

# Reward!

## I. Introduction:

**Well, I usually begin with a relevant point of humor:** But I thought it would be a bit Crass to do that this morning... After all, September 11, 2001 has left its marks... We refer to the day simply as **"9/11"**→ & Everyone knows what we're talking about... **It was a Day when we all woke up to those startling images:** That were so Implausible that we found it hard to define just exactly what was going on→ **But** (nonetheless) it was Horrific enough to keep us glued to the TV with Hyper Awareness... Four high-jacked commercial airlines / The demolition of two Icons of the NYC Skyline / & a staggering loss of almost 3000 lives  
LATER→ **It began** to dawn on us that our lives were not so secure as we thought... & **Now on the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**, thoughts are Swirling around once again→ **As to the Significance of this Day:** As the Cliché goes→ *"Nothing is the same after 9/11"*-- & Certainly in many ways that's true... Not only has it led to a National sense of Uneasiness → **Changing** how we navigate our Airports now through Security Check Points... It has spawned two wars / Set in motion International Manhunts / Intensified religious Suspensions & Hatred / Along with setting off a series of Dominoes falling in the Arab World... **Not to mention on a Personal Level:** How the Families of those who died→ **Had** to put the pieces of their lives back together again... & **Not Surprisingly, it even generated a marked Surge in the Religious Sensitivity & Church Attendance throughout America:** & If you're wondering if this has been Sustained?-- Well, NO, it hasn't... Over the past ten years a good deal of research has been pursued→ **In Attempt** to measure the Religious Climate of Christianity in America since 9/11... & By many of the significant spiritual indicators (like church attendance)→ **Statistics** have actually fallen BELOW what they were BEFORE 9/11... **SO, "Nothing is the same after 9/11"?:** Well apparently,

some things (that really matter) are the Same... **It seems** that (once again) we flocked to God for Therapy→ **But** we're not yet willing to allow God to Redesign our Lives-styles or Deepen our Spirituality...

## II. Well, allow me to **Transition**→ As we continue our thoughts together about Heaven: **This one** entitled simply –

**"Reward"** (the 9<sup>th</sup> in the series Surprised By Hope)... **I'm sure** we're all aware that many of the good things we do→ **Are** either Misunderstood / or Unappreciated / or Quickly Forgotten... **After All**, we live in a **Fallen World**: **& A** Fallen World often rewards the wrong thing→ **& Fails** to Honor (or even Notice) the right things... **If you pause to think about it: What** we reward in our culture most often→ **Centers Around** either a person's Athleticism / Or their Entertainment value / Or their Sartorial Taste (Oh, how I long to walk the Red-carpet→ So I can later be evaluated by Joan Rivers on Fashion Police)... **& So, in light of Eternity: We** focus on things that will not matter in Eternity-- **& quite frankly**, things that won't matter even a week from now... **& In** our Spiritual Schizophrenia here in America→ **It** can even border on the Ridiculous & Absurd... **But as we listen to Jesus:** We're challenged by one of life's **Great Reversals**-- (e.g. in what we call the Beatitudes) **"Blessed are the Poor / Meek / Pure / Persecuted→ They're the ones who Receive the Kingdom of Heaven / Inherit the Earth / See God / Receive their Reward in Heaven"**... **& So, we see that God** (too) **is a Rewarder: Did** you know that it's Inherent in the nature of God to be a Rewarder?... **In fact**, we're told that this is Essential to grasp→ **If you're to be a person of Faith... In Hebrews 11:6:**

**And it is impossible to please God without faith. Because anyone who wants to come to him→ Must believe that God exists / AND that he REWARDS those who sincerely seek him.**

**It's not enough that you simply acknowledge God's presence: You must embrace certain things about God-- & One** of the primary beliefs→ **Is that**

God (by nature) is a Rewarder... **In Fact**, I believe Heaven is going to inaugurated with a great **Rewards Ceremony**... **& That's** what I want to have you consider in our time together this morning...

