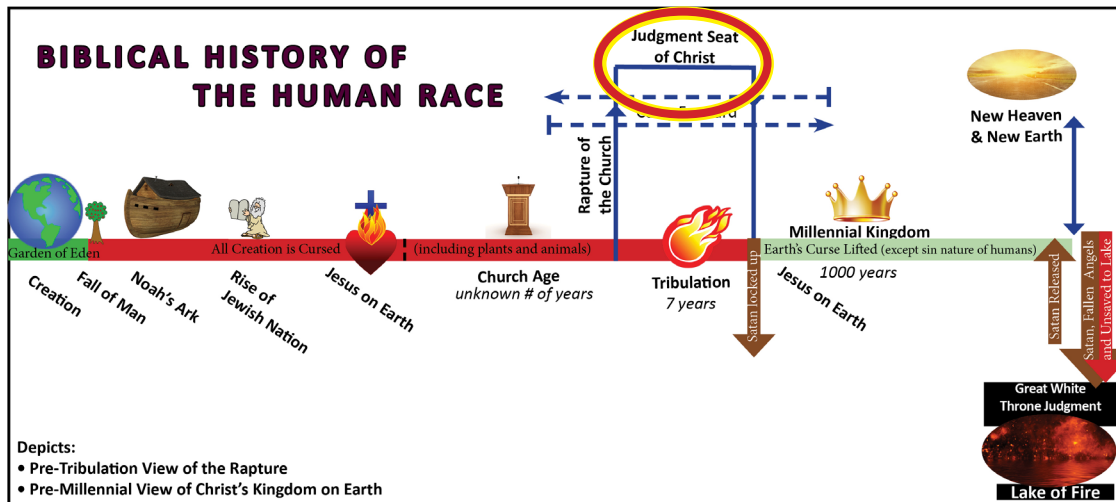


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LET'S GET PERSONAL: CIRCLING BACK TO THE BEMA

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See page 183 toolbox for full-page image.

CIRCLING BACK TO THE BEMA

Chapters 4 and 5 were a **limited macro view** of the millennium. We will now begin to **zoom in** on ourselves seeking to discover what our lives reveal and what it might mean to our future. To do this let's climb back into our time machine and travel back to the bema - The Judgment Seat of Christ.

Refresher: EVERY BELIEVER will stand before Jesus at the bema (Judgment Seat of Christ); there are no exceptions to this fact.

¹⁰For we _____ appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive _____ us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10

Don't panic! The word "bad" in this verse is *phaulos*. In this instance it means worthless or of no account (i.e., not worthy of reward). It is different from standing before Jesus to answer for our sins as He satisfied that debt for us at the cross.

¹Therefore there is now _____ for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1

⁶And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Hebrews 11:6

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In reality, rather than fear the bema we should rejoice at the thought of it as we will soon see. New Testament passages consistently say that we will “rule and reign with Him.” How that plays out for each of us individually will remain to be seen. Some Bible scholars believe this means “everyone will have a position of authority” while others disagree.

I personally disagree as well - I’ll show you why in the next chapter.

For me, the important question is **what will MY position of responsibility and authority be, how will I serve my Lord in the millennium and how/when is this decided?** Although salvation is a gift that could never be earned, Jesus decided to allow us **to earn our positions in His Kingdom**. The Scriptures call “earning our position” **rewards** or *misthos*.

If you believe the Scriptures - make sure you understand and believe this verse from the final statements of Jesus:

¹²*“Look, I am coming soon! My _____ is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have _____.”*
Revelation 22:12

²⁷*For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and _____ each person according to what they have done.*
Matthew 16:27

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST: AKA THE BEMA

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE BEMA?

The purpose of the bema is for Jesus to **reveal** the rank/role each one of us has earned in His upcoming Millennial Kingdom. It will be based on His assessment of who we became and how we lived during our “Christian life.” A preview of this may be found in

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Exodus 18:15-23. We will cover it in more detail in the next chapter.

WHAT PERIOD OF MY LIFE WILL THIS JUDGMENT COVER?

