

What Rewards Will We Receive?

Throughout the Bible we're told that God will reward those who faithfully serve Him. However, in spite of this teaching appearing in many passages, God doesn't actually tell us what our reward is going to be.

For example, Jesus taught that those who are persecuted for His sake will be greatly rewarded in Heaven:

Matthew 5:11-12: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

Luke 6:22-23: "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. 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."

What is that great reward going to be? He doesn't say. Now, God surely knows what it is (because He knows all things). He *could* tell us how the persecuted saints will be rewarded in the life to come. But He doesn't.

Jesus said that those who give to the poor in secret will be publicly rewarded by God:

Matthew 6:3-4: "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly."

How will God publicly reward them? He doesn't say.

Jesus also taught that those who pray in secret will be rewarded:

Matthew 6:6: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Once again, Jesus tells us that there will be a reward but He doesn't give any hints about the nature of that reward.

Likewise, Jesus taught that those who fast in secret will be publicly rewarded:

Matthew 6:17-18: "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

How will God publicly reward those who privately fast? Jesus doesn't say.

Jesus taught that there are other ways to earn rewards as well. In fact, even giving a cup of cold water to a child can earn a Heavenly reward:

Matthew 10:41-42: "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. 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."

Mark 9:41: "For whosoever shall give you a cup

of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward."

What is a prophet's reward? Jesus doesn't say. What is a righteous man's reward? Jesus doesn't tell us that either. What reward will be given to those who help children? Once again, Jesus doesn't explain that either.

Jesus also tells us that He will greatly reward those who do good to their enemies:

Luke 6:35: "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil."

But He doesn't tell us what that reward is going to be.

Interestingly, Jesus repeatedly tells us that *He's* the one who's going to give people their rewards. He even tells us that He's going to do it when He returns! This is mentioned in several places:

Matthew 16:27: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works."

Revelation 22:12: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

Jesus wants us to know that when He returns He's going to publicly reward those who faithfully served Him (*especially* those who were persecuted for His sake). However, He doesn't tell us *how* He's going to reward them. That part is kept secret.

The apostles also taught that God will reward those who serve Him, and they *also* didn't mention what the reward was going to be. For example, Paul taught that those who spread the gospel

will be rewarded, but didn't mention the nature of that reward:

1 Corinthians 3:8: "Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour."

1 Corinthians 9:16-17: "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me."

The apostles even taught that it's possible to *lose* rewards:

Colossians 2:18: "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,"

2 John 1:8: "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward."

Paul even taught that some people will receive rewards and others won't. Not everyone is going to get one. Some Christians will go away empty-handed on the day of judgment because they did nothing worthy of a reward. However, Paul doesn't tell us what rewards will be received by those who were faithful:

1 Corinthians 3:13-16: "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. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall

be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”

What Paul *does* do is tell us that Jesus is going to be the one who will give us our rewards:

Colossians 3:24: “Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.”

That means we know *who* is going to give us our rewards (the Lord Jesus Christ). We know *when* we’re going to receive them (when Jesus returns). What we don't know is *what those rewards will be*.

It seems that knowledge has been deliberately kept secret from the church. The reason I say that is because Jesus actually told His disciples how He was going to reward them for being with Him during His earthly ministry:

Matthew 19:28: “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.”

Luke 22:30: “That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

How is Jesus going to reward them? They’re going to reign over the twelve tribes of Israel during the millennium. That's their reward. Unlike us, they were told *in advance* what they would receive.

There's one other example where God told people in advance what their reward would be. God told Israel’s priests that in the millennium they would be given the most menial jobs in the millennial temple, because they worshiped idols and didn’t

faithfully serve Him:

Ezekiel 44:10-14: “And the Levites that are gone away far from me, when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; they shall even bear their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having charge at the gates of the house, and ministering to the house: they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister unto them. Because they ministered unto them before their idols, and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity; therefore have I lifted up mine hand against them, saith the Lord God, and they shall bear their iniquity. And they shall not come near unto me, to do the office of a priest unto me, nor to come near to any of my holy things, in the most holy place: but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed. But I will make them keepers of the charge of the house, for all the service thereof, and for all that shall be done therein.”