**II. If you're acquainted with the Gospels:** **Certainly** you're aware of the many stories Jesus told that had as its basic **Plot-line**→ **How** there's this Master who is going to leave for a while (Referring to His own Ascension into Heaven) / **But How** that Master is going to come back (referring to His Second Coming)... **& The point of these parables** set the stage for us to understand-- That when Jesus comes back→ He's going to expect an **Accounting** (i.e. "Did you actually do the things I told you to do before I left?")... (e.g.) **One of the most familiar stories is called the Parable of the Talents:** **The** Master gives three different servants→ Three different levels of Responsibility ("according to each one's Ability")... **You See, when Jesus comes back:** **He's** not going to expect of you→ **Things** He didn't give you the ability to do... **But Nonetheless**, our life is going to be Evaluated by God... **Now pick up** with me there in **Matthew 25:19f** what's going to happen...

**After a long time their master returned from his trip→ And called them to give an account of how they had used his money. The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, "Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest→ And I have earned five more." (The master was full of praise) "Well done, my good and faithful servant-- You have been faithful in handling this small amount→ So now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!" The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, "Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest→ And I have earned two more." (The master said) "Well done, my good and faithful servant-- You have been faithful in handling this**

small amount→ So now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!"

**You See, Scriptures record a coming Day of Great Reward!:** Yet, the very idea of receiving a "Reward" from God also causes some **Confusion**... **If you just pause to think about this for a minute:** You can see why the idea of "Reward"→ **Makes** many Christians Uncomfortable... & That's Quite simply b/c we understand→ That we're Justified by faith (not by our own Efforts)... & So, the very idea of being a Christian for what we get out of it→ Is Distasteful... **But given the repeated nature of these stories & the force in which they are framed→ It** seems a bit Inescapable (doesn't it?)... & Of Course given the Joy promised→ **Why** Disown it?... **So, allow me** (on the front end here) to point out a couple things:

**A. First, you must understand that Heaven itself is NOT the Reward:** The very nature (Connotation / Nuance) of the word "Reward" points to something that is Earned (does it not?)... But Eternal Life is a Gift... Scriptures often refers to Heaven as an **"Inheritance"**... (e.g.) As Peter tells us in **I Peter 1:4-5**

**We have a priceless inheritance — An inheritance that is kept in heaven for you (pure and undefiled) beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith: God is protecting you by his power→ Until you receive this salvation**

**You See, an Inheritance is not a Wage:** An Inheritance is a Gift that is freely bestowed on those who are (simply by Birth) the Rightful Heirs... & So, we're told that we're going to receive Salvation (Eternal Life)→ **By** virtue that we are the Children of God... & So, **there's going to be Equality in Heaven in the sense: That** All of us who are there→ **Are** going to be there by Sheer Grace!... None of us are going to Earn heaven (no one Deserves this!)... & So,

heaven isn't a Reward→ **But a Gift** given to those who become Children of God by Faith in Jesus...

**B. But Secondly** (& here's where the Confusion comes): Although heaven is not a Reward→ **Heaven** will clearly be a **Place of Reward**... Now, if you've Trusted Jesus as your Lord & savior→ **You** don't need to Fear future Judgement on your sins (The Scriptures are clear about this)-- B/C your sins have been judged→ **When** they were placed on Jesus Christ when He died on the Cross (& that's the GN!)... If you're Clothed with Christ-- The question of your eternal destiny→ **Has** already been answered... **BUT, that doesn't mean that Christians do not face future Judgment: We do** face Judgment (the Evaluation of the fruitfulness of our lives in this Cursed World)→ So God can then determine the eternal reward He will give to each of His children... **As you have noticed: One of** the Threads woven throughout this series on heaven→ Is this understanding of **Redemptive Continuity** (i.e. That Who we are & What we do in this life→ Is Carried-Over into our Resurrected Lives / In a way, I see heaven as being Personally Design for each one of us)... & So, **What we believe determines our eternal Destination→ But how we live determines our eternal Compensation**... N.T. Wright frames it this way: *"It isn't a matter of Calculation (i.e. Of doing a difficult job→ In order to be paid a wage)... It's much more like working at a marriage→ In order to enjoy the other person's company more fully... It's more like learning Greek or German→ So that we can read some of the great poets and philosophers who wrote in those languages... The 'reward' is organically connected to the activity-- Not some arbitrary pat on the back→ Otherwise unrelated to the work that was done... And it's always far in abundance beyond any sense of direct or equivalent payment"*... It's this very thing that Paul is driving at→ When tells the Christians in Ephesus (in **Eph.6:8**): **Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do... & Likewise Jesus, too**, would often use the word "Reward"→ **In Order** to motivated His Disciples to be faithful-- (e.g.) **Remember what Jesus said to the Wealthy &**

