

## The Judgement Seat of Christ. Spanish Wells Conference. 30 May 2009.

Jeff told us yesterday that he plans to speak this evening in the last Gospel Service of the Conference on the solemn subject of God's judgement on the sinner. Well, in this, the last early morning session of the Conference, I am also going to speak to you about God's judgement, but His judgement not of the sinner ... but of the saint ... at 'The Judgement Seat of Christ'.

The actual word translated 'judgement seat' occurs only twice in the Greek New Testament in connection with the judgement seat of God and of Christ before which all Christians shall one day appear – once each in Paul's letters to Rome and to Corinth. But this raw statistic is misleading because there are in fact *many* passages in the New Testament which are concerned with the subject. For now, we will read the two passages in which the actual word occurs : *Rom 14. 4a, 9-12; 2 Cor 5. 9-10.*

The word translated 'judgement seat' refers properly to a tribunal where a judge sat. Sometimes the word refers to the raised official platform on which the judge's seat was situated and sometimes to the actual seat itself. As I said, the word occurs only twice when speaking of the great day of review for Christians – and I was fascinated to discover that the only occurrences of this word in the latter section of Luke's Acts of the apostles – the section devoted to the ministry of Paul – relate to a judgement seat at Corinth – that of Gallio (the 'deputy' KJV {the proconsul} of Achaia), 18. 12, and a judgement seat at Rome – that of Caesar himself, 25. 10 ... I say fascinated because it was only when writing to Christians in these two cities that Paul used the word – where he could be confident that the saints would be familiar with it. But in the verses we have read from Romans 14 and 2 Corinthians 5, Paul has neither human proconsul nor human emperor in view – far from it.

The timing of the judgement seat of Christ is easily established from the New Testament – the consistent claim there is that it will take place soon – in all likelihood, immediately – after the Lord's coming for His church. We could think, for example, of Paul's words to the Thessalonians – 'For what is our hope, or joy, or *crown of rejoicing*? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ *at His coming*?', 1 Thess. 2. 19, or refer to our reading from 1 Corinthians 4, 'Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts. And then each one's praise will come from God'.<sup>1</sup> And then there is the testimony of the Lord Himself – stretching from His words recorded in the gospels through to the very last chapter of the Bible – from 'when you give a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind, and ... you will be recompensed at (better 'in') the resurrection of the just', Luke 14. 13 – to the central of the three "I am coming quickly"s of Revelation 22 – in verse 12 – 'Behold, I am coming quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each according to his work'.

So the New Testament clearly identifies **WHEN** we are to appear before the judgement seat. Although the New Testament is silent on the matter of precisely **WHERE** this will take place, it seems to me most likely that this will be in the heavenly realm itself. The only alternative, I guess, would be in the air – where we are first to meet the Lord on his return, according to 1 Thess. 4. 17. But the New Testament says nothing about this – so neither will I. But what matters by far the most to us is not **WHEN** we shall stand before the judgement seat, still less **WHERE** that will be, but **THAT** we shall stand there, and **WHY** we shall ... not *the timing* – not *the location* – but *the fact* – the absolute certainty – that we shall appear there – and *the purpose* of this – to have our lives and service reviewed.

You may have noticed that, apart from the word 'judgement seat' itself, our readings from Romans 14 and 2 Corinthians 5 both have three other words in common – namely, the words 'before', 'all', and 'each'.

(i) First, the word '**before**'. We must pause to consider the One before whom we are to appear. Many Christian scholars and Bible translators believe that Romans 14. 10 originally read 'the judgement seat of God' – rather than 'the judgement seat of Christ' of the King James Version. And there is certainly some good manuscript evidence in favour of this.<sup>2</sup>

Although, frankly, it doesn't make a great deal of difference – because, in John 5, the Lord Jesus made it clear that the Father executes *all* forms of judgement *through* the Son – and explained both the purpose and the reason for this. The purpose: 'The Father has committed all judgement to the Son, that all should honour the Son even as they honour the Father', v. 22. The reason: He 'has given Him authority to execute judgement because He is Son of man', v. 27 – that is, the One who sits in judgement on men is not only one with the Father but one with us; He shares the nature of all those He judges – a point made by Paul to the Athenian philosophers at the end of Acts 17; 'God ... has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has appointed ('designated')'.<sup>3</sup>

That both God and the Lord Jesus are involved in the judgement of the believer's service is made clear in 1 Corinthians 4 – for it is *the Lord* who sheds light on those things now hidden by darkness and who exposes the secret intentions and motives of the hearts – but the resulting personal praise, you notice, comes from *God*.

