

The Judgment Seat of Christ: Going for the Gold

Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.

INTRODUCTION

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul gives us very important details about the judgment seat of Christ. This is probably the premiere passage, the passage that gives more details than any other passage in the Bible. However, having studied eternal rewards for some years, I've learned that there's much more in the Bible on this subject than meets the eye.

I've heard different people say, "There's not that much in the Bible on it."

I say, "No, that's not true."

If you don't have a paradigm, if you don't have a perspective to see it, you won't see it anywhere. Once you begin to look for it, you will find it everywhere. Maybe it's overstated to say *everywhere*, but there are many passages in the Word of God that describe this. It's a very fascinating subject; a subject you should take very, very seriously because it's personal to your life and your future. Let's read this entire passage and then we'll break down some of the key phrases.

LET EACH ONE TAKE HEED

Paul writes, "Each one of you will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Cor. 3:8, paraphrased). Now go to verse 10. Here's the key exhortation: "But let each one take heed how he builds on it" (v. 10). In other words, be careful. Be careful. Take heed how you live. "Take heed how you build your life," is what he's saying; "be very careful about what decisions you make." Take heed.

NO OTHER FOUNDATION CAN BE LAID

Then, so that there's no confusion, Paul makes it clear: there is no other foundation for your life than the foundation which was laid by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). Paul said, "Don't be confused; I'm talking about eternal rewards, which you build on the foundation, but don't confuse them with the foundation. There's only one foundation: the person, the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ" (v. 11, paraphrased). The free gift of salvation is the only foundation that exists. You can't earn it; you can't deserve it; you can only receive it as a free gift. Don't confuse what you build on the foundation with the foundation itself. You can't earn salvation, but you can build with gold, silver, and precious stones on that foundation, and it will be rewarded forever.

MOST OF THE DEEDS ARE SMALL

The amazing thing is that ninety-nine percent of the works you do are small. They're very small works. Ninety-nine percent of the works of your whole Christian life are things like saying kind words, giving some money, giving some effort, humbling yourself—instead of defending yourself and exerting yourself in a proud way. They're very simple deeds; they're deeds that every one of us does every day. Don't think of the great deeds as those very unique, heroic acts. There may be a few heroic acts of obedience you make over several decades, but ninety-nine percent of our works are very small things. They're attitudes that lead to different actions. You can change your attitude, so you decide to serve, or even ignore, rather than attack the man. It's that simple. These are very simple deeds.

WHAT WILL YOU CHOOSE TO BUILD?

In verse 12, Paul says we can build on the foundation of the free gift of salvation, and he lists six different types of building materials: three of them are good and three of them are bad. He says, “Here is what you can build your life with: gold, silver, precious stones” (v. 12, paraphrased). He’s talking about acts of obedience, acts of love, and acts of humility that turn into gold on the last day. Or, you can build on the free gift of salvation, the foundation of salvation, with wood, hay, and straw. After the day you are born again, you can live in such a way that all that you’re doing with your time and money produces wood, hay, and straw. Then, on the last day, it all burns up. You love Jesus, but the decisions you made with your time, your words, your money, and your energy, burned up. It amounted to nothing in eternity. What an intense revelation of life here! Paul says in essence, “If anyone builds on the foundation of the free gift of salvation, you can build a lifestyle that results in gold, silver, and precious stones in the age to come, or you can build with life choices that result in wood, hay, and straw on the last day” (v. 12, paraphrased).

EACH PERSON’S WORK WILL BE CLEAR

In the next verse, Paul says, “Be sure of this: each person’s work, each person’s life work, will become clear” (1 Cor. 3:13, paraphrased). Your life work is the summary of your entire Christian life, but it includes all the individual acts of obedience along the way. Each person’s life work, including every individual, very small act of obedience, will all become clear. The truth about all of them will become clear when you stand before Jesus. “For the day will declare the truth about what you did” (v. 13, paraphrased). What’s “the day?” The “day” is the day you stand before the judgment seat of Christ. It’s the trophy center, so to speak—the gold-medalist platform. The day when you stand before Jesus to receive your rewards, the truth about the way you lived will be openly declared by Jesus. Jesus will declare it. He will declare it with His words, but He will also declare it by the gifts and the rewards He gives you. He will declare what He feels about the way you lived before Him. Each person’s life work will become clear. The truth about it will be clear, because on the day we stand before Jesus, it will declare the truth about the way we lived on the earth.

