

Maximize Your Rewards

*“And the king said to him, ‘Well done, good slave!
Because you have been faithful in a very small matter,
you will have authority over ten cities.’”*

—Luke 19:17

If you do good works for God for a reward, you will lose them anyway; because you are doing them for the reward.” Have you ever heard that? That sentence has led many to conclude the exact opposite of what Scripture teaches. Jesus taught His disciples how to gain rewards in Heaven many times. He instructed them carefully on how to pray to receive rewards in Heaven (Matthew 6:6), how to give and receive rewards in Heaven (Matthew 6:2-4), and even how to be first in Heaven (Mark 10:35-45).

The word “reward” is recorded 30 times in the New Testament. With those occurrences, there is much instruction on the topic. God desires us to have deep understanding regarding how to maximize our reward possibilities that are available everyday.

Do Things in Secret

One of the most emphasized instructions Jesus taught, concerning gaining rewards in Heaven, was for people of faith to perform their actions in secret. Regarding giving money, Jesus taught the people:

“Be careful not to display your righteousness merely to be seen by people. Otherwise you have no reward with your Father in Heaven. Thus whenever you do charitable giving, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in synagogues and on streets so that people will praise them. I tell you the truth, they have their reward. But when you do your giving, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your gift may be in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:1-4).

Regarding praying, Jesus taught the people:

“Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray while standing in synagogues and on street corners so that people can see them. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:5, 6).

Secrecy is important because it takes the most faith. When we do things in secret like giving and praying, and those actions are between an individual and God alone, and one believes he will be rewarded later, it is both obedience and faith as a motivation. Without faith it is impossible to please God (cf., Hebrews 11:6a). In other words, actions done in secrecy will be rewarded because first, we had faith in what Jesus taught; second, we acted in faith on what He said; third, we must wait by faith until we cross into the next life to receive the reward.

We, as fallen people, crave attention. The fleshly attention is a reward killer.

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People may see some of our works, but our ego is ready to relish the attention. We need to do everything we can in secret in this life.

We Act on What We Believe

You and I act on what we believe. We always have and always will. If I told you that a 50-pound meteor was going to smash into your exact location in 30 minutes—and you believed me—you would leave your location. In the same way, when Christians are fully convinced that they are going to see Jesus face-to-face, then they respond in specific actions as God has instructed. *We act on what we believe.* That is what James, the leader of the early church, presented when he wrote, “... faith, if it does not have works, is dead being by itself.” It is quoted much of the time as, “Faith without works is dead.” Faith is a must in any Christian action, endeavor, thought or word, and good works prove our faith to be genuine.

All of Life is Rewardable

The Lord is keeping track of cups of water that are handed out to people. Wow. Jesus said, “And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple, I tell you the truth, he will never lose his reward” (Matthew 10:42). This teaches us that even the smallest of things have an associated reward with it. *Every word, thought, and deed is rewardable.*

Jesus is not only keeping track of every detail of our lives, but He is keeping a reward count for every person who has ever lived. Jesus taught, “For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will reward *each person according to what he has done*” (Matthew 16:27; emphasis mine). Jesus also informed the churches of Asia through John about rewards. In Revelation 22:12, Jesus taught, “Look! I am coming soon, and my reward is with me to pay *each one* according to what he has done!” (emphasis mine).

Paul taught us about our rewards also. To the Church in Rome, Paul wrote, “He will reward *each one* according to his works” (Romans 2:6). He also reminded the Church in Corinth, “The one who plants and the one who

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waters work as one, but each will receive his reward according to his work” (1 Corinthians 3:8).

This Reward is a Great Reward

Jesus used a parable to teach that people may receive 30, 60, or even 100 times more in Heaven than what they gave here (see Matthew 13:1-23). Jesus assured Peter of his reward when Peter seemed to exclaim to Jesus, “Look, we have left everything to follow you!” Jesus responded, “I tell you the truth, there is no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive in this age a hundred times as much—homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, fields, all with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Mark 10:28-31).