(ii) Consider next the word 'all'. Great stress is laid on the fact that *all* the people of God, without exception, are going to stand and to appear before the judgement seat – 'we shall all stand', says Rom. 14. 10; 'we must all appear', says 2 Cor. 5. 10. There can be no doubt then that the time of review will be all-inclusive. No invitations are going to be issued – for us to accept or decline as we wish – no apologies for absence will be accepted.<sup>4</sup>

(iii) And then think of the word 'each'. For, although we shall *all* be there, the time of review will also clearly be intensely *personal*. And scripture emphasises this – for 'each of us will give account of himself to God' and 'we shall each receive back'. Indeed, it is worth noting that the other key passages which deal with the subject of the judgement seat also lay emphasis on the fact that it will a time of individual assessment. This is true, for example, of 1 Corinthians 3 : 'each will receive his own reward according to his own labour ... the work of each will become manifest ... the fire will prove the work of each of what sort it is', 1 Cor. 3. 8-13. The same is true of 1 Corinthians 4 : 'Then shall each have his own praise from God', 1 Cor 4. 5. Right through to Revelation 22 : 'To render to each according to his work', Rev. 22. 12. That is, although all Christians will be there, we won't be judged en masse. There will be no opportunity then for Malcolm to lose himself in the crowd. It is a sobering thought that I shall answer personally and directly to the One who died to save me.

I want you to notice next that the judgement seat is a place where believers both 'give', as in Romans 14, and 'receive' (or receive back), as in 2 Corinthians 5.

First, we are going to 'give' - to 'give account', Rom. 14. 12. The New Testament makes it clear that all human beings - without exception - are at one time or another going to give account to God. Peter speaks in 1 Peter 4. 4-5 of *non-Christians*, who will be called to account for their sins, 'they think it strange (odd) that you not run with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: who shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead'. Romans 14 is speaking, of course, of Christians.

It is important that we distinguish carefully between, on the one hand, the judgement seat of God and of Christ, and, on the other hand, the shadowless Great White Throne of Revelation 20 - where unbelievers are called to account for their sins – the place of fearful and eternal condemnation.

I want to make it clear that the believer has no place *there*. Jesus said in John 5, 'He who hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not come into judgement, but has passed over ('crossed the frontier') out of death into life', John 5. 24. As a Christian, my sins have already been fully judged and punished in the Person of my glorious substitute at the Cross. I need have no fear that the One who sits on the judgement seat is going to reopen that particular issue – that He is going to dredge up and pass eternal sentence on the very sins for which He died.

By way of contrast, the judgement seat is concerned with the review, the scrutiny and evaluation of the Christian's service – concerned with our rewards as servants, not with the determination of our eternal destiny and destination. Everyone must appear before one or other. All will, at one time or other, be assessed according to their works – either believers – when the Lord comes to render 'to each according to his work', Rev. 22. 12, or unbelievers at the Great White Throne when they will be 'each judged according to their works', 20. 13. We need to be very clear then that the judgement seat is concerned with the conduct of believers – not with the condemnation of sinners.

According to Hebrews 10, God has said, 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord ... their sins and iniquities will I remember ('remember against them') no more', Heb. 10. 16-17 – and for that reason we will have no place before the Great White Throne. But the One who doesn't remember *our sins* against us, doesn't – and will not – forget *our service*, for, turning from Hebrews 10 back to Hebrews 6, we read that 'God is **not unrighteous** ('not unjust') **to forget** your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, having served the saints, and still serving'. We can rest assured that 'the Lord, the righteous judge', as Paul spoke of Him, will miss nothing – but nothing – which has been done genuinely for Him ... and that He will fully recompense His people for all the cost, the suffering, and the sacrifice they faced when serving Him.

