

Rewards

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Date: 16 December 2018

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[0:00] So friends, the Lord commands that we share the gospel with the world.! And simply because He's God, we owe Him obedience.

! Yet He chooses to reward our faithfulness as well.! I want to show that there are two rewards in this passage.

The first is in verse 40. And the second is found in 41 and 42. And this is what Jesus is leaving His disciples with as He sends them off, is remember these two great rewards.

He begins with the big one, the great reward in verse 40. Whoever receives you receives me. And whoever receives me receives Him who sent me.

Now the person who receives the apostles and the disciples is the same person that we saw back in verses 12 through 14. And Jesus said to them, You see, the one who receives Jesus' disciples is the one who hears the message of Jesus and accepts it.

[1:30] And what does that person receive? He says, whoever receives you receives me. Whoever receives me receives Him who sent me.

Last week, Jesus was giving a warning before this encouragement. And even in that warning, we saw that there was an implicit promise. Remember? Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take His cross and follow me is not worthy of me. What was implicit last week is now explicit this week.

Whoever receives Jesus' representatives and the message they preach receives Jesus. He offers you Himself. And He offers you the Father.

You and I are offered living fellowship with the triune God. And that's why we said last week that God's greatest gift to you is not rescue from hell.

[2:41] It's not heaven. It's not everlasting life. It's not the crown of glory. God's greatest gift to you is God Himself.

Heaven is simply where we will have Him. Eternal life is how long we'll have Him. The crown of glory is simply what we will be wearing with Him.

But He is the focus. He is the center. He is the great reward. The main attraction. The thing that really counts is this. Jesus offers Himself to you.

The one who has all life, glory, goodness, blessedness in and of Himself. And is all sufficient.

Not standing in need of anything in creation. Who Himself is the foundation of all being. The one from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things.

[3:42] He took on a human nature to bleed and die in your place. So He could reconcile you to Himself.

And offer you to be His friend and family forever. This is the great motivation for missions and evangelism.

When we receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, we get Him. How can we not want that for others? Do you enjoy giving gifts at Christmas?

When you've given someone just that perfect thing that fits them. And you see them light up. Does it delight you to offer something valuable or personal?

Or just the thing that is so fitting for the occasion. For that person. Well, friends, evangelism offers someone the best. The most valuable. Most personal.

[4:45] Lasting gift of all. Jesus Christ Himself. Just a few weeks ago, I was sharing the message of the cross with someone who didn't quite understand grace yet.

He was conflicted over, you know, like, oh, there's this grace thing that I want. There's also this, like, judgment thing. And I'm not sure how they interact and how, like, how do I come to God. And when I was able to show him that Jesus Christ stood in His place and took the judgment that was due Him, His face lit up.

Wow. It's hard to describe how cool that moment is. My wife teaches English as a second language. And from time to time, she's taught it online. I remember her telling me, this is years ago now, but that she was teaching someone an English lesson from across the globe. They lived in a place where Christianity was not normal.

[5:54] This person had never heard the message of Jesus before. And she used the story of Jesus as the content of the English lesson. And when they got to Easter Sunday, he exclaimed, He came back to life?

Seriously? It's been years now, but I remember how much that energized her. Friends, sharing the gospel is great joy.

And so it is my joy, if you have not yet received this greatest gift, to offer it to you now.

Will you receive Him? Jesus said, He who receives me receives the Father. And friends, He is the only way to God. The only way is.

But Jesus says, If anyone loves me, he will keep my word. And my Father will love him. And we will come to him. And make our home with him.

[6:55] He offers you Himself. There is no greater or more lasting gift. So if you will but repent and believe, He stands in your place.

And takes the blow of judgment, of justice that your sin deserves. And offers to you life. Himself.

If God Almighty commanded that we share the gospel, we would owe Him obedience simply because He's God. But it's also the joy of being able to offer people the great gift.

And then in verses 41 and 42, He adds a second kind of blessing. On top of that, grace upon grace.

Verse 41, The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward.

And the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward.

[8:03] And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

There are so many questions to ask. Who exactly are we talking about here? And how do we get these rewards exactly? And what are they?

And how do we actually do this practically in everyday life? Those are the questions I had. So let's look at them. First, who are these people?

There's the prophet. There's the righteous person. There's the one of these little ones. It seems to me, and most of the commentators I read agree, that what Jesus is doing here is likening these 12 apostles in front of him to the Old Testament prophets.

He's giving them a similar authority and role. The righteous person, I think he is calling each Christian a righteous person.

[9:13] By that, does he mean that we are counted righteous in Christ because he died on our behalf? Or does he mean that we are outwardly righteous in our hearts and word and deed?

I think the answer is both. Those are not separable realities. When God the Holy Spirit gives new birth, he unites us to Christ so that his death pays for our sins and we are clothed in his righteousness.

And when God gives new birth, he imparts new life, changing our hearts so we begin to love his law, despise sin, and act justly.

