

Rewards and the messenger

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[0:00] So that is the passage before us and I've split it up into an A, B and C to show you that! there are three sayings here and just to get your mind working well one thing compared to what you've just had read from the old NIV you will see that this is the new NIV and there are a few more welcomes where there were some receives in the reading okay so you'll notice that so like in B whoever welcomes a prophet etc but will receive a prophet's reward so there are a couple of different words going on it is the same original no no there are different words different words actually but the one that they both have that idea of receive but welcomes is the appropriate one for the new NIV is is um that's the verdict they've taken but let me just ask you as you're looking at these three statements what is the common word between the first two sayings and there's one common word between the second two sayings can you help me with that what's the what's the common word in the first two sayings that's it welcome all right so it's got welcoming in there and what what comes into the second two sayings that's it reward I've colored it up for you a little bit like that um so anyone who welcomes me who welcomes you welcomes me and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me that's the first one and then B starts to bring in the idea of a reward for those who welcome a prophet as a prophet or a righteous person and also someone in this very lowly act of giving a cup of cold water um to a disciple truly it says that person will not lose his reward and it might on the surface look like well is it cryptic is this all meaning the same thing and I just offer you these thoughts um that in verse 41 that talks about whoever welcomes but back in verse 40 it's uh anyone who welcomes you and in 42 it's talking about these little ones and at least my proposal having studied some of this is this is really all talking about a similar thing and not to be pulled apart as um you know that this is about disciples and whether and it includes the prophet and the righteous people it includes what they're saying and they're they're living in accordance with god's standards and it's just saying you know people who welcome you will receive a reward so let's move on that's where i'm going to go in some main headings here the importance of welcoming god's messengers and i think this idea of the unity of the messenger and jesus comes out just want to spend a bit of time there and i think that the most difficult area for us to say anything very definite is in the nature of rewards i think there's a main one we will all know about but but whether there are smaller detailed rewards is is a bit more speculative as to how that works and then there's some lessons for us so the importance of welcoming god's messengers uh so we are talking about people who speak god's message those are the prophets and the meaning of the word righteous you probably know is is is to do with god's standards and those who live by it but it's it's interesting that they're not separated really that god's messengers and god's people who live by his standard it's kind of one and the same you don't get people who have nothing to do with trying to live this out trying to speak god's word

the two come together in the disciples but let me ask you a question would you not think that upright people speaking god's truth would always be welcomed wouldn't you think most of us would say oh yeah of course we would but then if you think back uh not that many weeks ago when phil was looking at verse 14 of chapter 10 you might just want to glance down there um this word welcome crops up again there but in that context this was about not being welcomed wasn't it if anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words it carried on like that you remember the passage about offering peace to the house but if they don't welcome you the peace will come back to you um but it says if you are not welcomed and they were told not to go with money or food they were told to expect hospitality but if you're not going to be welcomed leave and shake the dust off your feet was what came out then and it goes on to say it will be uh worse for sodom and gomorrah than it will be for those phil drew that out quite well didn't he about how important it is this welcoming business was quite critical so there was a negative side to verse 14 and it's worth remembering the context that in the roman empire who wanted emperor worship and anyone who was saying no you know caesar is not god but jesus is this was a risky business welcoming christian christian christian christian christian christian christian who said he would never deny jesus but when the when the pressure was on he even he got caught here it's a risky thing to show hospitality to christians because someone might be coming after you so it might seem kind of a small thing in our culture someone who might be bringing god's message comes around and of course you just want to welcome and give hospitality but the other thing the other context of this is is we're used to um relatively set gatherings apart from the view visitors in in places now you have to picture jesus moving around crowds of people very enthusiastic about jesus but not all of them yet uh committed to the harder demands of discipleship and i think something in these words is recognizing um especially when you think of the of the part in verse 42 that even if you are not on the front line uh doing a lot of the key um speaking god's message if you actually are just well disposed to and welcome uh especially when there's some risk attached these small gestures even giving a cup of cold water to someone in a hot climate who needs it who is a messenger of god these small gestures speak volumes and jesus really is really recognizing in this rather different sort of gathering with some people who are interested but not yet committed he is he is saying that even those people in verse 42 if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple i tell you that person will certainly not lose their reward so that was just a bit about welcoming now notice the unity of the messenger and jesus and i will just read verse 40 again anyone who welcomes you welcomes me and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me so it's just as if jesus was being welcomed so however those disciples bearing his message were received jesus felt

