

02 – GOD’S REWARD SYSTEM

✓ We started this series by looking at the difference between gifts and rewards:

- Gifts are Free – You don’t *earn* them. You don’t *work* for them. God gives them to you, just because you belong to Jesus.
- Rewards are Earned – **Rewards come to you based on your works.** (How you’ve lived and what you’ve done for Jesus.)

Rewards Are Linked to Your Works

✓ Notice how often the words “work” and “reward” appear together in the following verses.

1 Cor. 3:8 (ICB) – “The one who plants and the one who waters have the same purpose. But each will receive his own **reward** according to his own **work**.”

2 Chronicles 15:7 – “Be strong, and don’t let your hands be slack; for your **work** will be **rewarded**.” (WEB)

Revelation 22:12 – “Behold, I come quickly; and my **reward** is with me, to give every man according as his **work** shall be.” (KJV)

✓ Clearly, rewards are based on your works. Now, whenever I talk about works, I find people who struggle with the concept. We’ve heard so much about salvation not being “by works”, that some have gotten the idea that *all* works are bad. But that’s not true!

Works Are Not Bad ... (In the Right Place)

✓ Now, if you’re trying to get saved by works ... then, that *is* bad! (You can’t get in that way!)

Ephesians 2:8-9 – “For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **Not of works** ...” (KJV)

✓ Make no mistake! Works play no part in salvation, whatsoever! (Let me show you a verse that illustrates why.)

Isa. 64:6 – “We’ve all become unclean, dirty with sin. **Even our good works are not pure. Our good works are as filthy rags.**” (NOG, ERV)

✓ I’ve met lots of people, through the years, who thought they could *earn their salvation* by good works. (This verse illustrates why that won’t work.)

✓ Illustration: Suppose I’ve got a white board that has some writing on it. I want to clean it off, but all I’ve got is a rag that’s been sitting in a bucket of grease, paint, and mud. So, I take that cloth and start to wipe the board, but it’s not getting any cleaner. So, I rub harder. (Let me ask you a question. Will any amount of “elbow grease” get that board clean? No. Why not? Because the rag is dirty.)

✓ That’s the problem with trying to get saved by doing good works. You can’t be cleansed by good works, because your *works* are dirty, too. **Before salvation, works are useless.**

But After You’re Saved, Works Become Very Important

✓ We just read Eph. 2:8-9. We found out you can’t get saved by works. (That’s true! But did you ever read the next verse?)

v. 10 – “For we are His workmanship. He has recreated us in Christ Jesus **to live lives filled with good works.** Works that he has prepared for us to do.”

✓ Before salvation, works are useless. After salvation, works become the basis for our rewards. (Since this is unfamiliar to so many Christians, we’re going to look at some Scriptures that talk about the place that works hold in the Christian life.)

1 Timothy 6:17-18 – “Tell those who are rich in this present world, to use their money to do good. They should be **rich in good works** ...” (TLB)

Hebrews 10:24 – “And let us consider one another in order to stir each other up to love and good works.” (KJV)

Titus 2:7 – “Show yourself in all respects to be an example (role model) of good works.” (EHV)

Titus 3:8 – “This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.” (NKJV)

Matthew 5:16 – “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (KJV)

1 John 3:18 – “My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action (works).” (GNT)

Titus 2:14 – “... who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” (NKJV)

2 Chronicles 15:7 – “Be strong, and don’t let your hands be slack; for your work will be rewarded.” (WEB)

Revelation 22:12 – “Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.” (KJV)

We All Get the “Gifts”, But Every Christian’s “Rewards” Will Differ

- ✓ Think about it! If everyone was going to receive the same reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ, then why bother having a judgment at all? (Why go over every detail of a person’s life, if it doesn’t affect the outcome?)
- ✓ There’s a judgement because God rewards each person “according to what they’ve done”. (That means some will get a *little* reward. Some get a *lot*. And, sadly, some will get *nothing*.)
- ✓ At this point in the discussion, someone usually brings up the parable in Matthew 20. (On a surface level, it looks like this parable

teaches that everyone gets the same reward.) Let’s look at it.

Matthew 20:1-12 – “For the Kingdom of Heaven is like the landowner who went out early one morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay the normal daily wage and sent them out to work. At nine o’clock in the morning he was passing through the marketplace and saw some people standing around doing nothing. So he hired them, telling them he would pay them whatever was right at the end of the day. So they went to work in the vineyard. At noon and again at three o’clock he did the same thing. At five o’clock that afternoon he was in town again and saw some more people standing around. He asked them, ‘Why haven’t you been working today?’ They replied, ‘Because no one hired us.’ The landowner told them, ‘Then go out and join the others in my vineyard.’ That evening he told the foreman to call the workers in and pay them, beginning with the last workers first. When those hired at five o’clock were paid, each received a full day’s wage. When those hired first came to get their pay, they assumed they would receive more. But they, too, were paid a day’s wage. When they received their pay, they protested to the owner, ‘Those people worked only one hour, and yet you’ve paid them just as much as you paid us who worked all day in the scorching heat’” (NLT).

- ✓ The point being, of course, that no matter how long each man was in the field, they all received the same payment. Doesn’t that prove that everyone gets the same reward? No, it doesn’t! Why not?
- ✓ The key to interpreting a parable is to look for the “trigger”. (No parable was ever told in a vacuum. There was always a conversation or a question that prompted Jesus to tell the story.) That conversation limits the interpretation you can put on the parable.
- ✓ In this case, the context is clearly salvation. In 19:16, the Rich Young Ruler comes asking about *salvation*. Then after he leaves, the disciples *continue* talking about *salvation* (v. 25). (Since their questions were about *salvation*, then Jesus’ story must be about *salvation* as well.)

The point Jesus is making (in the parable) is this: Some people come

to Christ *young* and live their entire lives for Jesus. (Like the first workers in the parable, they spend the “entire day” in the field.)

- ✓ But not *everyone* gets saved young. Other people “slip in” at the last moment, in a death-bed conversion. But those who get saved on their deathbed don’t receive a lesser salvation. They’re just as saved as everyone else, even though they only followed the Lord for a short time. (This parable isn’t saying that there are equal *rewards*. It’s saying there’s an equal *salvation*.)

6. What Kind of Judgment Is It?

- ✓ **It’s Fair and Accurate** – An earthly judge doesn’t know everything about the case he’s trying – but *this* Judge does! With perfect sight and understanding, Jesus won’t make any mistakes.
- ✓ That’s really encouraging! Think of all the times when people misjudged you. You were *trying* to do right. You did your best. Your motives were pure. But things didn’t turn out right, and you were judged unfairly. But Jesus knows the truth! He saw your heart and your motives, and He’ll factor those things in – (1 Cor. 4:5).
- ✓ **It’s a Personalized Judgment** – He takes “you” into consideration. We don’t all have the same ability. (You don’t get to decide how much ability you’re born with. That was decided for you – 1 Cor. 4:7). I don’t pastor a mega-church because I wasn’t given the ability to do so. That’s okay. God rewards faithfulness and fruitfulness.
- ✓ Not only are we born with different *abilities*; we don’t all get the same *start in life*. We can’t control the hand we’re dealt! A person born in Billy Graham’s home would have a *much* better start than someone who was born to a crack addict!
- ✓ Then too, we don’t all have the same *resources*. If we learn anything from the widow who gave two mites, it’s this: God considers your financial situation. (She gave *little*, but *to* her, it was a lot!) Compare that with the woman who poured the perfume on Jesus’ head. Jesus commended *both* because they “did what they could” (Mk. 14:8)