

Section 6, Week 49
Home Page Summaries, Days 2-5

Day 2

God's Identity

Rewarder of Righteousness

Some have said that character is revealed by what you do when no one is watching. The cynic would respond by asking, "If no one is watching, who cares?" David, the king of Israel, cared. He revealed a profound truth about how God responds to what he sees. Read the amazing story of David's faithfulness in 1 Samuel 26:23-24 (p. xxx).

Day 3

My Identity

Rewarded for Reverence

What is it about puppies, kittens, lambs, and calves that delight us so? By instinct, they know no fear and no boundaries. Their joy is seemingly limited only by their energy. Interestingly, God compares his rewards for those who fear him with the joy of one of his baby creatures. Discover which one, and why the comparison, in Malachi 4:2 (p. xxx).

Day 4

Impact

The Timing of Rewards

The decision to save a dollar instead of spending it is a challenging lesson for children to learn. Developing a long-term perspective is a sure sign of maturity at any age. Even Christians have to face this issue: Do we seek the rewards of this life or the rewards of the life to come? Jesus gives the answer to that question in Luke 6:22-24 (p. xxx).

Day 5

Implication

Leaves of Gold

People compete for all sorts of prizes in the modern world: Trophies, recognition, money, praise, fame—even self-satisfaction. Rewards for faithfulness in reaching a goal are motivational; they help us endure the sacrifices of training and endurance. God also has a reward for his saints who endure to the end. Discover what it is in James 1:12 (p. xxx).

Section 6, Week 49, Day 1
1 Corinthians 3:11-15
373 words

The Promise Rewarding Faithfulness to Christ

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 It is probably safe to say that almost anything can be counterfeited. But for everything that is an imitation, a test exists which will reveal its true nature.

Take diamonds, for instance—still considered the universal symbol of wealth and luxury. Besides being beautiful, diamond is also the hardest mineralogical substance known to man. Its hardness rating of 10 is the standard against which all other minerals are measured. Diamond has many imitators: Strass, quartz, doublets, strontium titanate, and cubic zirconia. None but the last are good imitators. Good quality cubic zirconia, a mineral which crystallizes in a tetragonal form, can pass for diamond to the untrained eye—at least in appearance. Zirconia’s flaw? Its hardness rating is only 7.5. Put it on the end of a drill bit and it will disintegrate while a diamond remains unscathed.

Even Christians can be guilty of being less genuine than they appear—and sometimes it’s hard to tell the difference. Once when the Christians in Corinth were arguing over which apostle they thought was most worthy to be followed (1 Cor. 1:12), Paul silenced their debate with this revelation: God has a test in store for every believer that will reveal the genuineness of his or her work for Christ. A “Day” is coming in which all believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). God’s perfect judgment will be applied to the service and ministry that was built upon the foundation of faith in Christ. If the believer has built for the sake of the kingdom of God, he or she will be rewarded for faithfulness and spiritual genuineness. But if what was built does not survive the “fire” of God’s test for faithfulness, it will be consumed, along with the reward the believer might have received. All true believers in Christ will be saved, but not all true believers will be rewarded. God’s test will tell.

There is only one way to prepare for such a test, be proved genuine, and receive your reward: Live each day fully submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ. If you have built using “gold, silver, [and] costly stones,” God’s fire will reveal it, not destroy it—and you will have your reward.

God’s Promise to You: “I truly desire to reward you for your faithfulness to Christ.”

Section 6, Week 49, Day 2
1 Samuel 26:23-24
374 words

God's Identity
Rewarder of Righteousness

1 Samuel 26:23-24 Surely no person in the Old Testament is more cherished than David, the shepherd-king of Israel. We are granted the broadest exposure to his life than any other figure except Moses. Our heart aches for him, thousands of years after the fact, when we read of his moral failure with Bathsheba and her husband. An earlier glimpse into David's life, long before his encounter with Bathsheba, makes that latter incident all the more puzzling. David had already proved that he knew better.

Saul was the first king anointed to serve over Israel. He was chosen by God and anointed by Samuel—but failed to remain obedient to the Lord. As a result, David, the youngest son of Jesse, was anointed by Samuel to be Saul's successor. After David was anointed, but before his accession to the throne, he served in the court of Saul. During this time, David's skills and exploits stimulated intense jealousy in Saul, so much so that David had to flee for his life. Saul pursued him on one occasion into the wilderness where David and his men observed Saul and his soldiers sleeping in their camp. David crept into Saul's camp and took Saul's spear and water jug to prove that he had been there but had spared the life of God's anointed. In this encounter, David displayed a profound understanding of God's role as rewarder and punisher.

David had earlier refused to allow his men to kill Saul, explaining that God would visit a similar fate on the murderer (1 Sam. 26:9-10). On the other hand, David knew that if he acted righteously by not harming Saul, God would reward him "for his righteousness and faithfulness." In other words, David illustrates what Paul, centuries later, told the Christians in Galatia: "A man reaps what he sows" (Gal. 6:7). It is a principle operative in God's spiritual economy that "every man" is rewarded for his actions.

David suffered greatly through the death of his son for his actions with Bathsheba, actions which he knew God would repay. But God also rewarded David's righteousness and faithfulness with the life of a greater son, Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:1). There are rewards in time and eternity for those who are faithful to God.

God's Promise to You: "I am the observer, and rewarder, of your faithfulness and righteousness."