HIS EYES WILL SEE THE MOTIVE

“For the day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is” (1 Cor. 3:13b). This is the fire of Jesus’ eyes. I’m adding that in, but those eyes will test every single act you committed. His eyes of fire will look at your life and His eyes of fire will see the motive and the reality behind everything we did. It will reveal and test everyone’s work to reveal what sort of work it was. Was it gold, silver, and precious stones? Or was your work wood, hay, and straw?

THIS IS THE TIME TO INVEST Now Paul goes on to make the final point. “If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward” (1 Cor. 3:14). In other words, “If anyone’s life work, which he has built upon the free gift of salvation, endures, he will receive a reward” (paraphrased). Oooh, yes, this is good! If it endures, you’ll receive a reward forever. Beloved, the exchange rate is really high right now. This is the time to cash in; this is the time to put your time, energy, effort, money, and all that you have into the invisible kingdom before the eyes of Him who is invisible. He sees it and He returns it all back to you—openly—on that day. Oooh, I love this verse.

“IF ANYONE’S WORK IS BURNED . . .”

“If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss” (1 Cor. 3:15). If anyone’s work is burned up, meaning, the way they spent their time, the way they spent their money, the way they used their energy. If it wasn’t doing the will of God, it will be burned up. That believer will suffer loss. “But he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire”

(v. 15b). Paul is saying that it's possible for a believer to receive the free gift of salvation, although they spent their time, money, and energy in such a way that, when they stand before Jesus, when all of their life work is offered to Him, it's all burned. They themselves are saved, but their life's work is burned.

This is what the Lord told me in that visionary experience I spoke about earlier. He looked at me and said, "You're saved, but your life was wasted." In essence He was really speaking about 1 Corinthians 3:15. There are many believers, I believe, who will be saved, but everything they did after their salvation will be wasted. I feel this. When I read this, I feel it. Each time—rather, almost every time—I read this passage, I feel this phrase, "He will suffer loss." Do you know what *suffer* means? It means *suffer*. *Suffer* is a bad word on the last day. What that means is that they'll have the pain of regret. They're saved, they know Jesus loves them, they love Jesus. They have a resurrected body, and that's pretty good, but when they look in the eyes of Him who gave them everything, and He says, "What did you give Me to show your love?" they have nothing, but they will have pain. It will be the pain of love; it will be the pain of regret; but beloved, the Bible makes it clear that it will be pain.

Someone says, "What about that verse about how all tears will be wiped away?" (c.f. Rev. 21:4). It's true; but that verse is speaking of the end of the millennial kingdom, a thousand years after this day. I believe that believers will have the pain of regret for a season in the age to come. I don't know if it lasts the whole 1,000 years. I do know that after that, it's all wiped away.

REMAIN FAITHFUL MOMENT BY MOMENT

I've never experienced more pain in my life than in that visionary experience. I came out of it and said to myself, "I'm not going to live in such a way as to hear that from the lips of Jesus. I will not!" Now, I'm a weak man, just as you're a weak man or woman. I said, "I need help; I'm going to blow it 1,000 times."

And the Lord's answer to all of us is, "Hey, I work well with weak people. That's all I have. You qualify; I'll help you. Don't give up; don't give in. If you stay with it, you'll win. You'll break through, little by little in every issue, if you stay with it. Step by step, decision by decision, just stay with it."

When you blow it, confess it. Don't make up some Bible verse to back up your sin. Call it sin. You're not going to fake Jesus out; trust me. He's the one Man you'll never fake out. Call it sin. "Well, we didn't really go all the way. We didn't actually cross the line. It wasn't sin; it was mostly just affection." Beloved, call it sin. Be honest with Him. Say, "I don't want to do that. It was wrong. I declare war on it." Press delete. Stand before Him in boldness and go hard after God. Don't even lose one hour. I mean, go hard after God within that hour. Eventually, if you keep doing that, you won't yield to that same issue that has been dogging you time and time again. You'll break through, you really will, in time.

