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Sermon Notes

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Living Boldly for Eternal Rewards

Matthew 19:27-30

Introduction: “He Is No Fool...” (though he may appear to be one!)

On October 28, 1949, a young college student at Wheaton College wrote these words in his diary:

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

His name was Jim Elliot, and he was meditating on the great value of appreciating heaven on earth... a heavenly mindset would enable anyone to transcend the illusions of temporary pleasures, temporary gains, temporary treasures... to transcend that illusion and make the sacrifices necessary to gain eternal pleasures, eternal gains, eternal treasures

The bottom line is this: every worldly possession and position and skill and talent and opportunity we have is TEMPORARY... entrusted to us by Almighty God for a short time

God wants us to USE those temporary riches for His Kingdom and with an eye to eternity

Jim Elliot put that concept into his famous line:

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

His future wife, Elizabeth Elliot, wrote of how Jim Elliot lived out that principle:

“Seven years later, on a hot Sunday afternoon, far from the dormitory room where those lines were written, he and four other young men were finishing a dinner of baked beans and carrot sticks. They sat together on a strip of white sand on the Curaray River, deep in Ecuador’s rain forest, waiting for the arrival of a group of men they loved, but had never met—savage Stone Age killers, known to all the world now as Aucas.”

Jim Elliot laid down his life that day—that which he could not keep—to gain many things that he could not lose:

- An eternity in the presence of God... A rich welcome from Christ...Eternal rewards given directly by God that will shine for eternity
- AND the eternal friendship and brotherhood of the same Auca Indians who killed him with a feathered spear on that sandy riverbed... through his sacrifice and that of

the others (including their wives) Stone Age killers were transformed to Christ-loving saints

Every person listening to me today has an array of earthly blessings entrusted to you by God... what are you willing to give up in order to follow Christ?

I. Peter's Desire for Rewards

A. Context: Rich Young Ruler

1. Seemingly the "perfect seeker": rich, young, influential, pious, seemingly humble, very respectful of Jesus
2. Fundamentally flawed

Vs. 16 Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

- a. He didn't understand "goodness"

"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good.

- b. Therefore, he didn't understand God
 - c. And he didn't understand who Christ was
 - d. Therefore, he didn't understand himself as a sinner
 - e. And therefore, he didn't understand salvation
 - f. At core... he was an idolater... and the real idol was HIMSELF
3. Jesus' stunning command... and the sad result

Matthew 19:21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Vs 22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

4. Jesus' equally stunning warning about the dangers of wealth

Vs. 23-24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

5. Lesson for us all: IDOLATRY is rampant and incredibly dangerous!!

B. Peter's Question

Matthew 19:27 Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

1. He is probably stunned at the interchange with the young man, and the new insight that material wealth was not the blessing they all thought it was
2. At the same time, he's heard Jesus make an amazing promise:

sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

3. He had "heavenly treasure" on his mind!!... so he asks his question "What then will there be for us?"
4. The apostles HAD made that sacrifice:
 - a. We did the very thing you asked that young man to do
 - b. We left our boats, our nets, our tax collector's booth, our families, our wives, our fathers, our livelihood, our hometowns, even the esteem of all of our neighbors... all of that to follow you
5. What then will there be for us??

C. Peter Unfairly Criticized

1. some have criticized Peter vigorously for this question... as though a desire for rewards is BAD... they say Peter's attitude is SELFISH... MERCENARY... GRABBY
2. BUT NOTICE: First, Peter is NOT just asking for himself... he asks on behalf of ALL of them
3. Secondly: notice that **Jesus does not criticize Peter's question**... though as we shall see, He seeks to modify Peter's understanding (and that of all His disciples) about HOW God will reward those who sacrifice everything to follow Jesus
4. Thirdly: Christ lays out overwhelming promises of lavish rewards in the Gospel... "eternal pleasures at His right hand"... even in THIS PASSAGE!!

II. Jesus Promises Rewards

Matthew 19:28-29 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or

children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

A. Eternal Rewards to the Apostles

1. First, the certainty of the reward: ***“Truly, I say to you...”***

- a. Jesus said ***“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will NEVER pass away...”***
- b. In other words, you can take this promise to a bank and cash it!!

