32:3-5 (ESV)

Although matters which have been sincerely confessed to God and repented of will not be criticised at Jesus' future judgment of us, we cannot expect them to be any basis for praise or reward either. Jesus will only reward those actions, words, thoughts, attitudes, etc which *pleased* Him and which were done, thought or said in *obedience* to Him.

Nothing else can be a proper basis for any reward, least of all our sins, which have been forgiven and forgotten. So far as those forgiven sins are concerned, all we can ask for is that they will not count against us, or not even be mentioned at all. They certainly cannot be used in our favour.

The Judgment Seat of Christ is not something that we can just assume will automatically and inevitably go well. Many of us will do badly because the fact is that some of the things we do are bad, even after we are converted:

“For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad”.

2 Corinthians 5: 10 (NIV)

Therefore, instead of being complacent about this Day of Judgment, we need to prepare for it diligently. We should do so in much the same way as we might if we were an MP and we knew that the Prime Minister wanted to see us at the end of this parliamentary term to assess our performance and decide what, if any, Government role should be assigned to us after the next election. Most of us, if facing such an assessment in 3-4 years' time, would find it hard to forget about it. Our minds would regularly be focused on it, perhaps even every day.

But surely, such an interview as that would be of minimal importance compared to the prospect of a face to face encounter with The Lord Jesus Christ? He is all of the following things and more besides: *Messiah, King of Israel, King of kings, Lord of lords, Lord of Hosts, Creator, High Priest, and Name above all names.* He is also the One who is deemed worthy to sit at the right hand of God the Father. Those are just a few of His many titles and roles. Therefore when we speak of a one to one meeting with Him on that Day of Judgment, we need to remind ourselves of who and what He really is. And doing so ought to make us tremble.

It seems clear that we will not all be equal in Heaven or on the new Earth. We will each be appointed to different levels of authority and honour and will have different roles.

This is yet another controversial topic. People tend to get quite touchy if you suggest that we will not all be equal in Heaven. But the Bible makes it clear that we won't be. Neither will we be equal when

we return to the Earth for the Millennium and for the eternal state on the new Earth and in the new Jerusalem.

The stance taken by most of us is not to think about this question at all. However, if you do raise it then most people seem to assume that we will all be equal in every way after we die. But that is a huge assumption to make, and an odd one. At any rate, the Bible never says anything to support it. In fact it says quite a lot to the contrary. For example, let's begin by looking at this verse:

For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.
Luke 14:11 (RSV)

This is a statement made by Jesus which has important implications for the question we are now examining. We know that some people are going to be exalted and some will be humbled. But how can that mean anything unless those two groups of people are going to have *different levels* of honour, status, role, position, rank etc? It surely follows therefore that there are going to be distinctions and differentials between us after we die.

Perhaps you might argue that the exalting or humbling that Jesus was referring to is all to occur during this present life, not in the future. Certainly it does also apply here and now, but I can see no valid basis for limiting its application *only* to this present life. If that was the case then many other passages would make no sense. Let's look at some.

Consider first this passage from Matthew 19 where Jesus responds to a comment from Peter about what the apostles had given up for Him and what they might be entitled to expect from Him in return:

27 Then Peter said in reply, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?" 28 Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. 30 But many that are first will be last, and the last first.

Matthew 19: 27-30 (RSV)

Even from this short passage, a number of points emerge:

- a) the apostles are going to sit on 12 thrones
- b) they will judge the 12 tribes of Israel
- c) those who have made great sacrifices will receive a hundredfold more in the life to come
- d) many that are first now will be last
- e) many that are last now will be first

How can any of these five things happen in the future if we are all going to be equal? If we were then the last two passages quoted above would be particularly meaningless. How can there be people in *first* and *last* positions if we are all going to be the same? Moreover how can it make any sense for the 12 apostles to sit on "*thrones*" and to "*judge*" the 12 tribes of Israel if they will *not* have any power, authority, status, jurisdiction etc? At least in those terms, and perhaps in other ways too, the apostles will be different from, and higher than, the rest of us.

Likewise, if some people are going to "*receive a hundredfold more in the life to come*" then surely it must follow that they will have some kind of assets, property or wealth of some description which the rest of us, who did not make so many sacrifices, will not have. So, at the very least, we will not all be

equal in terms of what we *possess*. If there is this proportionality to the rewards given, i.e. that people will receive a hundredfold, then those who gave up 10 units in this life will end up with 1000 units in the next life. On the same basis, those who gave up 50 units will be given 5000.

So, even *within* the category of those people who receive this hundredfold rate of return, there is still going to be inequality because some of them will have sacrificed more or less than others. Thus that multiplier will apply to very different numbers in terms of the scale or magnitude of what we gave up for Jesus

If some of us are going to be *first* and others will be *last* then there clearly must be a hierarchy of some kind. If not, those words would mean nothing. Obviously, the factors which place a person at the top or the bottom will be different from the worldly criteria which we use in this life. Nevertheless, there will still have to be a hierarchy of some kind. That is the point. Consider this passage from Mark chapter ten:

³⁵ *Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."*

³⁶ *"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.*

³⁷ *They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."*

³⁸ *"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"*

³⁹ *"We can," they answered.*

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,"⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

⁴¹ *When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.⁴² Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Mark 10:35-45 (NIV)

From this passage we learn that:

- a) there will actually be two very special people who will be chosen for the ultimate honour, namely to sit at Jesus' left and right hand side when He reigns as King.
- b) There will be some people who will be "*first*", by which Jesus surely means that they will be higher, more senior, more honoured, more authoritative etc than others.
- c) Those people who are elevated to these higher positions which He calls being 'first' will be selected on the basis of the degree to which they were servants, i.e. how well they served.

Of course, the factors, characteristics and actions which lead to a person's promotion in the Kingdom of God are very different from those which apply in this world. But the operative point is that it is confirmed that there is such a thing as *promotion*. That fact alone shows that there will be people in higher and lower positions. And they will have differing levels of honour, status, possessions and wealth.

Jesus Himself was promoted by God the Father to the very highest place and it was done on the basis of merit. It follows that the same principle of promotion on merit will determine our future position in the Kingdom

If you want to see the ultimate example of a man being promoted on the basis of His self-sacrifice and flawless service, then we need to look at Jesus Himself. We saw in the earlier passage in Matthew 19 that Jesus is going to “*sit on His glorious throne.*” We also know from Philippians that He is going to be elevated by God to have the very highest place, such that He will be the “*Name which is above every name*”:

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11 (RSV)

The above passage contains a really important insight into how God will promote and reward us. We are told of how Jesus: “*emptied Himself,..... took the form of a servant,..... humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.*” What few people seem to notice is the very next phrase which says: “***Therefore*** God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name.....” In other words, He was promoted *as a result* of His actions and attitude.