THE VAST RANGE OF DEGREES OF REWARD

Paragraph D. There will be a vast range of degrees of reward, or different experiences of the glory of God, in the age to come. Did you know that, in the age to come, every one of you will have a unique measure of the glory of God that is different from that of the person next to you? Not one of you will have the exact, same measure of the glory of God as another person. Just as in this age, there's not one believer on the earth who has the exact, same experience of another believer. Every one of us is unique. It will be the same in the age to come. Some people have this idea that they cross over the line in the age to come, they get a resurrected body, and then everything is the same. Wrong. That's not biblical. We'll all be unique and we'll all have different

experiences with the Lord and different measures of the glory of God in our future experience. The measure of the glory of God we experience in the age to come will be related, not to how gifted we were, not to how smart we were, but to how responsive we were in this age to the will of God, to the heart of Jesus.

ONE DIFFERS FROM ANOTHER

Paul said, “There is one glory of the sun ... and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:41-42a). What does this mean? Paul says, “Look up in the sky. There are billions of stars. Every single star has a different mass, a different amount of radiance. In all the properties of these billions and billions of stars, the way they move and everything else, not one star is identical to another.” He says, “It’s the same way in the resurrection.” Did you know that in the age to come, some of you will have a capacity for glory in your physical, resurrected body that far surpasses the capacity for glory of others in their physical, resurrected bodies? Just like the angels: some angels have a great radiance of the glory of God and other angels have a far lesser radiance of the glory of God.

YOU WILL HAVE A GLORIOUS BODY

We’ll all have resurrected bodies. Let me just talk about that for a second. I don’t want to go too far off, but the resurrected body is one of my favorite subjects. Did you know that in the age to come, you’re going to have a physical—I want you to say *physical*—a *physical* body? You’ll be able to say, “Wow, physical.” You’ll have the supernatural abilities of the resurrection in your physical body. When you hug each other in the age to come, it won’t be like you’re a ghost. You won’t hug each other, pass through each other, and say, “Whoa! Let’s try that again. Hey, give me a hug!” That’s not how it’s going to be. When you hug each other—boom! You’ll feel that guy’s elbow. He’ll have an elbow, a real one, forever. You’ll touch him and say, “Hey, this is really cool!”

THE NEW JERUSALEM IS COMING

Some people imagine that the age to come is sitting on a white cloud, playing a harp, and floating in the sky. They’re going to see their best friend, way over there, and say, “Hey bro!”

“Dude, how is it going? Love Jesus!”

“Yes, me too!”

“See ya!”

A thousand years later, “Hey again! Goin’?”

“Yeah, it’s happening! Loving God!”

“Yeah, me too! See you!”

That’s not eternity. You’re not going to float on a cloud, playing a harp, feeling guilty that you don’t like worshiping all day long. That’s not what it’s going to be like. You’re going to have a real, physical body and you’re really going to be on the earth, this earth. You’ll feel the earth with your feet—for real—because the New Jerusalem, the city we’ll live in, is coming down to the earth. I think Justin Rizzo is leading worship tomorrow, or maybe the next day. He has the best songs on the New Jerusalem. He sings something like fifty

songs on the New Jerusalem. He's fixated on this subject. I love it! Justin, if you're out there, sing one or two of them; they're awesome. Many believers don't have any vision of the New Jerusalem coming down to the earth.

YOU WILL LEARN, GROW, WORK, TEACH, EAT, AND LOVE

You're going to live on the earth with a physical body and you're going to eat food and have friends and you're going to learn and you're going to teach. It's going to be a growing experience with real work. When you get a resurrected body, you don't get an omniscience chip. Some people think they get a resurrected body, cross the line, and now they know everything. "I know everything!" No. With a resurrected body, your ability to learn will be greatly enhanced. You'll learn just like you do now: line upon line, one piece of information at a time. You'll meet new people and introduce them to your friends. You'll hear their story, tell their story to other people, teach the Bible, learn the Bible, do the work of the kingdom forever and ever. It will be very exciting. It won't be boring, I promise you.

THINK ABOUT HEAVEN RIGHTLY

One preacher said, "If you don't think about heaven rightly, you won't think about heaven at all." Most people don't think about heaven rightly. They think of it as floating on a cloud—so they never think about it. If you don't think about it rightly, you'll never think about it. Let me tell you how to think of heaven rightly. You're coming to the earth with a physical, material dimension and a supernatural, spiritual dimension merged together, forever, on the earth. Think about it that way and it will start exciting you. I've gotten way off, but I'm glad I did. Every single one of you will differ in glory from one another. Study the resurrected body; it's awesome. It's worth everything we're going through to just press in a little for a few decades. The rewards we get, the pay, is so great. Beloved, it's worth it. I don't care what your friends might say. It's worth it.

