

9.

A JUST REWARD

In the last chapter we discussed the fact that not all God's children will enter into His Millennial Kingdom. Although they will all be with Him eternally, still, not everyone who names the name of the Lord will enter into the blessing of reigning and feasting with Him in His Kingdom. In this chapter we will be investigating an even further aspect of this truth. That is this: not only will some believers not enter into Jesus' Kingdom, but some of them who are rebellious and disobedient will also be punished. Not only will they miss out on the precious reward of the Kingdom, but they will be punished in various ways, some of them punished severely, for their disobedience. What we will be doing here is investigating the scriptures which illustrate this sobering truth.

The Bible teaches us that God is "bringing many sons unto glory" (Heb 2:10). What a privilege it is that we could be one of them. Since we have been redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb, we have been saved from the wrath of God and He no longer deals with us as He deals with His enemies. Instead, He deals with us as His children.

However, becoming God's sons does not mean that we have escaped His disciplining or that we can do as we please. Just as you, as a parent, would not allow your children to be rebellious and disobedient, but would keep them from living that kind of life by disciplining them, so God too disciplines His children. The scripture reads: "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son

whom He receives" (Heb 12:6). This word "scourge" means to beat with a whip or a rod. God is not the kind of father which some people are today. He does not advocate permissiveness. He loves His children, and in His wisdom He realizes that discipline is healthy – that to chastise them for their wrongdoings will cause them to do the right thing in the future. In fact, His disciplining of us proves that we are His sons, because in His great love, He provides us with correction (Heb 12:8).

Now we come to a very important divine principle. Galatians 6:7 reads: "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." Whatever kind of seed a gardener or farmer puts into the ground, that is exactly the kind of plant which will grow up. If he plants corn he will not get beans, and if he plants onions he will not harvest carrots. The seed that is sown produces exactly after its kind.

The same principle is true with us in the spiritual world. Consequently, we can be assured that whatever kind of life we live, we will reap the corresponding consequences, both now and in the future. If we live a sinful life, or in other words "sow to the flesh" we will reap the result of "corruption" (Gal 6:8). If we "sow to the spirit" we will receive more and more of God's eternal life, or in other words, spiritual maturity. God's children are not immune to this inalterable principle. We will certainly receive the results of what we are sowing today.

Don't think that just because we are under the grace of God and have been delivered from the wrath with which He will destroy His enemies, we can do as we please. God is not mocked, neither is He blind. Don't be deceived about this. The Bible tells us that the eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding both the evil and the good (Pr 15:3). It is He that "searches the minds and the hearts" (Rev 2:23). He knows what we think, He knows what we say and He knows what we do. All the things that are hidden from others, He knows. And for all these things we will be brought to give account before the judgment seat of Christ.

At this time, though no one will be in danger of the lake of fire, if we have been disobedient, we will be in danger

of the proper punishment which we have earned. We will reap exactly what we have sown. God will punish His rebellious children. In Revelation 2:23 we read of Jesus saying, "and I will give to each one of you according to your works." Revelation 22:12 reads, "behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every one according to his work." And again in II Corinthians chapter 5, verse 10 we read: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he has done, whether good or bad."

Concerning these verses I've heard some teach that whether the things we have done are good or whether they are bad, God will still reward us. He will still bless us. He will still give us only good things. This kind of thinking typifies what it means to be deceived. Somehow, the devil or your own thoughts have deluded you into believing something that cannot be true. It is impossible to sow bad seeds and grow up good rewards. I've also heard it said: "Well, those who have done good will receive many rewards and those who have done bad will receive only a few good things." I feel I must tell you in the name of Jesus Christ that this is not the truth.

When the Bible uses the word "reward" it does not always refer to something good or a blessing. The word "reward" is also used in the New Testament to refer to just punishment of ungodly acts. Basically, it means that we will get our "just recompense." When Jesus was hanging on the cross between the two thieves, one of them said, "for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man has done nothing wrong" (Lk 23:41). They were being crucified because they had done evil. Therefore, they were suffering the "reward" which they deserved. When Jesus Christ comes with His reward, we must not think that it will be only good no matter what we have done with the things that He has given us. Then He will judge us according to what we have done with our time and our talents (Acts 1:18, II Tim 4:14, II Pet 2:13, Rev 18:6).

