

CHAPTER 4

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT OF REWARDS AND COMMENDATIONS

*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)*

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

*⁶ 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)

**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 is 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?

We need to take a balanced approach to the Judgment Seat, and focus on both the negative and the positive aspects of it

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 do ever mention judgment, they generally only promote complacency about it, rather than any 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. He says this will happen at the “*resurrection of the just*”, so He plainly isn’t referring to the Great White Throne judgment:

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 neighbours, 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)

The relevance of the parable of the householder in Matthew 20 to the way in which the Judgment Seat will operate

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 chapter 20? He paid each of his servants the same, irrespective of whether they worked a full day or only one hour. Does that therefore 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. in 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 necessarily 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. However, 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 very 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 actually 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.

In fact, 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. Likewise, 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 of the most tangible rewards is the Jewish believers’ right to dwell in the Land of Israel, but also the land which will be allocated to Gentile Christians elsewhere

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.*

Psalms 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. However, 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:

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)

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. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And 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. ⁴ He 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."

⁵ And 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." ⁶ And 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. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Revelation 21:1-7 (ESV)

²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And 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. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But 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 ² through 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. ³ No 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. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And 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)

¹⁴ Blessed 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. ¹⁵ Outside 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.*” On the face of it, 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. I don't know whether or not Jesus will actually place literal wreaths around our necks. They could be either literal or metaphorical. That said, my own personal view is that they will be literal.

However, the operative 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 neither shy, nor embarrassed, about saying so openly:

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

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (RSV)

The blunt, straightforward attitude that apostle Peter had to the rewards he hoped to receive

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:

¹⁶And behold, one came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" ¹⁷And 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." ¹⁸He 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, ¹⁹Honour your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbour as yourself." ²⁰The young man said to him, "All these I have observed; what do I still lack?" ²¹Jesus 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."

²²When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions. ²³And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴Again 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." ²⁵When the disciples heard this they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁶But 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 also 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)

Even if it is alright to seek for rewards, is it appropriate for us to desire senior roles or positions in the Kingdom of God?

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 whatsoever 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) However, 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 actually 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.

The letter to the Hebrews puts it entirely beyond doubt that God wants us to desire, and seek for, rewards

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. However, 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 even 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. However, 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 *don't 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.

An even more surprising fact, for some, is that God also wants us to seek for glory and honour

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. However, 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 for which this world craves.

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 neither improper nor grasping. They are God’s way of recognising those people who have done well, and also of motivating us to do our best.

It does not please, or honour, God when some Christians say that merely getting to Heaven at all is enough for them and that they aren’t seeking for any rewards

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 directly tells us to do so. That surely exposes the foolishness of us having any kind of 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 really 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 that 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)

My assumption is that 'treasure' means literal treasure, but even if it is a metaphor, it stands for something very good and I want it

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 three chapters are intended to be just a brief and simplified summary of some (not all) of the many different ways in which He will assess us.