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God's Tests

By David Servant

NINETEEN

When the Beginning Ends

In every believer's life, there are three days that stand out above all others: the day of his birth, the day of his new birth, and the day of his judgment. Of those three, the day of his judgment is by far the most significant. That day is what makes the other two days as significant as they are.

The foremost significance of your birth was that it set in motion a life that would one day be judged by God. The foremost significance of your new birth was that it marked the beginning of a new life, which, if continued, would result in your inheriting eternal life at your judgment.

Think about how significant every person's day of judgment will be. Some people, who rejected Jesus Christ as their Lord, will from that day on, be banished to hell forever. Unlike any other day, from the day of birth to the day of death, the day of judgment ends all opportunity for a person to change where he will spend eternity. From that day on, there will never be another chance for the sinner to repent.

This life serves as a test for every person. All of us are given our lifetime to make an eternal decision: Will we make Jesus our Savior and Lord, or will we serve self and Satan? Our decision will determine where we will spend eternity. Only those who have believed in Jesus and served Him will have passed God's test, and therefore, be permitted to live with Him in His kingdom forever. The rest will spend eternity separated from God—an eternity suffering for their rebellion (see 2 Thes. 1:9). No person will have any excuse before the God who knows all there is to know and who is perfectly just (see Rom. 1:20).

At every person's judgment, his or her test is over. It marks the end of the beginning, and the beginning of the end. This is not only true for the unbeliever, but also for the believer.

The Christian's Judgment

The believer, unlike the unbeliever, has passed God's initial test—he has believed in Jesus and, if he continues in faith (see Col. 1:23), will escape hell. Just because a person passes God's initial test, however, does not mean he will not be further tested. On the contrary, all of God's children will be tested again and again—to see if they do continue in faith, and for the purposes of promoting them to higher responsibilities and entrusting them with greater blessings.

Obviously, God will entrust more to a consecrated believer than to one who is less committed. This fact will never be more apparent than when each believer stands before God's judgment seat. There, every believer will be recompensed for his works and will receive his position in God's kingdom. We are saved by grace, but we will be judged and rewarded according to our works. This is what the Bible teaches.

Let's consider three sobering scriptures:

But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? *For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.* For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then *each one of us shall give account of himself to God* (Rom. 14:10-12, emphasis added).

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10).

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. 4:5, emphasis added).

Many Christians unfortunately think that when they die, they will just go to heaven and move into their mansion. Then, once they are settled in and adjusted after a few days, they will stroll over to where God lives and stop in for a little chat. They don't realize that they are going to have to stand before God's judgment seat and give an account of themselves.

This won't be a judgment to determine salvation or damnation—this will be a judgment to determine rewards. Each will receive praise or reprimand, reward or loss, exaltation or humiliation, all depending on what he has done on earth. Jesus Himself plainly taught that in heaven, some will be called least, and some will be called great (see Matt. 5:19).

Just as David and Joseph realized their ultimate divine destinies when they came into their kingdoms, so, too, all of us will realize our ultimate divine destinies when we come into God's kingdom. Then we will be aware that this present life has been, more than anything else, a preparation for the next life. We will fully understand God's original intention from the beginning—to have a family of free moral agents who have chosen to love and serve Him from their own hearts and who will live with Him, obey Him, and serve Him in His eternal kingdom forever.

There will never be another chance for a rebellion (after the final rebellion at the end of the Millennium), because Satan and all who have chosen to follow him will be forever incarcerated. At the same time, God will have the guarantee that none of His children will ever rebel either because they have proved their love and faith through many testings. Those who can be trusted with much will be entrusted with much, and those who can only be trusted with little will be entrusted with little. Time will no longer exist, and we will live with Him for eternity.

God's Eternal Purpose

I hope you see that God has had an eternal purpose in doing what He has done (and in allowing what He has allowed) down through the ages. Paul affirmed this when he wrote, "This was in accordance with the *eternal purpose* which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11, emphasis added).

God has made no mistakes. Nothing has caught Him by surprise. He has been working (at least) since the creation of the world to bring His plan to pass. What exactly is that plan? Paul wrote:

Just as He chose us in Him *before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He *predestined* us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself (Eph. 1:4-5a, emphasis added).