Powerful in **Luke 14:12-14**?: “When you put on a luncheon or a banquet, don’t invite your friends/brothers/relatives/& rich neighbors-- For they will invite you back→ And that will be your only reward. Instead, invite the Poor/Crippled/Lame/& Blind. Then at the resurrection of the righteous→ God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you”... Again, you’re Accepted in heaven on the basis of your faith→ But you’re going to be Adorned in heaven based on the fruits of your faith... **& So, do you really find it at odds with God’s character to Evaluate the faithfulness of His children?:** Why His own Just nature demands it... Truth is, each of us have different levels of fruitfulness in our lives→ & God says He’s going to give attention to this... **In Fact, Paul reminds us: That** many believers (eventhough they have placed their trust in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ)→ **Will** face judgment having mis-spent their energies on pursuits that possess no eternal significance... **Pay attention to what Paul says in **I Corinthians 3:12-15****

Anyone who builds on that foundation→ May use a variety of materials (gold, silver, jewels / wood, hay, or straw)... But on the judgment day-- Fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done... The fire will show if a person’s work has any value: If the work survives→ That builder will receive a reward... But if the work is burned up→ The builder will suffer great loss-- The builder will be saved→ But like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.

**Now Paul will go on to say: That **ONLY God is Qualified**** to judge→ **The** faith & fruitfulness of a Believer... **& So**, you & I aren’t to get involved in that business... **& That is for obvious reasons: You & I** do not know the inner **Motives** of a person’s heart (i.e. Things aren’t always as meets the eye)... **Like** the Pharisees who prayed to be seen by men→ **Jesus** tells us that the only reward they will receive is just that – The Applause of people... / **Not only that, but you & I can’t see the ultimate Outcome: I mean**, some people seem to pour & pour out their lives into something with little apparent fruit



being born→ **But** later it bears fruit for generations... / **And Not only that, but you & I don't know the Circumstances** surrounding people's lives: **But** God sees the various Degrees of Difficulties that we all face in living out our lives for Him... **& So, we're not to get involved in judging our brothers & sisters:** **But** (nonetheless) understand→ **We** will be Judged... **& God** will reward that which was never rewarded in this world

### III. Let me suggest at least three rewards that we'll receive from God:

#### A. #1 **God rewards with Personal Commendations:**

(God will say) **"Well done, my good and faithful servant"**... **Now**, I realize that at first hearing→ **That** this might strike you as somewhat Inconsequential (Innocuous / you know, "So What?")... **But think with me here for just a moment:** **If I** were to ask you what we're going to be Doing Most in heaven→ **Many** of you would say "Praising God" (& that's not at all the Boring & Tiresome response as you might think)... **But have** you ever thought that **When you get to heaven→ Some of your time is going to be spent with God Praising You?**... Understand that we're talking here: About some generic **Hallmark Card**→ Where God offers some Disengaged Socially-acceptable response→ (where He simply says) "Thanks A lot" / & gets one of the angels to sign His name at the bottom... **I'm talking here** about a Personal Affirmation→ (Where the Lord God looks you in the eyes, & says) *"I watched your life / I saw what you did / I remember that day when"*-- **& God** starts to Thank You!... **& I really don't think we'll be Disappointed:** **There's** something substantial being offered us here→ **That** promises to carry us through eternity... **& it leads me to think** that this alone (when understood) is enough to motivate us to give our lives→ **To** things that will Carry-Over into the next life (When this fallen world is purged by fire / & The Curse is removed)... **God Wants** to get one-on-one with you to say "Thank

