

The Triumphant Epitaph of Paul, Part 3

2 Timothy 4:8

55-26

May I invite you to open your Bible to 2 Timothy chapter 4. We're looking at verses 6 through 8. This great triumphant epitaph of Paul which he himself wrote as a summary of his life has occupied us now for this the third week. I received a note on the back of a registration card this week pleading with me to go faster, asking why we have to spend so much time in one verse. And attached to it with a paper clip on the back was a second registration card that said to me, "May I please thank you for taking your time in doing such in depth study of each verse." So I...thank you very much...I don't know what to do, folks. But I want you to understand that when I go into the Word of God I am pressed by the Spirit of God to express out of that text what the Spirit of God lays upon my heart. And the pace in many ways is determined not only by the working of the Spirit of God but by my own desires and my own need as God points things in my life that I need to understand and very frequently what I preach to you is what I have sought to know for myself as the Spirit of God has worked this through my own heart. So if you cannot understand why it takes so long to get through a passage, it might help you to understand that it takes that long for the Spirit of God to properly teach me what is in here. And once I have learned it, then I can pass it on to you.

As Christians I think we're all very much aware of the fact that God is a God of great grace, that God has poured out to undeserving sinners the grace of salvation and beyond that grace upon grace, abundant grace for time and eternity is promised to us. We learn that God is not only a God of grace but God is a God of generous and abounding, yes superabounding grace. The amazing grace of God causes God to want to reward, imagine that, to reward faithful believers. It's almost unimaginable that God who by grace saves us and God who by grace enables us should by grace reward us for what He has done in us, and yet He does. In Genesis 15 I was reading this week about Abram and it says in chapter 15 after Abram had just given testimony of his faithfulness to God by not accepting things from the King of Sodom, it says the Word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you, your reward shall be very great." And God has chosen to give to His beloved very great rewards...very great honor. The culmination of God's love and the culmination of God's grace and the culmination of God's generosity is what He has planned as a reward for those who faithfully love and serve Him.

For example, coming into the New Testament you perhaps remember Luke chapter 6 verse 22 Jesus said, "Blessed are you when men hate you and ostracize you and cast insults at you and spurn your name as evil for the sake of the Son of Man, be glad in that day and leap for joy." You say why? "For behold, your reward is great in heaven." No matter what you may endure in this world, God in His loving, generous, infinite, superabounding grace has prepared a great reward for us in heaven. In fact, the Apostle Paul says that things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him...those who love Him. In Ephesians 2:4 it says that God is rich in mercy because of His great love with which He's loved us and then in verse 5 when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with

Christ for by grace are you saved. Verse 6, and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. Here's the reason, "In order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." He saved us with the intent that through all the ages to come He would pour out surpassing riches and mercy and grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Peter saw it. Peter in his first epistle looked ahead to that living hope and said that Christ had prepared and purchased for us in His resurrection an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you. Reward...reward in heaven...reward in eternity, that's God's plan for His people.

The psalmist said in Psalm 58:11, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous." The writer of Hebrews characterizes God as a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. God is a rewarder of His people. He has promised that. And I don't believe anyone that I know of lived more in the light of that eternal reward than the beloved Apostle Paul. He lived for his eternal reward. He was not at all preoccupied with what he gained in this life. He said in Philippians 3, "I count all things but dung, rubbish, manure in pressing on for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." He said none of the things in this world are dear to me, not even my life. I just want to accomplish God's work and receive at His hand that which He has prepared for me. Things in this life were utterly incidental to Paul. Even the suffering of this life, he said in Romans 8:18, was not worthy to be compared with the glory which would belong to him in the future. And then that wonderful statement he makes to the Corinthians which I love so very much, and you do too if you remember it, 2 Corinthians 4:17 in which he says, "We look not at the things that are seen but at the things that are not seen, for the things that are seen are temporal, the things that are not seen are eternal." That was his focus in verse 18. Then in verse 17 he says this, "Therefore our momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." I have my eyes on eternal things. I have my eyes on my eternal reward.