I WOULD LIVE WITH MORE INTENSITY, NOT LESS"

I've been pressing into God hard for forty years. I look back over forty years and I made a lot of mistakes. But there's one thing I don't regret. I missed out on a lot of money, a lot of parties, a lot of opportunities, a lot of games, a lot of recreation. I missed out on a lot of that. I have zero regret at age fifty-five about missing those things. None. Zero. If I had to do it again, I would do it with more intensity, not less.

DON'T LET THE PROMOTERS OF PASSIVE LIVING ROB YOU OF ETERNAL REWARD

Many of you are twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three. Go hard. Don't listen to those voices over there—this false grace teaching—telling you the grace of God is about chilling out, living passively, living in compromise. That somehow, that's what Jesus died for: to make us comfortable while living a passive life. That's not the grace of God; that's a deception. Don't buy into that false doctrine. It's all over the Church today: "Well, I'm really into grace."

Do you think Jesus became a human, died, and rose from the dead to make you comfortable—chilling out and living for yourself? If so, you're absolutely deluded. He died to make you a lovesick worshiper and to give you the power to love God with all your heart. That's what He died for. That false doctrine of grace is all over the Church and all over the young adult movements. Jesus won't buy it at the judgment seat. He will expose it as dark and false. Don't buy it; it won't hold up on that day, I promise you.

Jesus would say, "You think I became a Man and died so you could live that way? Are you kidding Me? I want you. I love you. I want you to love Me. That's why I came after you. . . not so you could chill out your whole life, live selfishly, and call it the grace of God."

I love Corey Russell's message the other day. I was back there watching. I tell you, I wished I was twenty years old so I could do it all over again, harder. I'm going to do it harder in the next few decades anyway, even at age fifty-five.

THERE ARE TIMES THAT FLOW AND THERE ARE TIMES, WELL . . .

Paragraph F. Paul said, "Every man will be rewarded according to his labor" (1 Cor. 3:8, paraphrased). Paul said, ". . . his labor." What a word: *labor*. You know why he used the word *labor*? Because it's labor! He really said it right. Paul, you get it.

Paul says, "Yes, I know. I did it. It's labor."

Our obedience takes effort, but not always. Some of our obedience flows like a river, and then some of it's effort. I love the obedience that flows out of my heart with energy and love. I love what I do. I love righteousness in those moments. The glory of righteousness fills my heart, I feel radiant, and I love that flow. I also know what it means to not love the right thing and choose it anyway, and labor with it. I know what it means to flow and I have known what it means to labor. Both of them are a part of our lives. I like the flow better, but I still labor in my ministry and I labor in my obedience. Sometimes, not all the time, it's labor. It takes effort. Sometimes it's costly. Sometimes it flows and it doesn't cost anything. We think, "Are You kidding, Jesus? I would do this anytime, because I love You."

At other times it's like, "You want me to do *what*? Everyone else is doing the opposite."

He says, "I want you to do what I tell you to do."

IF HE CAN CHANGE ME, HE CAN CHANGE YOU

It's costly sometimes. It's difficult. It's inconvenient. The effort is hard—the effort to wake yourself up, to put yourself in His presence, and to pray. It takes effort. I remember when I was twenty-four or twenty-five years old. Again, that was thirty years ago. I made a decision when I was about twenty-four years old that I was going to go to daily prayer meetings for the rest of my life. I thought, "Oh, gee! Hope I do!" I was twenty-four and all excited. The Lord talked to me about intercession. I didn't get it. He talked to me about being in His presence. It was really boring. I loved Jesus, but the Bible was boring, prayer was boring, and I hated fasting. I said, "I love You, Jesus, but the Bible is boring and prayer is boring and I hate fasting." I liked meetings. I did like meetings; I could go to meetings every day. They were fun. Music was good. I flirted with a few of the girls and showed off a little. This was back at my high school. I loved meetings; they were fun. Raw me and Jesus, yeah! Boring Bible, distant Jesus, defiled heart, ehhhh! I just said, "No way." If you had told me in my early twenties that I would be leading a twenty-four-hour house of prayer, I would have said, "Absolutely impossible. There's no man on the earth who could endure prayer, and certainly I'm not going to. I'm just not going to." If you had told me in my twenties what I would be doing in my fifties, I wouldn't believe you. I didn't like to pray at all.

