

WHAT'S AFTER ATX

EXEGETICAL NOTES:

REWARDS THAT LAST

A. Revelation 19:8

G. K. Beale offers two ways of understanding this verse. On the traditional view, the white robes represent the righteous deeds of the saints. On Beale's view, he believes the white robes should not be equated with the righteous deeds but translates the verse as "the fine linen is *the reward for (or result of)* the righteous deeds of the saints."¹

Beale explains that "righteous deeds" must be understood within their context; thus "righteous deeds" are understood in light of vv. 10 where these deeds are understood as "holding to the testimony of Jesus." Beale wrote that holding to the testimony means the saints "will not give their loyalty to Babylon but separate themselves from it."²

Beale further explains that elsewhere in Revelation, receiving white robes conveys the idea of "*purity resulting from a test of persevering faith*" (e.g., Rev. 3:5-6).³ This is why he believes that the verse should be translated as "the fine linen is *the reward for (or result of)* the righteous deeds of the saints." In summary, Beale posits that the white robes symbolize, 1) "human faithfulness and good works (as necessary evidence of right standing with God," and 2) "vindication or acquittal accomplished by God's judgments against the enemy on behalf of his people."⁴ For Beale, he believes the "righteous deeds of the saints" should be left ambiguous to denote both a *subjective*

1. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation, A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 934-36.

2. *Ibid.*, 934.

3. *Ibid.*, 936.

4. *Ibid.*

genitive, or an *objective genitive*: “righteous acts *performed by* the saints,” and “righteous acts *for* the saints,” on behalf of God.⁵

Mounce is hesitant and wrote that the white robes *may* indicate the righteous acts of those who “endure to the end,” but does not give much comment on why he views the verse this way. He only wrote, and to this Beale agrees, that this verse does not deny Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith rather than works. “A transformed life is the proper response to the call of the heavenly bridegroom.”⁶

B. Matthew 10:26

The context of this passage is persecution and martyrdom. Jesus told his disciples not to fear what lies in their future, but to proclaim openly and boldly about God’s kingdom—even in the face of opposition. Vv. 26 is an allusion to Jesus’ teachings in Luke 12:2 and Mark 4:22. R.T. France explains that vv. 26 “balances the declaration that parables leave some in the dark. What may need to remain secret for a time must ultimately be revealed.”⁷ In summary, this verse is an encouragement to the disciples not to “hide their light.”

C. 2 Corinthians 5:10

Murray J. Harris wrote that 2 Cor. 5:10 illustrates “the interrelatedness of eschatology and ethics.”⁸ Our future hope is not divorced from our present behavior. Harris correctly observes from vv. 9 that our aim is to please the Lord because we are accountable to him. The event of Christ’s judgment is the general resurrection of the dead, though Paul focuses on the judgment of *believers* in this passage.⁹ Yet, with that said, this verse refers to the reality and inevitability of judgment for everyone.

In what sense are believers judged? Paul Barnett offers this suggestion; believers do not face *condemnation* but *evaluation* before Christ. “Perhaps, too, they will receive back within themselves elements of what they had practiced in the body (so 5:10), as eternal reminders that they had been saved through God’s mercy, and not by their own efforts. Those ‘outside Christ’ face the sinners’ judgment; on the other hand, those ‘in Christ’ face his judgment bench as saints.”¹⁰

5. Ibid.

6. Robert Mounce, *Revelation*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1977), 348.

7. R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 402.

8. Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 405.

9. Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 274.

10. Ibid., 277.

D. Revelation 14:13

In context, this passage is a call to endure for those Christians who were facing persecution under Rome. John told them to endure for there were rewards. But these believers were also warned in vv. 6-11. Beale wrote, “The desire to persevere is to be motivated not only by the warning of judgment but also by the promise of reward.”¹¹

What are these blessings, and how might God judge them if they are not faithful? The opening chapters answer these questions clearly. In the greetings to the seven churches, John gives warnings to persevere, and gives promises of blessings (Ephesus, 2:4,7; Pergamum, 2:14, 17; Thyatira, 2:20, 26-27; Sardis, 3:1, 5; Philadelphia has no warning, but blessing in 3:12; Laodicea, 3:15, 21). To the churches, Christ warned them of their deeds, and promised blessings “to those who conquered,” e.g., they who “conquered by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony” (Rev. 12:11).

