

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Matthew 25:14-23

Sermon Title: "The Biblical Principle of Reward" (Making It Happen)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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{SLIDE 1} We talked about the biblical principle of ownership, in which we said that God owns us. God's owns everything. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it."¹ We talked about the biblical principle of responsibility, in which we said that we are parts of the larger Body of Christ, and we all have a ministry to take on. The biblical principle of accountability tells us to carry out that responsibility without fail, and then take on the next responsibility and the next, for God counts on us to serve him.

{SLIDE 2} The last biblical principle for our stewardship campaign is reward. Did you know that there is a reward for faithful service? Did you know that God awards us when we give all things over to God and serve God with joy and thanksgiving? Why shouldn't there be a reward for being good and faithful servants? It isn't like God is going to expect something of us, and when we finish it to say nothing, because God expects us to follow his command without gratitude. Of course, there is a reward for being God's disciples. God will compensate us with more than we can imagine.

{SLIDE 3} Before we go on, though, we need to clear something up. Reward doesn't means we get what we want. We do not make

¹ Cf. Psalm 24:1.

big bucks all of a sudden and get all the material possessions of our wildest dreams. We are not talking about the so-called Prosperity Gospel that some preachers spout about. That gospel is no gospel at all.

This is what I got from Wikipedia: “Prosperity theology (sometimes referred to as the prosperity gospel, the health and wealth gospel, or the gospel of success) is a religious belief among some Christians, who hold that financial blessing and physical well-being are *always* the will of God for them, and that faith, positive speech, and *donations to religious causes* will increase one's material wealth. Prosperity theology views the Bible as a *contract* between God and humans: if humans have faith in God, he will deliver security and prosperity.”² Oh, my, where to begin with this rubbish. Firstly, the Bible is not a contract. It is the word of God for the people of God. God’s word speaks of our sin and of Jesus’ sacrifice, and God’s hope to remove our sin and make us holy through the righteousness (perfect blamelessness) of Jesus. Secondly, “financial blessing and physical well-being are *always* the will of God?” Really? What about removing our sin? What about saving us from death? Aren’t they God’s chief will for us? Jesus didn’t die on a cross and then exit the tomb with a wad of cash in his pocket to give all of us. Jesus gives us righteousness, his blamelessness, and we are offered everlasting life through him. {SLIDE 4} Lastly, “*donations to religious causes* will increase one's material wealth.” Again, really? Who is making it rich, when these words are spoken? Not

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prosperity_theology (emphasis mine).

the average worshipper in the pew. Not the average person listening from their living room sofa. It is the so-called preacher. The person getting rich is always the one telling people to donate to his or her church or ministry. They will continue to steal money from innocent people, because they know how to persuade and swindle and use God for their own financial gain.

The so-called prosperity gospel is not gospel at all. It is unbiblical. It is hokum (garbage). It is sinful and dangerous.

{SLIDE 5} So, I am glad we cleared that up, because when we talk about reward from God, we are not dealing with a false message.

We are still going to talk about reward, and we will do that by looking at one of Jesus' parables. We have heard the parable before, and we may know how it ends. In fact, I told you how it ends last Sunday, and it wasn't pretty. However, what we are going to do is only look at the two servants who did well. They were faithful in their service, and they were rewarded.

{SLIDE 6} Jesus says that the kingdom of God is like a man going off on a long journey. We cannot pass over those words. One commentary that I read says that Jesus is setting up a situation, in which the master comes to call people to service and then he returns to see how they did.³ In other words, Jesus came to earth to save people from their sin and to give them ministry to carry out for God's kingdom, and upon his Second Coming he will see how much the

³ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: Volume 2, The Churchbook, Matthew 13-28*, cf. 902.

kingdom of God has flourished. So at the beginning we discover that our reward from God has nothing to do with having great wealth on earth. It has to do with a lifetime of faithful service to our God, and when all the serving is done God looks at what we accomplished. We do not receive material wealth and a longer life on this planet. We receive God's unending gratitude and a long life with him in heaven.

{SLIDE 7} Now three servants are mentioned in Jesus' parable. One is given five talents, one is given two talents, and one is given one. The master hands out the responsibilities and expects the servants to carry them out to completion. Notice that Jesus says that the master entrusts his property to these servants.⁴ The property doesn't belong to the servants; it belongs to the master, or in this case, to God. Whatever work they do is not for their benefit; it is for the benefit of God and God's kingdom.

For us, it could be money, it could be ministries, it could be time and talents: it all belongs to God to begin with, and God entrusts us to use it. God desires for his kingdom to flourish by the work we do. We are God's hands. We are God's feet. We are God's mind and heart and voice.