Here's my point: we're all the same. The Lord changed me. He could change even me. I get where you are; I really do get it. I loved Him; I didn't like the Bible, prayer, quietness, or about ten other things—but I loved Him. I get where you are. Sometimes I meet young people and they give me the "Impress Mike" speech. I say, "Hey, you little whippersnapper; I was a little man too! I know exactly what you feel and do. I did it all, and more than you!"

They say, “No . . . ! I didn’t even know you knew that!”

I say, “Oh, I did lots of bad stuff.” Never mind, that’s for another day. My point is, that if God can take a defiled, bored heart like mine and make it interested in engaging with God, He can do it with you. I promise you, I was like you. I still am like you, I’m just older. My mind is different than it used to be, and that’s why my heart feels more.

STAY WITH IT AND HE WILL DO IT

I made a commitment at about age twenty-four. I said, “I’m going to go to daily prayer meetings.” I remember I was thinking, “This could be more bitter than death. What if I live to be, like, fifty? What if I go for years and I’m still having to do this?” Well, by the grace of God, it’s been thirty years. I’m guessing ninety-eight percent of the times I’ve been to corporate prayer meetings. I’ve never calculated, but I stayed with it through the years. My point isn’t that it was fun, exciting, or good. Just stay with it. Stay with it and everything starts moving in its own time. As Misty sings, He changes everything in its own time: some of it in this age, and some in the age to come.

Anyway, it’s labor sometimes. It’s labor. I know what it means to sit in boring prayer meetings reading a boring Bible with my defiled heart. I know what that means. I also know what it means to stay with it. I promise you, it changes. It changes. I’ve watched more people change in the last twelve years. I mean, Misty and Shelley weren’t exactly like this twelve years ago. That’s another story for another day. I love what has happened in their weak, little, broken hearts in the last twelve years. I say, “This is a miracle! This can happen to everyone!”

IT’S POSSIBLE TO BUILD WRONGLY

Paragraph G. Paul spoke about six different types of building materials. Here is his point: it’s possible to build with the wrong materials. As a born-again believer who loves Jesus, you can build with the wrong materials. In other words, you can use your time, money, energy, and abilities, and invest them in things that Jesus doesn’t remember or doesn’t reward. He remembers them but He doesn’t reward them. He doesn’t remember them for good. So, I want to spend my money in such a way that He says, “I like the way you spent your money. Not all of it, but I like how you spent a lot of it.” I want Him to say that to me on that day.

Gold, silver, and precious stones are of great value. They’re rare. They’re found in small quantities below the ground. It takes work to get them. When they go through the fire, they’re not in any way diminished, but purified. The fire doesn’t hurt them; it helps them. Wood, hay, and stubble are exactly the opposite. They’re of little value, not like gold. They’re common; they’re found in large quantities. They’re above the ground. They’re easy to get and the fire consumes them.

What these six building materials symbolize are the decisions you make with your time, your money, your energy, your influence, your abilities. If you choose the right things, they become gold, silver, and precious stones. If you choose mediocre and wrong things, they burn up on the last day.

“THE FIRE WILL TEST EACH ONE’S WORK, OF WHAT SORT IT IS”

Paragraph I. Paul said the fire will test everyone’s life work (1 Cor. 3:13). Your work will be tested, I promise you. The way you spent money last year and the way you spent money next year will be tested. I don’t care what Bible verse you pull out to justify the negative, or whatever way you think about it, it won’t hold up if it’s not true. I’m talking about the negative things. The reason I keep saying this, again, is that there’s a momentum

growing among young adults today with this view of the grace of God that's really distorted and wrong. It is a view of the grace of God that empowers them to live passively with compromise, and to feel comfortable while doing it. I'm telling you, the fire will test your work. If no one even agrees with you or appreciates what you're doing, but in the secret place—in your time, your money, your energy—you're trying to do the will of God, the fire will show that you were doing it for love, even though no one else even noticed. Jesus will say, "I noticed it, and My fire will reveal that it was gold."