Illus. Imagine a Royal Prince, during a war, captured... then escapes and is being chased; he makes his way through the territory of a neutral land, he stops at a farmhouse where a simple peasant lives with his family; he asks if he can borrow his family's one horse to ride on and get away from his pursuers; he writes the man a note, signs it, and seals it with his signet ring using the wax from a candle on the table; the note promises the man not only the return of the family horse, but also twenty gold pieces, royal clothing for himself and his whole family, and a permanent status as a friend of the Royal Household. All of that is written on the note and sealed with the Prince's Ring... so also Jesus, in his humiliation, is speaking of a future time when He will sit on a Royal Throne and reward all who saw Him by faith and served Him

2. Two types of rewards: those we get in this life, and those we get in the next

- a. Both rewards are mentioned by Christ, and are therefore significant
- b. The two rewards are NOT considered equivalent, however... the emphasis is always given to heavenly rewards

3. What eternal rewards are promised to the Apostles?

- a. First, note well the TIME of the reward: ***“At the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne...”***

- i) This word “renewal” is used only twice in the NT:
- ii) It literally means “re-creation” “palin” = again, “genesis” = creation
- iii) In Titus 3, it speaks of the transformation of a single soul by the gospel:

Titus 3:5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit

- iv) But here, it speaks of the transformation of the entire universe by the power of God

v) The prophets thus speak of a New Heavens and a New Earth

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

b. Note the occasion of their rewards is His own sitting on the throne

when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne...

i) Literally: "The throne of His glory..."

c. So what will the Apostles get?

you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

- Jesus will sit on the throne of the glory He deserves... and He will graciously grant others to sit on thrones based on His glory

Matthew 19:28 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

- So, the Twelve Apostles will have positions of great honor and power in the coming Kingdom:
- How exactly they "judge the twelve tribes of Israel" I do not want to speculate... some think it has to do with the Millennial Kingdom; others with positions of responsibility in the New Jerusalem

Future glory for the Apostles also established in the Book of Revelation:

Revelation 21:14 The wall of the [New Jerusalem] had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

So... in simple answer to Peter's question, Jesus predicts a glory far beyond anything they could have imagined... certainly far beyond anything they ever gave up!!!

B. Temporal Rewards to Anyone who Follows

1. Temporal = IN THIS WORLD... Luke 18 makes this plain

Luke 18:29-30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God ³⁰ will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

2. The quantity of this earthly reward is staggering:

Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much

3. The specific nature of the reward is clear... you get back what you gave up

Mark 10:29-30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields

4. How does this work?

i) People traveling from place to place in service to the Lord frequently experience the hospitality of the Body of Christ... similar to Elisha

2 Kings 4:8-10 One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. ⁹ She said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. ¹⁰ Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us."

ii) As honored brothers & sisters, they are adopted members of the family

iii) They have a new house they can call their own while they stay there

Romans 16:23 Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings.

iv) They have new fathers and mothers they can call their own as well:

Romans 16:13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.

v) This experience of hospitality is a rich unifier in the Body of Christ

Paul and the church at Tyre:

Acts 21:3-5 We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴ Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days.... All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray.

Summation:

These servants of the Lord, freed from materialism by the call of God, travel about in service to Christ and receive a hundred times what they left behind! They don't need to own anything... they are guests at the homes of brothers and sisters in Christ who know that they will receive an eternal reward just for putting them up.

This is the HUNDRED FOLD reward... now richly welcomed into a hundred different homes, richly honored with food, and love and hospitality and the genuine affection of brothers and sisters in Christ... to anyone who is willing to sacrifice these things to serve Christ

C. Eternal Rewards to Anyone who Follows

1. AND what else?

...and in the age to come, eternal life.

2. Let's not forget that!! An eternity in heaven
3. And what is eternal life?

John 17:3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

4. So, the true eternal reward is GOD HIMSELF!!!
5. But beyond that, a rich promise of reward in the presence of God

John 12:26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

III. Jesus' Conditions for Rewards

A. Faith: All must be done for the Kingdom of Christ

1. First, you have to realize that none of your service will ever be used to pay for sin... the Rich Young Ruler asked ***"What good thing must I do to get eternal life?"*** There is NO REWARD for any sinner who thinks that his life of sacrifice and service to God will MERIT IT, will DESERVE FORGIVENESS of sin

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

2. Secondly, to receive the promissory note, you have to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and will make good on His promises
3. You have to believe that the BEST is in the FUTURE; we do not look for our full reward IN THIS LIFE

Randy Alcorn: Two farmers owned farms side by side. One was a bitter atheist, the other a devout Christian. Constantly annoyed at the Christian for his trust in God, the atheist said to him one winter, "Let's plant our crops as usual this spring, each the same number of acres. You pray to your God, and I'll curse Him. The come October, let's see who has the

bigger crop.” When October came, the atheist was delighted because his crop was larger. “See, you fool,” he taunted, “what do you have to say for your God now?”

