



Lesson 13

RG and the BEMA

KEY PASSAGE(S)

¹⁴ “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:14-16).

THE BIG PICTURE – THE Story

If our understanding of God’s *Story* is correct, then the energy from the “first strike” has carried us to this point and beyond. The Bible teaches a final and full accounting. There is a tendency to look at this from a gospel-less perspective. If such is the case, then there is shame and condemnation. But if, however, we keep this in proper alignment with the gospel, there is joy and celebration for the BEMA is not about us, but about the faithfulness of God bringing about His victory to finish what He began.

God’s *Story* has six acts: God, Creation, Rejection, Redemption, Re-Creation and Worship. The *Story* ends with a final judgment where God acknowledges the last period on the last sentence. This chapter speaks to the final judgment of separation between the woman’s seed and that of the serpent.

INITIAL TRUTHS TO REMEMBER

The judgment seat of Christ in no way will be dealing with our sin. Many say the judgment seat of Christ will deal with our service and this is perhaps true. However, even here when judgment happens for the works done from a fleshly motive, the fire will consume them and treat them as non-rewarded. There is no sin assigned in any way to our account. Our account against God will be empty.

BASIC IDEAS:

1. At the BEMA, God reveals all that He chose to do in us and through us to those around us.
2. At the BEMA, every believer will have fruit to show.
3. The BEMA is a time of joy and celebration, not shame and judgment.

We should look on the judgment seat of Christ as an occasion of unprecedented joy and celebration. It is here the old nature shall finally receive its just reward. Here the removal of the old nature is final. It is here where one's practice will finally match up with one's position. In that glorious day, "when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

FACE TO FACE

Many Christians are already somewhat familiar with the thought of the BEMA judgment and what might happen at that moment. The impression left by much teaching on this subject is reflected in the following questions.

1. Is the Bema a time of remorse, regret, penal judgment, and personal shortcoming?
2. Is the Bema about you or is there something or someone else who will be receiving the spotlight?
3. Is it a time of reflecting back on failed opportunity and missed choices?
4. Is it possible for the believer not to be ruling and reigning with Christ in heaven?
5. How can we ever know if we have done enough?
6. Are we ever capable of really determining whether our actions (let alone our motives) have been pure?
7. If fruit bearing is the basis for evaluation, what exactly is fruit bearing?
8. Is it possible for the work of God to fail to such a degree that there is no reward-able act in His workmanship?
9. If our placement in heaven is based on our performance on earth, when is enough, enough?
10. If salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, why does sanctification and glorification demand a different standard?
11. How does a theology of future rewards from a man-centered perspective generate the kind of rest mentioned in Matthew 11:28-30? Is initial salvation the believer's only certainty concerning placement?
12. What exactly does the label "overcomer" mean?
13. Is there a legitimate distinction between entering the kingdom and inheriting the kingdom?
14. If all we need is in Christ, what more would we want?

Friend, there is a better way. This lesson will address and answer those questions.

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON

The question of having to give an account can be immediately answered and in short order. There will be an accounting before God of every New Testament believer's life. The evaluation of one's life exists. However, in saying this let us make sure we have our presuppositions in place. Everything we have studied up to this point comes to bear on this one glorious and unprecedented moment when the work of Jesus is fully manifested and all creation bows before Him as King of kings and Lord of lords. In order to understand the BEMA as one of celebration and not anguish, let us consider several areas.

Q1 - Is the Bema a time of remorse, regret, penal judgment, and personal shortcoming?

Q2 - If my placement in heaven is based on my performance on earth, when is enough, enough? How can I ever know if I have done enough?

TODAY'S LESSON

I. If fruit bearing is the basis for evaluation, what exactly is fruit bearing?

In looking at the idea of fruit bearing, it is important to remember that fruit-bearing, good works, obedience, and the New Testament commands are all synonymous ideas. There is no distinction between any of these “actions.” (Cf. Lesson 7)

If the underlying thought concerning fruit bearing is that a good tree can only produce good fruit, then why are we thinking about our bad fruit (Matt. 7:15-20; Luke 6:43-45)? A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, so whatever fruit is born that is bad is of no real consequence.

