



Bible Study, February 8, 2023

Series: The Discipleship Training of Jesus Christ | A Study of Matthew 5-7

Lesson 5: Earning Heaven's Reward Points

Pastor Reginald Rogers, Facilitator

Introduction

Whenever I make an occasional stop at a MacDonald's Restaurant Drive-Thru it never fails that the order taker will begin by asking me, "Do you have any reward points today?" This is a popular thing with some restaurant chains. For instance, I signed up for reward points with Red Lobster restaurants, and every time I order food from there, I earn reward points. When I have enough points, I can get a free featured item from the menu in exchange for the points I earned. Before restaurants and various businesses began offering reward points in exchange for goods and services, heaven was offering reward points (*my emphasis*) for living and practicing righteousness. Jesus Christ made this known to His disciples as He taught them. Today's lesson is another look at how the heavenly Father rewards the practice of righteousness before Him.

The Scripture Reading | Matthew 6:1-4; 19-24

¹ "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

³ 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.

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

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

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light.

²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.



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Examining the Text

Last week, I mentioned that our teaching from Matthew 5:21 to Matthew 7:27 are examples of what Jesus told the disciples about true righteous living. I remind you that His audience is the first four disciples that He chose and a multitude of people from all over the Galilean region that was listening to Him teach. This included the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law. As we look at our teaching moment tonight, we will see how important genuine generosity is when maintaining righteousness that surpasses self-righteousness.

1 "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Believers Must Give to GOD'S Causes

When it came to the generosity that was practiced in Ancient Israel, what were the people accustomed to seeing and doing under the leadership of the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law? The Old Testament has much to say about giving to the needs of the poor. So, those living under the rule of those religious leaders should not have been ignorant of the word of truth unless they were not taught the truth by those leaders. Let us examine closely some of the Scriptures written in the Old Testament.

Written in the Law is the following about giving to the needs of the poor: *Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this, the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.* [Deuteronomy 15:9-10] Israel was commanded by the LORD GOD to take care of the needy and the poor. He wanted them to be generous and not tight-fisted when doing this. Being tight-fisted was a sure sign of a grudging heart and a stingy soul (*my emphasis*).

The Book of Proverbs has several verses that encourage generosity towards the poor. One passage that strongly encourages giving is the following: *One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.* [Proverbs 11:24-25] Compare Paul's letter that was written to the Corinthian church to the Old Testament passages: *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* [2 Corinthians 9:7] Do you see the similarities and how the word of GOD is consistent between the Old and New Testaments?



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The poor, the needy, the widows, and the orphans are all a part of GOD'S causes. He is a giver and expects His believers to be like Him. After all, this is His will and true righteousness seeks to do the will of the Father. What is the proof in the word of GOD that He is a cheerful giver? Read *John 3:16-17*.

1. What key point can be learned about living and giving generously to GOD'S cause?

² "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

Believers Must Practice Christ-like Discipline When Giving

What does being Christ-like mean to you? I would say that this means the heavenly Father expects us to be like His beloved Son by giving and being generous when doing it. It is the expectation for every believer to be like the Son. Jesus taught the disciples that when they give do not make it a big fanfare. Do not blow the trumpets, do not throw the confetti, and do not have a "Main Street" parade. This is putting it in contemporary terms. Jesus was making a point about the self-righteous Pharisees and Teachers that did these things in the synagogues and streets so that people would honor them.

Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites. What is a hypocrite? A hypocrite is an actor or a pretender that plays the part to hear the applause of the audience. The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law did this to gain the approval of those watching them. By doing this they had already earned their earthly reward.

For the disciples, the expectation was for them to be generous in their giving. The Lord encouraged them to support the needy as a cause of GOD. Once again, Jesus was issuing a commandment that should have been practiced during ancient times in Israel. Consider the following: *There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.* [Deuteronomy 15:11] Does this verse sound familiar? Jesus stressed this point to His disciples during His final days on earth, "The poor you will always have with you..." (CF: *Matthew 26:11*) So, what is the expectation for the church today? The church should be merciful and demonstrate acts of mercy to others in need.



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2. What would be some general rules to follow when practicing generosity?

³ 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.

Believers Must Protect Against Bad Intentions to Receive Their Reward

Practice giving not to be seen for the approval of people, but for the approval of GOD. This is the heart and soul of Jesus' teaching to His disciples and church. It is difficult for a person not to want approval for the good works being done in ministry. It is a natural thing to want validation for the work that is accomplished. But Jesus warned do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Why? Because Jesus' analogy emphasizes giving in secret as often as possible. Also, do not make it a habit to tell others what cause was supported and how much was given. The fact that GOD knows about it is more than enough. Paul the Apostle wrote the following to the Church at Rome: *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, by the faith God has distributed to each of you.* [Romans 12:3] Let us make it a good intention to practice giving in secrecy.