And that's where his eyes are in our text, by the way. Would you look at it for me? Verse 6, "I'm already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Here's his future look, "In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing."

Facing his own martyrdom which was coming imminently, Paul had no fear, no regret, no desire to stay in this world, he longed for the world to come and the reward to come into that world. That was his hope. Now remember, this is a summary of his life, verses 6, 7 and 8. Verse 6 is the present tense, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure has come." He looks at the close of his life and he's ready. He sees where he is, he understands that it's an honor for him to die, this is his last act of sacrificial loyalty to Christ. And then in verse 7 he runs by the past of his life and he says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." In other words, as he looked over the course of his life he remembered that he was faithful. No regret, no sadness, no sense of unfulfillment, no feeling of incompleteness, not the smallest thing left undone, he had finished the work the Lord gave him to do just as he had hoped and prayed he would in Acts chapter 20. And he faces death with a triumphant spirit. He has seen the grace of God accomplished within him, all that God designed. And he is now ready to face death. The past is the past. The present is almost the past. And all that remains is the future.

Let's look with Paul then at verse 8 and let's see how he viewed the future, the crown of his life and the fact that he will be rewarded. And this, dear friends, is the joy of the heart of a faithful servant who comes to the end of his life knowing he was faithful and is to be rewarded. Verse 8, "In the future," he's looking ahead. That little phrase literally is what's remaining, or what remains. All that is left, he is saying. All that is left for me is to receive my reward, is to receive what God has for me.

Now somebody might say, "This seems a little egotistical. I've finished my course. I've kept the faith. I've done it all, now, Lord, I want my reward." Is this selfish? Is this somewhat crass or self-indulgent? Is this a bit self-centered? Let me tell you why it's not. God has made the promise. God promised the reward, it isn't wrong to want what God promised. Furthermore, listen carefully, our eternal reward takes into consideration not only what we did but why we did it. Did you get that? And why we did it can either affirm the doing or cancel the doing. For Paul writing in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and looking ahead to the time of reward says, "Do not go on passing judgment before the time but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts and then each man's praise will come to him from God." Motive is bound up in the deed. And admittedly sometimes...sometimes it seems as though you never do anything from a totally pure motive. But God knows the motive and what of that motive is pure is that which will be rewarded. So we don't need to fear that we might be rewarded for selfish self-centered egotistical self-indulgent crass service. The wrong motive cancels the doing of the deed. But whatever has been done for Christ and in His name with a proper heart motive for His glory, that will be rewarded.

So, as Paul anticipates the reward, he anticipates that reward which comes for a true heart and a pure intent. And so, his heart is set on that. He is the athlete who has won the struggle. He is the wrestler who has won the match. He is the boxer who has won the fight. He is the runner who has won the race. And now he looks to the judge's stand and he waits to hear of his winner's crown and to receive it. Nothing wrong with that. His effort was worthy and the righteous judge will properly reward him without mistake. So he looks to the future, in the future.

Then he says this, "There is laid up for me," the verb is the same language as 1 Timothy 6:19 used in the same basic way to express the same idea. It means safely stored away or deposited. And the term, by the way, was used of athletic awards, so he stays within the framework of his athletic analogy. And he says there is stored up, safely deposited with God, a reward for my service. It's a present tense, it could say...all that remains is what is being laid up for me...because he was still in the process of in a sense accumulating that reward, wasn't he? He was still alive and he was still serving the Lord.