{SLIDE 8} One servant gets five of God's talents, and he works as long as he needs to work. The second servant gets two talents, and he too works as long as he needs to work. They have God's talents. They do different types of work, or ministry, because they are parts of the Body of Christ, and each has special skills to do

⁴ Cf. Matthew 25:14.

special things for God's kingdom.

Sometimes we like to think that the one with five talents must be more important than the one with two talents. He received more responsibilities than the others, so he must be some big important disciple. If you do the maths, the first servant gets 2.5 times the amount of talents than the other. We come to the wrong conclusion that he is better than the others, and that is the type of disciple we should be. Strive for the best. Make impressions on others and succeed. Grow in wealth and health, just like those so-called prosperity preachers. However, Jesus is not interested in mathematics, as he tells the parable. He illustrates that we all do not receive the same talents in order to do the same ministries. We are responsible for one or two things as God has given them to us, and we go out and make it happen. We use God's talents in God's ministries for God's kingdom. We work until all the working is done. Both servants have a lifetime of service in the name of the One who loves them, entrusts them, and will congratulate them in the end.

{SLIDE 9} This will happen eventually, the reward at the end. Jesus says in verse 19, "After a long time..." He is not specific about the time. It is a long time, but to one person a long time is several hours, while to another it is several years. Who knows? Jesus says "after a long time" to help us understand that he is coming back. Christ will return and he will see how the kingdom of God has flourished. Have we, his disciples, taken the talents from God and done what we needed to do with them? Have we squandered all that God has given us, buried it all in the ground and let it do nothing for

nobody? “After a long time” Jesus will come back and he will see.

{SLIDE 10} “After a long time” also tells us that any reward we receive will not be used for our own pleasure on earth. Any reward given is an everlasting reward to be used for eternity. The master finally returns when the master is ready to do so, and he wants to settle accounts with all his servants, specifically the three from the beginning.

Too often we jump right to the third servant and berate him for being such an awful person. We are setting that person aside and focusing on the first two. The one with five talents returns five more, making it ten talents. That servant has done everything that needed to be done. Not one talent was wasted – the servant did the most for God’s kingdom. We will discover the same happens for the second servant who received two talents. He now has two more, making it four altogether. Both have done excellent work. Both received time and talents and treasure from God, and they found ways to use them to serve others and share God’s message of salvation.

{SLIDE 11} We can almost guess how the master will respond: “Well done, good and trustworthy servants; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” Most of the time when we hear, “Enter the joy of your master or Lord or God,” that means going to heaven. That means entering eternity and receiving the fullness of salvation, where not a tear will be shed and no pain will be felt. Both servants enter heaven toward the end of Jesus’ parable, and there they will receive the fullness of their reward.

{SLIDE 12} What is it that they will do in heaven? Who knows? We get ideas from reading different passages of the Bible of what heaven will be like, but otherwise we do not know exactly what other ministry we may carry out in God's everlasting kingdom. What we do know this, though: God has given us talents, maybe one or two or five. Those talents involve the money in our possession, the time we have on our calendars, and the skills we have in our hands. We don't sit on them and let them rust, wear out, and fade away. We use them for God's kingdom here on earth. We give whatever money God calls us to give. We give whatever time God places in our hands. We give whatever talents God entrusts us to carry out. Everything is God's everything, so we might as well give it back to God.

{SLIDE 13} When we do, our reward is great. We receive the best reward that anybody could ever receive: an eternity with God, the holiest, most peaceful place with God, a deeper fellowship with our fellow brothers and sisters, in which we do not look at skin color or gender or height or weight, but we see a revitalized, resurrected person who served God just as we did. There is no more pain, there are no more tears. There is no more suffering what we are suffering today. There is no broken promises and broken expectations. No schedules and deadlines. When the serving is all done, then comes the reward. An eternity with God. Unending joy. Never-ending gladness.

C. S. Lewis describes the reward this way: if our lives were like a book, our lives on earth would only be the cover and title page, which amount to only two pages. Our lives in heaven, however, will

begin with “Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever and in which every chapter is better than the one before.”⁵

The biblical principle of reward. It is not a new car. It is not a larger bank account. It is a full life with our salvation being complete. Sin is gone. Death is swallowed up. When we reach the finish line of life, we cannot wait to hear our God say, “Well done, good and faithful servants,” and then that is when the real celebration begins.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 184.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news: God's mercy is poured out like a mighty river. God's grace flows like a never-ending stream. Whatever we have done and whatever we have failed to do are washed away. We are made clean. We are raised up. We are forgiven and set free in the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God, amen.