There is no separation between our pardon from sin and our righteous living. If God is the great reward, if you've come to Christ and you want to walk with him, that is the walk of righteousness, we may not have one without the other.

Excuse me. So I think that's the prophets and the righteous people. Last is the person in verse 42, one of these little ones.

[10:27] Now, it seems unlikely that a group of children kind of wandered by and Jesus pointed them out. When he says, these little ones, I think he's still talking about these same people.

The little ones are the prophets and the righteous ones. It's more likely that he's referring to Christians. Whereas righteous ones refer to Christians in our justification, that is our pardon of guilt, and our new birth, that is our outward working of righteousness, this little ones idea refers to our station in life.

The apostles were never wealthy or powerful or politically connected. And that has been the case for most Christians throughout history.

Jesus, who came himself in weakness and humility, has ordained that his people, for the most part, not be great in the world's eyes. The gospel will shine throughout the world, not because of our greatness or our prominence or our power, but because of his.

I think that is likely how we are to understand these three groups of people. Next, how do we actually get these rewards as we interact with them? The first thing to say is that we have not in any way earned these rewards.

[12:01] If we get what we have earned, we get death and judgment and hell. And in fact, we already owe him obedience based solely on the fact that he is God.

Obedying God does not earn us in any sense a reward as if he owes us anything. In Luke chapter 17, Jesus says, when you have done all that you were commanded, you will say, we are unworthy servants and have only done what was our duty.

Our obedience to Christ does not earn us any God points. Right? He's not under any obligation to repay us any more than I am obligated to give my toaster a reward when it toasts my bread.

But here is the glory. He chooses to anyway. These gifts come from his heart overflowing with grace.

In their book, *You and Me Forever*, Francis and Lisa Chan wrote, these blessings actually keep us from becoming self-righteous. It takes the attention off our sacrifice and places it on his generosity.

[13:26] Eternity will not be about look what I sacrificed, but rather look what he gave me. God will be the center of attention. We will spend eternity marveling at the immeasurable riches of his grace.

So what are these rewards? rewards of grace? What is the prophet's reward? The righteous person's reward?

The reward of one of these little ones? Is it a reward from the prophet? Is it the same reward that the righteous one receives?

Is it something else? Here's the thing Jesus doesn't tell us. He doesn't elaborate.

And I don't think we can know. I think there are a lot of good guesses. Some people have guessed that it means we will have a better seat at the wedding feast of the Lamb.

[14:27] Some people have guessed that it will be more jewels in our celestial crowns which we will then throw at Christ's feet. Some have guessed that it means more responsibility in the new heaven and the new earth.

Some have thought that it might be a bigger mansion in heaven. I don't know. But what I do know is this. Jesus thinks that this is so big that it's the last thing he tells his disciples before he sends them out on their own.

And this is the climax and conclusion of his sermon on missions which we began five weeks ago.

And so no matter what these rewards are Jesus thinks they are so significant that his disciples need to hear it right alongside I offer you myself.

And here's what else we know. What no eye has seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.

So we've already asked who are we talking about? The apostles and all Christians.

[15:43] How do we get these rewards? Not by earning them but by God's goodness alone. And what are they? We're not quite sure but we know that Jesus thinks they're awesome.

Lastly how do we do this in real life? Everyday life? I think we need to break it down just a little bit and we'll see how this comes to fruition.

First who is this one who receives? Right? The one who receives the profit is the one who gets the reward. What does that mean? I think we can get part of the way by looking at the kind of person who receives the blessing.

The one who receives a profit. The one who receives a righteous person. Whoever gives even a cup of cold water. First maybe the most striking thing here is that these are not monumental tasks. The world won't raise a statue for you when you show hospitality but Jesus in his great grace will give an even better reward. Small faithfulness elicits a great reward from our gracious God.

[16:56] one pastor put it this way those who accept show hospitality to and respond to a profit even in the smallest way the cup of cold water will be rewarded by God for their kindness and openness to the gospel.

Next it is a small faithfulness and a great reward. next it is also directed at the church.

These are all directed in love to the people of God. Jesus loves his church so much that he gives outsized rewards for small faithfulness and love towards his people.

Even a cup of cold water. Do you desire the rewards of grace that Jesus is offering here? Well then bless your church family and every Christian you meet and your cup will be full.

How good and pleasant is it when brothers dwell in unity? These outsized rewards which are given for our love and faithfulness towards his people he says the one who receives the prophet because he is a prophet or the righteous person because he is a righteous person.

[18:25] It's easy to receive that is to show hospitality and generosity and care for prominent or wealthy or popular or fill in the blank kinds of people isn't it?

How do you choose who you'll speak to? Who you'll share fellowship with? Who you'll show hospitality to? How do you choose which new person you're going to introduce yourself to?

In other words among the people of God are you networking or are you being the church? If you serve others to advance your own interest you're serving yourself not Christ.

unless you're showing hospitality and love and generosity to the people of God for their own sake because he is a prophet because he is a righteous person.