Now as he looks at his reward he sees it in very general terms and doesn't go into detail, but I want you to understand what he means by this, and this is going to be, I think, rich and helpful to all of us. What does he call his reward? Verse 8, he says there is laid up for me, safely deposited in the presence of God, the crown...or perhaps the wreath for the word here is stephanos and that had to do with a wreath placed on someone's head usually woven like a garland out of some kind of plant. It is the very same word, by the way, used in Matthew 27:29 to describe the crown of thorns that was placed on the head of Christ. The word diadema or diadem as we know it in English, speaks of king's crown, this is not that. This wreath, this thing woven out of a plant, in Jesus' case a thorny plant, was a wreath that was used to put on the head of a person being honored. It was used, for example, of a magistrate who had completed his term in civil government and was stepping down and when he had a special event in his honor as a retiring magistrate, they would put on his head a laurel wreath as a

symbol of the crown of his faithful service. Whenever there was a special celebration of joy, the special guest at such a celebration would wear a laurel wreath as an indication of the focus on their dignity and the honor they were to receive on this occasion. When people went into the temple to worship pagan gods, they often put a garland on their own heads to indicate the dignity and the honor which they considered they were undertaking by entering the presence of a deity. So it was used of celebration and special honors.

But most of all it was associated with athletics. And the winner of any great athletic event in that part of the world might receive that garland around his head. In 2 Timothy 2 you might remember verse 5 which talks about the athlete who competes to win the prize, and the prize would be public honor as symbolized by the wearing of the wreath, much like we are watching as the athletes in the Olympics are receiving a gold or a silver or a bronze medal around their necks. Paul says I'm ready to step on to the judge's stand and have the righteous judge give me the proper reward.

He was anticipating the winner's wreath. And he was anticipating a winner's wreath unlike those that he had seen in his world that would never grow old. In 1 Corinthians 9:25 speaking of the effort and the winner's reward he wrote, "They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one." The runner's run to win a perishable thing, we to win an imperishable. So he was looking for his reward, his great reward, that which would crown his life, that which would evidence to him that God was pleased with the service he had rendered.

And just what is that crown? Look back at our verse. What is it? It is the crown of what? Of righteousness. Now as we look at that we might as the question...what does that mean? And some have suggested that it might be in the Greek language, it is in the genitive case and there are several options you have with a genitive form in the Greek. Some would say it is a genitive of source, that is to say it is the crown which comes from righteousness...righteousness being the source of the crown. That is to say it is the crown given to me for my righteousness, the crown that proceeds from righteousness. That's possible linguistically. I don't think it sounds true to the nature character and humility of Paul. And furthermore it wouldn't define the crown at all. If it said the crown that proceeds from righteousness, we wouldn't know what the crown meant or what it was.

There's another approach and I think a better one and that is to see it as a genitive of apposition, which is a very common use of the genitive which means it would read like this, in the future there is laid up for me the crown which is righteousness...the crown which is righteousness. I take it that that's exactly what it means, that's the preferred interpretation. You say why so? Well because I believe that is what is anticipated when one comes to Christ. Do you remember Matthew chapter 5 verse 6? As Jesus characterizes the one who comes to true faith He says this, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after...what?...righteousness for they shall be filled...filled with what?...with what they hunger for, with what they thirst for." Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled with righteousness. And I believe then that that is the crown of the believer's life. I believe there are two things that a believer, including Paul, desires. One, the presence of God. Two, the absence of...what?...sin. And so he is looking at the great laurel wreath of his life which is righteousness, the absence of sin that debilitating reality, deeply entrenched in his flesh. And though he had the gift of imputed righteousness even as Christ had been made unto him righteousness, and though he had practical righteousness as in Romans 6 when he wants the servant of sin had become the servant of righteousness, he did not yet have perfect righteousness. Yes the righteousness of Christ was imputed to him in salvation, yes practical righteousness became part of his life through the indwelling Spirit and the power of new life, but he had not yet known the fullness

of eternal perfection and righteousness. The Kingdom of God ultimately, Romans 14:17, is righteousness, righteousness as well as joy and peace. Christ is ultimately to be made unto us righteousness. And so as you look at the future and you look at your eternal reward, what you see is righteousness...righteousness. That's your reward.

