

Jesus' Advice on Investing part 2 9-14-03

With points from the second half of A Life That God Rewards by Bruce Wilkenson

Last week we began an investigation into Jesus' teaching on investing in eternity. We saw those two words that He used, *misthos*, which means wages, and *apodidomai*, which means to repay. We outlined the difference between belief which determines where you will spend eternity, and behavior which determines how you will spend eternity. Today we'll look further into heavenly rewards.

In recent years the media has really emphasized the stories behind the lives of the athletes that compete in the Olympics. They are trying to get you to make a connection with the athletes so that you are more likely to watch every time they compete and thus advance their ratings. It works! And then when your favorite athlete slides past his competition and takes the gold, wow! You can't help but cry along with their tears of joy. But the clincher is when they get on that podium and start playing the National Anthem. Pass the Kleenex.

That is remotely similar to what it will be like when Jesus brings His reward for the service you have rendered for the Kingdom of God. I wonder if we will all see your battles and the choices you made to forsake the world and follow the Lord you love. The author of Hebrews tells us we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses right now (Hebrews 12:1), surely the grandstands will be filled to capacity when Jesus hands out His rewards one day. He'll call your name, and as you step forward, your works will go on that testing block. The fire will burn away all that was done for the wrong motives, for self, out of a desire for the respect of men. Then only the pure work of the Holy Spirit through your life, done with the pure motivation of love, will remain. Then, accordingly, you will receive your reward from those nail pierced hands. But here is cause for pause. Not everyone will receive a standing ovation, or even a reward. *10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.* 2 Corinthians 5:10 (NIV)

Until the fire tests our works, we really have no idea who has been a servant of Christ and who has just been religious. Each of us will have to account for what we did with what God invested in us. *10 You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. 11 It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God." 12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.* Romans 14:10-12 (NIV)

Does the Bible give us some guideline of what is rewarded by God? Absolutely! It tells us very clearly what will be rewarded. Here are some of the things that God promises to reward:

1. You will be rewarded for seeking God in prayer and fasting. *6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.* Matthew 6:6 (NIV)
6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to

Commented [notes1]: 1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Heb 12:1 (NIV)

him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)

2. When you serve your employer as serving the Lord. *7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, 8 because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.*
Ephesians 6:7-8 (NIV)

3. When you deny yourself for God's service. *24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For 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 16:24-27 (NIV)

4. When, in His name, you serve the needy. *41 I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.* Mark 9:41 (NIV)

5. When you suffer for Jesus' name or reputation. *22 Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. 23 "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.* Luke 6:22-23 (NIV)

6. When following Him causes you to have to sacrifice something. *35 But 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)

7. When you share your talent, time and possessions to advance God's Kingdom. *3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.* Matthew 6:3-4 (NIV)
18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. 1 Timothy 6:18-19 (NIV)

There are seven very clear instructions that promise heavenly reward. It isn't an unattainable list. Every time you yield to the Holy Spirit working in you, you will find you are doing one or more of those things. That means it will remain after the testing fire hits. That reward you receive is something that stays with you throughout eternity.

Jesus told a number of stories about stewards, servants entrusted with the care of something. Each ends in a reward. All of those stories have the same key events in the following order:

- The commission to the steward then
- The Master leaves next
- The opportunity of the steward next
- The Master returns and finally
- The reward of the steward

Jesus teaches us that our Creator has invested in us our life, our talents, our strengths, personality and interests. Our opportunity is to manage the assets He's entrusted us to further the Kingdom of God. We do so while waiting for our Master's return. When He does return He will evaluate what we did with what He gave us and reward us accordingly.

This time of opportunity for us as stewards requires faith. We have to have the faith that He is who He said He is, faith that He is returning, and faith that He will reward our faithful service. The Apostle Paul said that the one thing required of stewards is that they be found faithful. (1 Corinthians 4:2) God rewards us according to our faithfulness. Faithfulness means you yield to God what He has invested in you so the Spirit of God can bear fruit through your life.

One of these parables is in Luke 19. God gives each steward a mina – that is equivalent to 3 year's wages. He tells them that He is going away and that they are to do business until He comes (v. 13). When the Master returned, He found that one of them made ten times as much. He was commended as a good and faithful steward. The reward was to rule over ten cities (v. 17). Another had made five times as much. There was no commendation. Perhaps the Master knew that steward was capable of more. He was rewarded with ruling over five cities (v.19). The last kept his mina safely hidden. The master called him a "wicked servant" (v.22), took his one mina and gave it to the one that had ten (v.24).

At first it seems the master was a bit harsh, after all, the third servant didn't lose anything. But think about what you would do if you had employees. If you have an employee that did exceptionally well, wouldn't you do the same? If you have an employee that doesn't do what is expected, will you commend him?

This parable directly addresses many common attitudes today. Does God care if we shelve what talents and abilities He has entrusted to us? He certainly does! He expects us to use them for Him at every possible opportunity. Doing nothing with what God has given is wicked.

We tend to think that God is going to reward everyone equally, but the parable shows our reward is in proportion to how we multiplied our life for Him. We tend to think that if we do nothing for God, the worst that could happen is no reward. The third steward teaches us that we can suffer loss. If we waste what God has given, we lose the potential reward and the opportunity to serve God more fully in eternity.