The point is that God promoted Jesus in these ways *because* He had humbled Himself etc. There is cause and effect at work here. God the Father did not automatically promote Jesus to be the Name above all names simply because He was the Son of God. It had nothing to do with His existing divine status and identity. He was promoted in these ways, and appointed to these roles, *because of what He had done and how He had lived*, not least the fact that he was the first and only man ever to perfectly obey the Law of Moses. He achieved all that even before He went to cross.

My argument is that it is reasonable for us to infer from the way in which Jesus was promoted that the very same principle applies to us and will operate at the Judgment Seat of Christ. That is we will be promoted, or not promoted, based on how we lived, what we did and what attitudes we had. People tend to shy away from using the word *merit* at all. It is a word that most evangelical Christians don't like. It has a ring about it that suggests being saved by our own good works rather than by grace through faith.

But, as we have seen, we are not talking here about how we are saved in the sense of being *justified*. Our present discussion is only about the basis on which Jesus will reward us for our actions and attitudes *after we have already been justified*.

Jesus is also going to inherit the whole world, because He has been appointed by God the Father to be the “*heir of all things*”

In addition to all the exalted titles that He has been given, Jesus has also been made the “*heir of all things*”. In other words, Jesus is going to inherit the whole world, indeed the whole universe. It will all be given to Him and He will rule over all of it:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

Hebrews 1:1-2 (RSV)

The entire creation is going to be placed in subjection to Jesus. He will reign over everybody and everything in the universe and His reign will be eternal:

²⁰ which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; ²² and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:20-23 (RSV)

⁵ For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶ It has been testified somewhere,

*“What is man that thou art mindful of him,
or the son of man, that thou carest for him?”*

*⁷ Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels,
thou hast crowned him with glory and honor,*

⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.

Hebrews 2:5-8 (RSV)

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

Revelation 11:15 (RSV)

So, it is clear that everything is going to be given to Jesus. He is the heir and everything will be His. Therefore it will all be His to administer, divide out, or give away, as He sees fit. He will distribute power, positions and possessions to those who are going to rule and reign under Him in His Kingdom. But who will these people be? Does it mean *all* genuine believers, or only *some* of them?

The Bible also says that there are going to be some people who will be fellow heirs with Jesus of the Kingdom which has been promised to Him

Jesus is *the* heir. He inherits everything, with absolute title. However, we also know that at least some of His followers are going to be “heirs” alongside Him:

Listen, my beloved brethren. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?

James 2:5 (RSV)

James does not make clear whether this status of being “*heirs of the Kingdom*” applies to *all* genuine Christians or only to *some*. However, the implication is that it is more limited and selective, because James says that God has chosen “*those who are poor in the world*”. That would not seem to apply to every believer, nor even to every genuine and faithful believer. It seems to be referring to those who have given up much and avoided worldliness in this life. There would seem to be at least an element of *merit* involved in the selection. Indeed, in this regard we have God the Father’s promotion of Jesus Himself as a precedent.

Jesus is going to be promoted to the highest place not because of *who He is* but because of *what He did*. He has *earned* the highest place on the basis of merit. My point is that the very same principle will apply to all of us. We will be promoted or demoted according to what we did in this life and how

we served. Likewise, this status of being an heir of the Kingdom alongside Jesus would seem to fit in with that overall pattern, or principle, of the Kingdom being a meritocracy.

If we were to divide up the whole Church into groups, at least in the West, then the majority probably does not know much, if anything, about the ‘inheritance’ that is available to Christians or about being an ‘heir’ alongside Christ. Those who do know something about it tend not to give it much thought. At any rate, it is rarely emphasized, or even spoken about at all. Clearly, that is the wrong approach.

There is a smaller group which does think about the prospect of being an heir but they make a different mistake. That is to assume that every one of us will *inherit automatically*, simply because we are Christians. That would not seem to be the case, as far as I can see. Consider this next passage from Romans:

¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!”¹⁶ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:15-17 (RSV)

This passage speaks of us being “*children of God*” and “*fellow heirs with Christ*”. However, there is an important condition within verse 17 above that few people seem to notice. Or, if they do, they don’t speak about it much. That is where it says “...*provided we suffer with Him.....*” What does that mean? Is this status of being a “*fellow heir with Christ*” only available to those who have suffered with Christ in some way? It would seem so.

The next question we need to ask is what exactly is meant by the word ‘*suffer*’? What kind of suffering and how intense or prolonged does it need to be in order to satisfy the condition? I don’t see any clear answer to that in the Bible.

Nevertheless, it does seem clear that in order to become a “*fellow heir with Christ*” we need to have become sufficiently identified with Christ as to arouse the opposition of this world system and the worldly people in it, such that we suffer at their hands in some way.

Presumably it does not require that we become martyrs, because the passage makes no mention of that. It refers only to our needing to “*suffer with Him*”. That can and does occur regularly for many believers, without going so far as to have to die for their faith.

I do not feel able to be more specific than that. It may be that Jesus will give a very broad definition to the word ‘*suffer*’ and include those who have only experienced persecution and opposition in small or occasional ways. Or it may be that He will define it more narrowly, setting the bar at a much higher level. We shall have to wait and see.

What we can say is that suffering with and for Christ, by reason of our close allegiance to Him, should not be seen as a wholly negative thing. At the very least, such suffering is not unproductive and may well be the key to our making real progress in our walk as disciples, especially if it is our aim to be heirs alongside Christ.

