

Ministry of Grace Church

1 Thessalonians Chapter 2

Preface:

As we learned in our study of Acts Chapter 16 the missionary team (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) had experienced a fairly successful ministry down by the river in Philippi where the Jewish women had been meeting for prayer. But Paul and Silas were thrown in prison because Paul had cast a demon out of a slave girl, making her owners angry because they were no longer able to get rich off her. After being released from prison, Paul and his team headed to Thessalonica. It was against this backdrop that Paul wrote his first letter to the church in Thessalonica.

The city of Thessalonica was located on the Ignatian Way, the famous highway that went east to west through Macedonia. Thessalonica was also an important port with people and cultures from all over the world. There was a great variety of religions, religious cults and philosophies in Thessalonica. Here you would witness the worship of the gods of the Olympian pantheon, especially Apollo, Athena, and Hercules. You would also find the native Greek mystery religions, celebrating Dionysius and the sex and drinking cult. The Greek intellectual and philosophical traditions were also represented. Mixed in among these were shrines to many Egyptian gods: Isis, Serapis, Anubis, as well as the Roman State cults that deified the political heroes of Rome. Finally, there were also the Jewish people and the God-fearing Gentiles. This was the environment into which Paul and his associates came as they proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God.

Paul's Ministry to the Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

¹For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ²But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. ³For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. ⁷But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. ⁹For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹For you know how, like a father with his children, ¹²we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. ¹³And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you

heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. ¹⁴For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, ¹⁵who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind ¹⁶by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!

Notes:

Paul and his team had a short, but very successful time in Thessalonica. In fact, they had so many converts during their short stay that the local Jews became jealous and tried to find Paul to drag him in front of the authorities. This is why Paul says in verse two:

But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

Thessalonica was a melting pot of various religions, philosophies, and cults. The purveyors of these ideologies were missionary minded and sought to spread their ideas using itinerant evangelists and preachers. Most of these missionaries were opportunists, who took everything they could from their listeners, and then moved on to find someone else to support them. So, it was not uncommon for people to view all of these as charlatans and they quickly accused Paul of using the same tactics as these false religion evangelists.

One of the purposes of this letter to the Thessalonians was to address some of the accusations and rumors that had been spread about Paul. The first accusation was that he was a criminal with a police record and had been thrown in prison. Yes, Paul had been thrown in prison, but not because he was a criminal. He was there because he had set a slave girl free from her demon possession.

Next came a series of accusations including one that said Paul was delusional and that he was teaching error. They said his ministry was based on selfish motives and that he deliberately deceived others. Finally, they said that Paul preached to please man, not God. In response to these four accusations, Paul pointed out that God had entrusted him with the Gospel, so he always made an effort not to please man, but to please God, because only He is able to test our hearts and ascertain our true motives.

The naysayers also accused Paul of ministering for personal gain and personal glory, claiming that he is a kind of a dictator. Paul's response was that he and the others on the team could have made demands on the Thessalonian Christians because, after all, they were apostles of Christ. Instead, Paul says, they did not make demands of the people. In fact he says that they were gentle, taking care of them as if they were their own children.

He pointed out that the missionary team did not depend on the donations of the people, but worked hard night and day to earn their own way so as not to be a burden to anyone. Not only did they show tenderness toward the Thessalonians, treating them the way a nursing mother would tenderly care for her baby, but they fathered them as well. Paul says that they challenged and encouraged the Thessalonian Christians, commanding them to behave in a manner that shows their godliness.

The Apostle also complimented them and thanked them for accepting the word of God for what it is, God's Holy Word. Then, he reminded them again that they were being like the churches in Judea that had to endure harassment and suffering even at the hands of their own countrymen.

Paul's Longing to See Them Again

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

¹⁷But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰For you are our glory and joy.

Notes:

This has to be one of the most tender expressions of love that Paul ever expressed in any of his letters. He acknowledges that when he left Thessalonica, it was not because he wanted to get away from them. He even says that he was “torn away” from them. This is from the Greek word *aporphanidzō*, which refers to children who have been forcefully orphaned. Clearly, Paul felt emotional pain as a result of this separation and he longed to be with them again. So much so that he apparently tried time and time again to go back to Thessalonica. He even indicates that it wasn't just the general consensus of the team, it was his personal desire to see them again. But Paul recognized that it was Satan who kept hindering him from reuniting with his beloved spiritual children in Thessalonica.