As Azariah the prophet once said to King Asa, 'Be strong, and let not your hands be weak; for your work shall be rewarded', 2 Chron. 15. 7. I guess that Paul's words at the close of 1 Corinthians 15 say it all, 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord'.<sup>5</sup>

So, although I don't view the judgement seat at all lightly – indeed I confess that I view it with considerable apprehension – I am enormously grateful that, by God's grace, I shall appear *there* and *not* before the Great White Throne – and that the One who will assess and evaluate all I have done in *my body*,<sup>6</sup> will Himself carry *in His body* the marks which tell me that He once died to take away my every sin, and to deliver me from appearing before that throne of judgement!

As I pointed out earlier, both passages which mention the judgement seat by name have serious and profound **practical implications** for the way we live and serve. Romans 14. 10 reads, 'But why do *you* judge your brother? Or why do *you* despise your brother? **For** we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ (or 'of God')'.

And 2 Corinthians 5 verse 9-10 read, 'Therefore we labour ('we strive earnestly, we make it our goal, our aim, our ambition' – we make it a 'point of honour') ... to be well pleasing to Him'. Not, I must stress, that we 'may be accepted of Him', as in the KJV – but 'well-pleasing' to Him, being the word we meet in Hebrews 13, 'Now may the God of peace ... work in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight'.

'Therefore we labour to be well pleasing to Him', Paul says, '**for** we must all appear (which is a totally different word to that in verse 12, 'glory in appearance' – the word here meaning, not to 'put in an appearance', but to be manifested, to be displayed<sup>7</sup> – having all the veneer stripped off, without any disguise or mask – such as is all too easy for me to wear to meetings such as this) ... we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each may receive back the things done through the body'.

First, **Romans 14**. The background is that there were major disagreements in the churches at Rome over which food Christians could and should eat, and over whether or not Christians should regard some days as having special religious significance. There were two opposing camps. The one party – who were more scrupulous and particular – 'judged' the other party and criticised them ... while the other party – boasting of their liberty – looked down on and 'despised' the first party. The one camp viewed the other with an attitude of criticism while the other camp viewed them with an attitude of contempt.

Paul faced the saints with various factors and considerations aimed at putting a stop to their warfare – one weighty consideration being that no believer has the right to judge another believer because both believers are personally and directly accountable to God.

The point Paul makes is that 'We shall all *stand*' – not here 'shall appear', or shall be manifest, as in 2 Corinthians 5 – 'before the judgement seat of God' – adding that 'each of us shall give account of himself to God' – that is, I am personally and directly accountable to God – not to you ... nor you to me. . On that day, you and I shall *stand before* that seat – neither of us will *sit on* it. We shall not be giving account *of* each other, *for* each other or *to* each other. So for me to judge you now is for me to invade God's domain and to usurp God's prerogative. And that is serious stuff. It is – to put it no stronger – gross presumption on my part!

Not only so, but, just as each of us is personally and directly accountable to God as judge, so also, according to verses 4 to 9, each of us is also personally and directly responsible to Christ as Lord.

As the apostle stresses, the Lord Jesus alone has ultimate authority over His servants – for every servant stands or falls to his own lord, v. 4. And 'Christ died and lived again', Paul says, 'that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living', v. 9.<sup>8</sup>

As *I* have neither died nor lived again, I am therefore not qualified to lord it over either the dead or the living. I simply do not possess the necessary credentials to exercise lordship over other Christians. In summary – and putting it bluntly – though no more bluntly than Paul – I am to keep off God's patch as universal Judge - and the Lord Jesus' patch as universal Lord.

When we speak about our sins having been cast into the depths of the sea – a reference to Micah 7. 19 – we sometimes say that the pardoning God has put up a large 'No Fishing' sign. Well, when it comes to forming judgements of a personal nature on others, the Judge of all erects another sign – 'No trespassing!'

In the closing chapter of the last letter we possess from Paul, he expressed his confidence, 'Henceforth is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which *the Lord*, the righteous judge<sup>9</sup> will give me in that day', 2 Tim. 4. 8.

But Paul knew that, before *the Lord* will give his reward to him, *he* will first have to give something to the Lord – he will first have to 'give account' – 'to give account', note – and not, please, 'to give an account', in the sense of 'any old account'.

