

What the Bible Says About Rewards

*But when you make a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind:
And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee:
for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.*

Luke 14:13-14

It happened one Sabbath. Jesus, along with a distinguished list of guests, had been invited to dinner at the home of a local leader (Luke 14:1). As the guests were finding their places, Jesus watched them maneuver for the best seats at the table.

Suddenly, He offered some unsolicited advice:

But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Luke 14:10-11

Can you imagine how uncomfortable this must have made those who were trying to get the best seats? But Jesus wasn't finished. He turned to the host and began to give him some personal advice and instructions on how to entertain his guests;

Then said He also to him that bade Him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also invite you back, and you get repaid."

Luke 14:12

Wow, what an awkward moment! Jesus seemed to be saying to His host, "Next time, don't invite all these people you have here now."

Was He questioning the man's taste in friends or his grasp of social etiquette? Look closely at what Jesus said next:

"When you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed."

Luke 14:13

Rather than criticizing His host for his generosity, Jesus was showing him how to get something important-something more lasting than a wonderful evening-in exchange for it. The first hint we get of that something is in the word **blessed**.

Blessed! All of us know that feeling. I was downtown Baltimore at a light and there was a homeless person, I simply gave him what I had in my wallet, he was very grateful and I felt a strange sense of peace. It was a warm feeling. Jesus was right blessings do come when you do good deeds to those who cannot repay you.

But that's not what Jesus was talking about!!!!

That evening I believe Jesus had something else in mind as he spoke to the host.

WHAT JESUS SAID NEXT

The rest of Jesus' statement brings us to the heart of the Bible teaching on rewards.

“And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Luke 14:14

No one in the room could have missed Jesus' astonishing revelation-God will repay you for a good work after you are DEAD. This goes against what most people think and what everyone in the room believed-that God rewards people only on earth for the good they do in this life.

Jesus revealed just the opposite. His words show that when you do a worthy deed for a person who cannot repay you:

1. You will be repaid
2. Your payment will come in the next life
3. When you receive it, you will be blessed

Certainly, God blesses us here on earth out of His unmerited grace and goodness. God may also give us temporal rewards for right actions or faithful service to Him in the here and now. But the rewards Jesus reveals in this story-and the ones He talks about most-are different. They are God's guaranteed response to a specific action on our part that will continue to affect our lives far into eternity. These rewards come not from asking, but from doing-and not now, but after death.

Do not miss these differences or you will set yourself up for disappointment. You'll find yourself asking questions like these: *I serve God in every way I know how, so why is our family struggling so much financially? Doesn't God know or care?* Yes, He cares and He knows all about what you are going through, but He doesn't promise that work for Him now will always result in gain from Him now.

In fact, the rewards Jesus wanted you and me to know about most do not come now. He said it in His first sermon, and He said it again to a roomful of religious know-it-alls at dinner.

His eternal rewards come later, and they begin with something you do today.

WHAT DOES JESUS MEAN BY REWARDS?

Interestingly, the Bible uses two different words to describe Jesus' reward. The Greek word used in Jesus teachings in Luke 6 is *misthos*. Literally, it means *wages*:

*“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your **misthos** [wages] are great in heaven”*

Luke 6:23

Jesus used the same word later when He spoke of earthly wages:

*“Call the laborers and give them their **misthos** [wages]”*

Matthew 20:8

And Paul told Timothy,

*“The laborer is worthy of his **misthos** [wages]”*

1st Timothy 5:18

Everyone who heard Jesus understood exactly what He meant: “When you labor on earth, your employer gives you *misthos*. And when you labor for Me, I pay you wages, too.”

Jesus never described His reward as a charitable tip (“Here’s a little something extra”), or a token of appreciation (like a plaque for thirty years at the factory). He called it wages—something you earn resulting from something you do.

The second word used for reward in heaven appears in our dinner story in this chapter. Here Jesus used a compound word, *apodidomai*. *Apo* means *back*, and *didomai* means *to give*. Combined, *apodidomai* means to give back in return, or simply, repay.

“You will be blessed...for you shall be apodidomai [given back in return] at the resurrection of the just.”