God also said that since the sons of Zadok remained faithful and did *not* worship idols, they would be given the best jobs in the millennial temple:

Ezekiel 44:15-16: “But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord God: They shall enter into my sanctuary, and they shall come near to my table, to minister unto me, and they shall keep my charge.”

As we can see, God can indeed tell people what their rewards are going to be if He chooses to do so. Yet God hasn't done that for the church. Instead He's kept it a secret.¹

Some people may object to this and point out that God told Abraham that *He* was his exceedingly great reward:

Genesis 15:1: "After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."

That is absolutely true. However, that's entirely different from what Jesus was talking about. If we die the moment after we're saved, before we have a chance to do any service for God at all, He will *still* be our exceedingly great reward. That's very different from what Jesus was talking about, which is rewards for those who faithfully served Him. God is the reward for *all* Christians, not just those who do something worthy of a reward.

Other people may point out that Jesus repeatedly promised to give everlasting life to those who believe in Him:

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

John 5:24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

¹The exception to this are crowns, which can only be earned by doing very specific things, and which are used to worship Christ in Heaven. Since I've already discussed crowns in detail elsewhere I'm not going to repeat that lengthy discussion here. As you can see from the verses that are quoted, the activities discussed in this paper don't have a crown as a promised reward.

John 6:40: “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

That’s true as well. However, that isn’t a reward for faithful service. If someone dies the moment after they become a Christian, God will still give them everlasting life even though they haven’t done any service for God at all. That’s entirely different from the rewards that God has promised to give for those who were greatly persecuted for His sake. (After all, God will raise *all* Christians from the dead, not just the martyrs.)

Jesus told us that those who suffered some type of loss for His sake will be greatly rewarded:

Matthew 19:29: “And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.”

As you can see, those who suffer for Him will receive *a hundred times* whatever they lost. However, Jesus doesn’t tell us what that reward will be. (It seems unlikely that those who lost their wife for the sake of Christ will receive 100 wives in the world to come. It’s more likely that their reward will be a hundred times greater than what they had to sacrifice.)

On top of all this, the apostle Paul told us that the things of this world are shadows of things to come:

Colossians 2:16-17: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.”

It seems that one day food, drink, and the Sabbath will be replaced by something far greater. That’s pretty exciting news!

What are those things going to be replaced with? *We're not told.*

Why is that? I think the answer is simple: it's because God wants us to take Him at His word. He wants us to trust Him even when He doesn't tell us everything. In other words, He wants us to have faith in Him:

Hebrews 11:6: "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

God wants us to sacrifice *everything* for Him and believe it will be worth it, *even though He hasn't told us how we'll be rewarded*. He wants us to love our enemies, give to the poor, fast and pray in secret, and live faithfully for Him even though we have no idea what we'll be given in return. God wants us to believe that it *will* be worth it, we *will* be rewarded, and our reward will be far greater than whatever we sacrifice.

The Lord wants our heart to be set on Heaven, even though the things of this life (like food and drink and marriage) *aren't going to exist there*, and God hasn't told us what's going to replace them. He wants us to believe by faith that the world to come *is* better, and is worth giving up everything to obtain.

This means we have to trust God in a really big way. We have to believe that He's right, that He's good, and that the things of the next life (which we can't see and don't know about) are vastly superior to the things of this life (which we can see and do know about). It means we must choose to give up the things we already have for things that are unknown to us. That's a major act of faith.

Some people don't trust God enough to take that step. If people don't take God seriously and don't believe that the rewards which He promised are worth having then they won't pursue them. Instead they'll chase after the things of this world and neglect the things of God. When the day of judgment comes they'll receive nothing, and will have no one but themselves to blame. At that point it will be too late.