

YOU REALLY CAN EARN HEAVENLY TREASURE

IN THIS LIFE people spend a great deal of time getting as many material possessions as they possibly can. This is a pretty universal trait for the entire human race. No matter how wealthy people are, they always seem to want even more. People who have thousands of dollars want millions of dollars. People who have millions want billions – and people who already have billions want billions more.

Now, some people respond to this by saying that Christians should take a vow of poverty. They claim that since Jesus was poor, we ought to be poor as well. They condemn the accumulation of material goods and teach that being rich is a sin. Wealth, they say, is bad. Christians just shouldn't live like that.

That all sounds very spiritual, but it's not Biblical. God gave Abraham an incredible amount of wealth – so much so that when Lot was carried away captive by an invading army, Abraham trained 318 of his servants in order to defeat the army and rescue his nephew (Genesis 14:14). You've got to be pretty well off if you have more than 300 servants! God also gave David an incredible amount of wealth – so much so that David donated *billions* of dollars worth of material in order to build the Temple (1 Chronicles 29:1-5). God also gave Solomon a *staggering* amount of wealth – not because Solomon asked for it, but just because God wanted to. God never chastised any of these

people for being wealthy. *Having money is not a sin.*

Jesus had a lot to say about the subject of money, but He never condemned wealth. However, what He *did* say is quite startling. Jesus told us to **lay up our treasures in Heaven:**

Matthew 6:19: “Lay not up for yourself treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

There's a lot in these verses, and I'd like to take some time to delve into them. First of all, notice that Jesus doesn't prohibit the accumulation of treasure. Jesus has no problem with people storing up wealth. He could easily have said “Don't you dare lay up treasure; that is a sin, and it's bad.” Instead He said something very different: He wants us to lay up our treasures in Heaven instead of Earth.

MOTHS CANNOT EAT SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

Now, this passage tends to get spiritualized quite a bit. People read it and assume that it's talking about spiritual blessings. They interpret these verses to mean something like this: “If I work for God then God will bless me spiritually.” That may sound plausible, but it's *not* what the verse means.

Stop and think about it for a moment. Jesus said if we store our treasures on Earth then they will be subject to decay

and might be stolen; however, if we store them in Heaven then they cannot be stolen and will last forever. These statements make a lot of sense if it's talking about physical treasure, but they make *no sense at all* if it's talking about spiritual blessings. After all, it is absolutely *impossible* for moths to eat your spiritual blessings or for a thief to steal them!

Take a moment to think through the various spiritual blessings that God has given you. God has promised us eternal security in Christ. Can a moth eat that? God has promised to always be with us and to never forsake us. Can a burglar steal that promise while we're away on vacation? Of course not! The only things that moths can eat and thieves can steal are *physical goods*. Christ is saying exactly what He seems to be saying: we should move our physical goods to Heaven so that they can't be stolen. In other words, God wants us to use Heaven like an *offshore bank account*.

I realize this sounds crazy, but that's because we have a very unbiblical view of Heaven. When many people think of Heaven they picture a big white place with lots of clouds and harps, where people spend eternity strumming their harp and not really doing much else. That picture of Heaven is *not remotely Biblical*. The place that the Bible describes is completely different – and the Bible actually spends a lot of time describing it. God has far more to say about Heaven than we realize, and it's a real shame that we get most of our ideas about Heaven from Hollywood.

THE COMMON VIEW OF HEAVEN IS COMPLETELY UNBIBLICAL

First of all, Heaven is not a vague place with clouds. The Bible tells us that ***Heaven is actually a city***:

Hebrews 11:16: “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”

What has God prepared for us? A *city*. Notice that it doesn't say “a cloud”! We are *not* going to spend eternity floating on a cloud somewhere; instead we are going to spend it living *in a city*. The last two chapters of the Bible spend a lot of time describing this Heavenly city, which the Bible names “the New Jerusalem”. This incredibly large city has trees, streets, a stream, walls, food, and God Himself – to list just a few of the highlights!