"IF ANYONE'S WORK IS BURNED, HE WILL SUFFER LOSS"

Paragraph J. 1 Cor. 13:14-15. "If anyone's work ... endures, he will receive a reward" (v. 14, paraphrased). "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss" (v. 15).—meaning he won't receive reward.

Paragraph K. This verse is so heavy: "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss." I feel this because of that experience thirty-two years ago when I was twenty-three years old. I can still remember this. Paul said, "That man will be saved; he will suffer loss." Beloved, it's possible to suffer loss of potential rewards—rewards that God wanted you to have—that you never entered into.

HE UNDERSTANDS OUR HUMAN FRAILTY

Don't worry; God isn't like a mean coach. He's not looking at you, saying, "OK, I warned you. You had better pay attention!" He doesn't have a mean countenance. His standard is human-friendly. He's kind to weak and broken people. He wants us to make an effort. When we fail, He wants us to sign back up—again and again. I tell you, He looks at that and says, "That's good. I will reward that." He understands our frailty. Get the idea of the mean coach, the angry father, out of your mind. He's a Bridegroom who's also a king, who says, "I'm working with you. I want to reward you beyond anything you can imagine! Anything I can possibly reward you with—I will, because it's in My heart to give to you."

OBEDIENCE THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES

Beloved, He has a lot of rewards. If He gives you rewards, He doesn't run out of them so that He can't give them to someone else. He has plenty to give to everyone. He just wants it to be real, that's all. The apostle John talks about the fear of the Lord. This is a very sobering topic. Here's what he says: "Watch out that you don't lose what you worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully" (2 Jn. 8, paraphrased). Did you know you can lose some of the things you're working for if you don't stay obedient until the end? You'll lose out even on some of that early obedience. Obedience must be followed through throughout our lives. It doesn't mean we can't fail, but we can't give up. We have to stay with it.

YOU LOSE YOUR REWARD BY GIVING UP

I decided in my twenties that I wanted to be a man of prayer. I've had many bad days where prayer was so boring. I would sit in the room and say, "Ahh, this is horrible. God, I love You. Why did You invent prayer? Couldn't You think of another way to run Your kingdom? This doesn't make sense to me. You already know everything. Why do You care if I tell You what You should do? Come on!" Prayer seemed weird to me back then. I would say, "God, I'm telling You what You tell me to tell You? So that You know it—or so that I know it? Who's knowing this? What's going on?"

He says, "Just do it." Over the years I began to change on the inside. I said, "Whoa! This is a pretty good way to run a kingdom. I agree with it now."

Here's my point: we can fail and stumble, and that's one thing—to stumble and sign back up and go hard again. Stumble, sign back up, and go hard again. I've done that many times. What the enemy wants you to do is stumble and say, "Ah!" Stumble. "Ah!" Stumble and give up. "Ah! I'm not even going to try anymore!" That's what the Devil is after. That's how you lose your reward: not by stumbling, but by giving up. The point I want to make is that you can lose rewards that were within your reach in the grace of God to receive.

FORGET THE FLOW TO BE WELL-PLEASING

I've taught this over the years and people say, "I don't like that."

I ask, "Why?"

"Well, it makes me feel like it really matters what I do today."

I say, "Good, you're getting it. It really matters what you do today."

"Yes, but, I don't want to feel like it really matters, because then it really matters. I would rather just go with the flow."

No, forget that "go with the flow" thing. Make it your aim to be well-pleasing. You're going to stand before Him; so go hard, and I promise you, you won't regret it when the decades pass.

HOLD FAST WHAT YOU HAVE

Paragraph two. This is a troubling one. It's from the lips of Jesus in Revelation 3:11. Jesus said this. Again, this is Jesus, the great grace teacher. How many of you know that Jesus understands the grace of God? Here He says, "Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown" (Rev. 3:11).

You say, "What? How can you take my crown in the age to come? Do you run ahead of me in your resurrected body, steal my crown, and outrun me—running off in the other direction? How do you take my crown? Hey, come back here! Give me my crown!"

"Sorry!..."

