Part A: Salvation, Part B: Judgment, Part C: The Ages to Come

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B-5: "I will Give Thee a Crown of Life!"

The Bible often speaks about rewards in the Afterlife. In the Old Testament there was a clear understanding about it: *"The LORD knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever."* This *"inheritance"* was envisioned usually as coming on Earth after the Resurrection: *"the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."* (Psalm 37:18,11) Beyond this general understanding about future reward, we read in the Book of Daniel the words, often referred to in this study, of the angel Gabriel, speaking in more specific terms:

> ***Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace. Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever.* (Daniel 12:2-3, NLT)**

The above Scripture refers to that great future event known as the Rapture, which leads into the *"marriage supper of the Lamb"*, a special victory celebration in the Heavenly Dimension for the people of God of all ages. (Revelation 19:5-9) Of course, it is wonderful to know that there are victory celebrations in Heaven. But we shouldn't forget there are also times of judgment – or perhaps this can be expressed better as "the review and consequences of our earthly lives".

Now, regarding the statement in Daniel 12:2 about those who *"awake*

***to shame and everlasting disgrace"*, it is often assumed that this group of souls are non-Christians destined for the *"lake of fire"* (mentioned in Revelation 19:20, 20:10). But the *"lake of fire"* is not the same as *"shame and everlasting disgrace"*.**

Why? For one thing Gabriel states that these who are *"raised"* at Earth's final *"time of trouble"* are the *"sons of your people"*, whereas those who are sent to the *"lake of fire"* are anything but the *"sons of your people"*. (12:1) The *Lake of Fire* is meant, first of all, for the demons, and secondly, for those human souls who were rebellious enemies of God and destroyers of mankind.

For example, we learn in Revelation 19:20 that the Antichrist and False Prophet, who will fight against Christ and his armies at the *Battle of Armageddon*, *"were cast alive into the lake of fire"*. Then in the next chapter we learn that *"the devil… was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone."* (20:10) We can assume then that the *Lake of Fire* is meant for the rebellious enemies of God, a different class of souls from those who, even though they *"awake to shame and everlasting disgrace"*, are, nevertheless, the *"sons of your people"*.

But the difficult question is, how could they be *"sons of your people"* who are *"delivered"* and yet it seems that some of them *"shall awake… to shame and everlasting disgrace"*? Understandably, it is difficult for believers to see how this might apply to them, even though the passage's context in this regard seems plain enough.

To answer this, we could start by trying to define who exactly are these *"people"* whom Gabriel declares will be *"delivered"*. On the most general level, it probably refers to those of whom Jesus said,

> ***All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out… This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day… that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day… No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day… everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.* (John 6:37,**

39-40, 44-45)

These, of whom Christ said He would *"by no means cast out"*, are the "overcomers" spoken of in 1John 5:4-5

> ***For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?* (1John 5:4-5)**

This is a fairly general level of overcoming, and Jesus expressed it in much the same way: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment , but has passed from death into life ."* (John 5:24). That is all that is required to gain entrance into the Kingdom.

Anyone who *"believes that Jesus is the Son of God"* has "overcome" – because their faith also includes a commitment to righteousness. *"For with the heart one believes unto righteousness."* (Romans 10:10) A person cannot even *"come to the light"* unless they are doing *"what is right… what God wants."* (John 3:21, NLT)

Now in that Scripture (Daniel 12:2), Gabriel distinguishes between those who *"will rise up… to everlasting life"* (NLT) and those who *"shall awake… to shame and everlasting disgrace"* (NKJV). Does that mean one group will land in Heaven, and the other in Hell? No. it is merely showing that God's Kingdom will accommodate all who come to Christ, even those who didn't do so well during their earthly lives.

All are granted citizenship in the Kingdom. *"The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out… and I will raise him up at the last day."* (John 6:37,40)

So those who come to Christ, then later turn back, are not booted out of the Kingdom. Upon arrival in Heaven, however, they are apt to feel ashamed: *"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed… And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."* (Mark 8:38,

1John 2:28) These words of exhortation were spoken and written to believers.