In Galatians 5 and verse 5 Paul sees that in the future. He says, "For we through the Spirit by faith...listen to this...are waiting for the hope of righteousness." You say, "Now wait a minute, don't you have imputed righteousness from Christ?" Yes. "Don't you have practical righteousness in your living? Aren't you obeying God's law?" Yes, not perfectly but yes. But what I don't have is the fullness of righteousness for which I hunger and thirst. Every true believer longs for true and perfect righteousness.

Peter understood it, I think. In 2 Peter 3:13 he says that looking ahead to the new heaven and the new earth he says, "According to His promise we are looking for the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells." Righteousness...righteousness, the absence of sin. Revelation tells us there won't be any unrighteousness there, none at all. All the liars and sorcerers and defilers will be outside. Heaven will be righteousness perfected. So he is looking then at the reward of his life which is eternal righteousness.

Beloved, does that sound wonderful to you? The absence of sin, the presence of God, never to know again a temptation, never to know again an evil thought, never to know an evil word, never to speak an evil word, never to do an evil deed, never to not do something you should have done, absolute perfect and eternal righteousness...that's what he longed for. The greatest battle Paul ever knew in his life was not against false teachers and it was not against demons and it was not against Satan. The greatest Paul ever fought was against...what?...sin. And the weariness of life is all bound up in the fact that while we're trying to be successful in the battle against those outside of us, we're constantly having to fight the battle against that which is inside of us. And he longed for eternal righteousness. The fight was a fight and the struggle involved him and the race was a tough race and he was running against himself. And as he tried to keep the treasure of the faith, he had to fight his own fallenness and his own sinful heart to stay true to God's Word. And he was weary with it all and it was over and he wanted eternal righteousness.

This genitive of apposition that says the crown which is righteousness, I think we see in a couple of other key spots. Look at James 1 for a moment, this will broaden your understanding. James 1:12, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial for once he has been approved he will receive...here's another genitive of apposition...the crown which is life which the Lord has promised to those who...what? that's the second time we've heard that this morning...who love Him...who love Him." First Corinthians 2:9 said, "Eye hasn't seen and ear hasn't heard and it hasn't entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared to those who love Him," here James says, "Those who receive the crown which is life will be those who love Him." And Paul has just said in 2 Timothy 4:8 that this crown which is righteousness will not be for him only but for all those who have...what?...loved His appearing. Keep that in your mind. We're going to come back to that thought.

The crown which is life then is just like the crown which is righteousness. What is the crown which is life? The crown which is eternal life. These are separate crowns for separate people, this is the general wreath that will crown the head of every believer. We'll all enter into eternal righteousness. We'll all enter into eternal life.

Look at 1 Peter 5...1 Peter 5:4 he writes, "When the chief shepherd appears, when the chief shepherd appears you will receive the unfading crown...another genitive apposition...which is glory." That's promised to every believer. When the chief shepherd appears you will receive the crown which is righteousness, the crown which is life, the crown which is glory. All that means is you will be rewarded for your faith and service to Christ by eternal righteousness, eternal life and eternal glory. Wow! No more sin, no more death, no more humility or defeat, eternal righteousness, eternal life, eternal glory.

Revelation 2:10 also speaks of the crown which is life. "Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown which is life." So, beloved, we're not talking about some specific crown that goes on your head in eternity that you wear around forever saying, "Look what I won!" We're talking about eternal righteousness, eternal life and eternal glory. And just as in the time when the Bible was written, an honored person wore that laurel wreath as the expression of someone's respect and someone's love and someone's desire to exalt them, so we will wear forever eternal righteousness, eternal life and eternal glory as evidence of God's desire out of love and grace to exalt us forever and ever and ever in His presence. Marvelous, marvelous truth.