But, if in Romans 14 it is a question of what I am to *give* – in **2 Corinthians 5** it is a question of what I am to *receive* – or better, to 'receive back' (the word carrying the thought of repayment and recompense), namely, to 'receive back the things which I have practised through my body'. We should note that in 2 Corinthians 5 Paul was in fact applying the truth of the judgement seat to his own service – and was speaking therefore of his own body – which had been the subject, not only of the earlier verses of chapter 5 but of most of chapter 4. For from verse 7 of chapter 4 to verse 16, the apostle had spoken of his present body – frail, mortal and decaying ... from verse 17 to verse 5 of chapter 5, he had spoken of his resurrection body – a 'house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens', in contrast with his present 'earthly tent' ... and in verse 6-8 of chapter 5 he had spoken of the possibility of being

*disembodied* – of the interval between death and the Lord's coming, when he would have no body – occupying neither tent nor building.

I understand Paul to be saying in our text – verse 10 – that though his body *was indeed* frail, mortal and decaying, and though he would much prefer to have his resurrection body – indeed that he would even prefer to have no body at all, so that he could be at home with the Lord' – yet he certainly didn't despise or belittle his body – that what he did 'through' it while in the world was all important, and carried with it far-reaching and eternal consequences.<sup>10</sup>

'Each one will *receive* back according to the things done in the body, whether good or bad'. 'Bad', please, not in the sense of morally evil and wicked, but, as the word means, in the sense of 'worthless and paltry'. The word originally described that which was 'slight, trivial, blown about by the wind', and then came to describe that which was 'common' in the sense of being worthless and contemptible – that is, 'good-for-nothing'. In other words, Paul spoke of receiving back 'the things done in the body, whether good or "good-for-nothing"' – with the 'loss' of reward which the latter involves.

And that word 'loss' in connection with the judgement seat takes us, of course, into 1 Corinthians 3 – which I understand to refer, in context, to the nature and the quality of the teaching which is built into the local church – built on the only adequate foundation which can be laid for a church – namely the preaching of 'Jesus Christ', and Him crucified – as expounded by Paul in the previous two chapters. And Paul was concerned not only with *where* the teachers at Corinth were building – namely on the right foundation which he had laid – but *how* they were building, v. 10, and *with what*, v. 12.

Although then, in context, I am satisfied then that Paul is saying 'only that teaching which is true to Christ crucified will stand the testing fire of His judgement' – I believe that *the principles* which he lays down apply to *all* who contribute *anything* to the local church – and indeed to any form of Christian service.

Note in particular that 'the day' ... the day of review, that is; the time when we appear before the judgement seat ... will 'declare' – will 'make plain' – the true nature and value of all our work – *as the Lord sees it* – 'gold, silver, precious stones ... wood, hay, stubble' – whether valuable or common – whether costly or inexpensive – whether durable or perishable – whether it took time and effort to obtain or was quickly and easily come by. And the big issue, Paul explains, is whether – when exposed to heaven's fire – our work is found to be combustible or not. For 'the fire will try' – will test, with a view to acceptance and approval, as the word means. *Only* the work which survives the fire will attract a reward. If the work is consumed – is burned up completely and utterly – the person himself will 'suffer loss' – will forfeit his reward – will miss out.

Paul told the Philippians that *he* had once 'suffered the loss' (the same word) of all that he had once counted dear and of great value – and that he did this that he might '*gain*' Christ, Phil. 3. 8. That was as a Pharisee – but he had absolutely no intention of 'suffering the loss' of a full reward – as a Christian – when he *met* Christ! Jesus once asked, 'what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and *lose* his own soul?', Matt. 16. 26. And there can be little doubt that the next greatest tragedy to suffering the loss (the same word again) of one's soul, is to suffer the loss of one's service – perhaps because rendered for entirely the wrong motives – all done for myself and my own glory – and not for the Lord Jesus and for the good of others!

For it is clear from 1 Corinthians 4 that the 'counsels' – the intentions – 'of the hearts' will be 'manifested' – along with the person – the same word as in 2 Cor. 5. 10. In that day, my Lord will take full account of the secret motives of my heart. In that day, if not now, I will appreciate the meaning of what Paul wrote in verses 3-4 of 1 Corinthians 4; in effect, 'It matters nothing to me what you Corinthians think of me – it matters nothing to me what men in general think of me'<sup>11</sup> – it doesn't even matter to me what I think of myself! The only thing which matters is what the Lord knows me to be'.