At least some of us are going to “*reign*” with Jesus at various levels of authority

In addition to being heirs, some of us are going to reign with Jesus. It is not only the 12 apostles who are going to do so. There will be others too who will also reign, presumably at many different levels of seniority, if we meet His conditions and if he is pleased with our service for Him:

***and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”***

Revelation 5:10 (ESV)

Here again, in 2 Timothy, apostle Paul appears to link reigning with Christ in His future Kingdom with our having previously endured, or even died, with Him in this life:

¹¹ The saying is sure:

If we have died with him, we shall also live with him;

¹² if we endure, we shall also reign with him;

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

2 Timothy 2:11-12 (RSV)

What exactly does it mean to “die with Him”? Is it to be taken literally, or does it refer to our dying metaphorically, such as where we die to self and crucify our flesh nature? It would seem to have a broad definition because the very use of the word ‘endure’ in verse 12 above implies that we can become qualified to reign with Jesus even if we only endure rather than die for Him. That point is supported by this next passage, in which Jesus Himself says, in the book of Revelation, that certain believers, i.e. those who are “victorious” and who “do my will to the end” will be given “authority over nations”:

***To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—
²⁷ that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I
have received authority from my Father.***

Revelation 2:26-27 (NIV)

Those who are chosen to reign in these ways will begin by reigning during the 1000 year Millennium which will begin when Jesus returns to the Earth:

The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

2 Timothy 2:11-12 (ESV)

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:4-6 (ESV)

However it would seem that this arrangement, by which at least some people will rule and reign, will also continue on, beyond the 1000 year Millennium Kingdom and into the eternal state, when a new Heaven and a new Earth are created. At any rate, the Bible says nothing to suggest that the status of being an heir and of reigning with Jesus is only for the Millennium. One assumes therefore that it will continue for eternity. If so, then that underlines even more emphatically the immense importance of doing well at the Judgment Seat of Christ, because so much depends on it, for the duration of the Millennium and presumably also for eternity thereafter.

What does it mean to ‘reign’?

The Bible tells us very little about what is actually involved in reigning and what exactly it will mean. One therefore has to fall back to some extent, on our understanding of what it means to reign in this life. On that basis, it will presumably involve similar concepts of having authority, the right to judge and the power to make executive decisions.

Of course, those who reign in God’s Kingdom will not do so in the same proud, worldly, sinful way that so many people rule and reign in this life. It will be operated in a godly way and will involve servant leadership. Those who reign will have a deep and genuine pastoral concern for those whom they lead.

Nevertheless, having emphasized all of that, reigning will still involve the exercise of real authority and power. Given that Jesus Himself will be reigning as an absolute monarch, not as an elected politician, He will choose to delegate to His subordinates in much the same way as any absolute monarch would. That is He will pass on delegated authority which will be effectively absolute.

The crucial difference is that those who reign under Him will be careful to do His will, not their own. They will be people of real power with the ability to judge and to make real decisions. Yet they will be careful to exercise that power as Jesus would have done, and in accordance with what they know His will to be.

Where, how, and over whom would we potentially be able to reign?

There is good reason to expect that in the Millennium, and even in the eternal state thereafter, the world will be organised along national lines, as it is now. At any rate, we know that there will be Gentile nations, because we are told that they will come up to Jerusalem to worship, for example in Zechariah:

¹⁶ Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. ¹⁷ And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain on them. ¹⁸ If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the Lord smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. ¹⁹ This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.

Zechariah 14:16-19 (NASB)

Jeremiah speaks in the same way:

At that time they will call Jerusalem ‘The Throne of the Lord,’ and all the nations will be gathered to it, to Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord; nor will they walk anymore after the stubbornness of their evil heart.

Jeremiah 3:17 (NASB)

So, there will be distinct nations with national boundaries, just as we have now. Therefore, it would appear that we will each live within particular countries and also within villages, towns and cities. Those places, large or small, will all need to be governed in some way and one assumes that it will involve similar kinds of power as we see being exercised by those who govern us now.

The Earth will be populated by those saved believers, in their resurrection bodies, who survive the Great Tribulation. They will live on into the Millennium and they will have children and steadily repopulate the Earth. By the end of the 1000 years, the world’s population is likely to be very large indeed, probably larger than it is now.

In the early part of the Millennium those people, who will be living in their mortal bodies, will all be believers. Therefore, every person on Earth at the start of the Millennium will be saved. However, as time goes by, more and more of them will refuse to repent or to follow Jesus, even though He is physically present on the Earth. We know that because, at the end of the Millennium, a proportion of them will be incited by Satan to rebel against Jesus, until He crushes their rebellion:

⁷ When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. ⁹ And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Revelation 20:7-10 (NASB)

At any rate, the point is that during the Millennium one group of people over whom the Church, or at least parts of it, could reign, would be these believers who are still in their mortal bodies. They will be saved believers, at least at the start of the Millennium, but they will not be part of that privileged group which we call '*the Church*'.

Resurrected Christians, in their eternal, indestructible resurrection bodies, will also be living on the Earth, alongside those believers who are still be in their mortal bodies. They will all live alongside each other, the resurrected and the mortal, in each of the nations. Some of those who have been resurrected will be appointed by Jesus to govern some specified area, or to exercise some particular function.

However, the implication is that they cannot *all* reign, because if that was so, then over whom would anybody reign? Just as at present, there will be rulers and those who are ruled over. Therefore those reigning, even if they are numerous in absolute terms, would still be a minority, just as they are now. How could it be otherwise?

However, authority will not only be exercised over geographical areas, with people appointed to lead villages, towns, countries and nations. There will also be a need for people to lead and have authority over particular functions or offices, just as we have today. So, somebody will have to be appointed by Jesus to be in charge of transport, education, agriculture and so on. There will need to be similar functions at local or regional levels too.

Thus there will be scope for vast numbers of people to at least be put in charge of something, at some level. That's because there will be so many different things to do, just as there are now. Nonetheless, it would seem inevitable that many of us will not reign at all, or will only reign at some junior, local or subordinate level. That is they will exert authority but only under others who are at higher levels.

At the very top, as the leading nation on Earth, will be Israel. That is where Jesus will reign, as King of Israel and of the whole Earth and universe. However, the resurrected King David will serve as Jesus' deputy. And, as we saw earlier in the passage from Matthew 19:27-30, the 12 apostles will also serve as rulers of the 12 tribes of Israel. They will presumably be serving under King David, i.e. they will be junior to him.

Let's look briefly at what the Bible says about the future roles of the resurrected King David. He will reign in Jerusalem with the title of '*prince*' and will perform a number of important functions. For example, he will serve in the new Temple that will be built in the Millennium. But the LORD Himself, i.e. Jesus, will be in overall command:

²² therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another. ²³ “Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the Lord have spoken.

²⁵ “I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. ²⁶ I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing. ²⁷ Also the tree of the field will yield its fruit and the earth will yield its increase, and they will be secure on their land. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them.

²⁸ They will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid. ²⁹ I will establish for them a renowned planting place, and they will not again be victims of famine in the land, and they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore. ³⁰ Then they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people,” declares the Lord God.

Ezekiel 34:22-30 (NASB)

Jeremiah also addresses this issue about David:

⁸ “And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord of hosts, that I will break the yoke from off their neck, and I will burst their bonds, and strangers shall no more make servants of them. ⁹ But they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.