Finally, Paul makes a reference to the Judgment Seat of Christ. He says,

For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?
(1 Thessalonians 4:17)

This crown of boasting is one of the five crowns mentioned in the New Testament. This is not a crown of royalty, but a crown of reward, a “victor's crown.” It is from the Greek word *stephanos*, which refers to a wreathed crown, which is what the winners of the Olympic Games of Paul's time were awarded.

This crown of boasting, or crown of rejoicing, seems to be the reward given to those who share the gospel with others. It is sometimes referred to as the “Soul-winners Crown.”

So What?

Since we're only in the second chapter of this first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, you're probably not yet aware that Paul makes a reference to the coming of our Lord in each chapter of this letter. Here it is a reference to one of the awards given away at the Bema Seat Judgment.

So, let's take a few minutes and talk about the **Bema Seat Judgment**. It is also referred to as the **Judgment Seat of Christ**. It is one of three judgments talked about in the Bible. The other two are The Great White Throne Judgment, where the works of all the unsaved will be judged, and the Sheep and Goat Judgment which is a judgment of the Jews and all those who live during the Tribulation. Everyone - that is to say, *everyone*, not some, but all who are judged at the Great White Throne Judgment will be cast into the Lake of Fire, because they are unbelievers. At the Sheep and Goat Judgment, those who are found worthy (based on faith as demonstrated by actions toward the Jews) will be ushered into the Millennium and the others will be held over for the Great White Throne Judgment.

When is the Bema Seat Judgment?

Based on **2 Corinthians 5** it is clear that the Bema Seat Judgment happens after this life:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

At the rapture, all Christians (Paul's reference to **we**) will receive our glorified bodies, and it is most likely at that time that the Bema Seat Judgment will take place because, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:17, from that moment on we will forever be with the Lord.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) [NASB]

Also, as we've just learned in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, Paul makes a reference to the crown of boasting at the time of Christ's returning for the Church. Now, let me say a word or two about the word translated "boasting." It is based on *kauchaomai*, which means to boast about something, in either a good sense or a bad sense. Let me give you a sports analogy to help you see the meaning here. If your team wins a game, you can either brag selfishly to others about the victory (boasting in a bad sense), or you can rejoice with those around you (boasting in a good sense). Since this is received at the Bema Seat, it is more likely that our response will be rejoicing, than bragging. For that reason I like to refer to this crown as a Crown of Rejoicing.

Paul seems to indicate that this crown (thus, all the crowns) will be given as part of the events of the rapture (at his coming).

For what is our hope or joy or crown of ~~boasting~~ (rejoicing) before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy. (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)

Next, in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 we see Christ bringing his redeemed ones to the Father and we (the redeemed ones) have blameless hearts. On first seeing this verse we may take it as referring to the coming of Jesus to the earth. However, if you read it carefully you will see that it is "before our God and Father" that Jesus is coming with all his saints.

so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1 Thessalonians 3:13)

Thus, it appears that the Bema Seat Judgment happens as part of the rapture process and before we are presented to the Father by the Son. Incidentally, this is in keeping with the groom presenting his bride to his father in a Jewish wedding.

As further evidence that this judgment happens immediately after the Rapture, the very next thing chronologically in the Bible after the rapture is the Tribulation. During the Tribulation, Christians will be in the Throne Room of God (we are the 24 elders) observing all that is going on, and we will be there with crowns (*stephanos*) which we will cast at His feet.

At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns (*stephanos*) on their heads. (Revelation 4:2-4)

And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns (*stephanos*) before the throne, saying, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." (Revelation 4:9-11)

One more piece of evidence that the Bema Seat Judgment will occur with the Rapture. In the description of the crown of glory, or overseer's crown, we are told that it will be handed out "when the Chief Shepherd appears."

And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:4)

What is judged at the Bema Seat Judgment?