There is something incredibly solemn about that 'If anyone's work will be burned up!' Some time ago, Linda and I stayed in a Christian Hotel in North Wales. We were amused to spot a prominent notice above the reception desk there which declared, 'No smoking! If we see you smoking, we will assume you are on fire - and take appropriate action!' ... But, alas for me, when my service passes through the celestial fire test, I will have neither fire extinguisher nor bucket of water to hand to quench any flames!<sup>12</sup>

As you may well know, rewards are spoken of in many ways in the New Testament. For example, in terms of :

**Crowns.** Not of the kingly, diadem type – as adorns the brow of the mighty warrior King in Revelation 19, where we read, 'on his head were many crowns'. But crowns rather of the kind which formed the victor's wreath or garland in the Greek games.

It is reasonably certain that Paul had been in Corinth during the then-famous Isthmia Games held in the Spring of A.D. 51.<sup>13</sup> These games were held, under the patronage of the city of Corinth, on the sea coast about nine miles to the north.

Among the many Greek games, the Isthmia Games ranked second in prestige only to the ancient Olympics.<sup>14</sup> I was amazed to discover that, although the crowns at Olympus were made of olive leaves, those at Isthmia were made of either pine leaves or – more often – of withered celery leaves. Yes, *withered* celery leaves!<sup>15</sup> The New Testament speaks in terms of five distinct crowns which can be earned by the Christian – *none* of them of withered celery leaves : an incorruptible crown, 1 Cor. 9. 25; a crown of rejoicing, 1 Thess. 2. 19; a crown of righteousness, 2 Tim. 4. 8; a crown of life, James 1. 12; Rev. 2. 10, and a crown of glory, 1 Pet. 5. 4.<sup>16</sup>

A second way in which rewards are spoken of is that of :

**Commendation.** ‘Then each one’s praise (each one’s ‘commendation’, ‘approbation’) will come from God’, 1 Cor. 4. 5. The Lord Jesus, in His parable of the talents, twice used the expression, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’, Matt 25. 21, 23. I couldn’t help smiling when I read that this particular text was inscribed on the tombstone of a country squire from the County of Warwickshire in England, who had been shot and killed when his servant’s gun went off accidentally. ... Hardly, I suspect, the *most* appropriate text in the circumstances! Doubtless we all want to hear our Saviour say those words to us – perhaps more than any other words. But, alas for us, they must – as the crowns – be earned.

I understand that, after World War II, on the shore of New York Harbour, there was a giant sign facing all incoming troop ships, which read: “Welcome home. Well done”.<sup>17</sup> And when the Lord returns, He will “Welcome home” every last one of His people to be with Him forever. By His grace, as a believer I am assured of my “Welcome home”. But whether or not I shall be greeted with a “Well done” is an altogether different matter.

And a third way in which rewards are spoken of is that of :

**Cities.** There is one expression which features in three of our Lord’s parables about reward – that is, in the parable of the pounds, Luke 19. 17, the parable of the talents, Matt. 25. 21,23, and the parable of the unjust steward, Luke 16. 10. This is the principle of rewarding the servant who is ‘faithful in that which is little’ or ‘least’. Each of these parables had to do with the actions of servants who had some of their lord’s goods available to them temporarily during his absence, and each parable directed the hearer’s attention to the time of reckoning and reward at the end. It is the parable of the pounds only which speaks specifically of cities – but all three teach that, in that coming day, the Lord will determine the place I will fill – the role I will occupy, the scope for service I will be given in His glorious kingdom – *not* on any arbitrary basis, but on the basis of what I have done here with what I have been given. That is, my role then is being hammered out now on the anvil of this ‘present’ life.<sup>18</sup>

Speaking as a Christian now of over 48 years, my *chief* regret is that, through these years, I haven’t loved the Lord more and served Him better. For I know well that, alas for me, this present life isn’t a dress rehearsal – that it is for real – that there will be no re-run – that when I stand before the judgement seat, it will be too late to make any amends – or to alter anything.

And I suspect that on that day I will regret my failures and poor service even more than I do now. I was struck some time ago with an old legend I read ... about three men who crossed a desert on horseback one night. Approaching a dried-up waterhole, they heard a voice which commanded them to dismount, to pick up some pebbles, to put them in their pockets and not to look at them until the morning. They were promised that, if they did as they had been told, in the morning they would be both glad and sad. The men did as instructed, mounted and went their way. As the first streaks of dawn began to spread across sky, the men reached into their pockets to pull out the pebbles. To their amazement, they found only diamonds, rubies and other precious gems. They then realised the meaning of the promise that they should be both glad and sad. They were each happy that they had picked up as many pebbles as they had – but they were each sorry that they hadn’t collected more.