No, how are you going to take my crown? Because He's talking about eternal rewards in this context, for sure. How does a human being take another human being's crown? He's not talking about salvation. Crowns and salvation aren't the same thing. No one can take your salvation; that's obvious. No man can get mad at you, take your salvation from you and say, "There you have it." He's not talking about salvation. What He's talking about is if you buy into some man's teaching and that man's teaching causes you to lose your zeal and your abandonment to God. He's taught you in a wrong way. You let go of your vision to press in, you buy into his teaching, and you live in a different way. On the last day, that man essentially stole your crown from you because you bought into his false doctrine on the grace of God.

When a man tells me, "Mike, settle down, chill out! God doesn't mind if you do all these things." I say, "You know what? I'm not interested in the persuasion to do less. You're not getting in between me and Jesus. I'm not buying your logic, your rhetoric; and you're not stealing anything from where I'm going to be on the last day. No, I will walk in the anointing to love Jesus with all my heart." I want you to be fiery about this.

The man says to me, “But that man has a really big ministry; he’s on TV!”

So what? If he’s famous, does that mean he has the Spirit of truth? I don’t think so. I don’t care how famous they are. Is the Spirit of truth in it? Does it the teaching give you a vision to give more to Jesus, or does it make you feel comfortable in giving less to Him? That’s the key question, along with several others as well.

SAVED AS THROUGH FIRE

Paragraph L. Paul said, “He himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:15). What an interesting phrase: “Saved as through fire.” What does that mean? Here Paul is quoting Amos the prophet. He’s quoting an Old Testament concept, but here’s the idea: Paul is picturing a man whose house catches on fire. The man gets up and says, “Ah, I have to get out!” He tries to get all his possessions. There’s smoke everywhere. He’s tripping all over the place; he drops everything; the roof is caving in. He doesn’t know where he’s at. Some man reaches in, grabs him, and pulls him out of the fire. He escapes in the nick of time. He’s lying on the ground. All his possessions were burned. He escaped the burning house. He was saved, but he barely escaped, coming through the flames.

Paul says, “Don’t live that way.” A lot of people love Jesus, they’re born again, but they live in such a way that when they stand before the fire of God, they’ll lose all that they lived for. They’ll escape through the flames. They’ll have their salvation, but they’ll lose everything else. This is real. They won’t say, “Well, praise the Lord; at least I’m saved!” They’ll suffer loss. They’ll say, “I regret this. I regret this! Why did I live so selfishly before the One who loved me so dearly? The One who gave everything?” We will look into Jesus’ eyes and say, “Why was I so selfish and so fixated on myself? Why could I not see that living for You was wisdom? It was the true way of life.”

I tell you, we will suffer loss. We won’t enjoy it. It won’t be incidental. We’ll feel it. It’s real. I felt it in a momentary experience when I was twenty-three years old. It was terrible; it has marked my life. I’ll never forget it. I can feel the pain of it to this day.

“BUY . . . GOLD REFINED . . . THAT YOU MAY BE RICH”

Paragraph M. I’m coming to our conclusion here. Revelation 3:18. This is an amazing verse. Jesus is speaking. He says, “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich” (Rev. 3:18). Wow, what a sentence. Here is the point I want to give you: Jesus appears to John the apostle to give him the book of Revelation, right? In Revelation 2-3, Jesus is giving seven messages to seven churches. This is the final exhortation, the final piece of advice Jesus gave directly to the Church in the Bible. If Jesus is going to give the final exhortation to the Church, what do you think it would be? He said, “Let me tell you this.” Now, I advise you; if Jesus is giving you advice, listen! He says, “I have some advice for you. I live on the other side. I have a resurrected body. I know what I’m talking about. I’m the Judge before whom you’ll stand. I advise you; get gold. Get gold. Refine it now, so that when you stand before My eyes of fire, I don’t burn it up. Get gold now.”

REMAIN STEADFAST

How do you get gold refined by fire? We make choices now. Many Christians don’t like them. We miss certain opportunities; we miss certain occasions for the flesh—and we feel the pain of it. We feel lonely sometimes. We feel the pain of drawing away from what everyone else is doing. That’s called fire. We feel it. It’s refining. We say, “No, no. I will obey Jesus. I don’t care what they’re doing.”

“Yes, but they’re all Christians, they’re all doing it.”

“No, I will obey Him.”