Commented [notes2]: 13 So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'

Luke 19:13 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 17 "'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'

Luke 19:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 19 "His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'

Luke 19:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 22 "His master replied, 'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow?'

Luke 19:22 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 24 "Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.'

Luke 19:24 (NIV)

I know some ten-mina stewards. One of them is a wealthy retiree here in Arizona. Instead of selfishly enjoying her retirement and traveling the world, she intercedes in prayer and leads others in that ministry. There is a businessman who arranges his travel schedule so that he will be at home a certain night of the week to help recovering addicts to keep making progress. I know a young man who was a youth pastor and was treated unfairly. Instead of giving up on ministry, he works a day job and plays in a Christian music group for his church and special events. It doesn't matter what you've been given, it's how you use what you've been given to advance the Kingdom of God. You probably know some ten-mina stewards.

The commendation that God gives the ten-mina stewards is "well done, good and faithful servant". They were faithful to use what God had given them to serve Jesus. The reward in this parable was to rule cities. God is testing and preparing us for much greater responsibilities in heaven. When you get a clear understanding of all that God has done for you, of how much love He has lavished on you, you are going to long to serve Him. The more faithful you have been here, the more opportunity you will have to satisfy that longing in eternity.

When we see over and over again a truth revealed in Scripture, as we have seen these two weeks looking at heavenly reward and God's willingness to repay all our sacrifice here, it should tell us something about God. His actions represent the expression of His character. What does this generosity tell us about the God we serve, this God who gives wages (*misthos*) and rewards (*apodidomai*)? Let's look again at Hebrews 11:6. We looked at this verse previously in reference to the things God promises to reward. ⁶ *And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.* (NASB) If you are going to come to God, two things are required. First, you must believe what you cannot see. You must believe that He is. Then you are required to believe that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. This word, 'rewarder' is used only here in the Bible. The Greek word is a combination of two words. Can you guess which two? *Misthos* and *Apodidomai*! If you are going to come to God you have to believe He is a paymaster. You have to believe He is the One who hands out the payroll and the rewards to those who seek Him. He is the *Misthapodotes*! God expects you to believe that is His nature. He isn't asking you to consider the possibility; He is telling you that you must believe it. I've heard that I must believe that He is my Savior. I've heard that I must believe He is the only God. But I've never been told, except by Scripture, that if I was going to please Him, I had to believe He is the Rewarder! What a wonderful God we serve! It shouldn't be such a strange idea. Every good thing we have is from the hand of our loving Creator.

I want to be a ten-mina steward. I want to hear God's "well done". I desire to be the faithful servant that has made the most of what God has invested in me. I hope that is your desire too. It has a lot to do with where our treasures are stored. If I've stored up my treasures and my hopes and dreams here, then my heart is here. If my heart is here, I'll never be a ten-mina steward. Most of us have one foot in

each world like the five-mina steward. Personally, I don't want to settle for that. Jesus gave His all for me. That's why I want to hear "well done". I want to hear that I was a good and faithful servant. I want to know He was pleased with what I returned to Him. Certainly burying the mina isn't something I cannot tolerate for myself. It is wicked and lazy. It is the height of ingratitude. No, I'm aiming for a ten-mina level of stewardship. That means my heart has to be set on heaven. Jesus commanded us to lay up treasure for ourselves there (Matthew 6:19-21). Then our hearts will be there.

In the book *The Treasure Principle*, Randy Alcorn illustrates the principle with this idea. Suppose you were a Northerner in Confederate territory during the Civil War, and you had amassed a large amount of Confederate Currency. You had just received inside information that the South was about to lose the war. You'd change that currency as quickly as you could for currency of the United States.

As a child of God, you have inside information about the future of the world. The Apostle Peter warned, everything will be consumed by fire (2Peter 3:12). Nothing here will last. Wouldn't it be wise to transfer your treasure to heaven where it will last. That was the point of Jesus' command in Matthew 6:19-20. *19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. (NIV)* You'll leave your earthly treasures either by the loss of them here or separation from them at death. Jesus was looking out for our best interests when He told us to invest in treasure that can't be lost.

One of the last statements of Jesus recorded in the Bible addresses this issue of behavior and rewards. *12 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. Rev 22:12 (NIV)* It won't be long, even if you live to be a hundred. If you've heard these messages and realize that God is the Rewarder, perhaps you've caught a bit of the excitement that each day holds. From now on you can look at each day as an opportunity to glorify God on earth, so that you will be better equipped to do so in heaven. I hope you too won't be satisfied with being anything short of a ten-mina servant.

He is coming quickly. Before we know it we will hear our name called. We'll walk to the floor of that heavenly stadium and place our actions on that testing block. The testing fire will roar. Then we will hear the voice of our Savior before the saints of all the ages declare the results. I don't think there is any way in the world that I will hear God's "well done!" But I do think there is a way in heaven. There is if I yield to the life of Christ in me. There is if I transfer my treasure from this earth to heaven. *"Every day is a new opportunity to discover what eternal business might be lurking in the ordinary business of being human."* Bruce Wilkinson

Commented [notes7]: 19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matt 6:19-21 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 2 Peter 3:12 (NIV)