

Jesus Advice on Investing 9-6-03

Matthew 16:27; Luke 14:10-14; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

Years ago, as I studied the Scriptures, I came to the conclusion that how we spend eternity in heaven has a lot to do with how we spend our life on earth. There is a clear teaching of rewards for things done on earth in both Old and New Testaments. I ventured to teach a class on it, but met with a lot of resistance. It wasn't resistance to what the Scriptures said, but to the very idea that we could earn anything from God. I quit teaching on the subject so as to not stir up controversy, and yet, the more I studied the topic, the more convinced I became that this was an important teaching of Jesus.

The church world seems to fall into two camps. One focuses on the grace of God for salvation. The very word 'works' causes the hair on the back of their neck to stand up. The other camp focuses on social works and has very little to say about the unearnable gift of salvation by grace through faith. Those I have tried to share with fall more into the first camp. Even though they see it is clearly expressed in Scripture, there is a reluctance to think that we should earn anything from God. I can understand that. After all He has done and is doing for us, He deserves nothing short of our complete surrendered service. Part of the confusion is the way we tend to blend the consequences of belief and behavior. Our belief determines where we will spend eternity, whereas, our behavior determines how we will spend eternity. Belief does not require works. Behavior is about our choices and actions that should be a result of belief.

A short time after giving up teaching on the topic of rewards, I saw an elderly man and woman with a flat tire. I stopped and helped them out. The man later sent me a few books he had written. One of them was on this very subject and made it even clearer to me than ever before.

Recently, Dr. Bruce Wilkinson published the book, A Life God Rewards. He is the best selling author of The Prayer of Jabez. The entire book is a Scriptural presentation of how our actions affect our eternity. He presented his research to a panel of leading scholars who met at Western Seminary in Oregon. Not only did they concur with his findings, but also many of them were challenged to have a different view on this life. If you believe that something you do for Christ on earth is directly connected with something great that He will do for you in heaven, it would change the way you see day-to-day life. So with the help of Dr. Wilkinson's book, I'm going to take this Sunday and the next to attempt to alter your perception of the importance of our daily actions. I want to excite you with the promises of Divine reward and the opportunity to reap dividends that you never dreamed possible. Wilkinson uses this great analogy to express our attempt to look into eternity. It is like one twin in the womb trying to convince the other that before long, they will both be breathing air and riding tricycles.

This teaching is nothing new. Rarely do we find anything new, just a forgotten emphasis of the some of the great men of God that have gone before us. Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wesley and Spurgeon all earnestly believed and hoped for eternal rewards. We respect their opinion, but none of them have stood in halls of eternity. We do, however, have the opinion of One who has, Jesus Christ.

Jesus gives us the unique perspective of the teacher who has been in eternity with the Father. Ultimately it is His opinion that counts. If we base ours on anything other than His, we are merely guessing. Here is what He had to say. *27For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.* Matthew 16:27 (NIV) In this passage Jesus teaches us several very clear points. He is coming again. He will bring a reward. That reward is determined by what each individual has done. That means that those who have died in Christ before us are still waiting for this event to occur. They haven't yet received their reward.

But let's step back for a moment and look at the six main events in everyone's future as described in Scripture:

1. We were all created in the image of God for a purpose. Over the last few months we've been looking at those purposes. We all have life.
2. We will all physically die. You and I will one day exit this world of organic matter and enter into the spirit. You will either be with God or separated from Him by your choice.
3. That destination is determined by your belief. There are only two destinations, heaven or hell.
4. Everyone will be resurrected. We will all receive immortal bodies. Philippians 3:21 teaches us that the believer's body will be like Christ's glorious body.
5. You will receive a reward or retribution for eternity that is based on what you did on earth. The Bible teaches both degrees of heaven and degrees of hell (Matthew 11:21-22; 23:14; 1 Corinthians 15:41-43).
6. You will live throughout eternity either in the presence of God or outside of His presence. You will continue to reap the consequences of your belief and actions while you were on earth.

There is an invisible one-way connection between everything that happens in step one and all that follows. The Law of Sowing and Reaping applies not only to this life, but most importantly and with greater impact in eternity. If you really believed this, what would change in your life? If you truly believed that you could spend this short time on earth investing in your eternal future, how would it affect what you do this afternoon? How would it change your perception of God?

Here is another great illustration from Dr. Wilkinson. Imagine your life as a dot with a line drawn from it off into infinity. - ----->
The dot is your entire life on earth. The line represents your life after death in eternity, and that is a never-ending line. Everything you do inside that dot results in consequences of astounding proportions on the line. Even if you are not sure as to

the validity of the Bible, you can see how important it would be to know if this is true or not. Are you living for the line or for the dot?

I think part of the reason that we only want to talk about salvation and grace is because, just like the world, we want to do our own thing, please ourselves, and live for today. Don't get me wrong; Jesus did not say He would love you any less in heaven because you didn't obey Him. He didn't say your salvation is in jeopardy if you live for self. He loves you, and He knows the connection between the itty-bitty dot and that long, long line. He lived like He did because He knew, among other things, the connection between the dot and the line. He instructs us to "Lay up treasure in heaven..." because He wants the very best for us.

Consider His example and God's reward. Why did God give Him a name above every name? It was not because He merely believed, but because He was obedient even to death on a cross (Philippians 2:8-9). Do you see the unbreakable link between behavior and reward? Jesus wasn't teaching something He didn't fully believe in and live. That is one reason His life was so extraordinary.

If you've been living for the dot, don't beat yourself up and go away like the rich young ruler with a look of defeat. The words of Jesus are going to tell us how to make our eternity brighter than you can imagine.