The other farmer replied, “My God doesn’t settle all His accounts in October!”

A life of sacrificial service to Christ may look outwardly foolish now, but it must be lived by faith in Christ’s word that He will reward faithful service.

B. Sacrifice

1. The Apostles had left everything to follow Christ

Matthew 19:28 you who have followed me...

2. So also verse 29 sets the same condition for everyone else:

Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake

3. Without the principle of sacrifice, there can be no rewards
4. To deserve the reward, a servant must be willing to give himself up to the will of the Master

C. Suffering

1. Mark’s gospel adds the word “persecutions” to the promise of those who have left everything to serve Him:

Mark 10:29-30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields-- and with them, persecutions)

2. We cannot expect to be richly rewarded if we’ve suffered nothing for Christ

Amy Carmichael, the missionary to orphans in India, wrote of this suffering, in the perspective of a heavenly accounting for a comfortable life

Jesus speaks to us:

*Have you no scar? No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
I hear you sung as mighty in the land.
I hear them hail your bright ascendant star.
Have you no scar?
Have you no wound?*

*Yet, I was wounded by the archers, spent, leaned me against the tree to die,
and rent -- by ravenous beasts that encompassed me
I swooned.
Have you no wound?
No wound? No scar?*

*Yes, as the master shall the servant be,
and pierced are the feet that follow Me,
but yours are whole.
Can he have followed far -- who has no wound? No scar?
Can she have followed far -- who has no wound? No scar?*

IV. Should We Desire Rewards?

A. Objections

1. It seems idolatrous
2. It seems mercenary
3. It seems... selfish

B. C.S. Lewis Quote

C.S. Lewis: “If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea... we are far too easily pleased.” [C.S. Lewis, *Transposition and Other Addresses*]

Lewis went on to argue that some people thought that the desire for reward made Christianity seem like a mercenary thing... but he said that’s only true if the reward does not connect with what you do to earn it

Illustration: A woman who marries for money is mercenary, because money is not the natural reward of love; but a woman who marries because she expects that the man who will become her husband will make her happy and bring her lasting joy in multiple experiences of love is not mercenary

In fact, it is WRONG to serve Christ and say “I don’t care what you give me” when He has made promises of lavish rewards... just as it is wrong for a person about to get married to say to the prospective spouse, “I don’t care if you make me happy!! In fact, even if I knew

our marriage would make me miserable, I would still marry you!!” WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU!!!!

We should say to Christ, “You have promised me eternal joy in your presence if I follow you... what will that be like? I am interested in that! I want it... I want as much happiness as I possibly can get in your presence!”

I think that is what Peter means when he says,

"We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

C. Simple Question: If desire for rewards is bad, why did Jesus promise them?

1. As Lewis says, “When we consider the UNBLUSHING PROMISES of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels...”
2. If we shouldn't want these rewards, why are they promised so often?

Matthew 5:11-12 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 6:3-4 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matthew 6:6 when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Revelation 22:12 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.

D. Rewards and Relationship

1. rewards are PRAISE FROM GOD

Matthew 25:21 "Well done, good and faithful servant...; enter into the joy of your master"

I take this to mean, “Let's share together the joy I had when you served me in that specific way...” It is very relational... not idolatrous at all; I want my Father to be pleased with me!!!

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

God will say “Well done, good and faithful servant...” about EVERYTHING done by faith in Christ

E. Conclusion: Our Desires Are TOO WEAK!!

1. The Bible says we should spend our whole lives storing up as much of this as possible

Matthew 6:19-21 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

2. We should want God to be pleased with the way we spent EVERY MOMENT and EVERY DOLLAR; and to praise us and share His joy with us

3. For this reason, Jonathan Edwards’ resolution:

22. Resolved, to endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness, in the other world, as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.

