



The Judgement Seat Of Christ 2 Corinthians 5:6-11

You know how the detective thrillers go. Whether it be Poirot, or Marple, or Holmes, or Columbo: as our sleuth considers the suspects, he or she is looking at motive, means and opportunity for each of the suspect to have killed the victim. Motive is very important because motive is what drives people to leave their comfort zones and do things, whether good or bad which benefits others or themselves.

Motive is something that drives us. The more motivation we have the more enthusiastic or driven we are. As we've looked through 2 Corinthians we've seen it's been a letter about motive. Paul's motives and legitimacy to preach the Good News were being challenged by some in the church and he felt compelled to defend his position even though he did not feel he needed to. To do the things he did, to take the risks involved and to ultimately be in a position where his life might become forfeit, he needed a considerable amount of motivation to drive him to it. In fact, he needed far more motivation than the fame and fortune sought by the Jewish preachers who opposed him.

So what motivated Paul. The reasons in 2 Corinthians are many and varied. Here's a number of reasons he has already given as things that have motivated him to take the most enormous risks and have ended getting him in scrapes.

We have experienced Christ's rescue 1:6-11

We have the presence of the Holy Spirit 1:21-22, 5:5

God led him 2:12-14

He operated in God's strength 3:5, 12

He reflected God's glory 3:18

Life is short but eternity is forever 4:15-18

We live by faith, not by sight 5:7

We always seek to please the Lord 5:9

So Paul was a man driven by what God had done for him in salvation, through the Holy Spirit and through divine leading and empowerment. He was a man that understood what his hope was, had glimpsed glory so he lived by faith and not by sight; and knowing how gracious the Lord had been to him, he sought to please Him. Which brings me to tonight's passage which embraces those last two points – we live by faith and not by sight and we always seek to please the Lord and then we're given another, quite different motivation.

We live by faith and not by sight. Paul did what he did because of a hope that whatever happened he would be with the Lord. That's what gave him his confidence. The Good News Bible puts confidence as full of courage. It was the confidence that produces courage. The interesting thing about courageous people is that they give that much extra despite the harm that may come to them. The highest award for military courage in Britain is the Victoria Cross its often given posthumously. Men and women who have sacrificed themselves for the sake of others. Paul's concept of courage may have not been quite as dramatic, but the sentiment was the same – he dedicated his life to the rescue of others.

Christian history is marked by Paul's – people who served God readily with courage. What made the difference – they walked by faith not by sight. And where did that faith come from – a dynamic experience of God.

I believe we are told these things in 2 Corinthians, not to leave us with the sense of inferiority because we can never be a Paul, but that God desires to give us all that relationship with Him; that leaves us tempered with that eternal hope and connecting with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in this present life. Its for all of us, even if God never calls any of us to be a Paul, we can still make that difference for Him in our families, church and community.

Let me read verses 9 to 11 again: *9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 10 For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.*

So Paul makes it his goal to please the Lord wherever he is - here or eternity. There are effectively two reasons in these verses. The first is that he knows he is already the recipient of God's grace. Whatever happens to him, he knows he is going to always be at home with the Lord in the end. The response to that hope surely should be to please the One that made it all possible.

Paul did what he did to please the Lord. It was his mission and call and he sought to do it to the best of his ability. The more we understand of the grace of God, the love of God, the power of God and the glory of God, the more it will be our desire to please Him and that inevitably means we walk in obedience to Jesus, following Him wherever He calls us to go.

But there's a second reason here. It's one of accountability. In the end we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ. Talking about judgement isn't a popular theme of Christian preaching these days. We like the idea of a loving, forgiving Father; but a God who judges, a Saviour who examines our lives. We don't like that.

In fact, accountability and responsibility are not popular ideas in our modern society. It's difficult to get people to take responsibility for something from politicians downwards. It's always got to be someone else's problem and blame has always got to be laid as someone else's door.

It's the same in churches. We know ourselves that it's very difficult for people to fill leadership positions and even to do regular tasks. It's not something endemic to MRBC but to our society. Yet at the heart of what it means to be a Christian is the notion of accountability. However verse 10 can be an very understood verse: *10 For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

What Paul is referring to here is a *bema*. What's a *bema*? Speak to one of the Top Gear presenters and they'll tell you that a Beamer is a nickname for a BMW! OK, I'm trying to be witty. I'm actually talking about a *bema* spelt b-e-m-a. It was the Greek word used for a judgement seat in Roman times where Roman judges handed down sentence, and it's what traditionally some have thought the judgement Paul was referring to in this chapter. Jesus the judge hands down justice to those giving an account of themselves to Him. People are then punished according to the judgement on them. But is that in accordance with scripture?