Ephesians 2:10 speaks of the believer being God's workmanship. The term “workmanship” says **we are the product of His hands**. **He is** molding the believer. **He is** designing us. **He is** doing the work in us and through us. This does not negate our will to choose, but it does source our will in His (Phil. 2:12, 13).

“Evangelicals see sanctification as living according to what they call ‘biblical principles,’ the ordinary things of life like marriage, family, business, finances, and diet. These principles do not define sanctification, lacking is the Christological dimension of living and dying for others. Who knows whether a life following biblical principles will result in success in business, marriage, and family, but this is not a life of sanctification, which cannot be measured by the quality and length of our lives.”¹

If it is not a fruit of the Spirit, then it is a work of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-24). If it is a work of the flesh, it has no eternal value and will be consumed in the day of accounting (1 Cor. 3:15 [if 1 Corinthians 3 is to be used in this way]).

II. Is it possible for the work of God to fail to such a degree that there is no reward-able act in His workmanship?

Because of the certainty of fruit bearing, the work of God cannot fail. There is nothing like a so-called “fruitless” believer. The implication of this is every believer will be reward-able. This is the point of Romans 14:3, 4.

³ “The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, **for God has accepted him.** ⁴ Who are you to judge the servant of another? **To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand**” (Rom. 14:3, 4).

This is the point of 1 Corinthians 4:4, 5

⁴ “For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. ⁵ Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, **but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God**” (1 Cor. 4:4, 5).

Often Matthew 24 and 25 are used to justify the belief that there are believers who are rewarded and those who are not. However, when studied in context, the scenario of Matthew 25 is clear enough. There are only two kinds of people, saved and lost. There is not a third category of saved lost people or dark light.

Many believers are under the impression hearing “well done” is an affirmation for earthly faithfulness to obedience. Its reception is tentative and uncertain. It is heard only by those who have “totally surrendered” to Christ. Because only the obedient receive it, some might not hear it. Yet, is this how we are to view the idea of hearing, “Well done?”

This block of teaching is in response to a question asked by his disciples. Jesus made a statement in 24:2 concerning the future destruction of the Temple. The question then asked was, “What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?” (v. 3). In response to the question, He runs through a series of events preceding the end. He then says, “Then the end will come” (v.14). He speaks of the Tribulation of those days and the coming of the Son of Man (vv. 15-31). He also speaks of the days of Noah being like the days in which the Son of Man returns (vv. 36ff).

He then paints a picture of contrasts between those who are ready and those who are not ready. What follows is a table depicting the two contrasting groups.

Reference	Saved		Result	Unsaved	Result
24:40 Two men	One taken			One left	
24:41 Two women	One taken			One left	
24:45-51 Two servants	Faithful and Wise Servant		Blessed / Set over all His possessions (v.46, 47)	Wicked Servant (v.48)	Cut in pieces / weeping and gnashing of teeth (v. 51)
25:1-13 Two groups of virgins	Five Wise		Ready, went in (v.10)	Five Foolish	I do not know you (v.12)
25:14-30 Two kinds of servants	Faithful Servants		Well-done, good, and faithful servant. Enter into joy (vv. 21,23)	Wicked, Slothful, and worthless servants (vv.26, 30)	Talent removed, cast into outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth (vv.29, 30)
	Five Talents	Two Talents		One Talent	
25:31-46 Two nations	The Sheep		Right hand Blessed, inherit the kingdom(v.34)	The Goats	Left hand - Cursed into the eternal fire, go away into eternal punishment (vv. 41, 46)

If Matthew 25 can apply, then every believer will hear, “Well done my good and faithful servant.” If this is not true, then the alternative is tragically confusing (Matt. 25:30). Because of our understanding of fruit bearing (Mark 4; Gal. 5), every believer will have “works” that are “gold, silver and precious stone” (if 1 Corinthians 3 is to be used in this way). Joy and reward awaits all who appear in that day.