Since God told us that we are going to spend eternity living in a city, that should give us a way to imagine what it is going to be like. After all, most people have spent their entire lives either living inside a city or near one! One of the things we know about cities is that they have places for people to live, and the New Jerusalem is no different. The Bible tells us exactly what we can expect as far as living accommodations go:

John 14:2: “In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”

I realize that a lot of modern Bible translations have rendered this verse as “many rooms”, and I think that's deplorable. I don't have time right now to delve into why that's the case, but I can say that Jesus is *not* talking about rooms here. Jesus is not saying “When you get to Heaven I've got a spare closet that you can spend eternity living in.” That's ridiculous! The New Jerusalem is full of *homes*. It is an enormous city that covers more than *2 million square miles*. God is not hurting for

space, and He does not have to stuff all of us into closets in order to make room for everyone. Do you seriously believe that your home on Earth, no matter how nice it may be, can even remotely compare to what God Himself has spent *two thousand years* preparing for you?

On top of that, I assure you that when you reach your heavenly home you are not going to find a building that is completely empty. You are not going to spend eternity wandering around an empty concrete shell, wishing you had a chair to sit on. Houses are furnished on Earth and they will be furnished in Heaven. They will have *things* inside them. There is nothing wrong with this; physical goods are not evil. If physical possessions were bad then Jesus would not have urged you to accumulate them in Heaven!

So, then, in Heaven you will have a place to live, and your place to live will have possessions inside it. What Jesus is telling us is that you should take the possessions you have here and relocate them to Heaven so that you will still have them when you reach Heaven. It's true that you can't take it with you, but you *can* send it up ahead.

Now, I'm not saying that there is some magical way you can mail your baseball card collection to Heaven so that you can have it in the ages to come. You cannot take your favorite shirt and mail it to the New Jerusalem so that you'll have it in the future. There is no way to actually move an item from this world into the next. However, there *are* ways that you can use your Earthly possessions in order to lay up real, actual treasures in your Heavenly home.

HEAVEN IS NOT A COMMUNIST PARADISE

Before we get to that, though, there is another issue that

we need to address. There are some people who claim that there's no such thing as treasure in Heaven because in Heaven everyone is equal and everyone has exactly the same thing. They reject the idea that some people in Heaven might have more than others, or that some people might have a higher status. This is a very common belief, but it's not Biblical. In fact, I Corinthians 3 says quite the opposite:

I Corinthians 3:11: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.”

This passage is clearly saying that every man's work will be tested, and anything that does not pass the test will be lost. A reward *will* be given to some people and will *not* be given to others. You see, ***God actually cares how we spend our lives***, and He will reward us accordingly. God is not going to say “Bob spent his life faithfully serving me while Fred spent his entire life lying drunk on the floor. I'm going to give them both the same reward because I don't care what they did with their time.” As the apostle Paul explains, people who wasted their lives will still be saved but they will suffer loss. They will attain eternal life but they will receive no reward. Those who faithfully served God, though, *will* be rewarded. The idea that “everyone will have the

same thing” is just not Biblical.

If you want some further proof of that, take a look at what Jesus told His disciples:

Matthew 19:27: “Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Who is going to judge the twelve tribes of Israel? The disciples. *You* aren't going to be sitting on one of those thrones, and I'm not either; that honor is reserved for them. In other words, Jesus gave the apostles something that *He is not going to give anyone else*. That alone destroys the idea that everyone in Heaven has the exact same position and rewards.

HOW TO LAY UP TREASURE IN HEAVEN

So just how *do* you lay up treasure in Heaven? One key way is to **give to the poor**:

Matthew 19:21: “Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.”

Luke 12:31: “But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto

you.

32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

33 Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Jesus is *very* clear about this: if you give to the poor then you *will* have treasure in Heaven. This is a guaranteed, ironclad way of transferring your wealth from this life into the next. If you give to the poor then God will give you "bags which wax not old", a treasure in the heavens that does not fail.

Now, I'd like to point out once again that Christ describes this Heavenly treasure as something that is *real and tangible*. He talks about bags that do not wear out and goods that are not eaten by moths. If Christ was talking spiritual blessings He could easily have said "Seek the kingdom of God and you will be drawn closer to God, which is your reward", but that's *not* what He said. Instead He talked as if the treasure was some type of physical good that would ordinarily be subject to the wear and tear of this life.