that and if they were indifferent or hostile jesus is feeling this very very personally and a while back when when i think i was looking at apostles with you just to remind you because at the end of that verse um whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me and that's the word apostolos um to send only used in the new testament this is the idea of being sent on a definite mission with that idea of accountability acting with the full authority of the sender so jesus is you know sending out his disciples with this authority and how people react to that is so so important but i'm just picking up this thread of how united jesus is with his messengers and i don't think we should think of the messenger as as someone other than us because towards the end of matthew 28 yes we're all to go out into the world to make disciples so in a sense i'm sure in our daily lives we we are all at times messengers and so i don't think what does this got to do with with me and let me just uh remind you of bits here some of this we read earlier but it says the king i've summarized and abbreviated bits here the king will say to the picture of the last judgment king will say to those on his right come you who are blessed by my father take your inheritance the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world then there are all these phrases for i was hungry i was thirsty i was a stranger and and in each of these things he mentions he says and you gave and you supplied and you helped me in these areas and the righteous people are saying a little bit confused by this lord you know when did we see you hungry when did we see you thirsty or a stranger and and this reply is so interesting isn't it the king will reply truly i tell you whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine you did for me so that's how involved jesus is uh with his uh with his his messengers i've got three verses coming up on this slide that just remind us of this unity between jesus and us this is well known in john one yet to all who did receive him to those who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of god children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will but born of god so there you get if you're wondering how this works there's a

statement here that to those who have believed in his name they are given the right to be born of god and to unpack a little what that means in one corinthians six do you not know that your bodies are temples of the holy spirit who is in you whom you've received from god you are not your own you were bought at a price therefore honor your god with your bodies born of god but the spirit of god given to be inside us this is why jesus is feeling so one with the messengers and feeling the pain or the or the welcome so keenly and chris reminded us on wednesday didn't he with this verse in galatians 2 20 as i thought it's so relevant to this this is a believers talking this is paul talking i have been crucified with christ and i no longer live but christ lives in me the life i now live in the in the body i live by faith in the son of god who loved me and gave himself for me but what a thought it's for this believer i no longer live but christ lives in me

it's a it's a it's a strange idea but but it's well it's it's a lovely idea but you have to pause a minute i was thinking of an example that might be a more disturbing one isn't it because this says i no longer live but christ lives in me now that sounds like i've been just taken over by someone am i just going to become a robot in my mind if you could just picture some of you will remember doctor who do you remember the cybermen in doctor who no only the elder ones maybe but the cybermen were like robots and they took people transmitted hypnotic signals and then they then they could what did they do they they did these cyber changes to them so that they sort of started wandering around like robots all the same and it was almost like they were absorbed and become all very clone like and everyone would have hated the thought beforehand you know they had individuality and now they were just you know that is nothing like what christ does when he enters us because we are all made in his image we are all there are scriptures i won't touch on now how different we all are and how in heaven we still retain some of those differences but this business about being indwelt by christ actually is a freeing up thing and it's uh for us to say it is no longer i who live but christ who lives in me it just means that all those bad emphasis and selfishness and sinfulness that i had i am learning to put that on one side as i live for christ and because so much of the center of god is giving out and selfless so nothing like cybermen and here's just a quick overview i won't pause on all of this but what does it mean to be in christ because this is about union with christ there's a lot of statements here i'm not going to dwell on them we are created in christ christ crucified with him buried with him baptized into christ and his death united with him in his resurrection seated with him in the heavenly places christ is formed in believers he dwells in our hearts the church is the body of christ christ christ is in us and we are in him the church is one flesh with christ believers gain christ and are found in him and in christ we are justified glorified sanctified called made alive created anew adopted and elected can you just see how rich this idea of being in christ is so when we are out there living this life in submission to god's standards seeking to explain it to others these are all the things that are true of us that make us rejoice deeply but what a what a intimate union there is between us and christ and then the third section is about rewards so i want this is probably the one that will make you think a bit more what what immediately comes to mind the prospect of rewards i suppose a lot of us are thinking about work situations we're in you might think about how much you're paid you might think of i don't know what kinds of rewards you might just think of if you're children you might just be thinking about birthdays and presents rewards what you can have what you're looking forward to let me remind you just to turn your mind somewhere else you remember star wars and i just want to quote you a couple of lines about han solo who was being asked to help princess leah right and luke is trying to reason with him and he says he says listen if you were to rescue her the reward would be more than you can imagine and han some of you know this film he pauses and he says i don't know he says i can imagine quite a bit yeah and then later on han is talking to princess leah and he says i ain't in this for your revolution i'm not in it for you i expect to be well paid i'm in it for the money that was what han solo was about and the princess says very putting him down you don't need to worry about your reward money is all that you love and that's what you'll get yeah sorry for those who don't know the film but there's one idea of reward and i wonder if you're thinking ahead to heaven what are you expecting as you think of a reward what is the reward spoken about in these verses because it's one thing that is clear is it's not perfectly clear it's not spelled out what it all is the greek word mythos i understand it it really has the idea of giving a course of action what it deserves not necessarily always a good thing so sometimes it's rendered as wages matthew 20 verse 8 and a few other references there negatively judas's blood money is called the reward of his wickedness that is this word so as we look at what this when it says in these verses that let's just read those verse 41 whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous

person will receive a righteous person's reward what what could it mean so if we're talking about prophets it could mean if you some of you will know the story of the widow at Zarephath you could look in 1 Kings 17 if you wish but I'll give you the gist of it it could mean that if you welcome a prophet that whilst this very supernaturally able one is with you as happened to the widow of Zarephath

[18:42] I'll just remind you of this story she was running out of her oil yeah and also her flour and Elijah comes to her and says will you make me some bread and she pretty much says yes well I will make you this bread but after that we'll have no more and then we're going to die because we haven't got enough and Elijah makes sure in a miraculous way that her jar of flour and oil doesn't run out you remember that lovely miracle but also later on in the story her son dies and Elijah with supernatural help from God brings her son back to life so that's a reward it could mean welcoming a prophet someone who perhaps has able the God is able to work more supernaturally through them it also could mean and if you just look at Matthew 5 here I'll read it this could be an idea of tough times now with blessings later we've been through this earlier when we were looking at the beatitude blessed are you when people insult you persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you and we're all scratching our heads thinking are we because of me rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven for in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you so the reward of prophets might be a bit uncomfortable for us at the moment might be quite painful or this reward could be just similar to what a prophet will receive because of when he meets

Jesus whatever God will give him in heaven apart from just eternal life so I can't categorically say you can't rule any of these out it could be either or any of these but it is worth looking back at the context of where we have come in verse 39 this is the last verse what is this about whoever finds their life will lose it and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it so just before we get into this passage this is about finding true life so in that context the reward has got to be something to do with finding true eternal life and in Matthew 25 which we read as one of those two readings it spells out a reward as the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world and in a nutshell it is eternal life rather than eternal fire and as we touched on when Phil dealt with this about welcoming and going to worthy houses this is a high stakes thing about how these sent ones are received because it's clear from this verse that those who welcome God's messengers and those who live by his standards are deserving of a reward but those who don't from that earlier passage verse 14 onwards high stakes on how the sent ones are received but I think we can all agree that in the main this reward which is a stupendously big and wonderful one in itself what is our reward that we don't want to lose out on and that we're being offered this is the reward of eternal life seeing him whom we love having no more sadness and sin and we've touched on it Phil has dealt with it even looking through revelation this is not sitting on a cloud stringing a harp getting bored this is something if we set a taste of what heaven will be like if we see a taste of it in the variety of creation at the moment then when God does a new creation I don't think we're going to run out of things to interest us so that is a wonderful fantastic reward in itself but in smaller details and as I said we might just have a chance for a few comments when I finish before communion in smaller details our rewards may differ there are verses and parables that suggest this