When you think about your eternal reward it's called by many names in Scripture, this eternal righteousness, eternal life, eternal glory. It's described as being with Christ, beholding the face of God, behold the glory of Christ, being glorified with Christ, reigning with Christ, reigning forever and ever, joint heirship with Christ, inheriting all things. It's described as an inheritance with the saints in light. It's described as shining as the stars, as everlasting light, as entering the joy of the Lord, as eternal rest, as fullness of joy, as the prize of the high calling of God, as treasure in heaven and as an eternal weight of glory. And it all refers to the same thing, eternal righteousness, eternal life, eternal glory.

That's what Paul looked for. He wanted what God had promised him, the absence of sin, the absence of death, the absence of humiliation, righteousness, life and glory forever. What a hope...what a hope. That's what was waiting him deposited safely with God.

You say, "Well, John, are you saying that there are no specific crowns? Are you saying that there are no specific rewards for my service to Christ?" No, that's just not spoken of here. If I can footnote let me say I believe that there will be a time when we will receive certain rewards at the same time, that there will be the general reward of righteousness, life and glory with all of its different terminology. There will also be some specific rewards to individual believers for their faithful service. They will be over and above the great rewards.

Now if you look at eternal righteousness, eternal life, eternal glory, you can see that all wrapped up in the parable of Matthew 20. Don't look it up, we don't have time. But in that parable Jesus pictures a man who went out to hire some people to work in his vineyard. He hired some, they worked twelve hours. He hired some more, they worked nine hours. He hired some more, they worked six hours. He hired some more, they worked three hours. He hired some, they worked one hour. At the end of the day he paid them all...what?...the same, exactly the same. And Jesus was saying the last shall be first, the first shall be last which means everybody ends up the same. The last are first, they're first. And if the first are last, as soon as they become last they be first again. So everybody finishes the same. And the point of the parable is illustrated in the way the men were paid. No matter what your service was, no matter how long you worked, no matter how hard the work, in the end we'll all

receive the same eternal life, the same eternal righteousness, the same eternal life, the same eternal glory, the same eternal Christlikeness. That's illustrated in that parable.

You say, "Well what about the individual rewards? Aren't there some specific rewards to individual believers like us for our service to Christ?" Yes, I believe there are and I believe Scripture teaches about those. In Romans, for example, just briefly to touch the Scriptures, we don't have time to develop them, Romans 14 it says verse 12...verse 10, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God, then verse 12, each one of us will give account of himself to God. So we're going to bow the knee, verse 11 says, and we're going to praise God. That's, I think, very specifically talking about the judgment time of believers. We're going to come before the Lord, He's going to evaluate our works. We'll all have eternal life, righteousness and glory but He's going to evaluate our service. And each one of us will give an accounting of our service.

Second Corinthians 5 broadens our understanding a little bit, verse 10, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Same idea, judgment seat of God in the prior passage, judgment seat of Christ here, Christ is God, that each one may be rewarded for his deeds in the body according to what he's done whether it's good or phaulos, not really wicked or evil like the word kakia, or kakos, but useless, valueless because there's no issue of sin there, there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ, Romans 8:1. We're not going to the judgment seat of Christ to be punished for our sin, to have our sins exposed, there's no sin there, sin has been dealt with, right? At what judgment seat was sin dealt its fatal blow? The cross. The judgment seat is not a place of condemnation, the bema as it's called, is not a place of judgment. Sin has been taken care of. I don't believe there will be any sin there at all. I don't believe there will be any sin there. For believer's sin is a past issue, it's put away in Christ. No sin brought up. Only an evaluation of a believer's service to determine what is good. And the basis of the future reward will be that service rendered in this life. There's no issue of evil there. The judgment seat of Christ, whether our deeds were highly valued or useless. Sin is not the issue, just the relative value of our service to Christ.

Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 3, one more and perhaps the most key passage. Describing that event it says verse 12 that we can build our lives with gold, silver, precious stone, wood, hay, straw. Now are any of those things evil? Is straw evil? Is hay evil? Is wood evil? No, they're just relatively invalue...relatively valuable or invaluable. Precious stones are invaluable, gold is valuable, silver is valuable, wood is not so valuable. They throw wood away. You have never seen a gold scrap heap. You've never seen a silver scrap heap. But you have seen a lot of wood scrap heaps. Straw, hay...not particularly valuable, not evil just of no value. So he is saying you are building your life and some of the things you do are gold, silver, precious stones, some are wood, hay and straw. In the day that we come to the judgment seat of Christ our work will be made manifest or evident, the day will show it, fire comes in the picture here, fire hits all that...guess what burns? Straw burns, hay burns, wood burns, the rest doesn't. So that's what remains. On the basis of what remains in verse 14 it says he shall receive a...what?...a reward. So here beyond that sort of generic eternal righteousness, eternal life, eternal glory, the Lord will grant to us some reward. And whatever is burned up, verse 15 says, we'll just suffer the loss of reward but still be saved. We just won't have the reward like we might have had.

You say, "Well, what in the world are these rewards?" And as I pointed out in our series on heaven, I believe the reward itself given to us will be our capacity and the nature of our eternal service. We'll all have eternal righteousness, eternal life, eternal glory, eternal Christlikeness, but we'll all do different things in eternity. And the things we do and the sphere of our service and the nature of our service

and the sphere of our authority and the nature of our co-regency with Christ will be determined by the faithfulness of our service here. Just by faith in Christ and salvation you receive the crown of righteousness, the crown of life, the crown of glory, but the rest of these rewards come as a result of your faithful service here and what you do in service here will determine the nature and extent of your service and your authority and your co-reigning with Christ throughout eternity.

Revelation 7:13 to 15 says we'll serve Him. Revelation 22:3 says we'll serve Him. The nature of that service, I believe, determined by our service here. In Matthew you have the parable where our Lord promises the person who has been faithful over little that He will give him...what?...much, much greater service, much greater authority. The man the Lord Jesus talks about, the one who is faithful over a small area being given a greater area of responsibility. And thinking of Luke I think it's chapter 12 verse 42 where the Lord talks about the one who is a faithful servant, He says in verse 43, "Blessed is the slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes, truly I say to you he'll put him in charge of all his possessions." In other words, if you're faithful while the Lord's away, when He comes back He'll give you a greater sphere of responsibility. If you're faithful with what He gives you here, if you use your gift here and use your ministry here and use your opportunity here, then forever and ever and ever you'll have a greater sphere of service.

And I want you to know, beloved, you know this as well, the greatest single joy in life is serving Christ, right? So the greatest joy of eternity will be serving Him. And the greater the opportunity to serve Him in eternity, the more wonderfully fulfilling it would be. That's why John writes in 2 John 8, "Look to yourselves that you don't lose your reward," it's precious because what you do here will be rewarded by God's allowing you to do things there in heaven forever and ever. Revelation 3:11, "Don't let anybody take your crowns from you," don't let anybody rob you of that. You be faithful so you don't lose the reward you've already gained by some discrediting, some sin. We're going to reign with Christ. Revelation 2:26 it says, "I'll give him authority over the nations." We're going to have...we're going to reign with Christ, we're going to serve with Christ. And the sphere of our reigning and the sphere of our service is determined by the faithfulness here. You remember the man who was faithful with what the master gave him and he said, "Well, I'll give you ten cities." Faithful with a few minas, which is a hundred days labor, I'll give you five minas, or ten minas. That's the idea of eternity, when the master comes back all those parables say is if you've been faithful with what you've had, He's going to give you more, more service, more responsibility, more authority. That, I believe, is what our eternal reward specifically is. Generally it's eternal righteousness, eternal life, eternal glory, eternal Christlikeness. But we're all going to spend eternity serving Him and ruling along side of Him.