And I have a suspicion that when I appear before the Judgement Seat, I will wish I had done – and had given – more.

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## End-notes

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 4. 5. See also 'when', 1 Pet. 5. 4.

<sup>2</sup> The word 'Christ' in Romans 14. 10 is found in no Greek manuscript earlier than the 8<sup>th</sup> century (L) – whereas the word 'God' appears in manuscripts from the 4<sup>th</sup> century – including all six major manuscripts which we possess that were written before the 8<sup>th</sup> century. But, as is often true, things aren't quite that straightforward. For Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, and Marcion, an early heretic – both writing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century – quote the text with 'Christ'. Clearly some early scribe had either changed 'God' to 'Christ', probably to bring Romans 14. 10 into line with 2 Corinthians 5. 10, or had changed 'Christ' to 'God' because it seemed to fit better with verses 11-12. Personally, I tend to the view that Paul wrote 'God' – but I have to confess that I am not altogether convinced.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 17. 30-31.

<sup>4</sup> It will be a case of compulsory attendance.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. 15. 58.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Cor. 5. 10.

<sup>7</sup> In the context, the apostle appeals to his sincerity; see verse 11. Paul knew that he would be manifested in the future at the Judgement Seat, just as he was already manifest to God, and, he trusted, to the Corinthians too – if they would allow their consciences to bear witness.

<sup>8</sup> We all enjoy those texts which tell us that the reason Jesus died was to do us good :

Galatians 1:4 Who gave himself for our sins, *that he might* deliver us from this present evil world (age).

Ephesians 2:16 *That he might* reconcile both (Jew and gentile) to God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.

Titus 2:14 Who gave himself for us, *that he might* redeem us from all iniquity.

Hebrews 13:12 Wherefore Jesus also, *that he might* sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, *that he might* bring us to God.

1 John 3:8 For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, *that he might* destroy the works of the devil.

We love to think that we have been delivered, reconciled, redeemed and sanctified. But that is only part of story. The purpose Jesus had in view when He died and rose to new life, Paul says in Romans 14. 9, was that He might be Lord over all His people.

<sup>9</sup> To be righteous judge needs know not only all happened but what would done if circumstances different or someone else – all possibilities. In 1 Sam. 23. 12, God's answers to both questions were, in one sense, hypothetical – His answers were based upon one key variable remaining unchanged – that David stayed put! God was saying that, *if* David remained in Keilah, Saul's army *would* come and attack the city. And, *if* David remained in Keilah, and Saul's men then came and attacked the city, the men of Keilah *would* turn David and his men over to Saul. The Lord's words to David were absolutely true – but they were dependent on David's own actions. And it was to inform those actions that David had sought this very information by asking the questions which he had.

The Lord knows, not only all things actual – past, present and future – but He also knows all things which 'could have been' but weren't, all things which 'could be now' but aren't, and all things which 'could be in the future' but won't. Our passage illustrates the fact that God knows how every man, woman and child *would have* acted *if* their circumstances had been different to what they were. The Lord Jesus demonstrated this very kind of knowledge when speaking of the unrepentant cities of Galilee: 'Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for *if* the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, *they would have repented* long ago in sackcloth and ashes ... And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for *if* the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, *it would have remained* until this day', Matt. 11. 21-23. The words of Jesus make it clear that God will take account of such things when He judges. And by doing so His judgement will be entirely just and fair – and take full account of the differing opportunities and abilities which every person has ever had. Malefactor, Paul and me! Note that he doesn't say, '*if* ... they *might* have', but '*if* ... they *would* have'.

<sup>10</sup> It does seem that the believer's reward will be eternal. Scripture speaks of an 'incorruptible' crown, 1 Cor. 9. 25, and an 'unfading' crown, 1 Pet. 5. 4 – both of which words Peter used of the believer's inheritance in heaven, 1 Pet. 1. 4. (The word translated 'unfading' occurs in only 1 Pet. 1. 4 and 1 Pet. 5. 4.)

