

Rewards

Matthew 10:40-42

In our text this evening, Jesus is ending his instructions to the twelve apostles as he sends them out as his ambassadors for the gospel. We began the chapter several weeks ago with,

Mat. 10:1 “And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.”

Mat. 10:5 “These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 And as you go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Their calling would not be easy.

Mat. 10:16 “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. 17 But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues.”

But he gave them encouragement, as well.

Mat. 10:26 “Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.”

And where we ended last week, he gives his apostles a great, personal challenge.

Mat. 10:38 “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”

That challenge is extended to everyone of us, but then Jesus concludes his instructions with something that seems out of

place, and I struggled a bit even to put it into place, the place where Jesus puts it! He ends with a description of rewards. Rewards to those who seek to help his children, his disciples. Rewards to those who serve Jesus by serving his disciples.

With that emphasis, Jesus is able to move away from a description merely of the disciples back to himself, so as he instructs his apostles, he emphasizes that they are his servants, and he himself is to be honored. That’s why the rewards are given, for Jesus’ sake not so much for the sake of the apostles. And that’s where I will begin this evening, with the whole subject of rewards.

I. JESUS AND REWARDS.

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First, though, what is the meaning of rewards? And to whom are they given? To answer that second question first, they are given to the faithful, to one who gives “only a cup of cold water...”

A. The meaning of reward for the faithful.

It comes with great emphasis. “He shall *by no means* lose his reward.” No chance of that happening. The reward is certain and secure.

Now, to be sure, there is no merit in that. Nothing earned or deserved, in terms of our eternal salvation. No denial of the working of God’s grace, by which he bestows his blessings upon us despite our shortcomings and sins. But still, a reward! A blessing attached to the performance of our righteousness. Yet even then, always, our righteousness is imperfect and God’s requirements are unattainable in their perfection. So even his reward is a matter of his grace, choosing to reward that which is good in us, that which Jesus has enabled us to do, and for the sake of Christ, blessing us with reward.

Rewards are a biblical concept, and a thoroughly consistent biblical motivation. We have seen it before in this gospel, though usually in the context of a warning not to seek the rewards and honors of men, but rather the blessing of God. Yet when Paul writes to the Corinthians, he gets even more specific,

1 Cor. 3:14 “If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.”

And, 2 John 8 “Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.”

Paul is even willing to speak of this idea of a reward in terms of a prize in an athletic competition. This is one of the most motivational exhortations found anywhere in Scripture.

1 Cor. 9:24 “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

So win the race. Seek the prize. Gain the reward. That’s consistent biblical teaching. And notice how Jesus applies that idea to his disciples. Back in our text,

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The reward is given to the faithful. But more than that, notice the humility of the good work that is rewarded. The good work is giving “one of these little ones ... a cup of cold water.” Just a cup of water. Nothing more than that humble service. And it is given to “these little ones.” Nobody particularly important. That’s humility. Humble service. Given to humble and lowly recipients.

Nothing spectacular. Nothing that would ordinary bring you praise or notoriety. Just humble service. That’s what earns the reward.

B. The blessing of reward to the humble.

Jesus would have another more familiar way of expressing this sort of humble service, with reference to the final judgment at the end of this age.

Mat. 25:31 “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. 33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

37 “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ 40 And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’”

Jesus honors, with reward, the humble service of his disciples, and that ought to be of great encouragement and motivation to each one of you. And if Paul is a proper example, then it is not wrong to look for that reward.

2 Tim. 4:6 “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8

Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

Surely the crown of righteousness is the greatest reward you could possibly imagine! James calls it the crown of life.

James 1:12 “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

So look for that crown. Work in order to gain that crown, to win the prize. With this measure of humility,
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Let’s go back, then, to verse 40, and look further at these concluding instructions Jesus which gives to his disciples. It is quite encouraging. It also takes us back into a discussion of the relationship between,

II. JESUS AND HIS FATHER.

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Jesus makes a very significant point, that,

A. We represent Jesus to the world.

In the context, of course, he refers to the apostles. But they, as the foundation of the church, represent all of us, the whole of the church. So, as Jesus says, when others would receive us, they would receive him. Ultimately, when they hear us, they hear Jesus. When they receive the ministry of the gospel from us, they receive it from Jesus.