Would God punish some of His children? Yes indeed He would and He is going to if they are rebellious and disobedient. In fact this is one of His great promises upon

which we can depend! Now there are some who say that the chastening and scourging to which the Bible is referring happen today in this life only. They think that the Lord would never do that when He comes.

While it is true that in this world God does discipline and chasten us very much, it is equally true that some of God's children do not respond to this. They do not heed the admonitions of God and do not allow themselves to be guided and corrected by Him. Instead they continue in their rebellious ways. Oftentimes these people will attribute the unfortunate circumstances which come upon them as natural happenings and refuse to recognize the hand of God in His dealing with them. Some will find any excuse not to admit that the problems through which they are passing are the divine disciplining of the heavenly Father. These people stiffen their necks and harden their hearts against what God is doing. Therefore, they do not benefit from the divine discipline in this life. Due to their resistant disposition they do not allow the Holy Spirit to do His work. Though they may deceive themselves trying to imagine that everything is O.K., when Jesus Christ returns all things will be manifested. All the hidden counsels and thoughts of the heart will be brought to light, and these men and women who knew the Lord's will but didn't do it will be justly punished by Him.

Let us turn again to Matthew chapter 25 and examine another kingdom parable which details this truth for us. Starting in verse 14, this passage reads:

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his ability; and immediately went on a journey.

Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he that had received two, gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the earth, and hid his lord's money.

After a long time the lord of those servants came, and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things: enter into the joy of your lord.'

Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.'

But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. Therefore, you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.'

Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.' For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him that does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

And cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 25:14-30).

What a tremendously sobering parable this is. In it, Jesus Christ is speaking about His "servants." If we think

honestly about it, we must arrive at the conclusion that these three servants were all believers. They were all servants of the Lord, and each one of them received talents from Him to do His will while He was away. No unbeliever fits into this category. Do not make the mistake of calling two servants believers and the other servant an unbeliever. All three must be the same thing. And all three are born-again believers who are servants of Jesus Christ.

In this Kingdom parable we are informed that the unprofitable servant will be cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. We aren't told exactly what or where "outer darkness is," but one can imagine that it is a place which is separate from the direct presence of Jesus Christ and that it is a place of deep soul searching by the individuals who are cast there.

The weeping and gnashing of teeth about which the scripture speaks is caused by the anguish of these believers who have realized what they could have had, the joy into which they could have entered, if only they had taken a little effort to be faithful. But now they see that it is too late. They cannot at this point recover themselves to enter into the Kingdom and they are left out in this dark state for 1,000 years, during the wedding feast, until the beginning of "eternity future." This is a serious punishment. It is something which I am sure no one would like to experience. Fortunately, no believer has to, since God has enabled us all to be faithful and He will empower us to be obedient.

It is important to note that outer darkness is not the same thing as the lake of fire. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that it is. It is common for Christians to put these two things together when they should not be. There are several good reasons to make such a distinction. To begin, the lake of fire cannot be dark. For many thousands of years, until the use of electricity, the only way to have light in a dark place was to have a fire. A candle or a lamp is simply a small fire. Therefore, no one living in Jesus' time would think of a fiery place as being dark. In fact, they would think in just the opposite way.

Next, we must remember that this judgment of "servants" takes place when Jesus returns. As we have already

seen, no unbeliever will be raptured. Therefore, no unbeliever could be present before the judgment seat of Christ when the other "servants" are rewarded. It is only after the millennium that the non-believers are resurrected and judged and it is only then that anyone (other than the beast and false prophet) will be thrown into the lake of fire. Let us not take our inspiration from Dante or Milton, who portray hell as a place of various kinds of punishments and sufferings (i.e. darkness, scourgings, fire etc.). No, being cast into outer darkness is a punishment for God's children. It is temporary and it is something which happens at the judgment seat of Christ, at the beginning of the Millennium.

In many people's eyes this servant's sin does not really seem to be too bad. He didn't really do anything blatantly evil. He simply didn't do anything at all. We have spoken before about the fact that there is no neutral ground in this world. In our lives we are participating in either one kingdom or the other. Either we are living in Christ's Kingdom and in obedience to Him, or, knowingly or unknowingly, we are serving the devil.