It is important to realize that the window of opportunity to earn our position in His Kingdom is during a very specific period of time:

- It **starts** the day of our salvation (when the “new us” was born). We will NOT be judged for what we did from the time of our first (natural) birth, but for what we did **after our second (spiritual) birth**.
- And **ends** the day we die or are raptured.

NOW is the time to earn our positions in the Kingdom, tomorrow may be too late (if the rapture happens today or we die).

HOW WILL WE BE JUDGED?

CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS JUDGMENT

In his book, *Your Eternal Reward*, Dr. Erwin Lutzer provides an outline of how Jesus will judge on that day. Here are some of the **highlights** from the chapter entitled, *Characteristics of Judgment*:

- **“We will be judged fairly.**
 - o We are judged by our Savior [who loves us and died for us].
 - o This judge will be merciful and fair because His Father is our Father.
 - o Even though we are believers as witnessed by our attendance at the bema, if we are **unfaithful** here on earth, the judgment could be severe. Christ often gives severe warning to His redeemed church.
- **“We will be judged thoroughly.**
 - o When Paul says we shall “appear” at the judgment seat of Christ, he uses the Greek word *phaneroō*, which means “to be made

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manifest.” The imagery is that we shall be “turned inside out.”

- o We will be judged *“for the deeds done in the body... whether good or bad 2 Corinthians 5:10 NASB*. The good deeds will be lovingly remembered. That which is “bad,” or worthless, will most assuredly be a negative counterbalance for that which is classified as “good.” Because Christ is omniscient, every single detail can be brought into the final verdict, with every motive and action accounted for in the context.
- o Lutzer writes, ‘Later I shall discuss the question of whether we will actually see our sins. For now, let me say that we can be sure our sins will provide input into the evaluation.’ [Author’s Note: Dr. Lutzer is referring to **unconfessed post-salvation sins**. This is discussed in a later chapter.]
- **“We will be judged impartially.**
 - o When Paul outlined the principles by which God would judge us, he assured his readers that “God shows no partiality” (Romans 2:11). Indeed, the judgment of God is according to truth, that is, according to reality.
 - o No special advantages are given to the wealthy; to those who counted on perks and power in this life will find themselves stripped of every crutch, all forms of manipulation.
 - o Nor will pastors and missionaries be given preferential treatment. Those who have given their lives to serve Christ, often at great personal sacrifice, might receive a greater reward, but they are judged by the same standard of faithfulness. In fact, those who teach the Word of God will be judged by a stricter judgment (James 3:1 NASB) because

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they were given greater responsibility.

- **“We will be judged individually.**

- o You will give an account of yourself; I shall give an account of myself. We will not have to speak on behalf of someone else.
- o Will the judgment be private or public? I think it probably will occur in the presence of others, including angels before whom Christ promised to confess that we are His (Luke 12:8).
- o Since there are millions of Christians, some people have questioned whether it is possible for Christ to judge us individually. The point is that there would not be enough time for millions of encounters, especially if it's done in the seven-year period beginning at the Rapture and ending with the glorious return of Christ. But let us not limit Christ's ability. We do not know how long each judgment will take; also, research will not be needed to get all the facts. Christ can cause our entire lives to be present to us in a moment of time.

- **“We will be judged graciously.**

- o The purpose of the judgment seat of Christ is to properly evaluate us, to grade us so that our position in the coming Kingdom is made clear. This life is like a college entrance exam that helps us to know where we shall be slotted into the kingdom of the coming King.
- o ... this judgment is not a declaration of gloom, but an assessment of worth, with the assignment of rewards to those who, because of their faithfulness deserve them, and a loss or withholding of rewards in the case of those who do not deserve them.
- o If you feel distraught because of your sins

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If you are interested, check out my story in the toolbox (page 182) about a grading system I used when I was a university professor in an “earlier life” - I think it pairs to this nicely.

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and failures, take heart. All of us have experienced the depths of our own evil hearts and actions. As we shall discover, those sins that we judge through personal repentance will not be brought to light, except insofar as they will result in a loss of rewards.