Jeremiah 30:8-9 (RSV)

From the book of Isaiah we also learn that:

“...the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before his elders he will manifest his glory.”

Isaiah 24:23(b) (RSV)

The passage above from Isaiah is a clear reference to Jesus Himself. It is He who will be the King in Israel. It does not mean David. Next, in Ezekiel, we are told that David will serve as a prince over the people of Israel forever:

²² and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms. ²³ They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God.

²⁴ “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them. ²⁵ They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons’ sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever. ²⁶ I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. ²⁷ My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. ²⁸ And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.””

Ezekiel 37:22-28 (NASB)

Some people think that the person referred to as David, or as the prince, is actually Jesus Himself, i.e. reigning in His capacity as the Son of David. However, that cannot be right. The book of Ezekiel

says many things about this person which make it quite clear that it is not referring to Jesus but to David himself. For one thing, we are told of the various functions that David will perform in the Temple. These are clearly not suitable for Jesus to perform:

It shall be the prince's part to provide the burnt offerings, the grain offerings and the drink offerings, at the feasts, on the new moons and on the sabbaths, at all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel; he shall provide the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering and the peace offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel.

Ezekiel 45:17 (NASB)

We know that the person referred to as the prince is not Jesus because we are told that he also provides an offering *for himself*, which Jesus would have no need or reason to do. Moreover, the offering is made *to* the LORD, not *by* the LORD:

²¹ ***“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall have the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten. ²² On that day the prince shall provide for himself and all the people of the land a bull for a sin offering. ²³ During the seven days of the feast he shall provide as a burnt offering to the Lord seven bulls and seven rams without blemish on every day of the seven days, and a male goat daily for a sin offering. ²⁴ He shall provide as a grain offering an ephah with a bull, an ephah with a ram and a hin of oil with an ephah. ²⁵ In the seventh month, on the fifteenth day of the month, at the feast, he shall provide like this, seven days for the sin offering, the burnt offering, the grain offering and the oil.”***

Ezekiel 45:21-25 (NASB)

Moreover, we are told that the prince will *worship*, which would be entirely appropriate for David to do, but not really for Jesus:

The prince shall enter by way of the porch of the gate from outside and stand by the post of the gate. Then the priests shall provide his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate and then go out; but the gate shall not be shut until the evening.

Ezekiel 46:2 (NASB)

The position is made even clearer by this next passage which refers to the prince's *inheritance* and to the fact that he has *sons* who share that inheritance with him. Therefore it must mean the resurrected David and his resurrected sons, because Jesus has no sons to share anything with:

¹⁶ ***“Thus says the Lord God, “If the prince gives a gift out of his inheritance to any of his sons, it shall belong to his sons; it is their possession by inheritance. ¹⁷ But if he gives a gift from his inheritance to one of his servants, it shall be his until the year of liberty; then it shall return to the prince. His inheritance shall be only his sons’; it shall belong to them. ¹⁸ The prince shall not take from the people’s inheritance, thrusting them out of their possession; he shall give his sons inheritance from his own possession so that My people will not be scattered, anyone from his possession.””***

Ezekiel 46:16-18 (NASB)

The strongest argument of all is that throughout chapter 48, we are told of areas of land which will be allocated to David the prince and also of various other parcels of land that will be given to others. This clearly means David, not Jesus, since He inherits the whole universe, not just particular parcels of land, however large they might be:

²¹ ***“The remainder shall be for the prince, on the one side and on the other of the holy allotment and of the property of the city; in front of the 25,000 cubits of the allotment toward the east border and westward in front of the 25,000 toward the west border, alongside the portions, it shall be for the prince. And the holy allotment and the sanctuary of the house shall be in the middle of it. ²² Exclusive of the property of the Levites and the property of the city, which are in the middle of that***

which belongs to the prince, everything between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin shall be for the prince.

Ezekiel 48:21-22 (NASB)

We see therefore that the resurrected David will have a very major role to play, ruling and reigning over the Jewish people as the Deputy to Jesus, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords. David's duties and privileges will clearly be extensive. The position will be similar for those resurrected Christians who will be appointed to rule and reign at various levels, and in various places, throughout the Gentile world. So, David's appointment to this role illustrates how we too have the opportunity to be given positions of power and authority, albeit at a lower level than David.

It will be fascinating to watch all of that take shape and to see these great figures from the history of the Church who will be resurrected and given leading roles in the Gentiles nations. One assumes that men like John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, William Carey, James Hudson Taylor and many others are likely to be in high positions. That said, we can't be absolutely sure, even for them, and will need to find out when the time comes.

There will also be many other believers whose lives impressed Jesus even though we have never heard of them. We may therefore be in for some real surprises when we find out who our new leaders are going to be and also those who are *not* going to be in senior positions in the Kingdom of God, even though they were famous Christians in this life.

Commendations and rewards of various levels and types will be given to those who please Jesus, by their obedience, faithfulness and fruit

We know that some people are going to be rewarded and commended, by Jesus:

*The nations raged,
but your wrath came,
and the time for the dead to be judged,
and for rewarding your servants the prophets and saints,
and those who fear your name,
both small and great,
and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."*

Revelation 11:18 (ESV)

For it is not the man who commends himself that is accepted, but the man whom the Lord commends.

2 Corinthians 10:18 (RSV)

It would seem to be self-evident that some people will be commended more than others. At any rate, there is no reason to suppose that the commendation will be the same for everyone. The Bible never says so. Indeed, it would be extraordinary if it did, because we have obviously all done different things and have served with differing levels of faithfulness and fruitfulness. For example, consider what Jesus says about those who are reviled and persecuted on account of Him:

¹¹ "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:11-12 (RSV)

Surely, nobody will argue that in this life all Christians are equally reviled and persecuted. Indeed, such things are not experienced at all by some of us. Some Christians face terrible persecution, and even martyrdom, whereas others face much less or even none. For Jesus' words to be meaningful it

must follow that differing levels of reward and authority will be given to each of us, dependent on the nature, intensity and duration of the persecution we have endured on His behalf.

As with the many other types of reward, this one which is referred to in Matthew chapter five above, must be given out at different levels. Moreover, given that the reward itself is described as “*great*”, there is evidently going to be a major difference between those who receive it in full and those who receive none of it at all. Otherwise, why say that it is great?