This *"shame and everlasting disgrace"* is not the real Hell, the judgment or separation of a soul into the *Lake of Fire*. But it is the hell of failure, the hell of turning one's back on the Lord, the hell of not living up to God's calling, in putting one's own will above God's will. These memories are not forgotten the moment one enters Heaven. In time however, this *"shame and everlasting disgrace"*, this remorse over past failures, are wiped away and forgotten, and one is left with the treasures and blessings of his or her heavenly existence.

It should be noted, by the way, that the word *"everlasting"* refers to the everlasting realm of the spirit – the domain that is permanent, as opposed to the temporary one we dwell in now. It doesn't mean an infinite amount of time. (More on this point later in Post C-4.)

To shed further light on the question of what happens to believers in the Afterlife, we can look at this statement in 1Corinthians 3: *"each one's work… will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is… If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."* (3:12-15)

There are those, many perhaps, who build their lives with *"wood, hay, straw"* and *"suffer loss"*. Nevertheless, they are *"saved".* They do not lose their salvation; they are citizens of the Kingdom, overcomers who have come over to Christ.

However, although they have escaped the *Second Death*, that does not mean they have escaped the *"fire"* altogether. "Fire", as we shall learn further ahead, is symbolic of purging. And for some souls (or maybe all of us to some degree or another) will need some purging. And that is what happens in the *Judgment Seat of Christ*; we *"receive a reward"* for those works built with *"gold, silver, precious stones"* and *"suffer loss"* from whatever was built of *"wood, hay, straw"*.

In the *Revelation Book* also, we find there are different levels of dedication and reward, different levels of overcoming. For example, Christ seems to make a distinction between "overcomers" who are believers,

citizens of the Kingdom, and those who not only believe but *"keep My works until the end."* To them Jesus said He would give *"power over the nations"*. (Revelation 2:26)

During His time on Earth, there was a clear distinction between those who had come to Him but later, because of a *"hard saying… walked no more with Him"* and those disciples who wanted to *"continue in His Word"*. (John 6:60,66, 8:31 – KJV)

This principle of enduring faithfulness with its accompanying reward is conveyed also in the Scripture, *"Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."* (Revelation 2:10) This statement is made from a positive viewpoint, throwing out the challenge for believers (overcomers) to aim for maximum return on their life's investment.

Then comes the statement – *"he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"* – which is followed by the guarantee that believers who overcome can expect. It is a double-negative statement, meaning a strongly worded assurance that *"he who overcomes shall not* [by no means] *be hurt by the second death."* (Revelation 2:11)

The idea here seems to be, it is one thing to *"overcome"* on a basic level; coming to Christ is in itself a measure of great courage and submission to God. But greater yet is it to *"be faithful unto death"* – that is, to keep going for God till the end of one's life – either by natural death or, in some cases, by martyrdom. The reward for such faithfulness goes well beyond the reward of entrance into the Kingdom of God. For in addition, it means their *"work"* is not *"burned"* but is rewarded with a *"crown of life"*. (1Corinthians 3:15, Revelation 2:10)

In Philippians 3:9-11, the apostle Paul declared that he sought, not for his *"own righteousness"*, but for *"the righteousness which is from God by faith."* Why? So that *"if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."* And how to attain that? He would seek to *"know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformable unto His death."* The requirements are different for every person, and for Paul, no doubt, much was required of him.

But for any of us, it boils down to what Jesus said in Luke 9:23, *"If*

anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." **Whatever our *"cross"* happens to be, that is what is required to *"attain to the resurrection from the dead."* Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, *"obtain a better resurrection"* by *"not accepting deliverance"* – that is, to continue to stay faithful to one's calling – *"not cast away your confidence, which has great reward."* (Hebrews 11:35, 10:35)**

Jesus also spoke of this, of *"those who… attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead,"* that they would be *"counted worthy"* and that *"they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection."* (Luke 20:35-36) That word *"worthy"* was used elsewhere to describe the apostles' reaction to getting *"beaten"* by the Jewish authorities – *"rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."* (Acts 5:41) Paul, writing from a Roman prison, exhorts the churches *"to walk worthy of the calling"* and to *"walk worthy of the Lord."* (Ephesians 4:1, Colossians 1:10) To be *"worthy"* really meant something.