Jesus Christ has entrusted us with a commission to go into the world, teach all nations, and make disciples of them (Mt 28:19). A disciple is someone who is obedient and disciplined by his Master. Believers are entrusted with this message and are given various abilities to use in carrying it out. If through fear, laziness, or simple disobedience we do not exercise our gifts and talents to fulfill what God has commanded us to do, we will answer for this at the judgment seat of Christ. At this time, some of God's children will be cast into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Not only will some believers be left out of the wedding feast, but also some will be punished in this manner for their lassitude and disobedience.

Jesus repeats this same warning in another place where He states that "many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; (this is the wedding feast) but [some of] the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and

gnashing of teeth" (Mt 8:11,12 NASB). Who are these sons of the Kingdom? They are those who by virtue of being sons, who because they were born of God, had the right to inherit the Kingdom. Just as the son of an earthly man will inherit his substance when he dies, so the sons of God have the right to inherit the Kingdom which He has promised. The Williams translation makes this very clear by saying: "many will come from the east and from the west and take their seats at the feast with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be turned out into the darkness outside, where they will be weeping and grinding their teeth." Those of God's children who are unfaithful will be disinherited, and not only will they be disinherited, but they will also be punished.

There are many who mistakenly try to apply this and other "Kingdom" parables to "eternity." Thus, they reason that the unfaithful servant who is punished is "lost." They suppose that he lost his eternal life. He was once born of God, but because of his disobedience, he ceased being one of God's sons. If we take this view, then we would have to assume that God is generating children randomly and even irresponsibly. If this is true, then our heavenly Father is allowing people to receive His life and become part of His family without any plan for dealing with their problems and deficiencies. This idea leads us to think of the new birth simply as a kind of experiment to see if it will go right or not. This would be like a man having, let us say, a dozen children and then, when some of them do not please him, shooting half of them, "culling the herd" so to speak. No, God is doing nothing without a preplanned purpose. He knows the beginning and the end. In fact, He *is* the beginning and the end. Therefore, when anyone comes to Him and is received by Him, He already had the plan and power to deal with Him as a son and to eventually bring that son into submission to Him. This divine plan includes discipline.

Why is God punishing and disciplining His sons in this way? Everything He does concerning His children is done because of His love. So we can be sure that this future punishment also has the same motive. He will do it for our

own good. This chastisement of God's children is to break down their stubbornness and their resistant will. If we do not submit to Him in this lifetime, then He will have to work to correct this problem when He comes. He will do this so that we will learn to be obedient, so that when eternity comes we will be ready. When the Millennial Kingdom is over and "eternity future" begins, all rebellion must have been cleansed from the hearts of God's people so that they can enjoy freely the new creation. God knows what is best for us. I'm sure it grieves Him tremendously that His children have not made themselves ready. But in His divine providence He has made a way to help us so that eventually, we will be ready.

MANY STRIPES

Let us turn now to another passage in Luke chapter 12, starting with verse 35. Keep in mind that this passage is also spoken in the context of the Kingdom (see verse 31):

"Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately.

Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. (This speaks of feasting in the Kingdom). And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants" (Lk 12:35-37).

"And the Lord said, 'Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.' (This speaks of reigning in the kingdom).

But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is

delaying his coming' and begins to beat the men servants and maidservants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at hour when he is not aware; and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers." (This word "unbelievers" should be translated "unfaithful" according to the Concordant Literal translation).

"And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many blows. But he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few" (Lk 12:42-48).

Here we have elaborated for us clearly and undisputedly the fact that when Jesus Christ returns, some of His servants will be punished. The particular servant of whom the scripture speaks here was beaten with many stripes. The words in the New King James version, "cut him in two," (vs 46) do not mean to cut him into pieces but mean to "scourge him severely," according to a marginal note in the American Standard Version. This is referring to how the skin on the back is cut open by repeated lashing with a whip. This must be the correct translation since God is not some kind of maniac who will hack people up into pieces in his basement, but is a loving Father who will discipline His children.