So far I have focused mainly on those aspects of the Judgment that ought to cause us to be apprehensive. I have done so partly to redress the balance, because most churches do not even mention, let alone emphasise, any of this. In so far as they ever do mention judgment, they generally promote complacency about it rather than reverence or concern. However, we do need to have an element of fear about the prospect of being judged. We are *meant* to be apprehensive to some degree.

Nevertheless, as well as fearing the judgment, we also need to emphasise the fact that rewards of many different types and levels will be awarded to those who are deemed to deserve them. We must try to look at it from both directions, considering both the negative and the positive aspects. If not we will become unbalanced.

So, let’s consider several more verses where we are assured that rewards are going to be given to some of us. Note how often this issue of rewards comes up in the Scriptures. Even this brief selection of verses in the pages that follow is enough to justify regarding it as a major theme.

*A wicked man earns deceptive wages,
but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward
Proverbs 11:18 (RSV)*

*But you, be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work.
2 Chronicles 15:7 (NASB)*

This positive dimension to the Judgment Seat of Christ, i.e. the prospect of receiving rewards, ought also to interest and motivate us. It is an essential part of God's generous character, as well as being an aspect of His justice, that He wants to reward people where rewards are due. He does not do it reluctantly, but willingly, because it is His nature to do so. We even see it early in the book of Genesis in His dealings with Abraham (then called Abram):

*After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."
Genesis 15:1 (RSV)*

So, Abraham was told the same as Jesus told the disciples, i.e. that the reward will be ‘great’. This point is repeated again by King David in the Psalms:

*Oh, how great is Your goodness,
Which You have laid up for those who fear You,
Which You have prepared for those who trust in You
In the presence of the sons of men!
Psalm 31:19 (NKJV)*

The prophet Isaiah also speaks of there being rewards:

*Behold, the Lord God will come with might,
With His arm ruling for Him.
Behold, His reward is with Him*

***And His recompense before Him.
Isaiah 40:10 (NASB)***

We are also told about how God rewards people in the letter to the Hebrews:

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV)

Jesus Himself also tells us from His own mouth of how He will recompense or repay *every man*, both good and bad, for their deeds in this life:

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds.

Matthew 16:27 (NASB)

Jesus tells us that this will apply to every man. He does not limit it only to the wicked. Therefore, every single one of us, without exception, will have to face Him as a Judge. He is going to repay both the good and the bad for what they have done. See also what Jesus said concerning the question of being “repaid” for our good deeds at the “resurrection of the just”:

¹² He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Luke 14:12-14 (ESV)

If it is true that we are going to be unequal in the next life, with different levels of rewards and treasure, then what are we to make of the parable of the householder in Matthew 20? He paid each of his servants the same, irrespective of whether they worked a full day or only one hour. Does that contradict the idea of there being unequal levels of reward at the Judgment? Let’s examine the passage:

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place; ⁴ and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. ⁵ Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶ And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ ⁷ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ ⁸ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ ⁹ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder, ¹² saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ ¹³ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?’ ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last.”

Matthew 20:1-16 (RSV)

To understand this parable properly we also need to focus on what comes before it, i.e. the last verse of Chapter 19, which reads as follows:

***But many that are first will be last, and the last first.
Matthew 19:30 (RSV)***

To prevent us from overlooking this statement, the same point is repeated again at the end of the parable:

***So the last will be first, and the first last.”
Matthew 20:16 (RSV)***

As I understand it, the main point of the parable is that the mere *length* of our service to Jesus is not the decisive factor in determining the level of our reward. So, someone who is granted a long life of 90 years cannot assume that he will receive a greater reward than another believer whose life as a believer only lasted 90 days or 90 hours or 90 seconds. The length of the service, in itself, is not the issue. Instead it is the nature, quality, effect and fruitfulness of that service that really counts, however long or short it may have been.

Therefore, many who began to serve Jesus earlier and served for longer may find themselves, in the end, being equal to, or even lower than, those who began later and served Him for a shorter time. Indeed, their positions might easily be reversed. That may sound like bad news to those who have served Jesus for decades. But it is good news for those who only discover the gospel late in life, or who are not granted a long life and are called upon to die young or even to be martyrs.

A classic example of this point would be to look at the contributions made by two remarkable men who were close friends in their youth and who were both greatly used by God. They were Jim Elliot and Dave Hunt, who were students together. However, Jim Elliot died as a martyr at the age of 28 trying to bring the gospel to the Auca Indians in South America. Conversely, Dave Hunt lived to be 86 and had a long and faithful ministry. Obviously, neither you nor I are qualified to judge either of these men. Only Jesus can do that. But the point is that the mere fact that they each served Jesus for different lengths of time will not be what determines their respective rewards.

They will be judged on the basis of *what they did in the time they were given*. Therefore it is perfectly possible that the one who served for a shorter time could receive the same, or even a greater, reward if his service, though short, was equally faithful or more faithful than the one who served for seven decades. So, this parable does not contradict what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 19 and elsewhere. How could it? It complements it and clarifies it and is completely consistent with the fact of there being differing levels of rewards.

The rewards that Jesus will give out will be real and tangible – the Bible calls them *treasures*. They are not just metaphors or poetic language.

Very few people talk about the ‘*rewards*’ or ‘*treasures*’ that await us, both in Heaven and on the Earth, when we are resurrected. Even fewer people ever preach on this theme. However, whenever the subject is mentioned it is generally treated as something vague, nebulous and ‘airy fairy’. That is the rewards are usually spoken of as if they weren’t real or physical, but only some kind of metaphor, expressed in poetic language.

I feel unable to go along with that. As I see it, we are meant to take these things literally and to see them as real, tangible, physical things. We are meant to take the prospect of treasures just as literally as we take, or should take, the prospect of our being resurrected. I don’t want a metaphorical resurrection body. I want a real one. And I want, and expect to receive, real treasures too. They are spoken of here in Proverbs:

The reward for humility and fear of the Lord

is riches and honor and life.

