

MOVING TO THE CORE

Part 9

I believe in heaven. I believe that it is a literal place, as real as Chicago is real. I also believe that someday most if not all of us here today will end up there. Recently I was giving some thought to this and I decided to write down ten things that I most want to see in heaven. Let me share with you my list. How would it compare with a list that you might draw up?

1. First, I want to see Father God in all His glory
2. Next, I want to see Jesus. I want to thank Him for taking my place on that cross.
3. Hey, I want to see that grand host of angels that the Bible talks about. Guess which angel is my favorite? Michael.
4. I love beautiful scenery. I am anxious to just see what heaven looks like from the other side. I know that the Bible tells us that **“eyes have not seen, nor have ears heard what the Lord has in store for those who love Him.”**
5. I also want to see my loved ones that are there – my dad and my father-in-law among others.
6. I can hardly wait to see former parishioners and friends whom I have led to Christ. Just to be honest, the list is rather long. I dare say that there will be high-fives and hugs to last for quite a while.
7. I’m human. Just to be honest, I want to see where I am going to live. Will it be a mansion? A condo near the Crystal Sea? A cabin over the hilltop, I don’t know. I am hopeful that Marilyn’s place is close by, though. See, I told you that I am human.
8. I want to see the great saints of the ages – Abraham, David, Moses, John the Baptist, the Apostle Peter, the Apostle Paul, the great evangelist D. L. Moody....
9. The Throne Room has to be somewhere near the top of my list. I have been there many times in prayer. However, I want to actually see it, experience it, feel it. Awesome!
10. Finally, I want to watch as the rewards are passed out. We will be there. We will see it happen. Can you imagine the Apostle Paul finally getting his long-sought-for prize?

This morning, as I wrap up this series of messages on “Moving To The Core”, I want to talk to you about “core” rewards. As I do so, I want to create in you a desire, an excitement for the day when you too will stand before the Lord and receive the results of your life of service.

- Not just eternal life,
 - Not just entrance into the heavenly city,
 - Not just the keys to your everlasting abode,
- But your “core” rewards.

As I address this subject, I want to focus on three primary points:

1. The Possibility of Reward
2. The Desire for Reward
3. The Realization of the Reward

1. LOOK WITH ME PLEASE AT THE POSSIBILITY OF REWARD

Let me be rather elementary here for a minute. There are, generally speaking, two classes of people in the world today: those who are saved and those who are lost. That is it. You either go to heaven or you go to hell when you die.

- If you go to hell, it will be because you refused to believe the gospel.

- If you go to heaven, it will be because you believed the gospel. It will be because you saw that the only way to be saved is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Having said that, I need to now point out that in God's divine plan, there are also two categories among those who go to heaven:

- those who receive rewards and
- those who do not.

Don't get me wrong, there will be a day of reckoning when all of us stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ – that day of judgment that precedes our entrance into heaven. However, not all of us will receive the prize as the Apostle Paul put it.

Will you?

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 9. Paul uses three important words in this chapter:

1. The first word that I want us to explore is **"PRIZE"**. It is found in verse 24, **"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize."** The same word can be found in Philippians 3:14, **"I press on towards the goal to win the prize to which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus."**
2. Then in 1 Corinthians 9:25 we find the second word, **'CROWN'**. It also appears, for example in:
 - James 1: 12, **"The crown of life will be given to those who love him"**;
 - I Peter 5:4, **"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away"**; and
 - Revelation 2:10, **"Be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life"**.
3. The third word is **"REWARD"** and it is found in 1 Corinthians 9:17. This word is used twenty-nine times in the New Testament, fifteen times by Jesus.

The thing I want you to see here is, the Apostle Paul stressed the fact that there are prizes, crowns, and rewards to be gained over and beyond our being-saved.

The highest honor in America is to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. It is awarded by the President. However, that medal pales in comparison to the prizes, crowns, and rewards that will be handed out by none other than Jesus himself. Can anything be greater than that?

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 likewise notes: **"So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."**

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Lord will reward the honest, the faithful, the dedicated, and the good:

- The little widow that gave her two little mites -- all she had -- a half-cent in today's currency -- will be recognized for her sacrifice.
- The unnamed heroes of Hebrews 11 -- the martyrs -- will receive their just reward.
- The lad that gave up his loaves and his fishes will receive back more than he ever imagined.
- The pastors and servants of God that serve faithfully in house churches in China will be given a crown from the hands of Jesus Christ!

- Those who faithfully labor in out of the way places for little or nothing will find out that God didn't consider their works little or nothing.
- The saints who teach, who serve, who give, here will receive a reward,
- As will those who love and serve Him in holiness.