Luke 14:14

Jesus also used this term in His well-known story about the Good Samaritan, who stopped to help a traveler that had been beaten and robbed by bandits. When the Samaritan took the injured man to a nearby inn for care, he told the innkeeper,

“Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will apodidomai [repay] you”

Luke 10:35

The word *apodidomai* takes the idea of wages into even more surprising territory. Jesus says that when you receive His *apodidomai*, you are being reimbursed in full measure for what you did on His behalf. If you’re thinking that God would repay you only for grand acts of personal sacrifice and not everyday acts of love, remember that Jesus said,

“For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name....will by no means lose his apodidomai [repayment]”

Mark 9:41

Have you heard and embraced Jesus’ amazing promise? No deed for God will pass by overlooked or unrewarded. Not one cup of water, or one prayer in the middle of the night.

PORTRAIT OF A LIFE

There was an elderly lady who was bed ridden, she said, “I get so discouraged lying in bed all day. Speaking to her pastor she said, “I can’t really do anything for God but pray.” Her pastor said, “Do you pray a lot?” She said, “I pray for half the day, and some of the night, too.” Her pastor said, private prayer is so valuable to God that “**your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly**” (Matthew 6:6).

Maybe, like this lady you’re doing more of eternal value than you realize. So what would a portrait of a life God rewards look like?

Nowhere does Jesus give an exhaustive list of what actions He will reward. Yet I’ve observed in cultures around the world that people know instinctively what a good work is—an act you do for someone that meets a need and honors God.

1. God will reward you for *seeking* Him through spiritual acts such as fasting and praying (Matthew 6:6; Hebrews 11:6).
2. God will reward you for *submitting* to your employer as a faithful steward (Matthew 24:45-47; Ephesians 6:8; Colossians 3:22-24).
3. God will reward you for *self-denial* in His service (Matthew 16:24-27).
4. God will reward you for *servicing* those in need in His name (Mark 9:41).
5. God will reward you for *suffering* for His name and reputation (Luke 6:22-23).
6. God will reward you for *sacrifices* you make for Him (Luke 6:35).

In fact, Jesus said that every person who sacrifices to follow Him will be rewarded a hundredfold (Matthew 19:29).

7. God will reward you for *sharing* of your time, talent, and treasure to further His kingdom (Matthew 6:3-4; I Timothy 6:18-19).

This list should encourage you not get you overwhelmed. The question is how could someone like me really earn rewards?

Every one of us, regardless of circumstances or ability, has an equal opportunity to please God and receive His “**Well done, good and faithful servant**” (Matthew 25:21).

GOD’S PREROGATIVE

I’ve noticed that people who are making these discoveries for the first time respond with a wide range of feelings. Some experience intense gratitude; some, a burst of anticipation. But others tell me they are reluctant to believe what they’re hearing. They’ll say, “But I don’t deserve any reward!” Or, “if I’m spending eternity with Jesus in heaven, why would I want or need anything more?”

I understand these feelings. I had them myself when I first looked at this topic. In fact, I didn’t agree with God’s plan at all. I’d been working for the Lord for years. I couldn’t believe that God would want to reward me for what I was already willingly doing for Him. After all, Jesus died for me. Serving Him was the least I could do for Him.

Two passages in the Gospels helped my thinking begin to change:

- In Luke 17:10, Jesus told His disciples: “When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, “**We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.**”

This passage shows that, above all, it is my duty and privilege to serve God. If Jesus thanks me, it is because He is gracious and generous, not because I am deserving.

- In Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus told a parable about laborers who worked different lengths of time but all received the same wages. At the end of the day, when the workers who had worked all day questioned the landowner’s fairness, he said, “**Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?**”

This second passage reminds me that God can be as generous as He wants with what belongs to Him. If I argue with His amazing goodness, it may be because goodness is lacking in my own heart.

MEET THE REWARDER

You'll find this verse in Hebrews, nestled in a passage about heroes who pleased God with their faith. "*Without faith it is impossible to please Him,*" the writer says, "*for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder*" (Hebrews 11:6).

If you look up that word *rewarder* in the Greek, you'll be amazed by what you discover. The word used here is neither *misthos nor apodidomai*, but an unusual combination of both. In fact, Hebrews 11:6 is the only verse in the Bible where you'll find it used to describe a person. God is the *misthos-apodidomai*-the rewarder who pays back your wages in return.

God chooses to reward because it is an expression of His own generous nature. His plan to reward, like His provision to save, is a display of His amazing grace.

There is no other way to understand this. The Bible says if you want to please God, you must believe that "He is," but you also must believe something else. That your God "is a rewarder."