Some have unfortunately twisted scriptures like these to conclude that God has predestined some to be saved and some to be damned. Yet we must be careful that we don't ignore the hundreds of other scriptures that make it clear that we are free, moral agents who are given the right to receive or reject Jesus. Thus, when Paul says that we have been predestined, he can only be referring to all of us who have chosen to repent and believe in Jesus, otherwise he would be contradicting himself. God predestined that all who would believe in Jesus would be adopted as sons to Himself.

It is also clear from Scripture that God foreknew all of those who would one day choose to believe in Jesus. 1 Peter 1:1-2 says:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who...are chosen *according to the foreknowledge* of God the Father (1 Pet. 1:1-2, emphasis added).

God knew long before you were ever born that you would choose to believe in Jesus. John wrote in the book of Revelation:

And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world... (Rev. 17:8).

If you believe in Jesus and will continue to believe in Jesus, your name has been written down in God's book from the foundation of the world. And God foreordained that all believers would become like Jesus:

For whom He foreknew [that's us], He predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified (Rom. 8:29-30).

What was God's eternal purpose? *To have an eternal family—free moral agents who would choose to love and serve Him—sons who would be holy and blameless.* Of necessity, all free moral agents had to be tested in order to determine who qualified to live in God's kingdom forever and who would be trusted with greater or lesser responsibilities in that future kingdom.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, *in bringing many sons to glory* (Heb. 2:10, emphasis added).

God's eternal purpose was to bring "many sons to glory." Praise God that all who believe are God's sons, destined to live with the Lord forever in a kingdom of glory where there is no unrighteousness, no hatred, no selfishness, no sorrow, no sin, no sickness and no wars. It's beyond our finite understanding. This life is primarily a preparation for the next life, and we are all playing a part in a master plan that God pre-planned ages ago. (If you want to look at some exciting scriptures that reveal how long ago God formed His plan, see Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:4-5; 3:8-11; and 2 Tim. 1:9-10.)

What Will be the Rewards?

That is not the easiest question to answer. The Bible speaks of various crowns and special responsibilities that we might receive. Let's look at a familiar parable of Jesus, one which He spoke a few days before His death:

He said therefore, "A certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business with this until I come back.' But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'

"And it came about that when he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him in order that he might know what business they had done. And the first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Your mina, master, has made five minas.' And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities.'

"And another came, saying, 'Master, behold your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down, and reap what you did not sow.' He said to him, 'By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down, and reaping what I did not sow? Then why did you not put the money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?' And he said to the bystanders, 'Take the mina away from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' And they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas already.'

"I tell you, that to everyone who has shall more be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here, and slay them in my presence'" (Luke 19:12-27).

For the most part, the meaning of this parable is quite clear. Jesus is obviously the nobleman who received a distant kingdom for Himself. Those of us who have chosen to serve Him are comparable to the slaves who were each given some money by which they were tested. I assume that the money represents the gifts, abilities, and opportunities that we are given with which to serve the Lord. The citizens who hated the nobleman represent all the unbelievers.

Notice that the two faithful slaves were praised and then rewarded with greater responsibilities. They were to rule over a certain number of cities. The Bible teaches that we will rule and reign with Christ during His Millennial reign, so this parable correlates perfectly with that truth (see 1 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27; 5:10; 20:6). Our position of authority in God's kingdom will be determined by our faithfulness during this life.

Commentators debate if the unfaithful servant in this parable represents a true believer or not. Regardless of the answer to that question, our points have been well-served: God will reward us if we are faithful; those rewards could include promotion to positions of authority in God's future kingdom; and, obviously, if rewards are going to be passed out, then the faithfulness of believers is being tested now.

What Will Be Rewarded?

The deeds we do in Christian service for the right motives, at the instruction of the written Word of God or the Holy Spirit, will be rewarded. Jesus made it plain that good deeds done for the wrong motives will not be rewarded by our Heavenly Father:

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have *no reward with your Father who is in heaven*. When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and *your Father who sees in secret will repay you*.”