Again, 2 Corinthians 5:10, **“For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”** Let me break this verse down:

- **“For we...”** Paul the Apostle included himself here.
- **“Must”** We have no choice in this matter. The word “must” speaks of obligation and necessity.
- **“All.”** No exceptions. Billy Graham will be there. You will be there. I will be there. Each and every saint of God will stand at judgment.
- **“Appear.”** This means, “Be made manifest, be seen without disguise.”
- **“Before the Judgment Seat of Christ.”** This phrase points to the judge -- the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He alone has the final say at the final review. There will be no jury or deliberation. The ultimate verdict concerning our faithfulness will be His and His alone. He will judge "without respect of persons."
- **“...that each one may receive what is due to him....”** Whatever Jesus says and does will be perfectly just. No one will have to worry about getting a fair hearing. **“The Judge of all the earth will do right,”** Abraham said.
- **“...for the things done....”** We will face judgment for what we have actually done and accomplished. The Lord will not reward our plans or good intentions. The key word here is **“DONE.”**
- **“...while in the body....”** Here and now. Only one life will soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last. Only what's done here in the body will receive God's commendation.
- **“...whether good or bad.”** The word GOOD is good here. It means just what you would think it means. That which is good, beneficial. For the best possible definition of the word good, look at the life of Christ. He was good in the truest sense of the word.

Psalms 62:11-12 promises, **“One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.”**

2. HAVING SAID THAT, LETS LOOK AT THE DESIRE FOR REWARD

Return with me to 1 Corinthians 9 please. Let me read verses 24-27 to you, **“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”**

Corinth was known for the Isthmian Games which were second only to the Olympic Games in popularity. The games took place every two years with competitors coming from all over the Mediterranean world. There were six main categories of events: boxing, throwing the javelin, hurling the discus, racing, wrestling and jumping. Paul himself was in Corinth during the

spring of 51 AD, when the games were going on. Paul uses the games here in chapter 9 as an illustration. In verse 24 he talks about the race; in verse 26 he refers to boxing.

Interestingly, Paul says that a follower of Christ is to live a life just as disciplined as one of these athletes. He actually says that we are to keep our bodies under control as would a runner or a boxer. Notice his points.

1. The athlete enters the race to run and win (v.24).
2. He strenuously disciplines and controls himself (v.25).
3. He runs to obtain an everlasting crown (v.25).
4. He runs and fights with certainty and without distraction (v.26).
5. He masters his own body (v.27).
6. He guards against disqualification (v.27).

Again, why does the runner run? Why does the boxer box? In order to win the prize. Do you know what prize these athletes were going after? A wreath – actually a celery wreath! It was already starting to wilt by the time it was placed on the winner's head.

Paul says in the athletic contest every runner enters the race for one purpose only: to win. However, only one receives the prize; there is only one winner.

The believer also enters the Christian race for one purpose only: to win. Therefore, nothing is acceptable except running and running hard:

- Walking fast is unacceptable.
- Jogging is unacceptable.
- Lagging behind is unacceptable.
- Showing little concern for the finish line is unacceptable.

The point is this: the child of God must run as diligently as the runner at the Isthmian Games. The believer must put out the same kind of vigorous effort in order to reach the finish line. He must be forceful and hard-working in his/her efforts to gain the prize.

The passage reminds me of a story I once read. Let me share with you. It comes from the book *My Mother Played the Piano* by John William Smith. Smith writes: I have a dear friend who lives in Dallas and he has a daughter who is a very talented runner. The regional cross country championships were held in my town and he called to ask if I could pick up his wife from the airport and give her a place to stay while she was there to watch their daughter run. I was delighted to do it and so I found myself on Saturday morning witnessing the Texas Regional Cross Country Races.

It was a marvelously bright, clear, cool morning and hundreds of spectators had gathered on the hillsides to watch. They were mostly family members who had traveled hundreds of miles, in some cases, to watch just one race. I had no child running, and so I often found myself watching those who did. Their faces were intent, their eyes always picking out the only runner they were interested in, and often, when the runners were far away and could not hear their shouts of encouragement, still their lips would move, mouthing the precious, familiar names, and one other word. Sometimes they said the names audibly, but softly, as if for no ears but their own, and yet it seemed that they hoped to be heard.

"Run, Jimmy," they whispered urgently, "Run, Tracy, Run."

The cross country race is two miles for girls, three for boys. It is grueling, physically and mentally exhausting run over hills and rough terrain. There were ten races that morning. Each

race had from eighty to one hundred twenty competitors. The course ended where it began, but at times the runners were nearly a half-mile away.

As the girl's race came to a close, I watched a forty-plus year old mother, wearing patent leather shoes and a skirt, carrying a purse -- run the last hundred yards beside her daughter. She saw no other runners. As she ran, awkwardly, stumbling, her long dark hair coming undone and streaming out behind her, and giving no thought to the spectacle she made, she cried, "Run, Tami, Run! -- Run, Tami, Run!" There were hundreds of people crowding in, shouting and screaming, but this mother was determined to be heard, "Run, Tami, Run -- Run, Tami, Run," she pleaded. The girl had no chance to win, and the voice of her mother, whose heart was bursting with exertion and emotion, was not urging her to win. SHE WAS URGING HER TO FINISH!

