

## REWARDS IN HEAVEN Selected Verses

We begin first of all with our short answer question: **Will our pets be in heaven?** If they are, some will be happy and some will be upset. Maybe we should ask more generally, will there be animals in heaven? The dog in my neighborhood that is that is killing one of my boxwoods is not going! If it is heaven, squirrels can't be there.

If all pets go to heaven, there surely will be some pets missing their owners. If your pet goes, you better make sure that you are going.

If any animal goes to heaven, it will not be because they have accepted Jesus as Savior. It will be for other reasons.

Let me say: the Bible teaches that God does save animals [flood, Nineveh]. At times, His covenant included them [Genesis 6:18-19].

However, there is nothing in John 3:16 about animals. Only humans are made in the image of God. We are moral agents and different from the animals. I see nothing in the Bible about animals being in the Intermediate heaven.

When it comes to the final heaven, if you take "the wolf will live with the lamb, the calf and the lion and the yearling together" [Isaiah 11] as a literal picture of the New Earth, then animals will be there. What we don't know is if there will be animals from the old creation, including some we have known and loved.

We simply do not know the full answer.

But one thing we must not do is let sentimentality take the place of biblical truth.

Now, we turn our attention to the topic for today which is "Rewards in Heaven."

The thief on the cross ["Today you will be with me in Paradise"] and Paul ["I desire to depart and be with Christ"—Philippians 1:23] are both in the Intermediate heaven. Agreed? How will heaven, intermediate and final, be for each of them? To answer that question, we need to deal with the matter of rewards in heaven.

Both the thief and Paul are in heaven because of the grace of God and their faith in the Savior who died a substitutionary death on the cross. But consider the differences. The thief accepted the Lord prior to delirium and death. Paul had served the Lord for years. The thief never served the Lord a day in his life. He had not laid up treasure in heaven. He never suffered for Jesus' sake. He had not persevered under persecution. He had not walked faithfully with the Lord. He had not walked righteously. He did not die a martyr's death. To his credit, he didn't have time after professing his faith in Jesus to do any of these things. But Paul did and experienced all of these things.

Recognizing the differences between these two, it would seem odd to me if heaven for Paul and the thief are exactly the same. Yet, I know, for the thief, even if there is some kind of difference between him and Paul, heaven is still wonderful and his experience of heaven is not diminished in any way. So, how are we to understand the matter of Rewards in Heaven and the difference they make?

The matter of Rewards in Heaven is a biblical teaching. The Bible teaches that rewards can be received, not received or forfeited. The idea of rewards is not ours, but God's. Having said that, there is something about which we need to be very clear.

**God saves us because of Christ's work.**

**God rewards us because of our work.**

Hence, works do not affect our salvation, but they do affect our rewards.

It is interesting to see the combination of grace and works in an Ephesians passage.

***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do [Ephesians 2:8-10].***

God has a life-time of good works for us to do and reward is tied to what we do and how we live. And the reward comes from God. Let me share several passages with you to emphasize that.

***“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.” [Matthew 5:11-12].***

***“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is My disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward” [Matthew 10:42].***

***“For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father’s glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what he has done” [Matthew 16:27].***

***If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward [1 Corinthians 3:14].***

***“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done” [Revelation 22:12].***

There are many passages in the Bible like these. It is impossible to discount the matter of rewards. Rewards are from the Lord, based on our work here and will be given at some point after the consummation of history.

I want you to understand that the concept of rewards in heaven means:

1. What we do here matters. I have already said that the statement, “you can be too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good” is false. If we do not live here with a heavenly mindset we will not have any rewards.
2. There is a connection between earth and heaven in who we are and what we have done. When Thomas saw Jesus whom he had followed after the resurrection, he said, “My Lord and My God.” He was still Jesus. I will be Wayne in heaven. The created person, the one worth the self-substitutionary sacrifice of Christ—that person will endure. My name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. If we are not the same person [though changed and glorified] in heaven, rewards make no sense. The doctrine of judgment and rewards depends on people retaining their identities from this life to the next. And when I go to heaven my deeds follow me [Revelation 14:13]. What I have done will be a part of my record.
3. God is aware of every deed. Nothing goes unnoticed. Others may not see what you do, but He does. Even a cup of cold water given, the silent prayer uttered for someone, etc., He has seen and assessed the value of the act.

So, there are heavenly rewards based upon what we do here. They are given by the Lord when or after He returns. But here is the really difficult question. What are the rewards? How are we to understand them? How can heaven be heaven if somebody’s joy is diminished because he is envious of the rewards another received? Isn’t being in heaven with Jesus enough? What is the purpose of rewards? Doesn’t the concept of rewards seem a little worldly?