“And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, *they have their reward in full*. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and *your Father who sees in secret will repay you*.”

“And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, *they have their reward in full*. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and *your Father who sees in secret will repay you*” (Matt. 6:1-6, 16-18, emphasis added).

We can't judge others, but we certainly can't help but wonder how much of what is done “for the Lord” is really done to be seen by men. How many pastors have had checks personally handed to them by members of their congregations because those checks were “too big” to put in the offering basket as it was passed on Sunday? We can check our motives by doing deeds that no one but the Lord will know about.

Paul's Revelation Concerning Our Judgment

The apostle Paul had something to say about the kinds of deeds that will be rewarded when we stand before the Lord:

For we [Paul and Apollos] are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God which was given me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it [Apollos]. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for *the day will show it, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire* (1 Cor. 3:9-15, emphasis added).

Notice that Paul listed six categories of works: gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw. Three are combustible and three are non-combustible.

One day, every believer's works will be tested by going through a fire. I always imagine a big furnace with a conveyor belt passing through it. I imagine every Christian loading his or her works on one side of the furnace and then walking around to the other

side to wait and see what comes through the fire. Each Christian's works may well look the same going into the fire—his prayers, his tithes and offerings, his witnessing, his deeds of kindness, his sacrifices, the persecutions he endured, and so forth, although every Christian will have different amounts of each.

The fire, however, will burn everything that is done for the wrong motive and everything that was not done at the direction of God's Word or the Holy Spirit. Those deeds that *were* done for the right motives, at the instruction of the written Word of God or the Holy Spirit, will come through the fire as gold and silver and precious stones.

Now can you imagine some successful (but hypocritical) preacher bringing his works to the judgment seat? He loads his works on the conveyor belt, then parades to the other side of the furnace to proudly wait for his reward. Won't he be surprised when all that comes through is a small pile of ashes? "Lord, what about all those great sermons? What about that church that I built? What about the books that I wrote, and the crusades I preached?" And the Lord replies, "You did it all to be seen by men, and much of what you taught was unscriptural."

Can you imagine the little old lady who shyly approaches the judgment furnace, who loads her seemingly small works on the conveyor belt, and then meekly shuffles to the other side to wait and see what might possibly come through the powerful fire? Won't she be shocked to see great piles of diamonds and rubies along with bars of gold and silver? "Lord, what did I do to deserve all that?" And the Lord replies, "You faithfully taught the six-year-old Sunday School class for thirty-six years. You were a secret prayer warrior. You did just what I called you to do. I'm going to place you in charge of ruling ten cities!"

At that judgment seat, there will be cases of: "The last shall be first, and the first last" (Matt. 20:16). At that moment, we will fully comprehend the truth that "from everyone who has been given much shall much be required" (Luke 12:48).

Even "small deeds" will be rewarded then, as Jesus said:

"And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward" (Matt. 10:42).

Some Seats Are Already Reserved

Even now, some future seats of authority in the Millennium are already reserved. Jesus said to His twelve disciples:

"Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life" (Matt. 19:28-29).

So the twelve (perhaps Paul will be Judas' replacement) will have jurisdiction over the twelve tribes of Israel during the Millennium. Anyone who has sacrificed anything for Jesus' sake will be repaid in that age many times over by comparison to his sacrifice.

Thy Kingdom Come

Again, we must realize that our divine destiny will be *ultimately* realized in the kingdom *if* we are faithful and pass our tests now. How many will "finish their course"? How many will fall short?

God said to Daniel, recorded in the final verse of his book, these words of which we all should take notice: "But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into

rest and rise again to *your allotted portion at the end of the age*” (Dan. 12:13). Will you rise to your *allotted portion*?

It is my conviction that it was a part of your divine destiny to read this book. It was no accident that someone gave it to you or that you bought it at a bookstore.

What you do now, in this life, will have eternal ramifications, not only for yourself, but for others as well. You, like every other person, are on a journey to stand before the great Judge (see Matt. 5:25-26). Therefore, there is nothing more important than for you to pass your tests by *trusting and obeying*.