That's a footnote. Look back at the text. So what Paul is saying is that I'm looking forward to the crown which is eternal righteousness, I'm looking forward to being free from sin. I'm looking forward to eternal perfection. How is that received? Look what he says. "Which the Lord, the righteous judge," He's a perfect judge. You know He never makes a mistake? Never makes a mistake, perfect, righteous judge. He's a lot better than the judges at the Olympics, wouldn't you say? Perfect judge, never makes a mistake, knows exactly what everybody's performance is and whether it's perfect or imperfect and to what degree, perfect. He is the judge, it says in verse 1, of the living and the dead. And he says in that day the judge who is perfect in His judgment will apodidomi, will recompense me, will reward me. The judge who sees all, who knows all, who evaluates all in perfect righteousness will perfectly evaluate my life and give to me that eternal righteousness, that eternal life, that eternal glory and whatever other reward He deems fit.

You say, "When does it happen?" It says it happens on that day, on that day. What day? Well he's already mentioned that twice in this epistle. Chapter 1 verse 12 he mentioned that day, chapter 1 verse 18 he mentioned that day, and here he mentions it for the third time. It has to do with the day of the judgment seat of Christ, the judgment seat of Christ, the time when the Lord brings His people to the evaluation of their service.

You say, "When is that?" Well do you remember we were reading a moment ago in 1 Corinthians chapter 4, listen to verse 5, "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time but wait...where it is...until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts and then each man's praise will come to him from God." You'll get your reward in that day...here's the phrase...when the Lord comes. It's at the coming of the Lord, it's at the coming of the Lord for His people, at the coming of the Lord for His redeemed, it's when the Lord comes. Revelation 22:12 says, "Behold, I come quickly and my reward is with me." I believe it's right after the Rapture of the church. The Lord comes and raptures His church and takes us away and then we receive the reward.

You say, "Now wait a minute, you said that the eternal reward was eternal righteousness, eternal life and eternal glory. If we have to wait until the Rapture to get that, then what are people doing now who died?" Fair question. Well they already have eternal righteousness, eternal life and eternal glory only not in its fullness. You say, "Why not?" Because they don't have their glorified...what?...their body. So though they have eternal righteousness and eternal life and eternal glory, they have not yet experienced fully what that means because they do not have a glorified body to give full expression to that. And while they probably are already serving and reigning with the Lord in some way, it's not the fullest and final expression of that because they are as yet an incomplete being. And so Paul is looking to that fullness on the day when the Lord comes, takes His church and then rewards His church with glorified bodies and they in that final and fully redeemed total expression are able to live out their righteousness life glory and render their service and their authority on His behalf. So it's in that day that the fullness of it comes to pass, that day when the Master comes, in the words of Matthew 25:19, to settle His accounts and rewards His faithful servants.

So, there is a day when Jesus comes. The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians that He will rapture the church. The dead in Christ will rise first. We which are alive and remain will be caught up to meet them in the air then all of us will be in glorified spirits, glorified bodies, we'll be able to give full expression to our eternal righteousness, our eternal life, our eternal glory, our eternal Christlikeness and render full service, full authority over whatever God causes us to lead.

You see, it says in Luke 14:14 these words, "You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Very important statement. It's at the resurrection of the righteous that this will take place. That is not to say, and please don't miss this, that people now in the presence of the Lord are not expressing full righteousness, and are not expressing rather righteousness, life and glory, it's just not the full and complete expression that they will have when they receive their glorified bodies.

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:19, "For who is our hope, or joy, or crown of exaltation, or celebration? Is it not even you...listen to this...in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?" In other words, what's the crown of my ministry? What's the supreme joy of my life? What's the greatest glory for which I live? To see you at the coming of Christ. Why? Because it's at His coming that you will be redeemed soul and redeemed body, joined together in full expression of eternal righteousness, eternal life, eternal glory, eternal Christlikeness. Until that time it's not complete...it's

not complete.