Will the Lord actually castigate His children in a severe manner? You can be confident that He will do just that if we have been unfaithful and disobedient. This discipline which rebellious children will receive will be severe and prolonged. It is something which will take place during the Kingdom age. Further, it something which any wise child of God would want to avoid at all costs. Although I cannot predict exactly what form this punishment will take, it seems possible that, as we have already mentioned, a large part of it will be to see very clearly what they have missed. Those who were disobedient will see others enjoying the rewards of the Kingdom while they are left out. In Luke 13:28 Jesus warns about the possibility of seeing "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the

Kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out." While those who are excluded are waiting for the Kingdom age to finish, they will no doubt have time to review very clearly their lifestyle in this world. I imagine that this would cause great and prolonged anguish – weeping and gnashing of teeth – to see how easy it would have been to be obedient and how much God would have helped them to overcome if they had only been willing.

Although some would like to deny this stark, unpleasant reality by again trying to believe that the person who is punished could not be a Christian, here the scripture makes it plain that this is a believer. We read in verse 45, "But if that servant says in his heart, My lord is delaying his coming." This is the very same servant that in the preceding verses was blessed by the Lord and made to be ruler over His household. There should be no doubt that this servant about which the scripture is speaking was a child of God, but that in the latter part of this passage he became disobedient.

Yes, God will surely punish His children when they deserve it. Both in this life and in the Kingdom age which is to come, He will reward every man according to his works whether they be good or evil. All of God's children should take this message seriously. Colossians 3:23-25, which are words written to believers, reads: "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; (this means inheriting the Kingdom) for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality."

I have stated here that these punishments for believers are temporary – that they will last "only" one thousand years. Through the years, many have asked if there are any texts which prove such a thing. Is there any indication in the Bible that afterwards, God will restore these individuals in some way? Although there are no references in the word of God which specifically state this, it can be strongly inferred from the fact that these verses which we have been studying are specifically about the coming Kingdom. And we know that the Kingdom of God on this earth will last for one thousand years. Further, we do encounter in

Revelation 22:4 something very interesting. Let us read it together. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Significantly, this passage is recorded after the Millennium, at the beginning of "eternity" when God makes a new heaven and new earth (see verse 1). I would like to submit for your consideration that no one who is feasting, reigning and resting with Jesus Christ will be weeping or in pain. They will have no sorrow. They are rejoicing and celebrating.

But here we encounter another group of people. They have been weeping and having both pain and sorrow and so they need special attention and comfort. It is God Himself who will do this for them, wiping away every tear. I think that it is not stretching the scriptures too far to imagine that these people could be those whom the Father has disciplined during the Kingdom age but now at the beginning of "eternity" is restoring and comforting.

Still another interesting passage is found in Jude 8-13. Here the apostle is describing a very special group of church goers. These are "Christians" who "defile the flesh" or in other words are sexually impure committing fornication and adultery. They "reject authority" and we can assume this means the authority of Jesus. They are "self serving" and they "corrupt themselves" like "animals" (NIV). They produce no good fruit, are only serving themselves and not the Lord, and should have the good sense to feel ashamed but do not. These are people participating in the activities of the church but who are not living in the present Kingdom of God. In other words they are not submitted to the rulership of God. It is for these that a special place is reserved, "the blackness of darkness." This is the same as the "outer darkness" which we have been studying.

While some versions say that this punishment is "forever" (vs 13) the Greek text here does not support this. "Forever" is normally a translation of the Greek "to the ages of the ages." But in this verse the Greek reads "to the age" (singular) not "to the ages of the ages" meaning "for-

ever." This then is referring to the coming Kingdom age and not to eternity. The proper rendering of this verse also lends support to the thought that this indeed is a punishment which is for a predetermined, limited period of time. (The most reliable ancient texts do not mention a time frame in the parallel passage II Pet 2:17).

Brothers and sisters in Christ I beg you for your own sake, pay careful attention to all that has been said here. The way we live today has monumental consequences! Whatever we are sowing is exactly the reward which we will reap. No one will get special treatment or be able to escape the just reward which they have earned. If you or I are disobedient we will be punished by the Lord when He returns. Not only will we be left out of the wedding feast, but for 1,000 years we will suffer God's righteous discipline.

With these things in mind, let us examine our manner of living thoroughly to see if what we are doing is pleasing to God. And if we find that it is not, let us then repent for the sake of the Kingdom. It is very scriptural to live both soberly and circumspectly in this world so that we will be pleasing to our Lord. The things and worldly pleasures which we must deny ourselves today are not even worthy to be compared to the things which God has prepared for us. Our life here is short and fleeting. It is well worth the investment to spend our time here wisely and gain a Millennium of joy.