In this next story, Jesus gives a lesson to the power brokers of His day. ¹⁰*But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests.* ¹¹*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*" Luke 14:10-11 (NIV) Everyone was trying to sit in the seat of prominence. It showed their pecking order. The closer you could get to the head of the table, the more important you appeared to all, that is, all but God who sees the heart. Jesus probably shocked them all by saying the one who takes the lowest seat would be exalted. But that was nothing compared to what He said next.

¹²*Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.* ¹³*But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,* Luke 14:12-13 (NIV) Jesus just told them they were going about things from the wrong perspective. They invited the important people so they could get, instead of the poor so they could give. They were living for the dot. Then He told them how to live for the line. Invite people who can't repay you. If you are going to give, give to the needy. Why?

¹⁴*and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.*" Luke 14:14 (NIV) The reward on the line is incomparably better than the reward on the dot. When? At the resurrection!

Commented [notes1]: ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!
⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, Philippians 2:8-9 (NIV)

Most of us think about getting rewarded now. We want to reap the rewards from service now, not later. That happens sometimes, but the promise in this passage is teaching that the reward is later. It is the reward that He brings with Him. We need to understand this. When we go through things here after serving God and sacrificing and things still all fall apart, remember, Jesus didn't promise things would go well here. He just promised to be with us through it. The promise of reward is at the resurrection. Which would you rather have? Be honest! Maybe we need a clearer vision of the line? When I began to understand this, I began praying that God would help me to do things unseen, unrewarded here. I began asking for assignments that would have more heavenly than earthly reward. In the process, I realized how my heart craved recognition from men, desiring my reward here and now. That makes me pray, "Lord, change my heart. My head knows but help my heart to follow." That is the transforming work of the Spirit.

Let's take a look at the word that Jesus used for reward. "*Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your wages are great in heaven.*" Luke 6:23 (NKJV) the NKJV correctly translates the Greek word *misthos* as wages. It is the same word in the parable of the laborers hired at different hours of the day and received their wages at the end of the day (Matthew 20). It literally means compensation. Labor on earth, and your employer pays you. Labor for God, and when our day on earth is done, you will receive payment.

The other word Jesus used is *apodidomai*. It comes from two Greek words, *apo*, which means back, and *didomai* means give. In other words, it means to give back or repay. That was the word used in the Luke 14 passage. Spend on those who cannot repay, and God will repay you. It was the same word used in the story of the Good Samaritan who promised to 'repay' the Inn Keeper for expenses. Jesus taught, "*For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name...will by no means lose his apodidomai [repayment]*" (Mark 9:41).

To me, that sounds like the loving heart of our Father is just looking for ways to bless us. Remember last week we saw in Ephesians 2:10 that God has planned good works in advance for us to do. He engineers opportunities for us to get heavenly rewards. What a gracious God! You see, heavenly reward isn't about your greed; it's about the generosity of God.

If I could tell you how you could get better than a 15% return, guaranteed, would you be interested? Now I got your attention. Peter asked what the disciples would get for leaving everything to follow Jesus. Jesus said 100 times as much (Mark 10:28-30). That's 10,000 percent interest. Are you messing around with 4% -15%? Why? Yes, you need to provide for your family, and learn from the ant to save for time of need. Caring for your family in a godly way **is** investing in eternity. But when you have taken care of those essentials, take the God given opportunity to invest in eternity.

Once we realize this, there is a trap into which we can easily be lured. The only works that God rewards are those of lasting value, those inspired and empowered

Commented [notes2]: ²⁸Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"
²⁹"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel
³⁰will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life
Mark 10:28-30 (NIV)

by the Holy Spirit. You can easily get on a do-good trip, not realizing that none of it is worth anything. It can easily become for self instead of the glory of God. We can get all wrapped up in investing in heaven only to find we are working for self. The works that God is after come out of a relationship with Jesus. It has nothing to do with performance to satisfy God or gain something for self. The motivation of those works can easily become the respect of men. Jesus said that if that was the case, you already got your reward (Matthew 6:1-2). Our motivation should be to obey and glorify God because we love Him. Good works should always be genuinely trying to improve the conditions of another. Jesus said that if you hoped for nothing in return, your reward would be great (Luke 6:35). Paul warned us in his famous chapter on love, that if we give everything to the poor and offer our body up to the flames, if it is without love we gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:3).

Every work of every believer will one day be tested. The Apostle Paul tells of that day ¹⁰*By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.* 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 (NIV)

Here are the lessons: First, there is only one foundation on which to build – Jesus. Anything built on anyone or anything else is not lasting. Second, there are two types of building material, perishable and imperishable. Third, everyone will have his or her work put to the fire and only the imperishable will last. Fourth, some will suffer loss of all but their salvation.

The Day that Paul is referring to is the Judgment Day. The believer's destination isn't in jeopardy. Your beliefs aren't being tried. It is your works that are being examined by fire (verse 12,13). Until that Day comes, we can't judge anyone. Some folks will have quite a pile to put on the testing block, but when the fire is done, nothing may be left. We can't determine that now, only the fire will reveal what is real. That is why we can't judge anyone before that time.

I have a lot more to share with you on this subject, but I hope this begins the thought process of examining what you're investing in. Are you investing for retirement, or for eternity? Most people spend four fifths of their life preparing for one fifth. Why not spend it all preparing for forever? Are you living for the dot, or the line? Every one of us will step from the dot to the line in a relatively short matter of time. Have you invested in it? Where is your treasure?

At the end of the Apostle Paul's life he could say that he had finished his race and that there was laid up for Him a crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:7-8). He was full invested in eternity. He was looking forward to his reward. By the grace of God, may that be true of each of us.

Commented [notes3]: ¹Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. Matthew 6:1-2 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ³⁵But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Luke 6:35 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ³If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

⁸Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7-8 (NIV)