Another key way to amass Heavenly treasure is **to be persecuted for serving God**:

Matthew 5:11: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake."

12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

Luke 6:22: "Blessed are ye, when men shall

hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.

23 Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.”

If you are persecuted and suffer for the sake of Christ then you will be rewarded. In fact, your reward in Heaven will be *great*. Keep in mind that *Jesus*, the creator of the Universe, is the one who is saying “Yes, your reward will be truly astonishing.” *God* is the one who is saying that your reward will be so amazing and mind-blowing that you should be leaping for joy! That should really grab our attention. Imagine a reward that is so large that even *God* calls it “great”!

As Americans we are really not very persecuted. Our life is nothing like those who live in place like Iran, where being a Christian can get you sent to jail or even killed. We simply don't face situations like that here. However, that is rapidly changing. The day will come when we will suffer greatly for being faithful to Christ and standing by His Word. When that day comes, Jesus commands us to *leap for joy* because of the great reward that we will have in Heaven.

Another way to amass Heavenly treasure is to **receive the servants of God** as who they are, and by **helping others in the name of God**:

Matthew 10:40: “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

41 He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's

reward.

42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

This isn't as difficult as you might think. As the world becomes a darker place it will pressure us to distance ourselves from people who are God's faithful servants. The prophets in the Old Testament were hated: people despised them, refused to hear what they had to say, and executed them. Those who listened to the prophets and supported them were exposing themselves to persecution, and God promised to reward them. Likewise, when we stand by God's faithful servants and help them (instead of joining with the world to attack them), God will reward us.

God also rewards those who care about the needy and take care of them. The world is full of people who need help, and there is no shortage of opportunities to help them. If we are willing to act then there is a lot we can do.

IT IS NOT UNSPIRITUAL TO DESIRE REWARDS

At this point in the discussion there are some people who stand up and complain that the very idea of rewards is somehow unspiritual or bad. Some claim that even wanting a reward is a sign of immaturity. I'd like to point out that the person who commands us to want these rewards and get excited over them is actually *Jesus Himself* – and He said this not once, but *twice*. He *wants* us to be excited about what He's going to give us.

This really shouldn't surprise us. After all, how would you

feel if you gave a present to someone and found out that they weren't excited about it, didn't particularly want it, and were bored with the whole thing? Isn't it much better when you give a gift that you *know* is wanted, and will be enjoyed and appreciated? Do you really want to give someone a gift just to hear them say "No thanks; I'm too spiritual to care about gifts"? Of course not! God doesn't want that either. God is going to give us something amazing, and He does *not* want us to spend our lives saying "No thanks; I don't want it." That attitude does not honor God.

THE HEAVENLY CROWNS

There is another class of rewards that we need to spend some time talking about. The Bible tells us that it is possible to earn certain types of crowns. These crowns are not crowns of authority but crowns of victory. The Bible refers to them as **incorruptible crowns**:

I Corinthians 9:24: "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

As you can see, you have to *earn* these crowns. Some people will get them and some people won't. Paul urges us to run the race faithfully and to discipline ourselves so that when we are judged we will not come away empty-handed. If you want an incorruptible crown then you are going to have to work for it. Despite what some people claim, God does put a difference between Christians who faithfully serve Christ and Christians who don't. Those who serve well will be rewarded, and those who couldn't be bothered will not. The way that we live our lives *really does matter*.

One of the crowns that we can earn is the **crown of righteousness**:

2 Timothy 4:7: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:
8 Henceforth is laid up for me a **crown of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

This crown is an easy one to earn: all you have to do is long for the return of Christ. Those who eagerly want Jesus to come back will be given the crown of righteousness, and those who don't care or who are opposed to His return will forfeit this crown. It's that simple.

Sadly, there are many Christians in the world today who do *not* want Jesus to come back. They are actually terrified that Jesus might return at any minute and interrupt their lives. They want Jesus to stay away until they've finished their plans and have accomplished everything that they want to do. If God sent us a message saying that He would return at noon tomorrow, a great many Christians would be beside themselves because that would interrupt their plans. The things of the world have so

ensnared people that many see the return of Christ as a serious problem.