Proverbs 22:4 (RSV)

We would all find it easier to take the rewards seriously, and to give them the emphasis and attention which they deserve, if we began to see them as real and literal things. If you aren't currently doing that, and are struggling to come to terms with the idea, why not simply ask God to help you to see them as real and to take them literally? It will be a big step forward and will transform the way you respond to the promises of rewards and the way you see the whole Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Bible does not spell out in any detail what all the various rewards will be or even how many levels or types of reward there are. In fact, we are given surprisingly little information and certainly less than we would like. That said, we are given enough information to enable us at least to reach the following conclusions:

- a) that the rewards are real and tangible
- b) that they are very good
- c) that we are meant to desire them and to pursue them eagerly
- d) that they are intended to be incentives and are supposed to motivate us

King David speaks in Psalm 31 of the 'goodness' which God has 'laid up' or stored away, for those who fear Him. I believe that that is clearly a future reward. At least it includes an element of reward:

*O how abundant is thy goodness,
which thou hast laid up for those who fear thee,
and wrought for those who take refuge in thee,
in the sight of the sons of men!*

Psalm 31:19 (RSV)

One very tangible reward that is clearly spoken of is the right to possess the Land of Israel and to dwell upon it forever. We know that the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were promised the Land that we now call Israel. However, God said that although their ownership of that Land was eternal and unconditional, their actual enjoyment of it and the right to live in it was conditional. That is why they were exiled from it at various times, because they were not faithful. However, we are told in Psalms that the 'righteous' shall do more than merely own the Land. They shall possess it *and dwell upon it forever*:

²⁸ *For the LORD loves justice;
he will not forsake his saints.
The righteous shall be preserved for ever,
but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.*
²⁹ *The righteous shall possess the land,
and dwell upon it for ever.*

Psalm 37:28-29 (RSV)

Thus those Israelites or Jews who have been faithful will be able to dwell in the Land of Israel forever. What else can that mean other than that they will be resurrected? How else could they be enabled to live in the Land of Israel eternally, without ever being exiled from it again and without any fear of invasion or expulsion? That prospect alone is an enormous reward for the Jewish people. Moreover, it is real and literal. It is not a mere metaphor or figure of speech.

But what about those of us who are Gentiles? Will we have any land in our own countries outside of Israel? Will we have a physical, tangible reward of that kind? I believe that we will. For one thing,

those of us who are saved are going to be given resurrection bodies. We will then be able to live eternally on the Earth. So, we will have to be allocated some land somewhere.

To begin with that will be during the 1000 year period we call the Millennium. However, after that, God will create a new Earth and we will be able to live on that eternally. Consider these famous passages but, as you do, reflect on the fact that each of these requires there to be a literal, physical Earth for us to live upon with real land, cities, rivers, trees and gates. It is speaking of real places and we need to see them as real:

⁴Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:4-6 (ESV)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

⁵And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Revelation 21:1-7 (ESV)

²²And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Revelation 21:22-27 (ESV)

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servant will worship him. ⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Revelation 22:1-5 (ESV)

¹⁴Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. ¹⁵Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Revelation 22:14-15 (ESV)

Is it wrong to desire rewards and to seek for them?

Some people have told me that we should not actually *seek* for rewards. They suggest that there is something grasping, or even worldly, about *wanting* to be rewarded. They therefore maintain that we should do good things for their own sake, with no thought of any rewards that we might get in return. A phrase often used about this, and also about spiritual gifts, is that we should “*Seek the Giver, not the gift.*” That is an impressive soundbite and has a religious ring to it. However it is not biblical.

In fact it is rather silly. It could even be said to be an implicit criticism of God Himself for the way He has decided to operate and the way He has chosen to incentivise and reward us. If He had not wanted us to be motivated by the desire for rewards, He would not have told us to be. Indeed, He would not have set up such a system in the first place.

Consider this intriguing passage from 1 Timothy in which apostle Paul speaks of people doing good deeds and being generous etc and thereby “*storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future....*” The clear implication is that there will be rewards and Paul evidently intends for us to seek to lay up these treasures and to seek to acquire them for ourselves:

¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 (ESV)

Note also the way that apostle Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians of how he is seeking to receive an imperishable wreath, i.e. a garland, like an athlete receives. Whether or not Jesus will actually place literal wreaths around our necks I do not know. They could be either literal or metaphorical. My personal view is that they will be literal. However, the point is that they indicate Jesus’ public recognition and approval of our lives as disciples. Apostle Paul clearly has no qualms about saying that he *wants* such a wreath or garland to be placed around his neck. He is not shy or embarrassed about saying so openly:

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. ²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; ²⁷ but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (RSV)

It is helpful also to look at the attitude that apostle Peter had towards rewards. More importantly, we need to look at how Jesus responded when Peter expressed his desire for those rewards and treasures. Consider again this important passage from Matthew chapter 19. Jesus has just met the rich young ruler and has told him to sell his possessions and give to the poor and then he will have treasures in Heaven. This first section sets the scene:

¹⁶ And behold, one came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?” ¹⁷ And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” ¹⁸ He said to him, “Which?” And Jesus said, “You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, ¹⁹ Honour your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” ²⁰ The young man said to him, “All these I have observed; what do I still lack?” ²¹ Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

²² *When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.*²³ *And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.* ²⁴ *Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”* ²⁵ *When the disciples heard this they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?”* ²⁶ *But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”*

Matthew 19:16-26 (RSV)

The important point, for our present purposes, is what apostle Peter says next. He has just heard Jesus saying that those who sell their possessions and give to the poor will have treasures in Heaven. Peter is not the slightest bit coy or subtle about this. He asks Jesus directly about what he and the other apostles are therefore going to get, because they had given up everything to follow Jesus:

Then Peter said in reply, “Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?”

Matthew 19:27 (RSV)

Note Jesus’ reaction when Peter speaks so bluntly and gets straight to the point about what he and the other apostles are going to receive. Jesus is not shocked and He does not rebuke Peter or tell him that he is being vulgar or selfish. He is not critical of, or censorious towards, Peter in any way. Jesus just answers his question in a straightforward manner.

He does not imply that Peter has done anything wrong by asking that question, or by desiring rewards. On the contrary, Jesus’ reply firstly underlines the fact that rewards and treasure will be given out at the Judgment. Secondly, He makes it plain that He expects and wants us to *desire* those things and to *seek* for them:

²⁸ *Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* ²⁹ *And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.* ³⁰ *But many that are first will be last, and the last first.*

Matthew 19:28-30 (RSV)

Therefore, we need to reject any suggestion that there is something grasping or ‘unchristian’ about seeking for future rewards. Jesus obviously didn’t hold that view, so why should we? Consider this next passage from Luke, where Jesus Himself instructs us to provide for ourselves a ‘purse’ or stockpile of treasure in Heaven. He plainly wants us to focus on amassing such a store of *treasure in Heaven*, as opposed to here on Earth, in this life.