Look at the whole weight of the NT and Paul's writing in particular and we find that in Christ we do not get as our deeds deserve but are found to be forgiven. The punishment that was ours was borne for us on the cross. So we know that the *bema* of Christ is nothing to do with punishment. Paul had just been talking about the way in which as God's people we have an eternal hope.

There is of course another judgement, which is described in revelation – the Great White Throne when people will be judged according to their deeds, but we are people who are written into the Lamb's Book of Life, and that's the criterion by which we enter heaven, not our deeds or misdeeds. The Bema is about the church and what we have done with the grace given us.

A careful look at verse 10 show Paul had something other than punishment in mind: For all of us must appear before Christ, to be judged by him. We will each receive what we deserve, according to everything we have done, good or bad, in our bodily life. The *bema* (judgement seat) here seems to be about getting something that results from how we have behaved in life – a prize rather than a punishment.

In fact, in the Greek world a *bema* wasn't just a seat of judgement, it was the seat where the master of a games sat and to which athlete went to be awarded their laurel crown. This seems to be the context here and would be consistent with other passages in the NT where Paul runs the race to win

the crown. You can either race to succeed, or race badly, in which case you don't get away with much at all – an attendance medal or certificate and that's all.

Here's what an American theologian, Hampton Keathley III says: **The Purpose of the Bema: It is not punitive. It is not to judge believers for sin of any kind, confessed or unconfessed. "Scripture teaches that for the believer God's justice has already been fully and forever satisfied at the Cross in relation to the believer's sins. If God were to punish the believer judicially for his sins for which Christ has already rendered payment, He would be requiring two payments for sin and would therefore be unjust. Such a concept (punishment for sin) erroneously disparages the all-sufficiency of Christ's death on the cross."** Christ paid the penalty for the believer's pre- and post-conversion sins. The believer will forfeit rewards which he could have received, but he will not be punished in the judicial sense of "paying" for his sins.

We never think about our faith in terms of reward do we? We emphasise grace, and kind of forget about the concept of reward. But Paul is talking here about our faithfulness as believers in this life. Salvation is a gift, but we have a God who rewards us for faithfulness. There are other places in the NT where this idea come through as well:

1 Cor 3: 13 And the quality of each person's work will be seen when the Day of Christ exposes it. For on that Day fire will reveal everyone's work; the fire will test it and show its real quality. 14 If what was built on the foundation survives the fire, the builder will receive a reward. 15 But if your work is burnt up, then you will lose it; but you yourself will be saved, as if you had escaped through the fire.

1 Cor. 4:5 Therefore do not go on passing judgement 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 9:24 Surely you know that many runners take part in a race, but only one of them wins the prize. Run, then, in such a way as to win the prize. 25 Every athlete in training submits to strict discipline, in order to be crowned with a wreath that will not last; but we do it for one that will last forever. 26 That is why I run straight for the finish line; that is why I am like a boxer who does not waste his punches. 27 I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control, to keep myself from being disqualified after having called others to the contest

I see the race as more of a marathon than a sprint. We persevere to finish it. Read in the context of a race isn't striving to please Jesus by being legalistic and keeping rules – trying to get spiritual brownie points with Jesus - but striving to win the race. Wining a race requires perseverance and courage. Now courage is a word that came up earlier. Paul's mission was about risking his life that others ma come to Christ – taking the risks and focussing on the mission Jesus had given him.

What is the reward? What is the prize? Money? No. Spiritual position in heaven? I have no idea. What about seeing those whom I ministered to, cared for, shared a word with, shared Jesus with, showed love and care for. Whose lives were changed by my actions because I had the courage and the care to do what God had called and gifted me to do? People whom I never even knew were affected by what I said and did but in whom the Holy Spirit was able to work? Yes, they are the prize. Those who came to Christ because of us. Those who were encouraged, brought on, changed because we were there. Surely that's what the bema is about.

Paul doesn't use the judgement seat of Christ as a stick to beat us with by suggesting that we are going to be up before the beak for our bad behaviour. He wants us to realise that the master of the games wants to celebrate those things we did to further His kingdom. Things we never knew about and things we did. We shall celebrate our prize on that day. All Paul wants us to do is make sure we have a lot to celebrate rather than be sad about the missed opportunities because we thought about ourselves and served ourselves, rather than doing what Jesus had called us to do – to make the good news have an impact on the lives of others.