- o In the midst of failure, there will be grace.
- o Despite our propensity to sin, every one of us can live a life that will receive the Lord's approval rather than His rebuke. Indeed, **our struggle against sin, if it successful, is worthy of reward.** Today, in dependence upon Christ, we can live in light of that great day."¹

ARE ONLY ACTIONS JUDGED? WHAT ABOUT MOTIVES AND WHAT WE THINK AND SAY?

Our "deeds" include our motives, thoughts and the words we speak. I believe the Scriptures are quite clear on this topic:

¹⁰"I the Lord _____ the heart and _____ the mind, to _____ each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve."
Jeremiah 17:10

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

²³... Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will _____ each of you according to your deeds. Revelation 2:23b

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³⁶But I tell you that _____ will have to give account on the day of judgment for _____ they have spoken. ³⁷For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” Matthew 12:36-37

Here Jesus is talking about the post-salvation sins we (believers) cover up and refuse to bring to Him in confession and repentance (see 1 John 1:9).

In *The Big Book of Bible Answers*, Dr. Ron Rhodes says, “If even our careless words are carefully recorded, how much more will our calculated boastful claims, our cutting criticisms of others, our off-color jokes and our unkind comments be taken into account.”²

It will all be laid bare before the Righteous Judge and are likely part of why some of the rewards we think we have earned and should get to “keep” will be forfeited instead.

TEARS OF JOY, TEARS OF REGRET

On the day of our individual judgment we will all stand in the presence of Jesus and give an account of how we used what He gave us to work with. **He won’t ask how much we loved Him (that will have been proven by our deeds and attitudes).** He will review (reveal) how well we used His assets (time, effort, abilities, money and investments, everything) to accomplish HIS objectives on earth. Note that He is looking for a return on His investment (in us) – His life and death on earth. If we used what He provided us to maximize His ROI, He will be pleased. **It is neither foolish nor selfish to want His approval.** On the contrary, we should genuinely fear His disapproval. He is worthy.

²¹“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and _____!’ Matthew 25:21

If we use the time, talent and money He gave us

According to the Scriptures, God counts obedience, not feelings, as love. Emotional feelings are not germane here.

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for our own pleasure, however, He will be displeased.

To think otherwise is foolish and dangerous (a kind of danger that will last a very long time, for eternity, in fact).

In his book, *Your Eternal Reward*, Dr. Erwin Lutzer says, “I believe there are good reasons why there will be tears in heaven. When we reflect on how we lived for Christ, who purchased us at such a high cost, well might we weep on the other side of the celestial gates. Our tears will be those of **regret** and **shame**, tears of **remorse** for lives lived for ourselves rather than for Him who “loves us and released us from our sins by His blood.”³

Some believe there will be no review of our lives and no regrets or tears in heaven quoting Revelation 21:4 as their source, *and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes*. However, this viewpoint fails to note where in the Bible this is. This appears in the next to the last chapter of the Bible. It is AFTER everything has been accomplished. It is part of the description of the events at the unveiling of the New Heavens and New Earth, not at the Judgment Seat of Christ. We can be fairly certain that until that final day of the millennium, tears, regret and sorrow will be a part of life, even ours in some ways. How exactly, I don’t know. And, if you think about it, if there are no tears, what would there be for Him to wipe away?



Based on what you read about what will happen during the millennium in Chapters 4 and 5, what are some things we might experience during that time that could cause us tears of joy and tears of sorrow? And what might cause us to have tears of joy and tears of sorrow at the Judgment Seat?

WHAT ARE THESE REWARDS? HOW ARE THEY DEPICTED IN THE SCRIPTURES?

THINK OF THE CROWNS AS REWARDS

In the Scriptures “rewards” are sometimes described using the symbol of a “crown.” There are two types of crowns in the New Testament:

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DIADEM: In the descriptions of Jesus wearing a crown, He is wearing a diadem. A diadem is a jeweled crown or headband worn as a **symbol of sovereignty**.



In Revelation 19:12 we read ... *and on his head are many crowns*. The word there is diadem. Most of us immediately picture a stack of crowns on His head. We know this isn't meant to be literal if for no other reason than the phrase that precedes it ... *His eyes are like blazing fire...* What interpretation is appropriate here? Of course, it means that He is sovereign over everything – “the King of the universe, the King of everything” or as is described later as “King of Kings.”