Paul wrote an admonition to a man named Archippus which has some application to us all:

Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, *that you may fulfill it* (Col. 4:17, emphasis added).

Will you fulfill your divine destiny?

And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth (1 Pet. 1:17).

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil (Ecc. 12:13-14).

Appendix

This list contains all the references where the Bible states that God tested a person or persons. As I mentioned in the second chapter, the *King James Version* does not have any references to God’s testing anyone because the word *test* apparently didn’t exist in the English language four hundred years ago. Instead, the *King James* uses words such as *prove, try, or tempt* where most modern translations use the word *test*. The *New King James Version* has done a good job of correcting these words to *test* in many cases. The following list of references is based upon the *New American Standard Bible*.

Test, Tests, Testing, Tested

Gen. 22:1_ “...these things, that God *tested* Abraham...”
Ex. 15:25_ “...regulation, and there He *tested* them.”
Ex. 16:4_ “...every day, that I may *test* them...”
Ex. 20:20_ “...God has come in order to *test* you...”
Dt. 8:2_ “...that He might humble you, *testing* you...”
Dt. 8:16_ “...you and that He might *test* you...”
Dt. 13:3_ “...for the Lord your God is *testing* you...”
Jg. 2:22_ “...in order to *test* Israel by them...”
Jg. 3:1_ “...Lord left, to *test* Israel by them...”
Jg. 3:4_ “And they were for *testing* Israel...”
Jg. 7:4_ “...and I will *test* them for you there...”
2 Ch. 32:31_ “... God left him alone only to *test* him...”
Ps. 11:4_ “...His eyelids *test* the sons of men.”
Ps. 11:5_ “...Lord *tests* the righteous and the wicked...”
Ps. 17:3_ “...hast *tested* me and dost find nothing...”
Ps. 26:2_ “...*Test* my mind and my heart.”

Ps. 105:19_ “...pass, The word of the Lord *tested* him.”
 Pr. 17:3_ “...for gold, But the Lord *tests* hearts.”
 Ec. 3:18_ “...God has surely *tested* them in order...”
 Is. 48:10_ “...I have *tested* you in the furnace of...”
 Jer. 17:10_ “...search the heart, I *test* the mind...”
 Jer. 20:12_ “...Thou who dost *test* the righteous...”
 Zch. 13:9_ “...And *test* them as gold is tested...”
 John 6:6_ “And this He was saying to *test* him...”
 1 Cor. 3:13_ “...fire itself will *test* the quality of each...”
 1 Th. 2:4a_ “...but just as we have been *approved** by God...”
 1 Th. 2:4b_ “...but God, who *examines** our hearts.”
 Heb. 11:17_ “By faith Abraham, when he was *tested*...”
 Rev. 3:10_ “...to *test* those who dwell upon the earth.”

The Bible also speaks in several passages of God “trying” people. In some of those instances, the Hebrew word translated *try* is the identical word that is translated *test* at other times. In the examples below, the word translated *try*, *tried*, *tries*, or *triest* is the Hebrew word “bachan,” which is translated *test* in these scriptures in the above list: Ps. 11:4, 5, Prov. 17:3, Jer. 17:10, Zch. 13:9.

Try, Tried, Tries, Triest

1 Ch. 29:17_ “...that Thou *triest* the heart...”
 Job 23:10_ “...When He has *tried* me, I shall come forth...”
 Ps. 7:9_ “...God *tries* the hearts and the minds.”
 Ps. 17:3_ “Thou has *tried* my heart...”
 Ps. 66:10_ “For Thou hast *tried* us, O God...”
 Ps. 139:23_ “...*Try* me and know my anxious thoughts...”
 Jer. 11:20_ “...Who *tries* the feelings and the heart...”

*This word can be rightfully translated *tested* or *tests*. The Greek word is “dokimazo,” which is translated *test* in 1 Cor. 3:13, 2 Cor. 8:22, 1 Tim. 3:10, 1 Pet. 1:7, and 1 John 4:1 in the N.A.S. The *New King James Version* translates the second usage of “dokimazo” here in 1 Thes. 2:4 as *tests*.