

REWARDS

Matthew 6:1-18

Intro: Last Sunday, in considering the first four verses of Matthew 6 in the Sermon on the Mount, I spent some time speaking about *rewards*. Since we don't usually hear very much about *rewards* I felt led to devote my message today to this important subject. I don't mean to imply that this is a new subject to most of you by any means, but perhaps I can do, as the Apostle Peter sought to do in his second epistle, "stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance" (2 Pet. 3:1). This verb "stir up" means *to awaken you, or to arouse you*, to a subject in which we all should be interested. I think we all are so aware of the grace of God in our lives that we are hesitant to think that God would reward us for anything since He is the One Who works in us "both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). And I agree fully. And yet we all need to be reminded that even though our salvation is "not of works," as we are told in Eph. 2:9, yet verse 10 goes on to say,

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

And it is He, not we, who has brought up the subject of rewards. So He works in us to do His will, and then He rewards us as though what we do was our accomplishment on our own. *Rewards are to be an incentive for faithfulness in every aspect of our lives – not just in what we usually think of when we speak of works, but in every phase of our lives as the verses on rewards clearly indicate to us.*

In the Sermon on the Mount we come to the subject of rewards first in chapter 5, verse 12. This speaks of a reward that we will receive when we get to heaven. (Read.)

The second time the word *reward* is used in Matt. 5:46. This seems to speak of a reward that we can have now. "What reward have ye?" It is not always clear in the passages which refer to rewards just what the reward is, or when we will get it, but we can safely leave all of that in the Lord's hands.

Some rewards are not even called rewards. For example, the promises which are attached to the Beatitudes early in chapter 5 are rewards. After all, a reward is a special blessing that the Lord gives to us. There is a sense in which answered prayers are rewards. There are many, many promises given in the Word of God which have to do with prayer. Perhaps

you remember 1 John 3:22:

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. The Apostle John was saying here that if you and I earnestly seek to “keep His commandments,” the Lord will reward us with answers to our prayers. Even the act of praying has its reward. Isn’t that what the Lord promised Jeremiah?

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not (Jer. 33:3).

I don’t believe that now in New Testament times we are obligated to bring tithes to the Lord, as they did under the Law, but we have learned in the first four verses of Matthew 6 that God blesses us when we give. But the Lord gave the Israelites a tremendous promise regarding the tithe in the last book of the OT. Listen to Mal. 3:8-9:

8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

9 Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

But then the Lord gave them this great promise in Mal. 3:10:

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

The reward for giving their tithes would mean such great blessing that there would not be room to receive it! What a reward!

Once you start to look for rewards in Scripture, you see them everywhere! God is a God Who delights in rewarding us when we seek to be and to do what is pleasing to Him!

Sometimes rewards are spoken of as crowns. James spoke of “the crown of life” in James 1:12:

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

And Peter encouraged elders in their work with this promise of a reward:

2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive

a crown of glory that fadeth not away (1 Pet. 5:2-4).

Each letter to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, are concluded with the promise of a reward to those who overcome! For example, the promise given to the church at Ephesus was this:

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;
To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which
is in the midst of the paradise of God (Rev. 2:7).

That is a reward, a great reward!

The first time a reward is mentioned in the Bible is in Gen. 15:1. Abraham had just returned from conquering the kings who had taken Lot captive, and he evidently was afraid of retaliation from them. It was at that point that the Lord appeared to him and said,

After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward (Gen. 15:1).

What better reward could there be than the Lord Himself?

Usually the main idea in rewards is positive, and applies to the people of God. But there are also warnings to the wicked in the Bible, that the worst kind of disaster awaits those who persist in their sins instead of turning from their sins to seek forgiveness and eternal life from God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4). And the Apostle Paul sounded the warning in his letter to the churches in Galatia, along with the promise of a reward to His people:

7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not (Gal. 6:7-9).

We all would agree that we deserve none of the blessings that God has given us so far in our lives. Nor do we deserve the blessings that we will receive during the rest of our lives on earth. And we certainly agree that we will receive the rewards, the blessings, the crowns, that He may give us when we stand in His presence. *But we are to seek them!* And the Apostle Paul made that very clear in his first epistle to the church at Corinth. Listen to these familiar words:

24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one

receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway (Cor.9:24-27)

We are to run the race which is set before us just like we are competing with everyone else. We aren't actually, but that is the idea. And just as a runner disciplines himself in what he eats, and in the sleep that he gets, and in the training he goes through, you and I should be so intent on getting the Lord's, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25: 21, 23) that it is apparent to all that the main thing we are interested in, is pleasing the Lord. We are all in this race, and we all need to be running like we would if there were only one who could win. Paul was not afraid of losing his salvation, but we was concerned about "the prize." Cf. also Phil. 3:12-14:

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Now, for the rest of our time today I want us to look again at the passages in the Sermon on the Mount which speak of rewards, to see how we are doing.

I. THE REWARD FOR PERSECUTION (Matt. 5:10-12).

(Read.)

Persecution for us today in America is not what it was for the disciples. If tradition is true in their cases, then all of them suffered death because of their faith in Christ. And from the beginning of time, from Abel on, persecution has often been very severe for the people of God. If you want to read a terrible account of the suffering of the Lord's people in the past, read Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.