STEPHANOS The type of crowns used for human endeavors are stephanos crowns. **Stephanos describes the victor's crown, the symbol of triumph in the public games or a contest.** It can also be the reward or prize given to honor a person. This is the word used related to our future crown(s) - not a diadem like Jesus wears.



Some people say they are not interested in “earning crowns” because they don't last and that we will be “casting them at Jesus feet” in heaven anyway. This idea comes from Revelation 4. Let's look at the whole scene to see if we come to a different conclusion:

⁶In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. ⁷The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. ⁸Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

“‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.”

Ripe with symbolism: 24-7 these “creatures” (representing all of creation) are worshiping God. The words “was like” is used over and over.

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Interesting side note – as far as I know, the only time Jesus is shown as wearing a stephanos is:

⁹But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now CROWNED with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. Hebrews 2:9

This is Jesus in His humanity, not Jesus in His deity.

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⁹Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever,

¹⁰the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

¹¹“You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being.”
Revelation 4:6-11

Therefore,

24-7 these “24 elders” [whoever you believe they represent - I’ve heard many things – I believe they represent all redeemed believers].

worship Him ALL the time, proclaiming His worthiness.

I believe the “crowns” are symbolic of the rewards He bestows on His people at the bema and that the laying down of the crowns is symbolic of us acknowledging that He is the reason we have ANY ABILITY to earn the rewards He give us.

The crowns are symbolic and so is the “laying them down.” What if we substitute the word “crowns” with the word “rewards” in our minds? We will forever thank Him for our **ability to please Him and His **rewards** for us doing so. No doubt, rather than being puffed up with pride, we will be eternally grateful to our Savior for our sanctification.**

POST-SALVATION SANCTIFICATION = CROWNS/REWARDS

In his book, *55 Answers to Questions About Life After Death*, Dr. Mark Hitchcock asks some interesting questions about crowns:

“What will we do with these crowns? Will we wear them around in the streets of gold to show off? Will we compare them to the number of crowns others have received? The Bible is clear that having been rewarded by the Lord, the redeemed will immediately give all glory and honor for their rewards back to the Lord.”⁴

What are some of the specific “crowns/rewards” listed in the Scriptures?

Crown (Reward) of Life (aka the Martyr’s Rewards or Victor’s Reward):

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¹²*Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the reward (crown) of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. James 1:12*

^{10c}*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you [eternal] life as your victor's reward (crown). Revelation 2:10c*

²¹*To the one who is victorious, I will give the _____ to sit with _____ on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. Revelation 3:21*

The Crown (Reward) of Life applies to anyone who sacrifices their life OR undergoes extreme hardship in service of God. Many believe that this reward is only earned if one **dies** in that service. I do not agree with that interpretation. **I believe it applies to those who are truly willing to suffer and even die rather than renounce their faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. In this case it IS a matter of the heart and will.**

James 1:12 says "perseveres under trial" - he does not mention death as a prerequisite to earning the (reward) crown of life. Revelation 2:10 does mention death but it says, "even to the point of death" - again physical death does not appear to be a prerequisite.

Furthermore, it is God who decides when and how a person dies. I think about Peter, who died a martyr's death, and John who did not. Recall that John was exiled on the Island of Patmos as a prisoner under the Roman Emperor Domitian after they **tried to execute him (a martyr's death)** by boiling him in oil, but they failed. He didn't die; it didn't even hurt him. Instead, he lived and was commissioned by the Lord to write the Book of Revelation while in exile. In my opinion, John would have gladly died a martyr's death if that had been God's will for him. Therefore, I believe John will receive this same reward, just as Peter will. I believe our attitude towards God's will for our lives

→ Jesus was "victorious" by doing the work He was assigned by His Father to do while on earth (John 17:4).

That is how we can be victorious as well, doing the work Father has assigned to each of us (individually).

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Words like “never fade away” and “forever” related to crowns/ rewards lead me to believe that they last for all eternity - not just the Millennial Kingdom. What do you think?

plays a huge part in our rewards. What do you think?