Next week: the mystery of God’s rewards:

Matthew 19:30 But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

V. Application

1. Delight: Set your hearts fully on the delight that comes from pleasing Christ
 - a. Do not say that the rewards mean nothing to you
 - b. Deeply desire to live a life worthy of honor on Judgment Day
 - c. As a matter of fact, this is what AMBITION and DRIVE and DESIRE are for... for the pleasure and honor that comes from God on Judgment Day
 - d. Set your hope fully on the future Kingdom of Christ... and deeply desire the honors and rewards He will give at that time, knowing that each of them come as intimate relationship with him
2. Set Desire on Heavenly Pleasure, Not Earthly Gain:
 - a. CS Lewis called us “halfhearted creatures fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us

b. Let's RISE UP, O CHURCH OF GOD... and HAVE DONE WITH LESSER THINGS... Let's GIVE HEART AND MIND AND SOUL AND STRENGTH to SERVE THE KING OF KINGS!!!

3. Embrace Sacrifice: by faith realize that present pain is eternal gain

- a. Assess your life... see if you have left anything to serve Christ; see if there has ever been anything you have given up to follow Christ
- b. Be willing to sacrifice your time and serve the Lord... when there's a Saturday outreach, be there; when there's an opportunity to witness at work, seize it; when you have a spiritual gift like service or hospitality or teaching, use it vigorously
- c. Be willing to suffer in sanctification, inwardly... you train yourself for outward service by putting sin to death inwardly... every time you deny your flesh at the moment of temptation, you gain strength and energy to serve Christ outwardly

4. START WITH YOUR MONEY

- a. The Rich Young Ruler had made his material wealth an idol
- b. You cannot begin to follow Christ fully if your spending habits are selfish and idolatrous
- c. Randy Alcorn's Forty Questions

Randy Alcorn: Forty Questions to Ask God about Giving

1. "Have You raised me up, with the financial assets and opportunities you've entrusted to me, for just such a time as this? (Esther 4:14) "
3. "What am I holding onto that's robbing me of present joy and future reward? What am I keeping that's preventing me from having to depend on You? What do You want me to release that could restore me to a walk of faith?"
4. "Do You want me to assume that each financial blessing You entrust to me is not intended to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving?"
6. "Where in the world (and in my community) do You want me to go, to see and participate in Christ-centered ministries meeting physical and spiritual needs?"
15. "If I don't give something now is it possible I may no longer have it to give later?"
16. "If I don't give something now is it possible I may die before I get a chance to give it later?" (If my desire is to give it away before I die, and I can't know when I'll die, shouldn't I give it now?)
17. "If I don't give it now, am I in danger of my heart getting further wrapped up in earthly treasure, rather than heavenly treasure?"

21. "Can You produce higher eternal returns from money I give to You today than Wall Street can? Can anything match your promise of a hundredfold return (ten thousand percent)?"

24. "Since You called the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-30) to give away all that He had and follow You in faith, is it possible You might call me to do the same? (If I assume the answer's no, am I really recognizing your lordship?)"

27. "Instead of asking 'Why *should* I give this away?' do You want me to ask 'Why *shouldn't* I give this away?' Should I put the burden of proof on *keeping* rather than on giving?"

28. "Am I hanging onto excess money as a backup plan in case You fail me?"

29. "Has Money become my idol? Are material assets competing with You for lordship over my life? Is generous giving your lifeline to rescue me from bondage, your leverage to allow me to tear down the idols? If materialism is the disease, is giving the only cure?"

33. "What am I doing to train my children to be generous givers-and not just donors but disciples?"

40. "Five minutes after I die, what will I wish I would have given away while I still had the chance? Help me spend the rest of my life closing the gap between what I'll wish I'd given then and what I'm actually giving now. Empower me to help others do the same. Would you, for your eternal glory?"

For the full list, see Randy Alcorn's website "Eternal Perspective Ministries" (www.epm.org) and "Forty Questions to Ask God"

5. Be Humble: recognize that God's way of assessing our lives and service may not be ours... "Many who are last will be first and the first last" is a warning that God alone is the final judge of a life well-lived

So, George Whitefield, the tireless preacher of the gospel, who crossed the Atlantic Ocean thirteen times in a sailing vessel in the 18th century and was a mighty instrument of revival everywhere he went, rejected any claim of his greatness or his lasting legacy... and he believed only Christ could properly judge his contributions

Knowing this very thing, Whitefield wanted this on his tombstone:

"Here lies George Whitefield; what sort of man he was the Great Day will discover"