

Eschatology

What Happens to the Church Next?

Following the rapture of the church, Christ has two marvelous events in store for us: the judgment seat (bema) of Christ and the marriage of the Lamb.

In 2Cor 5:6-10 and Romans 14:10, it is stated that believers are to be brought into an examination before the Son of God for the works they did as His ambassador. 1Cor 3:13-15 explains the event in more detail.

The meaning of the judgment seat:

The judgment seat in 2Cor 5:10 is the Greek word *bema*, which is a raised place mounted by steps; a platform, tribune; used of the official seat of a judge.

In Grecian games in Athens, the old arena contained a raised platform on which the president or umpire of the arena sat. From here he rewarded all the contestants; and here he rewarded all the winners. It was called the “bema” or “reward seat”. It was never used as a judicial bench.

The time of the bema of Christ:

The judgment takes place immediately following the rapture of the church and before the 2nd coming of our Lord:

- Luke 14:14 – reward is associated with the resurrection.
- When Christ returns to earth with His bride (the church), the bride is seen to already have been rewarded (Rev. 19:8).
- In 1Cor 4:5; 2Tim 4:8 and Rev. 22:12 the reward is associated with “that day”, that is, the day in which Christ comes for His own.

The basis of the examination at the bema of Christ:

According to 2Cor 5:10 the purpose of the bema is to make a public manifestation, demonstration or revelation of the essential character and motives of the individual standing before Christ.

This judgment is not to determine what is ethically good or evil, but rather that which is acceptable and that which is worthless. It is not the Lord’s purpose here to chasten His child for his sins, but to reward his service for those things done in the name of the Lord.

The **result** of the examination at the bema of Christ:

1Cor 3:14-15 makes it clear that there will be a twofold result of this examination: a reward received or a reward lost.

- 2Cor 5:10 and 1Cor 3:10-14 make it clear that the believers works are undergoing “testing” based on inner character and motivation, NOT based on the outward observation.
- Things done in the strength and for the glory of the flesh, regardless of what the act might be, will suffer a reward lost (1Cor 3:15).

The phrase “as through fire” is similar to our adage “saved by the skin of your teeth.” These Christians will not lose their salvation, but they will have little to nothing to show for their life of Christian service.

- Things done with the proper motive to bring glory to God will experience a reward received. In the NT there are five areas in which the rewards are specified:
 1. An incorruptible crown for those who get mastery over the old man (1Cor 9:25).
 2. A crown of rejoicing for the soul winners (1Thess. 2:19-20).
 3. A crown of life for those enduring trials (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10).
 4. A crown of righteousness for loving his appearing (2Tim. 4:8).
 5. A crown of glory for being willing to feed the flock (1Pet. 5:2-4).

It is important to understand the wording for “crown” that Paul chooses to use is to describe that the rewards are associated with honor and dignity, which is bestowed on the over comer.

Although we will reign with Christ, the kingly crown is His alone. The victor’s crowns are ours to bring glory to God. (1Cor 6:20; 1Pet. 2:9; Rev. 4:10).

Something to think about as we live out our lives:

“To come to Christ costs you nothing,
to follow Christ costs you something,
to serve Christ will cost you everything.” – M.R. DeHaan

The Judgment Seat of Christ (The Bema)

Romans 14:10

Heaven

Christ Meets
the Church
1 Ths 4:16-17



The Rapture
1 Ths 4:13-18



Incorruptible Crown
The Victor's Crown
1 Cor 9:25

"Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible" (KJV).

The Marriage
of the Lamb
Rev 19:7-9



The Glorious
Appearing
2 Ths 1:7-10



Crown of Rejoicing
Soul Winner's Crown
1 Ths 2:19-20

"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy" (KJV).



Wood, Hay, and Stubble



Crown of Righteousness
For those who love His appearing
2 Tim 4:8

"There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (KJV).



Judgment of Believers
for Their Works
1 Cor 3:11-15; 2 Cor 5:10



Crown of Glory
Elder's Crown
1 Pet 5:2-4

"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (KJV).



Gold, Silver, and
Precious Stones



Crown of Life
Martyr's Crown
Rev 2:10

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (KJV).

The Marriage of the Lamb

A marriage was the single greatest celebration and social event of the biblical world. Wedding preparations and celebrations in ancient times were even more elaborate and involved than those of today. They consisted of 3 distinct stages:

1. The betrothal, or engagement.
Arranged by both sets of parents, legally binding and could be broken only by a divorce (Matt. 1:18-19).
2. The presentation.
A time of festivities just before the actual ceremony.
3. The ceremony.
Exchanging of the marriage vows.

After the ceremony would come a final meal, followed by the consummation of the marriage.

In many NT passages the relation between Christ and the church is revealed by the use of the figures of the bridegroom and the bride:

John 3:29; Rom. 7:4; 2Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-33; Rev. 19:7-8; 21:1-22:7

At the time of the rapture Christ is appearing as a bridegroom to take His bride unto Himself, so that the relationship that was pledged might be consummated and that the two might become one.

The **time** of the marriage:

According to Rev. 19:7 the marriage will take place just before the second coming of Christ and it must take place after the bema of Christ (Rev. 19:8).

The **place** of the marriage:

Since the marriage takes place after the bema and before the second coming of Christ, the marriage must take place in heaven. Also, no other location would fit a heavenly people (Phil. 3:20).

The participants of the marriage:

The marriage of the Lamb involves only Christ and the church.

Dan. 12:1-3 and Isaiah 26:19-21 reveal that the resurrection of Israel and the OT saints will not take place until the second coming of Christ.

Rev. 20:4-6 also makes it clear that tribulation saints will not be resurrected until that time as well. This group of peoples will be *observers* at the marriage supper.

The marriage supper does not take place in heaven. The supper is an event that involves Israel and takes place on earth. In Matt. 22:1-14; Luke 14:16-24, where Israel is awaiting the return of the bridegroom and the bride, the wedding supper is located on earth and has particular reference to Israel (as the Groom's guest).

Jews and Gentiles will be invited to the supper, which is on earth, during which time the bridegroom is honored through the display of the bride to all His friends who are assembled there.

J.D. Pentecost sums up God's plan for the church:

The church, which was God's program for the present age, is now seen to have been translated, resurrected, presented to the Son by the Father, and has become the object through which the eternal glory of God is forever manifested. The present age will thus witness the inception, development, and completion of God's purpose in "taking out a people for His name".

Acts 15: 14-18.