Let us take hold of the possibilities for our lives! Let’s act on the word of God. The writer of Hebrews gave the Church a great reminder, “So do not throw away your confidence, because it has great reward” (Hebrews 10:35).

Proximity Doctrine

Caveat: before I discuss the Proximity Doctrine, it is important to say here that God does the holy work in us to make us like His Son; this is a foundation of understanding. With that said, we must also say that we participate in the process of becoming more like Christ. We do this by, 1) dying to ourselves (give up what our flesh wants); 2) humbling ourselves and understanding that apart from God we cannot do anything; 3) asking for God’s leading, wisdom, and help in the situations in our daily life. When these things are a reality in our lives, *God lives through us*. Remember, the Vine lives through the branch (cf., John 15).

The Proximity Doctrine in a nut shell is the more faithful we are here, the greater access to Jesus we will have in the millennial kingdom. We may have closer dwelling places to His, have jobs that require access to Him, be part of His Court, etc. One may take issue with this because many have been taught

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that one may have dinner every night with Jesus at anytime. But the Scriptures don't teach that. Let's look at the Scriptures for truth.

Jesus described to his disciples how to sit at his right hand in Mark 10:35-45:

“Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him and said, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.” He said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” They said to him, “Permit one of us to sit at your right hand and the other at your left in your glory.” But Jesus said to them, “You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I experience?” They said to him, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink, and you will be baptized with the baptism I experience, but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give. It is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

Now when the other ten heard this, they became angry with James and John. Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions use their authority over them. But it is not this way among you. Instead whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The person on Jesus' left hand has the secondary position (proximity) when compared to the person on Jesus' right hand.

This may not sit well with some, but the positions and proximity of someone on Jesus' right and left hand should immediately dispel the teaching that is contrary to God's Word. Jesus clearly taught:

- To be first, one must be the slave of all humankind. This person will have the most access to Jesus.
- *To be great*, one must be the servant of all humankind. These will have much access to Jesus.

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Volunteered slavery to all people is what it will take for a person to sit at Jesus' right hand. The reward is closer proximity.

There is only one person who will sit at Jesus' right hand. There is only one person who will sit at His left hand. The most faithful people who ever lived on the face of the planet will have the most access to Jesus.

Let's also consider Revelation 2 and 3. Varying rewards are given to the churches based on their participation to overcome through God's power. To the church in Philadelphia, Jesus spoke the following in Revelation 3:12-13:

“The one who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never depart from it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God (the new Jerusalem that comes down out of Heaven from my God), and my new name as well. The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

There are people who will minister in the temple of God. They will have permanent access to the temple of God.

Jesus also taught about Proximity when He spoke about an earthly banquet and “The Great Banquet” afterwards as recorded in Luke 14.

⁷ Then when Jesus noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. He said to them, ⁸ “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, because a person more distinguished than you may have been invited by your host. ⁹ So the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your place.’ Then, ashamed, you will begin to move to the least important place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and take the least important place, so that when your host approaches he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up here to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all who share the meal with you. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

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“A better place” involves a closer proximity.

I believe from these passages that we may arrive at a conclusion: the more faithful we are, the closer we will dwell and work in relation to our resurrected Lord.

Therefore, the Proximity Doctrine’s central idea is that we should humble ourselves and participate with God in the road of slavery to humankind so that we may gain better access to Him throughout all eternity.

Scripture Passage

Luke 19:11-27

Questions

- 1) Do you live with the understanding that every thought, word, and deed are rewardable? Yes or No

- 2) What keeps us from living our lives as slaves of people?

- 3) Think about all of the conversations that you had over the last week. Were there any that were not God-honoring? Yes or No

- 4) If not, how could these conversations be different to honor God?

- 5) What attitudes and actions seem to stand in your way to maximizing your rewards?

- 6) What percentage of your Christian life—concerning good works toward others—has been in secret?

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Aim Point

1) Go to biblegateway.com and type in “reward.” Read all the verses on the topic. Be able to articulate a reward theology that does not violate these verses.