That is because, wherever our treasure is, that is where our heart will be also. We can clearly take it that during this life, Jesus wants us to have our hearts focused on Heaven. Moreover, He considers it to be right and proper for us to *want* to store up treasure for ourselves there:

²⁹ *And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be of anxious mind.* ³⁰ *For all the nations of the world seek these things; and your Father knows that you need them.* ³¹ *Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well.*

³² *“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.* ³³ *Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.* ³⁴ *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

Luke 12:29-34 (RSV)

We might by now be persuaded to believe that it is alright to seek for rewards, but what about seeking for *senior roles or positions* in the Kingdom of God? Is it right or wrong for us to do that? Let's look again at the passage we saw earlier in this chapter from Mark chapter ten. That is where James and his brother John caused some indignation among the other apostles by asking to be given two very senior positions in the Kingdom of God.

They wanted to be appointed to be the ones who will sit at Jesus' left and right hand side when He sits on His future throne. This time let's focus on the later part of that account, i.e. on what Jesus Himself said in reply to the other apostles when they got angry at James and John for making what they evidently thought was an inappropriate request:

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark 10:41-45 (NIV)

Note that Jesus says something very significant in verses 43 and 44. I have made the font bold in order to emphasise some of His words which are often overlooked. He says:

"...whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant...."

He then goes on to say:

"...and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all..."

I have often heard people focus on the second half of what Jesus says, i.e. about being a servant/slave but most seem to ignore the first half. People can see immediately that a Christian must aim to be a *servant*. However, very few notice that Jesus was also saying that it is an acceptable *motive* for being such a servant that we wish to be:

- a) '*great*', i.e. that we hope to be promoted into an important role in His Kingdom, and/or
- b) '*first*' i.e. in the sense of being senior, powerful or influential.

Jesus did not say, or even imply, that it is wrong to seek for seniority and for an important role in His future Kingdom. There is no basis for drawing any such inference from Jesus' words. On the contrary, what we can validly deduce from His words is surely as follows:

- a) Some people will aim to be appointed to high positions and to be great, first, senior, powerful etc in Jesus' future kingdom
- b) There is nothing wrong with wanting such positions or roles or seniority in the future, i.e. *in His Kingdom*
- c) Indeed, far from seeing it as wrong, Jesus is plainly endorsing such ambition. He wants us to aim to be in a high position in His Kingdom, i.e. *in the next life*.
- d) But there is potentially something wrong with seeking for such power or seniority *in this life*.
- e) Such seniority *in the next life* is obtained by humbling oneself *in this life* and by being willing to be the servant or slave of all. In other words, we obtain the highest places in the *next life* by

being prepared to serve in the lowest places in *this* life and by being obedient to do what Jesus calls us to do for Him.

Therefore Jesus is not saying that it is wrong to seek seniority in the next life. On the contrary, He is assuming that we will want that. He is simply telling us *how* such seniority can be acquired or earned. Therefore it is clear that we are *meant* to seek to receive it, albeit only in the next life, not in this life.

Accordingly, Jesus' words cannot be used as any authority for the idea that we *shall* all be equal, or even that we should all *want* to be equal, in the next life. He is saying the very opposite and instructing us as to where our emphasis should be, i.e. on the next life, not on this. Therefore we must not be super-spiritual or pretentious. We must not feel obliged to speak as though we want nothing and expect nothing in the next life. At any rate, we must not suggest that the Bible advocates such an approach, because it doesn't. It actually says the very opposite

Perhaps the most powerful evidence for the fact that God *wants* us to seek for rewards is found in the letter to the Hebrews:

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV)

This verse makes a surprising and even remarkable statement, which few people seem to notice. We are told that *in order to come to God* we must believe:

- a) that He *is*, i.e. that He exists and
- b) that He is a *rewarder* of those who diligently seek Him

The first requirement is hardly surprising, i.e. that we need to believe that God exists. But the second one may come as a surprise to some of us if we pause to think about it. Have you ever noticed before that the Bible says that we are *required to believe that God rewards people*? Indeed, believing that is presented here as a pre-condition to being allowed to come to God?

That is a very heavy statement to make. Yet, as with so many other things in the Bible, it is rarely ever preached on. At the very least, we can draw the following conclusions from this unusual verse:

- a) God *does* reward certain people
- b) There is *nothing wrong* with Him doing so. This should not even need to be said but, in view of the disapproving tone that some people adopt in relation to the whole subject of rewards, it probably is necessary to say it.
- c) We are *required to believe* that He rewards such people.
- d) If God gives rewards, He must be *right* to do so, given that everything He does is right.
- e) If it is right for Him to give rewards then we should *approve* of the rewards and of His system for giving them.
- f) If we approve of the rewards, and of God's system for giving them, then it would be absurd for us to then say that we *do not desire them*, and are *not seeking to be given*, those rewards
- g) In short, we are quite obviously meant to *approve of, value and seek for*, the rewards that God gives.

We are to have no truck with those who suggest that we should speak disapprovingly of God's system of honours and rewards, or act as if these things did not exist.

God not only wants us to seek rewards. He expects and wants us to seek 'glory' and 'honour' as well.

We might argue about what the precise definition of 'glory' may be, but one fact which seems undeniable is that God *wants us to seek for it*. In fact, in this next verse, Jesus actually criticises people for *not* seeking for glory from God:

How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

John 5:44 (ESV)

Apostle Paul also makes an important statement in his letter to the Romans. It concerns our pursuit of glory and honour for ourselves. Paul makes it unmistakably clear that God approves of those who seek for these things and that He even rewards them for doing so:

For he will render to every man according to his works: ⁷to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life;

Romans 2:6-7 (RSV)

It is quite obviously not considered to be wrong for us to seek either glory or honour. Otherwise, God would not grant us these things or reward us for seeking them. Therefore we can safely conclude that God fully expects us to seek for both glory and honour. However, that means the kind of glory and honour that will apply *in the next life* and which will be given out at the Judgment Seat. We are not meant to seek them *in this life*.

So, if we are to seek for glory and honour, we must define them accurately. Otherwise, we could make the mistake of seeking for fame and celebrity status of the kind that *this world* craves for. That is not what God means by urging us to seek for glory or honour. He means that we should seek for *His approval, commendation and promotion*.

The ultimate glory and honour for a Christian is to hear the words "*Well done good and faithful servant*" being said to us publicly by Jesus at the Judgment Seat. That is what glory and honour mean in this context and we are meant to want them both and to seek them both.

To want God's rewards, and to desire glory as well, is not improper or grasping. They are God's way of recognising those people who have done well, and also of motivating us to do our best. God is totally realistic about us. He wants us to aim high and to achieve everything that we can to serve Him. We are also to help each other, while we have the chance, during our brief time on this Earth. Jesus Himself refers to these rewards as being *treasures* and He actually commands us to *lay them up*. That means to earn them and store them for ourselves in Heaven.