<sup>11</sup> 'Man's day is the time when man passes judgment on things. The day of our Lord Jesus Christ will be the time when He will pass judgment on the service of His saints', W. E. Vine, 'Touching the Coming of the Lord', chapter 5. See 1 Cor. 3. 13 etc.

<sup>12</sup> Note 'receive back' both for 'good', Eph. 6. 8, and 'bad' (wrong. Used in Philemon 18 of Onesimus), Col. 3. 25. I can't pretend that I understand – or like – the latter, but it has to mean something. 'The wrong thing a believer does will surely have an adverse effect upon him sooner or later', E. W. Rogers. 'Whatever the nature of the divine requital, it will make a permanent difference in the eternal kingdom; it will mean a loss of what would have been most valuable to receive, a loss sufficiently serious to produce regret, and to cause us to refrain from doing wrong here', W. E. Vine.

<sup>13</sup> Archaeologists found fragments of a stone which probably was once attached to the outer wall of the Temple of Apollo. Inscribed in it is a copy of a letter from Claudius to the city of Delphi, naming Gallio as the friend of Claudius and proconsul of Achaia. In all likelihood Gallio held his office in A.D. 52. Paul had arrived in Corinth 18 months

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earlier than his appearance before Gallio, Acts 18. 11-12. F. F. Bruce was of the view that Paul was at Corinth from the Autumn of A.D. 50 to the Spring of A.D. 52. ('The Acts of the Apostles', page 55.) The Isthmia Games were held every two years, including in A.D. 51 (A. C. Thiselton, '1 Corinthians', page 10).

See also <http://www.ioa.leeds.ac.uk/1970s/70094.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> I have read that the word 'judgement seat' was used not only of the likes of Gallio and Caesar, but was also used of the seat of the umpire who adjudicated at Isthmia Games.

<sup>15</sup> Archaeologists have uncovered a stone head at Isthmia carved with a crown of pine leaves – and a mosaic of an athlete at Corinth with a crown of withered celery leaves. See 'Archaeology and the Bible', Wiseman and Yamauchi, page 93, and <http://www.ioa.leeds.ac.uk/1970s/70094.htm> and 'The Isthmian Victory Crown' by Oscar Broneer. *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 66, No. 3. (Jul., 1962), pp. 259-263. (Broneer excavated at Corinth.).

<sup>16</sup> Rev. 3. 11 – not take crown – Philadelphia – not another take our place and therefore reward - or pound, Luke 19. The servant who had his *pound taken from him* stands in the parable for *anyone* who does nothing of eternal value with the opportunities which God gives him. And by introducing this character into His story the Saviour is therefore telling me that my failure to exploit and use my God-given opportunities in this present life and world will lead inescapably to the loss of those opportunities of service which otherwise God would have readily given me to use for Him in His kingdom. The parable is largely about the pound which was transferred from one servant to another – that is, it is about the *use* or the *neglect* of the opportunities I am given! And, as I understand it, according to Jesus, by my misuse – my non-use – of those opportunities while 'I live in the present', I can forfeit what otherwise would have been mine in His kingdom. The wicked one would rob me of it – as Col. 2. 18. Don't let false teachers deprive and rob you of what would otherwise be yours.

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.memorialdayfoundation.org/info.asp?id=1975> and

<http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/aia/cyberspokesman/99-04/history.htm>.

Also, 'General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower was among the soldiers, seamen, and airmen passing in review in 1945, and smartly dressed, khaki clad "Ike", seated in the back of an open limousine, greeted the throngs in his typical public salute of outstretched arms and broad smile. The din from the cheering crowds had filled the avenue, and a festive blizzard of ticker tape and confetti swirled down to blanket the street along the way. The parade route was festooned with signs: "Welcome Home" and "Well Done". The people of New York were delirious', <http://www.davidpcolley.com/work1.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> If Paul's many references to the time of the believer's review in his epistles are any measure of how he regarded the judgement seat, we can safely say that he took it very seriously – that he thought about it often – and determined to live in the light of it. 'Therefore we make it our aim... to be well pleasing to Him ... *for* we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, 2 Cor. 5. 9-10. You can't miss it that the man who applied the truth of the judgement seat to others in 1 Corinthians 15, applied it to himself in 2 Corinthians 5.