We are, then, called ambassadors, with quite an urgent message.

2 Cor. 5:20 “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as

though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.”

We continue to bear that responsibility, don’t we? We continue to proclaim that message. We continue to represent Jesus to the world in which we live. To be even more explicit, Jesus sends us into the world to represent him. Thus he pray to his father,

John 17:18 “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.”

But there is more to it than that, and we quickly enter into the realm of the trinity. For just as we are sent by Jesus, so, too, Jesus was sent by his father. So,

B. Jesus represents his father to the world.

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So Jesus never acts independently from his father. He doesn’t act alone, in isolation. Instead, with a self-conscious awareness of his place within the godhead which call the trinity, he identifies himself as one who was sent by the Father. He presents himself as one who represents not his own interests, but those of his father.

Just a couple of other verses to demonstrate this vital union within the Trinity,

Mat. 11:27 “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

John 8:16 And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am

not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me. 17 It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. 18 I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.” 19 Then they said to Him, “Where is Your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.”

Jesus would even say this about the great work of salvation which his father had given him to do.

John 10:25 Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. 26 But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. 27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. 30 I and My Father are one.”

I and the Father are one. So fully, so clear is his identity and his work. So we as God’s people represent Jesus to the world, but Jesus represents his father to the world. And then, Jesus offers his apostles the encouragement that they would receive the reward, the prize. Look, finally, at,

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III. JESUS AND HIS APOSTLES.

There is honor to a prophet, what Jesus calls a prophet’s reward. The apostles would share in that, for they are joined together in one group, frequently called simply “the apostles and the prophets.” Together, they are the foundation of the church.

1 Cor. 12:28 “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets...”

They, together, are the recipients of the gospel, what Paul calls “the mystery of Christ.

Eph. 3:5 “which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.”

So you are to receive the prophets. You are to listen to the prophets, to believe them. You are to obey the prophets. For they have honor, and shall be rewarded with that special reward assigned to them.

A. There is honor for those whom Jesus sends into the world.

There is honor for the prophets, specifically.

v.41a

Notice, though, that Jesus broadens it, the honor. He broadens those whom he identifies as those sent into the world. And I believe he would intend to include all of us, the followers of Jesus, identified in verse 41 as “a righteous man.”

So it isn’t just the apostles and prophets who are identified to receive honor, but it is all of us. For we are all to included in this identification of “a righteous person.” That label isn’t used for just a few, special people, a few “saints” or super-Christians, as the popular thinking often goes. But rather, we are those whom Jesus has sent into the world. In John 17, when he speaks of sending us into the world, he speaks of all the elect, the people whom the Father gave to the Son to redeem.

John 17:6 “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. 8 For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them

and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9 I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.”

They are the ones whom Jesus sends into the world. They are the ones whom he would identify as “a righteous man.” They, too, have their own honor. They have their own reward. But it is not theirs only.

B. There is reward for those who receive the ones whom Jesus sends into the world.

v.41 “...And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward.”

That righteous man is to be you and me. That is to be a description of you and me. Not self-righteous, in the sense of self-sufficient and worthy of God’s favor on the basis of the performance of a sufficient degree of their own righteousness. Not a righteousness by which you make yourself acceptable to God, nor a righteousness by which you are justified. In that sense of justification, we are righteous by faith. We receive the righteousness of Jesus, by faith, and that is the only perfect righteousness by which we can be found acceptable in God’s sight.

It is not a righteousness by the law, Paul writes in, Rom. 3:21 “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

But our text this afternoon comes in an entirely different context. The person who has been justified by faith, the one who is righteous by faith, is the one whom Jesus sends into the world and who will receive a reward. And that reward is extended to all God’s people, those identified as “the one who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man.”

The idea, I believe, is simple. The blessing of rewards is given to all those whom Jesus sends into the world, and that includes you and me today. There is reward promised to all those who fight the good fight, who finish the race, who keep the faith. So I think it is good and proper for you all to claim with confidence the reward to which Paul looks forward, “Henceforth there is laid up 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 loved his appearing.”

And so, people of God, run the race so that you might win the prize. And as you do so, build on the only foundation which will last, the foundation of Jesus Christ. Let this challenge be an encouragement to you,

1 Cor. 3:12 “Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.”