Nevertheless, we do have persecution. It may take the form of ridicule, even for your children. It may mean that friends that you used to have, may not want to be your friends anymore. Sometimes Christians are passed over for promotions and better jobs given to others. Christians are often looked upon as bigots because they stand for the teaching of the Word of God. The world didn't love our Lord, and the world doesn't love us either, and the day may come even in our own country when persecution will take on a more active form.

But, however our relationship with the world may affect us, how do we respond? Do we feel that we are truly blessed of God if suffering for Christ's sake comes our way? Can our reaction toward trouble we have because we want to please the Lord, be described in the words, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad? Are we happy about being identified with Isaiah and Jeremiah and John the Baptist? Would we respond like the apostles did when they were beaten and told not to speak anymore in the Name of Jesus? Listen to what Acts 5:41-42 tells us about the apostles:

41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

I trust that none of us would do what Peter did earlier when he was confronted by our Lord's enemies, and denied with oaths that he even knew the Lord.

What kind of a grade do you give yourself on this point? Can you expect a reward? If you find the world friendly toward you, or if I do, perhaps we need to examine our lives to find out where we are failing the Lord.

Let us go on to a second point, and this is not completely separated from the first point.

II. LOVING OUR ENEMIES (Matt. 5:43-48, esp. v. 46a).

(Read.)

It really takes the grace of God to love those who hate us, and then to do them good, and even to add their names to our prayer list. Have we ever reminded ourselves that we would do what they are doing if the Lord had not saved us? Can we pray for them as our Lord prayed for His enemies when He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:43). Do we have any right to expect a reward this kind of a reaction to our enemies toward our enemies?

Again let me say that if we find it easy to get along with everyone, maybe it's because we are not living as the children of God should live.

III. GIVING (Matt. 6:1-4).

(Read.)

First of all, we need to ask ourselves if we give at all. Do we honor the Lord with the money He has given us? If we give, are we giving as much as we should? I mentioned the tithe a few minutes ago, and said that we are not responsible to tithe today. But let me add to that. If the Jews under the Law were *required* under the Law to tithe, we under grace should give even more. *The Lord loves a hilarious giver.* See 2 Cor. 9:7.

But the other part of this is, Do we keep what we give as a matter between ourselves and the Lord? Husbands and wives, are you in agreement with each other in this – both the giving, and to give not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing? Let the Lord decide as to how and when and where your reward will be given to you.

Does our giving make us candidates for God's blessing now, and also in the hereafter? Read Matt. 6:19-21.

IV. PRAYER (Matt. 5:5-13).

(Read.)

We haven't considered this section before, but you will see the word "reward" in verses 5 and 6. The mention of a "reward" indicates that they should expect a reward from praying. But the fact that they were praying to be seen of men and not because they were seeking God and His blessing, meant that that was the only reward they would get.

And this also indicates that one of the rewards we ought to be seeking is in prayer. Now many people have no reason to expect any reward because they are not praying at all. Or the praying they do is a formal prayer at the dinner table, or a brief prayer before they go to bed, but that is the extent of their praying. So the first question we need to ask is, "Am I really praying?" And the second question is, "Do I have a closet where I daily meet with the Lord?" A closet can be any place where you can be alone to commune with God. It might be your bedroom, or your study, or your livingroom – it can be any place where you can be alone with the Lord. It needs to be a place where you are away from even your family, a place

where you are alone to pour out your heart to the Lord.

James has written in his epistle that “we have not, because we ask not,” or that we “ask and receive not, because” we “ask amiss that we may consume it upon our own lusts” (Jas. 4:2b-3). The person who doesn’t ask, is not praying, and one way that we can ask “amiss” is to make sure that we are being seen of men.

All of us need to ask what our praying amounts to so we can determine if we have any reason to expect a reward for our praying.

V. FASTING (Matt. 5:16-18).

(Read.)

There will be rewards for praying, and there will be rewards for praying *and fasting!* But again, if we fast, why do we fast? Do we fast in order to be commended for our deep spirituality by our fellow-believers, or do we fast so that we can give the time to prayer that we usually give to eating? Do we fast because our burden is so great that we forego the pleasure of eating to show the Lord how much we desire an answer to our prayers.

The Pharisees made sure that their appearance indicated that they were fasting, and that was their reward. But the only one who needs to know that we are fasting is the Lord. Your husband or your wife, and possibly your children may know it. It is hard to keep such things from our family. But even then our purpose should be to have added time with the Lord.

What are the prospects that you and I will receive rewards here and now, and possibly in eternity itself, because we are fasting?

Concl: These are some of the areas where we should be seeking rewards.

We have to leave it up to the Lord as to what the rewards are –whether they are blessings that we receive now, or whether they are to be ours when we get to heaven. But I trust that you have seen that we should be seeking rewards in order that we might bring glory to God by having His blessing upon us from day to day.

Let me close today by giving you one more verse of Scripture. It is found in 2 Cor. 5:10:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

Every day we live is an important day. It can count for eternity, or it can be wasted. May the Lord put in all of our hearts a greater desire to do what the Lord wants us to do, not so we can have the commendation of men, but so we can have the blessing of God even though people may never know what we are doing because we love the Lord, and want to please Him.