Frankly, the Bible does not give us a full understanding of rewards [we are told what we do that earns a reward but not actually what the reward means] and very little is written by commentators on how we should actually understand the rewards. Let me try to explain some ways that we might understand rewards in heaven. I think that the concept of heavenly rewards is most likely related to two things: (1) God’s glory and (2) Our capacity.

First, I think we must understand rewards in light of our primary purpose of being. We were created to glorify God. That is the chief end of man. What does it mean to glorify God? It means to make much of God. “Glory” literally means “heavy.” Glory is that asset which makes people and objects impressive and important, winning them respect. So to glorify God is to make God heavy in one’s life, to point to God as the One Who is most important and most impressive. Creation makes much of God—declaring His glory [Psalm 19:1]. Jesus left heaven and came to earth to make much of God. He revealed His love, grace and power. He made much of God when He went to the cross. When we accept God’s gift of salvation, repent, trust Him, work in His power, and demonstrate the fruit of the Holy

Spirit, we make much of Him. When we build with gold, silver and precious stones that stand the test of His fire, we glorify Him. Making much of Him in the midst of persecution results in the crown of life [Revelation 2:10]. Making much of Him through a faithful walk and victory in the Christian life results in the incorruptible crown [1 Corinthians 9:24-25]. Making much of Him through the faithful representation of Christ in a position of spiritual leadership results in the crown of glory [1 Peter 5:1-4]. Making much of Him by purifying and readying yourself for His coming results in the crown of righteousness [2 Timothy 4:6-8]. Making much of Him by pouring yourself into others in evangelism and discipleship results in the crown of rejoicing [1 Thessalonians 2:19].

Rewards will be tied to our deep joy in knowing we glorified God. In fact, the crowns are not to be worn but to be laid at His feet, for it was by His power and grace they were attained. This brings further glory to Him.

***They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power" [Revelation 4:10-11].***

Rewards are tied to His glory. But if it is a reward to us, isn't there some blessing to us? Yes, I think so. So, secondly, let's talk about our joy and blessing and our capacity for that joy and blessing. As we do that, let me say that joy will be full in heaven because we all will fully understand grace and know how blessed we are to be there. But, beyond that, if there is reward, I think it may involve some of the following:

1. We will have a distinct blessing from knowing how God was glorified in what we did. Right now, we see as if through a glass darkly, so we do not know the impact of what we have done. But, in heaven with full knowledge, we will understand how God was glorified in what we did. That will be a reward. For the person who has not done those things that warrant reward, they will not have that knowledge.

This fits with the Hebrew and Greek concept of reward which carries the concept of wholeness of action. In other words, actions have certain results and the reward goes with the results. In heaven, we will have full knowledge. So, we will know the full ramifications of our work. We will know how what we did glorified God and the difference it made in somebody's life. What a reward!

2. We will be blessed when the Lord acknowledges how we glorified Him.

***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].***

Won't it be a reward to hear Him acknowledge our work? One word from Him is reward enough to wipe a lifetime of pain for Jesus' sake. Is that personally and privately or before everyone? If it is the latter, there will not be resentment and envy. Such does not exist in heaven. There will be joy on everyone's part because God was glorified. Those with higher status—and there must be with the apostles and Jesus Himself—will not be envied or resented. There will be celebration of how God was glorified.

3. Hence, I think that reward must involve a deep sense of joy experienced. It might have something to do with capacity. Paul would have that in a way that the thief would not. But Paul's sense of joy will not diminish the thief's. Let me illustrate that this way. Last Sunday, we had the Next Generation up here leading us in worship. We were all blessed by them. But for their parents and for those who had worked with them, there was a deep sense of joy and satisfaction that we did not have. The parents and those who worked with them did not need a pat on the back. That was not what they wanted. What they experienced was payment enough. Our experience was not diminished in any way by what they experienced. But there was a difference in capacity of blessing.

Understanding rewards should make us long for His approval more than wealth, position or success. We should seek to live now for His glory. Reward in heaven is about now. How much of

our lives do we waste? The wood, hay and stubble of our lives are going to be consumed. It isn't about recognition and praise here. It is about living for His glory now.

Live in light of heaven! To say that you want no reward is to say that you want nothing to lay before His throne. To say you want no reward is to say that you don't want to live to make much of Him. To say that you want no reward is to say that you don't want to live for His glory. To say that you want no reward is to say that you don't want your capacity to enjoy heaven deepened.