The girl was in trouble. Her muscles were cramping, her breath came in ragged gasps, her stride was broken, faltering, she was in the last stages of weariness -- just before collapse. But when she heard her mother's voice, a marvelous transformation took place. She straightened, she found her balance, her bearing, her rhythm, and she finished. She crossed the finish line, turned, and collapsed into the arms of her mother.

They fell down together on the grass and they cried, and then they laughed, and they were having the best time together, like there was no one else in the whole wide world but them."

Back to verses 24-27. I want you to notice the action words that the apostle uses: 'run', 'fight', 'beat'. The believer masters his own body. The word "beat" means to bruise, to beat back. Paul says he literally beats back his body and its cravings in order to bring it into subjection. He leads it about as a slave.

My son-in-law Todd illustrates this. He recently gave up television for 40 days. He loves sports -- especially golf -- and he found that he was spending so much time watching sports on the tube that spiritual matters suffered. So he brought his body and its desire under discipline and gave up the TV. In doing so, he made his body his servant, rather than serving his body.

Like Tami in the race, the believer is to expend effort -- go all out! Such effort is not required in order to get to heaven, but it is required to receive the prize.

HOW MANY OF YOU LIKE TO BE APPRECIATED?

Have you ever wondered why? Why is it that we so need the approval of husband, wife, or parents? I have given this some thought, and I submit to you that God made us that way on purpose. You see, the need for the highest approval of all -- God's approval -- is that which lies behind this promise of reward.

I have had Christians tell me that they aren't really into the heavenly reward thing. I have to wonder why.

- They certainly want the Lord's blessings in the here and the now.
- They want to have a financial return on their giving.
- They want the Lord to grant to them good health.
- And yet they aren't all that interested in prizes, crowns, and rewards? Again, why?

Again, I have given this some thought -- and study.

- Some people do not believe in the principle of heavenly rewards.

- Then, one author said here that “The person who says, 'I don't care about that sort of thing' either is not being honest and has become very self-righteous, or is so deeply hurt that he or she is no longer in touch with his true feelings.” (R. T. Kendall)
- Another reason, in my opinion, is that some people simply never give heaven the slightest thought. Their desires and treasures are all in the here and now.
- Others do not believe that they are worthy of a reward.
- Finally, some falter here due to a lack of knowledge of such things. They are just not aware of the rewards of the Lord.

Friends, when a new movie comes out, the advertisers like to tie the new effort to some past success. For instance, directed by the Oscar winning director of Star Wars, Produced by the producer of the Titanic, starring the actor who has starred in such classics as... the actress that has won more acting awards than any other modern-era actress. Wow. That is a winning lineup.

Friends, the One who offers prizes, crowns, and rewards is the same one who:

- Brought us the diamond in the Hope Diamond.
- Created every jewel in the Queen of England's Crown.
- Has given up sunsets and sunrises.
- Has given us mountains and star-lit galaxies.
- Has given us rainbows and every color in the rainbow.

I would say that His past performance is a pretty good indicator that His rewards are worth the effort; the prize is worth the sacrifice. These things are worthy of your desire.

3. THE REALIZATION OF THE REWARD

By now, I trust to believe that a reward is possible, and that such a reward is to be desired. Now I want to flesh out the reward. I want to give you some indication of what the prizes, crowns, and rewards might look like.

I seem to be hearing someone protest, that they have done nothing worthy of a reward. Hey, not so fast. You might be surprised at how generous the Lord is here. Listen to these verses:

Matthew 10:42, **“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.”**

What gains a reward here? I believe that the Lord is pointing out that even the smallest gesture of kindness will guarantee a reward.

Luke 14:13-14 quotes Jesus, **“But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and blind, and you will be blessed, since they do NOT HAVE THE MEANS TO REPAY YOU; FOR YOU WILL BE REPAYED AT THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.”** Doing good to those who can't do good back, results, again, in a reward.

Luke 6:35 fits here too, **“Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then YOUR REWARD WILL BE GREAT, and you will be sons of the Most High....”**

In Matthew 5:11-12, **“Jesus said, 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, for in the same way they persecuted the**

prophets who were before you.” Friends, it seems to me that just about anyone can gain a reward, if he or she really wants to. And, might I add, not just a reward, but a GREAT reward!

So, again, what would these rewards look like? Let me offer several suggestions:

1. **THE COMMENDATION “WELL DONE”.**

Several weeks ago on a Sunday night I shared with you a testimony of when I forgave a brother a great trespass. I concluded the account by saying that that night after I got home and started to relax in my living room chair, I felt the presence of the Lord come upon me. It was in that special moment that I sensed the Lord say to me, “Well done....” While I am not a person that is generally given to emotion, the words brought tears to my eyes. Marilyn was in the kitchen and I called her in to tell her about the experience. I will never forget it.