We receive the people of God not because they're attractive I mean look at you guys not because they are wealthy not because they are popular or helpful or useful but because the people of God belong to Christ and we love them for his sake here is a person that Christ died for here is a person I will spend eternity with before the throne of Christ here is a person who Christ has called to the same mission that he calls me to these rewards of grace come to us only when we bless the family of God because they are the family of God we show hospitality to someone to get on their good side right you know oh hey Matt has a pickup truck if I show hospitality to him he'll help me move my fridge right that's not that does not garner eternal gifts of grace right if we pick and choose who to receive who to show kindness to and generosity and hospitality the Bible calls that partiality and this passage precludes every kind of partiality in the church discrimination based on sex or race or age or wealth or appearance the list goes on if you love the people of God because they are the people of God these gifts are for you and so don't only receive the prominent prophet or receive only the attractive righteous one but receive one of these little ones too

[21:05] I pray that the Lord would make it clear to you today who you are to reach out to among the church of God so I think we've answered our most pressing questions who are we talking about how do we get these rewards what are the rewards how do we do it in everyday life now what does it look like practically in everyday life in his classic work the Christian in complete armor William Gurnall links the idea of receiving the prophet to praying for your pastors he says he that hears a sermon and has not prayed for the minister and the success of his labor plays the thief to his own soul while he robs the minister of the assistance his prayers might have brought him from heaven see it's to your benefit to pray for the leaders of your church to pray for the pastors here and your community group leaders that our families would be strong and that our preparation would be productive that our leadership would be fruitful and that our ministry would be personally engaging who benefits from that you and if you don't

Gernel calls you a thief to your own soul what's more praying for Christian leaders means that you're participating in their ministry Gernel continues he says so he that strengthens his minister's hand in his holy work whether by prayer encouragement or money becomes a partaker with him in his service and shall not be left out in the reward which also means that when you support

Shoreline financially even in a small way even a cup of cold water you participate in our local ministry and the missions work we support around the world you share in the rewards of Randy Matthews and the many missionaries sent out by the international missions board which we also support another way that this looks in everyday life is in unseen service to the church our children are sequestered behind that wall right now the work of the children's ministers is unseen to you right this moment but thank you to our children's ministers for giving our children a snack in Jesus name helping small people learn big truths is important to

Christ and for those who are still too young to hear a lesson helping the smallest feel wanted and welcome and safe in the household of God is a big deal and Jesus says that you will by no means lose your reward what does it look like to give a cup of water in marriage many in this room are called to marriage and he has given us a spouse for us to love and sometimes it's hard to love that person I know that I am often times unlovable but we are called to love our spouses not only for their sake but for Christ's when writer put it this way how much more the daily thoughtful skillful work of a godly wife who provides countless meals for her husband washes her children's clothes keeps to the home orderly prays for them encourages them in their struggles blesses them with wise counsel nurses them to health when they're sick how

Christ-like is this servanthood and how guaranteed is such a godly wife of eternal rewards from almighty God friends even simple and regular and unseen faithfulness to our families because Christ has given them to us is beautiful in Christ's eyes and he rewards it with outsized rewards last here's an encouragement if you feel like a little one today ignored or outcast or weak in fact it's two encouragements if you feel small or neglected or invisible or insignificant this passage says two things about you first Jesus sees you and knows everything that happens to you even when a cup of cold water is given to you how valuable are you to him if he will reward others for every small kindness done to you in

Christ's name Craig Blumberg in his book neither poverty nor riches says that the giving of a cup of cold water to a little one will be rewarded teaches Jesus' disciples that the least significant Christian has great spiritual value in God's eyes if you are one of these little ones if you feel like that today you are beloved by Christ and second he will reward you for your service no matter how small it seems the great Puritan Thomas Brooks wrote surely he that is God will reward the smallest good done by the weakest saint therefore be not discouraged if you feel like a weak Christian though you should meet with difficulty and rejection for the

[27:27] Lord will reward you he will not despise the day of small things what though precious soul you cannot talk so fluently and eloquently for Christ as others what though thy hand be weak you can't do much for Christ as others nor do so well for Christ as others yet the Lord seeing thy heart sincere will reward thee you shall have an everlasting rest for a little labor and a great reward for a little work Jesus emphasized this in Luke chapter 21 he was in the temple and he looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the offering box he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins and he said truly

I tell you this poor widow has put in more than all of them for they all contributed out of their abundance but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on the size of your faithfulness and obedience and work for the Lord to his people might be much bigger than you think and certainly his rewards the grace he shows to his people is much much greater than we can know what a savior let's pray Lord thank you that we get to participate in your mission to the world reconciling the world to yourself Lord even though we owe you all obedience just by the fact that you're God thank you that you delight to grant us gifts of grace over and above the gift of yourself

Lord I pray that you would help us to see our common acts of small obedience and faithfulness and love to your people as part of our relationship with you Lord will you help us to delight in them as you delight in them you be glorified in us we pray amen