It all comes back to Gabriel's words in Daniel 12. Will it be the resurrection of *"shame and… disgrace"*, or the resurrection of those who *"shall shine as bright as the sky"* and *"like the stars"* because they were *"wise"* and did *"turn many to righteousness*? (12:2-3, NLT) Elsewhere we learn, *"If we endure hardship, we will reign with him… If we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering."* (2Timothy 2:12, Romans 8:17 – NLT) Although all of God's people, whoever and wherever they are, will be resurrected, to *"obtain a better resurrection",* those are the conditions that must be met. But Christ assures us,

> ***All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out… This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.* (John 6:37,39)**

It's God's business to "draw the line" in the *Judgment Seat of Christ* (2Corinthians 5:10) as to where our place will be in the coming Kingdom. Our business is not to worry about it, but to stay in loving communication with Him, attentive to His voice and leading. Our sincere desire to love and follow Him will result in the kind of works by which we might obtain a *"better resurrection".* (Luke 20:35, Hebrews 11:35)

This is the meaning of true faith by which we *"please God",* when we not only *"believe that He is,"* but also, *"that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him… For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end."* (Hebrews 11:6, 3:14)

The whole Book of Hebrews, in fact, is an exhortation against falling away, against throwing away one's confidence in God – to persevere, to be faithful to the end, to accept discipline from the Lord, to aim for a better resurrection, to seek diligently after God, knowing that He will reward our efforts.

And Jesus said much the same thing in His several parables. He taught that there is a difference between those who are *"born again"* and those who, in addition to being born again, manifest a great deal of faithfulness during their lifetimes. (John 3:3; the parables in Matthew 24-25) There are *"in a great house… vessels for honor and some for dishonor."* (2Timothy 2:20) What we need to keep in mind, though, is that all are vessels who have a special and treasured place in God's *"great house".*

Yet at the same time, there is this obvious general division amongst believers – comparable perhaps to that in the sporting world, between the players on the field and the cheering crowds in the stands. They are all on the Lord's side, but obviously, the ones doing battle on the playing field deserve more honor and reward.

Where or how God draws the line we don't really know. But perhaps the following Scripture offers a helpful guideline: *"You have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name."* (Revelation 3:8) Now the thing to keep in mind is that, regardless of where we end up on the scale, our hearts will be so overjoyed to be united with our Savior and our minds so overwhelmed to have entered that glorious Heavenly Realm that nothing else will matter.

And although there are different classes in the Heavenly Kingdom, it is not the same situation as on Earth where, because of injustice and lack of mobility, there is much dissatisfaction and rivalry. In a just heavenly society, where everyone's needs are met and there is general contentment overall, that envy between classes won't exist – a difficult

concept for us in this life to grapple with perhaps. But surely, in God's glorious Heaven there will be overall a spirit of happiness and satisfaction that all of its citizens will experience.

And yet we may conclude from His several parables that Christ did establish two broad categories of reward, making it clear that there would be a difference between believers and followers.

> ***Believers*** **accept Jesus' teachings as true; they believe in Him, believe that He is their Savior, and they are saved. Jesus made it clear that *belief* in Him is sufficient for salvation when He said in John 3:16 that "whoever *believes* in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." It's a wonderful thing to be a believer! It brings with it everlasting life, eternity with God.**
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> **Walking the path of *discipleship* means that someone makes the choice to add *action* to belief. It's going beyond the *acceptance* of the teachings and involves choosing to *follow* the teachings, to apply them in daily living.**
>
> **("At the Heart of Discipleship", *Anchor – Hope for the Soul,* 23 February 2015.)**

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Continue to B-6: Heaven's Class Structure – No Envy or Comparing