Imagine that on a much larger scale – not in response to a single act of forgiveness, but rather to a lifetime of faithful Christian service.

- Imagine the commendation coming from the lips of Jesus Himself,
- Imagine the hosts of heaven watching and listening,
- Imagine those words coming after the trials and tests of this life are over,
- Just imagine.

Peter calls this “**a rich welcome**” (2 Peter 1:11).

2. **CROWNS**

Some time later on I will no doubt preach a whole sermon just on the crowns. They make for an interesting study. As I said earlier, the winners of the games in Corinth ran in order to obtain a crown that was already starting to wither before it was ever given to the contestants.

In addition, crowns were also awarded to heroic Roman soldiers:

- There was the **GRASS CROWN** given to the deliverer of a besieged army,
- The **OAK LEAF CROWN** awarded to a soldier who saved the life of a fellow soldier.
- There were also **TWO GOLD CROWNS**. One was awarded to the first man over the wall in a siege, and the other one was given to the first man over some enemy fortification during a siege.

In time, though, both the crown and the fame that accompanied it, faded away.

By way of contrast, Paul stressed that we will gain a crown that is everlasting – an incorruptible crown.

He also spoke of:

- The Crown of Life,
- The Crown of Righteousness,
- The Crown of Glory, and
- The Crown of Rejoicing.

A MOMENT AGO I MENTIONED THE CROWN OF QUEEN ELIZABETH II. Are you aware of the fact that her crown has 2,783 diamonds, 277 pearls, 18 sapphires, 11 emeralds, and 5 rubies -- all priceless gems. Pretty awesome, right?

Yet, just to be honest, I can't imagine the Lord being outdone by the Queen. I am quite

confident that many of the saints of God will gain crowns of far greater value. Just a thought.

3. A THIRD REWARD WILL BE LESSER OR GREATER AREAS OF ETERNAL RESPONSIBILITY WITHIN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Matthew 25:21 says, **“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 share your master's happiness!’”**

Before I explain this passage, I want to offer an editorial comment. While I know that this is hard to believe, I have had people – I could name names – who were unfaithful to their mates, unfaithful to church, unfaithful in their giving, unfaithful in nearly every area of their lives... (get the point), who yet believed that the Lord was someday going to say to them, **“Well done, good and faithful servant!”** I have wanted to ask such individuals, when did the Lord take up lying? He is not going to pronounce someone good who has not been good, and He is not going to pronounce someone faithful who has not been faithful.

The lesson of the Lord's parable here in Matthew 25 is, the reward for work well done will be more work to do.

Revelation 5:10 notes, **“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”** 2 Timothy 2:12 confirms, **“If we suffer, we shall also reign with him....”**

I don't understand it, I can't fully explain it, but the truth of the matter is, those who are faithful now – even over little things – are going to be rewarded with authority and responsibility that involves ruling, management, supervision, and governing. We shall rule and reign with Christ. We shall oversee and administer the affairs of the universe for Christ throughout eternity.

Pat Robertson, in his book *Answers* notes: "Perhaps people will be assigned to watch over a planet or two. We do not know for certain what tasks we will be performing, but there will obviously be an ongoing, functioning universe. We will be God's messenger/agents in ordering and running it."

In addition to this, the Bible also declares that, **WE WILL BOTH JUDGE THE WORLD AS WELL AS JUDGE ANGELS.** (1 Corinthians 6:2-3) The fallen angels, or demons, will come before us and we will agree with our Lord's judgment as He proclaims their fate at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Look with me now at Revelation 22:3, **“But the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall worship Him - pay divine honors to Him and DO HIM HOLY SERVICE.”** (*The Amplified Bible*)

What will this service include? I dare say that the same Holy Spirit that inspired the Psalms, the beautiful hymns, the artistic masterpieces of the ages, WILL NOT CEASE TO INSPIRE then as well! The sights, the sounds, the GLORY of heaven will motivate ACTION!

Yes, we shall **SERVE** God. We will do His bidding whenever, however, wherever.

The bottom line is, heaven isn't a monastery, nor is it a place of retirement on some heavenly pension. No! It is a land of continual progress. The lazy person might want to apply elsewhere.

IN CLOSING, in Daniel 12:13 we read these words, **“As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.”** Wow! Did you get that? God actually told the brother that he would not get his full reward -- his spiritual inheritance -- until after this life was over. Think of that, if you will.

Hey wait, preacher. I thought death ended it all. Not so. Life follows death. Reward awaits. An inheritance is yet to be gained. There's more to come on the other side of the grave!

Are prizes, crowns, and rewards awaiting you? I know that they are awaiting those at the core.