E. Hebrews 4:11

This verse appears in the context of a warning and encouragement. It’s a warning because the author is warning his audience to remain faithful to Jesus. Unbelief risks failing to enter God’s rest. This verse is an encouragement as well because it is a call to present perseverance. Though God’s rest refers to when Jesus returns, there is a present dimension to God’s rest as well.¹² When we obey Jesus, we find rest in God’s promises now, and anticipate God’s rest in the future.

This harkens back to Revelation 14:13 because though Christ promised the church future blessing (“to the one who conquers, I will give...”), he stood in present judgment to their behavior (“but I have this against you...”). Just as salvation is a present and future reality, judgment is also a present and future reality. God’s kingdom is a “now but not yet” kingdom.

Hebrews 4:11 demonstrates what Harris has said above—eschatology and ethics are interrelated. Being a Christian does not mean Christ does not hold us accountable, and Hebrews 4:11 presents Christians with the terrifying reality that a hard heart may prove the insincerity of salvation. In light of this, “fear of loss should inspire greater diligence in pursuit.”¹³ In summary, our present behavior matters before God—both now and later.

11. Beale, 767.

12. Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 199.

13. *Ibid.*, 212.

F. Luke 14:12-14

In this passage, Jesus tells a parable of a man who will be rewarded in the future through resurrection. This shows that resurrection is the reward granted to those who trust Jesus.¹⁴

Joel Green observed that Jesus only mentions the resurrection of the just. This does not deny a general resurrection of both righteous and wicked, wrote Green, but intimates “that ‘the righteous’ are those whose worldview is transformed along the lines Jesus promulgates...whose practices take the form of selfless generosity and redistribution on behalf of those who, for whatever reason, live at the margins of society.”¹⁵

The cultural background of this story is that who people invited to a banquet was a sort of “social currency” in “the marketplace of prestige and power.”¹⁶ People were expected to invite peers and family—people who expected gifts and status in return (thus Jesus in vv.12, “and you be repaid”). But the social conventions of Jesus’ day excluded the poor and outcast—those who were not the social elite. Jesus demands his disciples to defy the normal ways of looking at things.

In summary, Christian behavior matters, and Jesus demands that we not be exclusionary, but rather show concern and hospitality to the needy. From verse 14 we can infer that Jesus is watching us.

G. 1 Corinthians 15:58

“Death is swallowed up in victory,” wrote Paul. Why? Because of the resurrection. Like in Luke above, the New Testament affirms that resurrection of our earthly bodies is part of the promise of future glory.

Gordon Fee claims that vv. 58 is not about ethical behavior, but about the work of the Gospel.¹⁷ While Paul is writing due to his concern over the church’s behavior, this verse appears in his argument about the reality of the resurrection—some were denying the resurrection.¹⁸ Paul wanted the church to be “steadfast” and “immovable,” in the truth of the resurrection so that they would know, their “labor is not in vain.” Paul’s rhetorical point is to encourage his audience to keep up the Gospel work because the resurrection would make it worth their while.

14. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 554.

15. *Ibid.*, 554.

16. *Ibid.*, 552.

17. Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 807.

18. *Ibid.*

H. 1 Corinthians 3:12-13

In 1 Corinthians 3:12-13, Paul speaks of a “day” which discloses the quality of one’s work. This day definitely refers to the final day of judgment. Anthony Thiselton provides insight that is worth quoting at length.

*Prior to the last judgment all human evaluations remain corrigible; they depend on unknown factors about additional information, human motivations, and long-term effects. But God pronounces a definitive verdict at the last judgment which cannot be revised, for all the factors have been taken into account in a total context (emphasis his).*¹⁹

He writes further:

This final judgment will include whether this person trusted in Jesus, “but will also disclose the extent to which their work has produced some lasting effect in God’s sight. For if justification by grace means dissolution of all that is self-centered, sinful, and unworthy, such things by definition will not ‘survive.’ On the other hand, what was offered in the strength of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Christ will have effects that eternally abide within the very existence and praise of the redeemed community and the life of God at the last day. This is precisely Paul’s point when he writes that the Day will disclose **what kind of work each has done**” (emphasis his).²⁰

19. Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 313.

20. *Ibid.*, 313-14.