It is God who decides what trials we are to face, not us. In my opinion, however, we can bring unnecessary hardships to ourselves as well, those don't count. We are called to be “**overcomers**” in whatever **He decides** to bring our way. Therein lies our victories (Victor's Reward).

Crown (Reward) of Righteousness:

⁸Now there is in store for me the reward of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to _____ for his appearing.

2 Timothy 4:8

The Crown (Reward) of Righteousness is for **faithful endurance** and **obedience** through **discipline** and **self-control**. It includes “competing according to the rules.” As we faithfully wait for His promised return, we long for the day when we will see Him face-to-face.

Crown (Reward) of Glory:

⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the reward (crown) of glory that will _____ . 1 Peter 5:4

Peter is writing this letter to Christians who are “scattered” around the known world at that time. The Reward of Glory spoken of in 1 Peter 5:4 is in a part of that letter addressed “To the elders among you,” and **contains instructions about their attitudes and behaviors toward “their flock.” It is about faithful service and leadership** that is rewarded.

Is this reward **limited to leaders of organized churches**? I don't know, perhaps it was more at the time it was written than now. I think it is **possible** that it could apply to unofficial Christian leaders in some respect now. Read 1 Peter 5 to determine this for yourself. Note, however, that even though there is a unique reward given to pastors and teachers, they will also be judged by a higher standard. James 3:1 warns,

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“Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”

Caution: We must be careful not to teach or preach anything we aren’t living ourselves. As they used to say, “Practice what you preach!”

Incorruptible (Imperishable) Crown (Reward):

²⁴In a race all the runners run. But only one gets the prize. You know that, don’t you? So run in a way that will get you the prize.

*²⁵All who take part in the games train hard. They do it to get a crown that will not last. But we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶**So I do not run like someone who doesn’t run toward the finish line.** I do not fight like a boxer who hits nothing but air.*

*²⁷No, I train my body and bring it under control. Then after I have preached to others, I myself will not break the rules. **If I did break them, I would fail to win the prize.***

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NIRV

The Incorruptible or Imperishable Reward is a **reward for continuous disciplined, self-controlled Christian living all the way to “the end.”** Note Paul’s final comment about this, *²⁷...I train my body and bring it under control. Then after I have preached to others, I myself will not break the rules. If I did break them, I would fail to win the prize.*
1 Corinthians 9:27 NIRV **This is important –**

Crown (Reward) of Rejoicing or Soul Winner’s Reward:

*¹⁹For what is our hope, or joy, or reward of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? ²⁰For you are our glory and joy. *1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 NKJV**

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The Crown (Reward) of Rejoicing or Soul Winner's Reward is awarded to **those who faithfully share the Gospel with others ultimately resulting in them becoming believers.** Paul uses this imagery to express the spiritual victory and reward he anticipates because of the Thessalonians' faithfulness.

We may or may not "see" when others are saved - we just do our part and trust the Lord will do His.

WARNING: Note that Revelation 3:11 contains a warning: *¹¹I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your reward.* This validates the notion that rewards can be lost or forfeited, more on this in Chapter 10.

We can see, then, that there are different rewards based on our attitudes and our behaviors.

WHAT REWARDS ARE -

WHAT THEY ARE NOT

It is easier to start with what they are not. They are not physical gold, silver or precious stones that will be handed to us in a bag or something similar. They are not physical crowns that will be worn on our heads, kept in a display case or literally thrown down at Jesus' feet.

POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

They are probably best described as **positions of authority and responsibility to the King, positions of trust, positions of confidence.** They will be assignments commensurate with our faithfulness to Him today. And although judicial responsibility will no doubt be part of the job, it will not be limited to sitting on a court bench handing out verdicts all day. It will be much more than that. And it will be the absolute best job imaginable.

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UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION

1. Did you apply anything new last week from Chapter 5? What was it, how did you apply it?
2. Think about Revelation 3:11 *"I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your reward."* This seems to indicate that someone else can "take" or "earn" your reward. Have you thought about this before? What do you think Jesus meant when He said that?
3. Name one thing you learned in this chapter that will be beneficial in the days ahead. How will you apply it? (Be specific.)