And lastly, who is this for? Who gets in on this kind of reward? Look at the end of the verse, so very basic. On that day He will bring this reward and all that we have discussed not only to me but also to all...and what's the qualifier?, who have what?...loved His epiphaneia, His presence. Now remember I mentioned a moment ago that several times we read about those that loved Him. James said a crown of life is promised to those that love Him. Paul says that we don't even know with our eyes or ears or minds what God has prepared for those that...what?...love Him. And here he says this crown is given to all those who have...perfect tense...and in the past and continually are loving His presence. What does that tell us? Well who does this refer to? I'll tell you who it refers to, all true Christians. I have said this, I repeat it again, the greatest single mark of a true believer is love for God and Christ. That's it, that's the bottom line. Love, the heart of love toward God and Christ, Christians love God, love Christ, non Christians don't. That is one dominant note and theme in the matter of regeneration and conversion. When a person becomes a Christian, they love God, they love Christ, and they ought to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. But we're not there yet. When a person is regenerated and made new in Christ, he's given a new heart and a new will and a new desire and a new intent and a new attitude that expresses itself in love...in love. That's the essence of salvation, you love God. You don't always do what's right, but you love God and you love Christ. And when you sin, you feel badly because you have violated your love.

Jesus made it very clear in John chapter 5 and verse 42, Jesus said words that you can't miss. "I know you," He says, "that you do not have the love of God in yourselves," that's how He characterized the unbelievers. You don't love God...you don't love God. He characterized believers in John 14, just the opposite. John 14:21, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father and I will love him." He loves you, God loves you, you love Him. That's characteristic of a believer. Verse 23, "If anyone loves Me he'll keep My word, My Father will love him, will come to him and make our abode with him. We dwell in people who love us." Regeneration, see, is God's work whereby He enables you to love God. It says that God has shed abroad, Romans 5:5 in our hearts the love of Himself.

"Beloved," 1 John 4:7, "let us love one another for love is from God and everyone who loves...here it is...is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God." Could it be any clearer than that? The bottom line, loving God...loving God. Philippians 3:20, "Our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, Jesus Christ." Why do we eagerly wait? We love Him...we love Him. First Corinthians 16:22 says, "If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed, maranatha." Curse the ones who don't love Him. Bless the ones who do.

So, beloved, you can look at this verse and apply it to your own life. The reward of eternal righteousness and eternal life and eternal glory and eternal service and eternal authority that comes along with these general things is promised to all those who have loved His presence, because that's the mark of a believer, it refers to all believers, all Christians. Do you love Christ? Is that the deepest truest expression of what's in you? You love Christ? You show it by obeying Him. Is that the deepest desire of your heart? Do you delight in His law? Do you long to obey? Then you're headed for an eternal reward. But on the way you can enhance and enrich that eternal reward by faithful service and that's why Paul wrote to the Colossians these words..."Whatever you do, do your work heartily as for the Lord rather than for men knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance, it is the Lord Christ whom you serve." If you love Him, serve Him with all your heart and then enjoy eternity as He expresses back to you His gratitude for your service by enhancing your

service and your responsibility beyond your wildest dreams. And you'll know the fullness of eternal joy in serving the one who gave Himself for you. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You again this morning for such a wonderful testimony by the beloved Apostle Paul. Thank You for Your faithfulness to us. Even as we began with Abraham and the words that came to him, directly from heaven that told him You had a great reward, so we come clear to the end of the New Testament and we hear the words of Jesus..."Behold I come quickly and My reward is with Me." O Lord, how thankful we are that You're a God of love and grace and generosity and that You have designed eternity in order that You might pour out on us Your kindness, expressing to us all Your love, all Your goodness. Father, we long to serve You faithfully that we may enter into the fullness of our reward. We long to know that eternal righteousness, eternal life, eternal glory. We long to serve in the most wide- far-reaching way we can throughout eternity. We long to be as responsible as You will allow us and so, Lord, with that as a goal, help us to be faithful here knowing that if we're faithful over little, You'll make us lord over much. If we rule well over five cities, You'll give us ten. If we serve You faithfully, You'll give us a greater service. To that end we pray that Christ might be exalted now and throughout all eternity. Amen.

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