YOU”!... As Paul tells the Corinthians in **I Cor.4:5** (When this time of testing is done / & God has evaluated what everyone has been through in their life)→ **“At that time each will receive their praise from God”...**

**This picture from the 1998 Winter Olympics:** The person in red is **Bjorn Daehlie** from Norway→ **Who** is the most successful cross country skier in history of the sport... **The person he is greeting at the finish line is Philip Boit:** & Boit is from Kenya→ **&** (for obvious reasons) he was the only representative for Kenya at these Winter Olympics... **In fact**, Boit had never even seen snow in his life until two years earlier→ **When** he decided to pursue competing in the Olympics... **Well, he did represented his country: & Out** of 92 competitors in this 10,000KM→ **He** finished a strong 92<sup>nd</sup> (30 minutes after Daehlie won the race)... **But when Daehlie won:** He didn’t go off to celebrate-- **But rather** he stayed at the finish line & waited→ **So** that he could greet Boit... & Boit would later acknowledge the Deep & Enduring Impression this had on his life... **Well, the Lord Jesus is waiting on you:** He’s already run the race / & We’ll never run it like Him→ **But** He wants to embrace you / (& say) “You finished strong / You could have quit→ **But** you didn’t / I’m proud of you”... & I think we’ll Cherish every single word for the rest of eternity...

**B. #2 God rewards with Individual Delegation:** (God says) **“I’ll now put you in charge of many things”...** In other words it’s God’s desire to give you an **Eternal Promotion**... You Know, we unwittingly think that faithfulness should be rewarded by a Perpetual Vacation→ **But** God offers us something much more Substantial — (i.e.) More Responsibility / Increased Opportunities... **& It** will all be empowered by our new glorified bodies→ **Possessed** with Endless Energy / Sharpened Minds / & Unquenchable Joy... (God will say) “I’ve watched your life / & (even though no one else noticed) *I saw how faithful you were when you encountered this & this & this....*& Now, have I got something for YOU!!”... **& Again, it’s**



**going to be a day of Great Reversal:** Where (as Jesus reminds us) those who lived Humbly will be Exalted... & So, Yes, I believe **There will be Distinctions in heaven** (i.e. We're not going to be clones with the same Responsibilities / Exaltation)... **But there will not be Discrimination in heaven**... **& That's what we can't wrap our minds around here in this fallen world:** B/C (you see) Heaven it's not going to be about me→ **But** about Jesus-- & Whatever promotion I'm given→ **I'm** going to be **Euphoric** about this! (I'll be thrilled to do it for Him!)... As God looks at us→ (& says) "You served me well→ *So, let me show you what you're going to do for me now*"...

### **C. #3 God will reward us with Eternal Celebration:**

(Finally, God will say to us) "**Come enter your master's happiness**"... You See, here is a **Telling Picture**-- It not simply that being with God produces Joy→ **Rather** it's that God Himself is Joyful... **& God's Joy is Contagious:** & So, Joy will be the very Air we breath... & B/C God is Inexhaustible→ His Joy will never end... **You See, most of our lives are spent in what we call the Pursuit of Happiness:** But **In heaven, Happiness is the Starting Point**... **C.S. Lewis** put it this way: *"If we consider the unblushing promises of reward / & the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels→ It would seem that Our Lord finds our desire not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures-- Fooling about with drink & sex & ambition→ When infinite joy is offered us... We are like ignorant children who want to continue making mud pies Slum→ Because we cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a vacation at the sea... We are far too easily pleased."*