Jonathan Edwards said about heaven every vessel that is cast into this ocean of happiness is full though there are some vessels far larger than others and there shall be no such thing as envy in heaven but perfect love shall reign throughout the whole society so perhaps in so far as how we've walked on earth has helped us to drink more deeply of God there may be some richer experience I'm not going to speak categorically about this but there is just the sense that we are all different some more simple some we're just very different but yes none of us is going to be full of envy none of us is going to be looking at other people thinking hmm why have they got that's not going to be a thought that's there and there are other things let's just turn together to Matthew 20 which I think is the parable of workers in the vineyard because this is something that gives a hint that rewards might not be just as we think if we think oh so and so who's lived such a godly and committed life

and done so much you know they're going to have palaces in heaven

I'll just read because I think you know this one quite well I'll just read verses 12 to 16 but this is about workers the first ones that came it was a wage agreed for the day's work and if you remember the story other workers come in later and then at the end of the day the worker actually dealing with the people who came later first he gives them all the same and let's just read in verse 12 of Matthew 20 those who were hired last worked only one hour and they said and you have made them equal to us and who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day but he answered one of them I am not being unfair to you friend didn't you agree to work for a denarius take your pay and go I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money or are you envious because I am generous so the last will be first and the first will be last so who of us can really guess as we look around on any differences in reward but certainly that passage

[25:58] I think gives us something to think about so I'll come to lessons now from this and some of this I hope you'll find interesting the question of welcoming sounds like a very simple question I started with do we welcome those who speak God's message and live by his standards and of course we're all thinking in church where we're all very used to this well of course we do we welcome them we love this stuff we I want to just sharpen your thinking this might be a slight tangent but I hope not I hope just a helpful one but I want to pick up some thoughts about how we handle tough times before we just say oh yes we welcome God's message because actually for some people going through very tough experiences and I dare say there are some here tonight whose experience of God's face upon them at the moment is it's hard very hard and to actually turn around and say whether you welcome

God's message and his standards is a difficult one I wanted to give a little plug to this book which is one of my favorite book of mine by Philip Yancey it's a book called Disappointment with God which is a very provocative title and I'll just give you the gist of a little bit at the start of this because Philip Yancey who's a very able writer he says that a young student Richard who had been looking at Job gave him a study on it to look at but then this young Richard his life fell apart says his parents split up job opportunity fell through which left him in debt with college his girlfriend who happened to be a key spiritual prop to him left him and for him it just seemed like God was so absent and never answered his prayers so he was he just got to this point where it was all doing so well but it fell apart and Philip

Yancey interestingly thought a lot about this guy and he thought a lot about these things he says would you would you sum this up and say that you think God is unfair the title of this book is three questions no one asks out loud right you think God is unfair do you think he's silent all those times in the middle of his parents splitting up when he was praying and hoping it wouldn't happen and it didn't seem to be answered is God hidden and he said yes but then the interesting thing and it's just a way of helping you to think about tough times he was reading through Exodus and Numbers and the time of God's people coming out of and Moses with his face shining and the pillar of cloud around the people and he says you know maybe at the moment God isn't always very visible and lots of things that you look out on in life don't appear to be very fair but it's not always been so you think about this time if you think

God is unfair it was very predictable in those days when the law was given that if you obey this covenant and do this you'll be blessed and if you ignore this it will go bad for you very clear very fair so if it came hard on you because you'd ignored God's that was perfectly fair couldn't argue that one in those days was God silent no because he'd given them I think it counts up to over 600 laws so if you're trying to work out what you should be doing there was lots of things lots of things you should know in the Bible so God was not silent was he hidden no because in Moses as a leader his face is shining pillar of cloud and very visible God was but the question comes was this good for their faith did they thrive well under this and the sad thought seems to be no no their faith didn't flourish when everything was so visible so their faith didn't grow much let's go back for that but I just say for those

I don't know whether it's a little bit of a tangent but if you're thinking how much do I welcome God's message or even the people who live like this if any of you and there are some of you I'm sure