They’re mad at you, rejecting you, putting you down, mocking you, and you feel alone. You don’t feel His anointing or presence, but you stay obedient. Beloved, every single day you’re lining up your heart, making the choice, again and again. The choice is hard. That’s called making choices that are refined by fire. Jesus said, “That’s gold. I’m watching. They don’t think you’re acting in wisdom, but I do. If you get gold by making those choices and staying with them now, when you stand before Me, My eyes of fire won’t burn them up. My eyes of fire will prove them to be gold. So, I have one piece of advice for you: go get gold now. Get it.”

THE GREATEST ADVICE YOU’LL EVER RECEIVE AS A BELIEVER

Can you imagine that this is the last word of advice that Jesus gave the Church? Beloved, put this on your stationary; make this your life verse. This is the greatest advice you’ll ever receive as a believer. Here is my favorite part: “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire” (Rom. 3:18a). In other words, go through the fire now. Make those hard decisions.

Why? “That you may be rich” (Rev. 3:18b).

“So that you, Mike Bickle, will be rich.” This is really personal. I say, “I want to be rich; I really do.”

Jesus says, “Well, I actually want you to be, as well.”

“Well, that settles it. You want me to be and I want to be. Let’s do it.”

He says, “Mike, I want you to be rich. This is My will for you in the age to come, but you have to make choices now and you’ll be refined in the fire. Those choices will cause you to feel pain. You’ll feel lonely, you’ll feel discouraged, you’ll feel like it’s not working.”

Again, I’ve made many choices throughout the years. I felt bored, abandoned; then I didn’t feel anything, but I said, “I’m sticking with it.” I didn’t realize it, but that’s what gold in the fire means—you’re realigning your heart, a thousand times. You’re signing back up for obedience—a thousand times a thousand—over the years. That decision is refined in your life. He wants you rich and you want to be rich. It sounds like a great deal to me.

I love this. I want to be rich. I said that some years ago. Our young people made a video and edited it so that I’m saying, “I want gold and silver! I want to be rich!” They cut it off right there. I really said, “I do, it’s a fact—just in the age to come.” I want to get a billion dollars. The Lord promised me a billion dollars. Really! I’m not into poverty at all; I’m into wealth. I just want to give it all away—not ninety-nine percent—but all of it, as in one hundred percent of it. I’ve committed to live a simple lifestyle. When He gives me a billion dollars, I don’t even want one dollar of it. I just want to be a conduit and pour it right into the prayer movement. It’s a big story. I’ll tell some of it tomorrow. I believe some of you could be billionaires. I don’t want to give Him ninety percent. I want to give Him one hundred percent. I want to live simply, give it all away, and get gold forever. Ooh, I can’t

wait. I want to be rich. OK, I mean it. I mean it. This is real; this is what the Bible says. Do you believe the Bible? Go for it.

THE GREATEST ANOINTING: LOVING GOD

Paragraph N. We're not left guessing as to what God calls the greatest way to live. Jesus said, "Love the Lord with all your heart. This is the great way to live" (Mt. 22:37-38, paraphrased). It's the greatest calling. The greatest anointing you can ever have is the anointing to walk out the first commandment. That's a greater anointing than a big ministry—the anointing to love God. It's the greatest possession you'll ever have in your life.

I want you to understand this: Success and power in your life is defined by your ability to walk out the first commandment. If you walk out the first commandment and no one cares about your ministry, you're dynamically successful and you'll be rich forever. If you have the most famous ministry in the world, but you don't walk out the first commandment, much of it—most of it—will go up in flames. We want to readjust the primary dream of our life.

That's how we'll end this. Go ahead and stand.

MINISTRY TIME

We'll adjust the primary dream. Yes, we want ministry, we want money, we want the favor, we want all the relationships. We want all those things, but we want those secondly. We'll consciously make them second, and the anointing in the grace of God to walk out the first commandment will be our life passion. We'll give everything for this.

Beloved, when you get that, you'll start picturing your life differently. When I was in my twenties, I was picturing my fifties, but not with a big ministry and lots of money. I pictured being in my fifties with a tender heart, with an anointing of revelation, with a fearless abandonment to Jesus. I was in my twenties and I said, "Lord, what if I become fifty and I love You, and my heart is tender, and I have revelation, and I'm fearless in my obedience? What if I could be that?" I began to picture that in my twenties. I said, "Lord, if I can do that, that's what I'll live for. That's my dream. If I have a big ministry, that's Your business."