How much clearer could He be than that? He is *positively telling us* to seek for these rewards and to try to build up as big a stockpile of them as we can, as if we were saving up in the 'Bank of Heaven'. He is not merely *willing* for us to seek His rewards; He *wants* us to seek them. Indeed, He tells us to do so.

That surely exposes the foolishness of us having any inverted snobbery about the desire for rewards. People sometimes say: "*I'm not looking for any rewards. Just getting to heaven will be enough for me*". That's presumably supposed to sound spiritual and modest. However, anybody talking like that

is just being foolish. At the very least, they are not accurately reflecting the way that Jesus approaches this issue.

They may even be implicitly criticising Jesus for having told us to seek these rewards. In any case, anybody who thinks there is something improper or greedy about wanting to obtain as many rewards as we can, needs to argue about it with Jesus, not me. Better still, don't argue at all, because the rewards are His idea:

¹⁹Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Matthew 6:19-21 (RSV)

²⁹And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. ³⁰For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. ³²“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Luke 12:29-34 (ESV)

Note that in Luke 12:29-31 above, Jesus uses the words “*these things*” to refer to both of the following things:

- a) the things we are commanded not to seek in this world, i.e. material things
- b) the things that will be added to us in His Kingdom

Therefore it surely follows that *material things* will be a part of what is given to us in the future i.e. in return for our being willing to relinquish material things in this life. The point is that what is being promised to us sounds distinctly tangible and material rather than spiritual. At any rate, it sounds just as material as the things we are commanded *not* to pursue in this life.

My point is that we should not feel squeamish or embarrassed about wanting to receive material blessings and rewards *in Jesus' future Kingdom*. *It is not wrong to do so*. If it was wrong, then Jesus would not have spoken as He did or promised these things to us. Neither would He give them to us at all, because He would hardly give us something which He thinks we ought not to want.

Returning to the question of whether it is right or wrong to seek for rewards, is also noteworthy that Nehemiah had no qualms about asking God to remember and reward the good things he had done for Israel. He knew he had done what God had wanted him to do and that he was eligible to receive rewards for his faithful service.

He clearly wanted those rewards and did not hesitate to ask God for them. Nehemiah evidently wasn't so ‘super spiritual’ as to not want God's rewards, or to be unwilling to ask for them. On the contrary, like apostle Peter, Nehemiah got straight to the point when asking God about his future reward:

Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.
Nehemiah 5:19 (ESV)

Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.

Nehemiah 13:14 (ESV)

Whatever the word *treasure* might mean exactly, we are entitled to assume that it has got to be at least as good, and presumably better than, what we generally regard as treasure in this world. Jesus did not use words lightly or carelessly. He intended to convey to us the clear message that these rewards are very good indeed. Moreover, He obviously intends for us to aim to get, and keep, as many of them as we can. If not, He would not have told us to lay them up for ourselves in Heaven.

They may be stored up for us in Heaven, but these rewards will mainly be had/kept/enjoyed in the future *on this physical Earth*, rather than in Heaven. Therefore it is all the more reasonable to conclude that the rewards will be real and tangible. Indeed, given that Jesus uses the very word *treasure*, it should not surprise us if they were to include, at least in some way, a literal financial element.

It may well be that in Jesus' Millennial Kingdom, and even in the eternal state thereafter, there could be some form of money or wealth. There will certainly be land and property. We know that because we are going to be living on this physical earth. Perhaps some or all of these material things will be given to us? Why not?

It is going to be a physical existence on the Earth. There is going to be land and property to distribute at the start of the Millennium and there will be infinite scope for wealth to be created thereafter, even more so than on the Earth today. There will be nations during the Millennium, with rapidly growing populations, and there will inevitably have to be commerce, industry, farming etc for their sake.

How could those natural, material things *not* exist in a physical world in which everyone will have physical bodies and will require food, housing, transport, goods etc? Such things will all be needed. In that case, why should there not also be money? There will have to be some means by which exchanges and trade can be made possible. Personally I would expect money and wealth to continue to exist in forms very similar to what we have now. At any rate, there is no reason to suppose that they won't exist. Certainly, there is no biblical authority, at least none that I know of, for saying that they won't.

The main reason why I spend so much time emphasising that treasure may have a literal meaning is because most people automatically assume that it doesn't. But why should they assume that? If Jesus had wanted to say that the rewards were purely intangible or metaphorical, He would have used some other word and would have made Himself clear. We should ordinarily lean towards taking Jesus literally. Therefore we should assume, until we are clearly told to do otherwise, that the rewards will involve an element of what we would now call land, treasure or wealth of some kind.

However, even if the treasure is not literal, and is only a metaphor for something intangible, we can still be sure that whatever is represented by that metaphor would be good enough to be worthy of the word *treasure* anyway. If so, then it is a distinction without a difference. Therefore there is no basis for any super-spirituality or inverted snobbery. Neither can one validly say that there is anything sordid or greedy about seeking to obtain rewards from Jesus.

At any rate, whatever those rewards are going to be, I want them. Moreover, I hope to be able to amass as much, and as many, of them as I can. If Jesus has good things to award then I certainly want them, and I want all of them. Why shouldn't I, and why shouldn't you? We would be fools not to want them, quite apart from being disobedient and dismissive about the things Jesus is saying to us. Moreover, we should not be shy or awkward about *saying* that we are seeking for these rewards. It should not be regarded as some kind of guilty secret

So, don't be super-spiritual and don't have any false humility about rewards. We should all seek them unashamedly, and let others know that we are doing so. We should say it openly, and without apology. If not, we run the risk of confusing others and giving them the false impression that it is wrong or selfish to seek rewards, and that they ought not to be desired or pursued.

We will be judged on a wide range of different criteria

The Judgment Seat of Christ is certainly going to be very complicated. None of us could ever manage to do the mathematical calculations that will be involved in it. We couldn't even judge one person accurately and fairly. We could not take into account all the right issues with the correct weightings, discounts, multipliers and mitigating factors, quite apart from being unable to know other people's motives. However, Jesus will take into account all of those variables, and many others too.

I have pondered on this and have looked for verses in the Bible that speak about Jesus' criteria for judging us and how He will make decisions about allocating rewards. His criteria (i.e. the factors and standards by which He will assess and evaluate us) would appear to include at least the following broad principles and issues that are set out below. No doubt there are many others too. The next chapter is intended to be just a brief and simplified summary of some (not all) of the many different ways in which He will assess us.