Section 6, Week 49, Day 3
Malachi 4:2
366 words

My Identity
Rewarded for Reverence

Malachi 4:2 Sometimes metaphors in the Bible are lost on modern generations—especially images that have to do with agriculture and animals (witness the proliferation of “petting zoos”!). But in the biblical world, especially the Old Testament, such images are common and instructive.

Anyone who has spent time on a farm has spent time smiling at young calves at play—especially when they first come bounding out of the barn. On legs that seem semi-locked at the knees, they almost bounce across the fields as they frolic in their new-found freedom. A cool morning, unlimited pasture, nowhere to go and nothing to do but eat, frolic, eat, frolic, eat and frolic some more. Complete freedom mixed with boundless cow-joy is the life of the calf. Watching calves play brings one kind of smile, and reading about them in God’s own words brings another.

Through the prophet Malachi, God said that a day is coming that is a day of judgment—the day of the Lord (Mal. 4:1, 5). More than a 24-hour period (though it will happen at a time and place) the day of the Lord is that final culmination of events in which God judges and rewards humanity. While it is a day to fear for the “arrogant and . . . evildoer” (Mal. 4:1), those who have feared (revered) the LORD will be like calves released from the stall! The “sun of righteousness” (a metaphor for God; Isa. 60:1, 19) will warm the fields of heaven, and the righteous will go out and “leap like calves” in the pure pleasure of boundless bliss and fenceless freedom. Would God have pictured those who fear him as frolickers in heaven if he himself was not happy for us? It is a sign of his great love, and the rewards that he has in store for those who have revered his name, that he speaks in such endearing terms about the happiness our future holds.

If you have never seen a calf come frolicking out of its stall into the fields, find one to watch. The smile you cannot stop is the smile that will never stop when you enjoy the rewards God has for you in heaven.

God’s Promise to You: “It gives me great joy to plan great joy for those who revere my name.”

Section 6, Week 49, Day 4
Luke 6:22-24
373 words

Impact

The Timing of Rewards

Luke 6:22-24 A popular television commercial in years past had a burly auto mechanic telling his hapless customer, “You can pay me now or you can pay me later.” That is, you can either pay for preventive maintenance up front, or pay for repairs after the car breaks down—but you will pay. The underlying message was that the wise will be rewarded for their foresight with a car that lasts much longer.

Jesus Christ used a somewhat similar line of thought when teaching his disciples about rewards for faithfulness in the kingdom of God. He stepped back from the details of the spiritual life and painted a two-panel picture: There is “this present age” and “the age to come” (Mark 10:30). Should a person seek to gain comfort and reward in this age, there will be no reward in the age to come. But, should a person choose not to enjoy the comforts and rewards which this age can offer, he or she will enjoy ample rewards in the age to come.

Take faithfulness to Christ that results in persecution in this age. Certainly, being persecuted or martyred for one’s faith is not very “rewarding” in the vocabulary of this present age. But should one be willing to suffer persecution for Christ, “Rejoice . . . because great is your reward in heaven.” Those who choose the pleasures of this world over Christ “have already received [their] comfort” and should expect no reward from God. Jesus also offers other examples of taking our rewards now or taking them later: Acts of righteousness such as giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting (Matt. 6:1-6, 16-18). If we do all of those good works in front of people in order to gain their praise, then their praise is our reward. But if we do them in secret so that only God knows about them, then he will reward us later—sometimes even in this age (Mark 10:30).

God has built choices into the fabric of our lives. While the temptation is great to choose the immediate rewards of this world, God’s rewards for our faithfulness will be far sweeter. Rewards now or rewards later? In the end, only one will cause us to “leap for joy.”

God’s Promise to You: “Nothing you do for me in secret will go unrewarded in heaven.”

Section 6, Week 49, Day 5
James 1:12
370 words

Implication
Leaves of Gold

James 1:12 Regardless of how their success rewards them later in life, during the games Olympic athletes are supposedly motivated by a purity of devotion to their sport. While their gold, silver, and bronze medallions are modest rewards, they make the original Olympic “medals” look pale in comparison.

From the 8th to the 3rd centuries B.C., the Olympics developed into a showcase of self-discipline and athletic skill. The human body, tuned to perfection, was a thing of great glory to the Greeks. As a result, Greek athletes punished themselves for the privilege of winning, and wearing . . . a crown of leaves! That’s right. Years of pain produced nothing but a garland of oak, ivy, parsley, myrtle, or olive leaves—a prize that would wither and shrivel within days of its attainment. The image of a crown of leaves became a well-known symbol of the prize for endurance, devotion, and self-discipline in the ancient world. And it became a point of contrast for the New Testament writers.

The apostle James told his readers, who were undergoing spiritual rather than athletic tests, that if they persevered they would receive, not a crown of leaves, but the crown of life. In fact, the anticipation of enjoying life in heaven forever should make them “blessed,” or contented, in the midst of their trials. For their trials would eventually cease, but eternal life will never cease. It was for that reason that Paul contrasted the Greek athlete’s crown—a crown that would not last more than a few days—to the crown God gives “that will last forever” (1 Cor. 9:25). Likewise, Peter called the reward for faithfulness given to church leaders a “crown of glory that will never fade away” (1 Pet. 5:4). But regardless of the differences in the value of the crowns, saints and athletes do have this in common: Crowns are given only to those who endure and win the race.

When your spiritual life becomes a test of endurance, think of the crown of everlasting life God gives to all who persevere. If it helps to picture an athlete’s crown, make sure you picture it with leaves of gold—a crown of the highest value that will never fade away.

God’s Promise to You: “Those who endure to the end I reward with life that never ends.”