Another good intention is to forget what you give to avoid constantly thinking about it. Such a practice is a continuous replay of your giving and does not glorify the heavenly Father. The Lord's goal for His disciples is to honor the heavenly Father with our giving and let the Father bless us with His reward. Any more than this is pride, self-glory, or such as these. Let us practice the following verse: *Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.* [Proverbs 4:23] There are other rewards given by the heavenly Father for prayer done in secret and fasting that is done in secret. We will not examine those examples in our study tonight (CF: Matthew 6:5-18).

3. Why is seeking the approval of others a threat to those serving in ministry?

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and



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vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Believers Must Store Up Their Treasures in Heaven

Practicing true righteousness is still the theme that Jesus is teaching His disciples. In these next two examples, He is instructing the disciples to cherish the things in heaven more than on earth. This first example shows that He wants them to continue letting heaven be the ultimate place to live. Jesus contrasted this by telling them not to store earthly treasures where problems will exist. Why? Because of the distractions that physical accumulations of things cause. The Lord's emphasis is on the deterioration of these physical things. Moths can eat up fine clothing. What about vermin? Typically, wild animals destroy crops, termites destroy any kind of dampness or moisture-laden wood, and people ransack neighborhoods. This last one is also the thieves that break in and steal. Are you beginning to see the distractions that earthly treasures create?

Jesus told the disciples that the best way for them to live was living on less and give more to the heavenly kingdom (CF: Luke 12:33). This would be the true insurance policy against the things that destroy earthly possessions. Now, when Jesus taught in His parable about the hidden treasure, He said that heaven was the hidden treasure discovered in a field. When a person finds it, he will hide the treasure again. Then, he will sell everything he has to buy the field (CF: Matthew 13:44). When you hear words like this you meditate on what heaven must be like. Finally, in this example, Jesus told His disciples that where their treasure is, their hearts will be too. What is a person pursuing when he or she spends time, energy, and resources to gain a prize possession? How much of the heart is drained during the pursuit? A person cannot separate his or her heart from such a matter.

4. When Jesus calls believers to not store up treasures on earth, what is He wanting them to do?

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! 24 "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Believers Must Serve GOD and not Money

This is the second example of encouraging the disciples to look toward heaven, not upon the earth. How were they going to do this? Jesus wanted them to get truly focused and once again know that He wanted them to be generous. The eye is the body's lamp, probably indicating a

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singleness of purpose. A person with a clear eye is looking with singleness of purpose to doing the will of the Father just like Jesus. This is what Jesus proclaimed in the following verse: *Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."* [John 5:19] It should be the goal of every disciple to do the will of the Father without changing or doubting in the mind. By doing this, Jesus said the whole body is full of light. This is GOD'S radiant light.

The opposite of this is an eye that is unhealthy signifying not being focused. Jesus did not want the disciples to be greedy or stingy in their giving. This would be a sure sign that darkness was present in their hearts. A person with an unclear eye does not focus on what GOD wants according to His will. But that person is only concerned with doing their own will. There is more self-reliance rather than GOD'S dependence. There is more wandering in darkness and being self-seeking rather than walking in the light and seeking GOD'S revelation. Consider the following verses about this subject of selfishness: *Do not eat the food of a begrudging host, do not crave his delicacies; for he is the kind of person who is always thinking about the cost. "Eat and drink," he says to you, but his heart is not with you.* [Proverbs 23:6-7]

So, Jesus concludes His teaching on generosity by telling His disciples that no one can serve two masters. Here, He is not talking about serving two bosses in the workplace. This happens when a person works more than one job. But the comparison is to an enslaved person who has one owner. And Jesus was saying that the enslaved could not be partially owned by multiple owners. He goes on to say that the enslaved person will hate one master and love the other or be devoted to one master and despise the other. In the Lord's analogy, there is only one master either GOD or money. Why? Because the power of money control and influence people keeping them from coming into the glorious light and kingdom of heaven. Money alters the thinking of a person who attempts to gain riches and pleasures in this world while trying to please GOD. It does not work. When it comes to riches, the true master is GOD and riches must serve. When I say this, I mean to serve our needs and wants. If you want heaven's rewards, then honor and please GOD just like the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. Tell of some ways you have seen the power of money negatively control a person's financial or career endeavors? What was the outcome?

Endnotes

1. Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture is taken from *The Holy Bible, New International Version®*, NIV®, Copyright©1973, 1978, 1984. 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Biblica, Inc.® All rights reserved worldwide.