That is a truly terrible attitude to have. Imagine a bride telling her groom “No, I really don't want to marry you just yet. I've got a life to live, and things to do, and dreams to accomplish, and you are just a hindrance to all of that. You need to stay away from me until I've finished having my fun.” No groom is going to be happy about hearing that – and Christ doesn't want to hear it from His Bride either. He wants us to long for His return, to eagerly hope for it, and to wish each day that He would finally come for us.

Think of it this way: is your life, your dreams, and your desires really more important than the *raising of the dead* and the translation of all saints into *incorruptible immortals*? I mean, *really*? You are more important than all of that? You want Christ to delay coming back and rescuing all the Christians all over the world who are being *persecuted, tortured, and executed* just so you can finish your plans? You are so important than you want all those people to keep on suffering just so that you aren't inconvenienced? If you believe that then you have serious issues.

Those who long for the return of Christ will receive the crown of righteousness. Those who do not long for His return will lose it.

Another type of crown is the **crown of life**:

James 1:12: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”

Revelation 2:10: “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days; be

thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

As we can see, the crown of life is given to those who *endure temptation*. Christ wants us to love Him, and the way we show our love for Him is by keeping His commandments (John 14:15). This means that those who keep His commandments prove that they really do love Him. Those who endure temptation and defeat it, choosing to walk in the ways of God instead of the ways of the flesh, will be given the crown of life. In other words, the way that you live your life *really matters*. It is not fine to just keep living in sin. God wants us to be faithful *to death*. God really does put a difference between those who fight and overcome sin, and those who can't be bothered.

This crown is also the martyr's crown. Those who faithfully serve Christ and who choose death over abandoning Him will be given this crown. It is a reward for faithfulness.

Peter speaks of the third type of crown – the **crown of glory**:

I Peter 5:1: “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.

4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”

The only people who are eligible to receive this crown are pastors, evangelists, and elders. This crown is given to church leaders who faithfully and selflessly took care of their congregations. Those who were good examples, who preached the whole Word, who took care of the flock, and who did so not for wealth and power but out of an earnest desire to help, will receive a crown of glory. On the other hand, those who were faithless, or who set a terrible example, or who preached heresy, or who abused the flock for their own gain, will lose this crown. Once again we see that faithfulness is rewarded.

Some people will receive these crowns while others will go away empty-handed. Jesus Himself said that we must be careful because these crowns *can* be lost:

Revelation 3:11: “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”

Now, our *salvation* cannot be lost and *eternal life* cannot be lost, so Christ is not talking about either of those. What *can* be lost are our crowns, because they are rewards for a life well-lived. Incidentally, this puts crowns in a bit of a different category from other Heavenly treasure. If you give to the poor then God will reward you, and that reward *cannot* be lost. Crowns, though, are trickier to earn because they can only be earned by a lifetime of faithful service. They are harder to obtain, and few people will earn them.

WE WILL GLORIFY GOD WITH OUR REWARDS

The idea of being rewarded for our service makes some people uncomfortable, but *this is Christ's idea*, not our own. God is *not* doing something wrong by generously rewarding His people. We also need to keep in mind what people in Heaven are going to do with these rewards. While people are on Earth they can earn rewards by faithfully serving God. Once they are in Heaven they will take their rewards and use them to bring glory and honor to God:

Revelation 4:9-11: “9 And when those beasts give glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth forever and ever,
10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,
11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

What are people doing with their crowns? They are casting them before the throne of God and worshiping Him. The Lord had glorified them, and they have used their glory to worship the Father.

God wants us to use the possessions that He has given us to honor Him. When we do that – when we give to the poor, help others in the name of Christ, and suffer for His name – then God has promised to reward us. When we get to Heaven and receive the rewards that God chose to give us, we will take them and use them to glorify God – which is how we got them in the first place.

So, spend your life serving God. Lay up rewards in Heaven. Provide for yourself bags that do not wax old and an incorruptible crown that does not fade away. Then, when the day comes, you can honor the Lord and glorify Him with all the things He has given you. You might say that the reason God rewards us is so we can use that reward to glorify Him! Of course, you have to have a reward in order to do that, don't you? After all, you can't cast your crown before the throne if you don't have a crown in the first place!