According to 2 Corinthians 5:10, it is the works of believers that are judged at the bema seat. We will receive what is due to us based on what we have done while in this body of flesh.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

In 1 Corinthians 3:8-15 Paul uses the metaphor of a building as he talks about the work that we have to do for Christ. We shall receive rewards for the works that have been done for Him. The works which we have done for ourselves will be burned-up.

He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw -- each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:8-15)

According to this passage, the fire will "try" our works. This word is also sometimes translated as "test" or "judge." It is the Greek word *dokimadzō*, which means "testing or proving a thing to find its worth or goodness." It is the word that is used when referring to gold being refined, or proven, by fire. Hence, the judgment of the bema seat is for the purpose of finding good so that rewards can be given, **not** for the purpose of finding bad to be punished.

Also notice that as the fire "tries" our works, those things that we have done that are worthless will simply be burned-up. There is no penalty or punishment for that, simply a loss of what was done because it is worthless in God's eyes.

Are we judged for our sins or for our obedience?

Our sins will not be judged because they were paid for at the cross, and we have already been given the righteousness of Christ. We can never be judged for our sins because our sins have been paid for. The Lord Jesus Christ became sin for us.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Believers will not be judged for our obedience. We are being judged for our obedience daily in this life. When we misbehave and disobey the commands he has given us, he chastens us. This is not to punish us, but to teach us and to help us to grow. This chastening is for our own good, to produce the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:9-11)

Our obedience will not be judged at the bema seat. Our obedience is being judged now (and we are chastened when we disobey)!

What rewards are given?

Since the Bema Seat Judgment is for the purpose of finding good in our works done in this physical body, it follows that it is at the bema seat judgment where we will be awarded our crowns. In each of the following scripture passages, the word translated “crown” is a form of the Greek word *stephanos*. This is from the root *stephō*, which means “to twine” or “to wreath.” It is often referred to as a “victor’s crown.” The other Greek word that is translated as “crown” in the Bible is *diadēma*, which is often referred to as a “ruler’s crown” or a “crown of power.” The crowns in the following verses are all *stephanos*. The crown rewards for Christians are:

The Incorruptible Crown, or the victor’s crown

Do you not know that those running in a race all run, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain. And everyone who strives for the mastery is temperate in all things. Then those truly that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. (1Corinthians 9:24, 25) [MKJV]

The Crown of Life, for those who are faithful to the end.

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2:10)

The Crown of Glory, or the shepherd’s crown

shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1Peter 5:2-4)

The Crown of Righteousness, for those who love His appearing

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth 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. (2 Timothy 4:7,8)

The Crown of Rejoicing, or the soul winner’s crown

For what is our hope or joy or crown of ~~boasting~~ (rejoicing) before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? (1 Thessalonians 2:19)

It is not specified anywhere if everyone will receive a crown or if some will receive multiple crowns. The point is that we must be obediently working for our Lord and Master while on this earth if we want to receive any crown.

To summarize all this, the Bema Seat Judgment will occur as part of the Rapture process. Jesus will come into the atmosphere. The dead in Christ will be raised first, then we who are alive at the time will be changed into our perfect bodies. We (all Christians) will be caught up to forever be with Jesus. We will appear before the Bema Seat where we will receive our reward (crowns) for our good works. We will be presented as a spotless bride to the Father in His throne room where we will take a seat on a throne to witness the events of the Tribulation.

Now What?

Now, we all have to ask ourselves, “will I receive a crown at the Bema Seat Judgment?”

So, let me ask you, “Do you want to receive a crown?” If so, then it’s not too late. The general requirement for receiving a crown is this: “Live your life in fellowship with, and in obedience to, the Lord, instead of living your life for yourself.” Another way of saying that is, “Make Jesus your Lord, not just your Savior.” If you have been living your life simply as a person possessing a free ticket into heaven with little or no thought about the one who gave you that ticket, then you need to get your focus off yourself and focus on God. You need to humbly submit to His authority and serve Him instead of your own desires.

Or, as Paul, himself exhorted the Christians in Thessalonica:

we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

My prayer for every one of you is that *you will have no regrets when you appear before the Bema Seat.*

My friends, I have said it before, and I will keep on saying it, the Rapture of the church will happen at any moment. Be ready, so you can go up to meet Him with no regrets!

Let’s pray.

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