It appears His point would be, “Be ready so that when I come you do not find yourself unsaved.” If this is correct, then every saved person falls into the first category and every unsaved person falls into the second category. Because of the parallelism, every saved person rules over all His possessions, are ready, will hear, “Well done,” is good and faithful, will sit at God’s right hand, and will inherit the kingdom. This is consistent with 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24, and Philippians 1:6 and John’s usage of the idea of every believer being an overcomer. Not to hear well done is to find oneself in a place of eternal fire and punishment.

Every saved person will have service that is reward-able (1 Cor. 4:5). To be sure, this is but an initial attempt at answering an area that is large and complex. The answer is consistent with the doctrines of grace, one’s position in Christ, and the certainty of God’s rule over man’s will. It is not an exhaustive look, but it does provide “food for thought.”

Q3 - If fruit bearing is the basis for evaluation, what exactly is fruit bearing?

Q4 - Is it possible for the work of God to fail to such a degree that there is no reward-able act in His workmanship?

III. If performance determines placement, when is enough, enough?

(This will tie in with point four) Is it ever possible for the believer to know when enough is enough? If salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, why would sanctification and glorification demand a different standard?

Although, as Evangelicals we identify justification as being a monergistic work (Cf. Lesson 5), why have so many made sanctification and our ultimate placement in glorification a synergistic work? If we could not contribute then, why do we think we can now? John 15:4 and 5 clearly speak of not being able to do anything apart from Him. The cross swallows completely the “I” of self. This appears to be the point of Romans 6, Galatians 2:20 and Colossians 3:1-4.

IV. What does “overcomer” mean? Is there a legitimate distinction between entering the kingdom and inheriting the kingdom?

By far the author John dominates the New Testament usage of the word **nikao** (overcomer). His usage and our understanding of it are crucial. Of the 24 occurrences [of **nikao**]; three are used elsewhere (Lk. 11:22; Rom. 3:4; 12:21 [1 John 5:4 **nike** once in NT).

- First, Jesus speaks of having overcome the world (John 16:33).

For us, our union with Him (see most of the above material) makes what He is ours (1 John 4:17).

- Second, John speaks of the believer having already overcome the wicked one (1 John 2:13, 14).
- Third, as a child of God we have overcome the spirit of the antichrist.

Again, this is true because of our identity being in Christ (1 John 4:4). This has nothing to do with performance or obedience.

- Fourth, it is our faith in Christ that identifies us as one who overcomes the world (1 John 5:4, 5).
- Fifth, the implication of not being one who overcomes is more than a failure to reign (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).

The one who overcomes inherits all things (Rev. 21:7). Since we are sons and daughters, we are heirs (Gal. 4:7). In fact, we are joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Such talk to the contrary is unscriptural.

CONCLUSION

There are several observations.

- **First**, the coming of Christ is a day of great celebration and joy.
- **Second**, we should see the Bema Judgment as a time for removing forever the old nature.

The old nature will be the wood, hay, and stubble consumed on that day. Our old nature was judicially pronounced dead when we received Christ as our Savior. At the Bema, our old nature will be experientially removed for good forever.

- **Third**, we believe every believer will receive in that day a reward for service (1 Cor. 4:5).
- **Fourth**, because we believe it is a day for the removal of the old nature we cannot help but believe it will be a day of incredible rejoicing.

Friend in that day we will lose forever our old nature. The idea we will be ashamed and downcast is a great disservice to the nature of the event and to the power of the gospel. May God open our eyes to the sufficiency of His work in our behalf. May we see the day of accounting as a day in which He receives His glory in the church.

Q5 - How does a theology of future rewards from a man-centered perspective generate the kind of rest mentioned in Matthew 11:28-30?

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 1 Cor. 3:10-15; Matthew 24-25; Romans 14; 2 Cor. 5:20

¹ David Scaer (2015) "Sanctification," *Concordia Journal*: Vo..41: No. 3, Article 6.

