

## Matthew 6:1 - Don't Lose Your Reward

As I'm sure you guys know, we live in the information age. There is so much information and news and data that it's easy for us to get bogged down and avoid all of it because it's overwhelming. So websites have turned to having sensational headlines to grab our attention. We call those headlines "click-bait." The headline is so compelling to us we almost have to click it.

"You'll never believe how one man lost 50lbs in a month."

"3 quick ways to get a free vacation to Hawaii."

"The simple 5 minute meal your whole family will love."

Click-bait either tells us of some amazingly great thing we can get or some terribly, awful thing we can avoid - usually with a simple solution. And that perks out attention.

If we had never heard of Jesus before and saw **Matt. 6:1** on as a headline on the internet we would probably think it was clickbait. We get used to passages in the Bible so they tend to lose their punch. But this is a sensational verse. If it were click bait it would be:

"The one thing you must do to have a reward in heaven."

"The simple mistake one lady made that lost her eternal rewards."

"The shocking truth about rewards in heaven you never knew."

Now, clickbait usually has a negative connotation. The headline promises or threatens more than the article can deliver. But here, Jesus makes a sensational claim, a sensational threat. But this threat is not hollow. It's not all sizzle and no steak. It is sober and alarming.

Here's the threat: You can follow Jesus all your life doing all the right things, but if you do them for the wrong reason you will have zero reward in heaven. You might get heaven - that's a good thing - but you will have no reward once you're there.

Just to be clear, salvation is all of grace all through faith - no works. But for those who are saved, there is a hope of reward in heaven. And Jesus is talking about the reward in heaven, not salvation. He's saying we might get to heaven, but have no reward there.

It's like a kid being told he's going to Disneyland in a few months. So he's packing and preparing and planning every ride. He's excited to see Mickey, the star of the show. And he gets to Disneyland and is told: you can sit on the bench next to the entrance. What about Space Mountain?! What about the Teacups?! You're in, but no reward.

Now if you're like me, you're thinking: I'm just happy to get in. Well, that's true in one sense. But who goes to Disneyland just to sit at the entrance? What Christian wants heaven with no reward? And as Randy Alcorn says, it's false humility to say we want no reward. Why is that? Because Jesus says a life of following him is based on this principle of reward. The Bible talks about crowns as rewards, and ruling in different ways in heaven as rewards, having differing levels of authority.

Heavenly rewards are a big part of our motivation for following Jesus. Are we just following Jesus just so other people see us and praise us? Or are we following Jesus so that we are pleasing our Father? And in that discussion he mentions rewards - over and over and over. **Read 5:11-12, 46, 6:1-6, 16-18**

And although **Vss. 19-24** don't say the word "reward" specifically, Jesus makes it clear there is a way to invest in the Kingdom in order to get a return - a reward.

The word he uses over and over is μισθός - it means payment or reward work done well. And all through chapter 6 Jesus will contrast rewards.

Either you get a reward from: The Father or from people. In heaven or on earth. By actions that are unseen or seen.

This idea of reward is seen all over the Bible. In fact, Jesus doesn't even defend the idea of reward, he just assumes we know what he means.

**Look at 1 Cor. 3:10-17.** Here Paul is talking about how we don't need to be enamored with our favorite leaders or preachers because we are all rewarded based on our own station in life. Some plant the gospel, some water. Some lay a foundation, some build on the foundation. The only issue is are we doing our job well or are we messing around?**Read 10-17**

So you remember when Solomon was building the Temple for God? It was covered in gold and jewels and all these amazing things. It would have been weird if Solomon built God's temple with straw or hay. Solomon used the best stuff.

Here, Paul takes that metaphor and says actually we Christians are God's Temple. And we're to be building each other up with the very best things. Some people build each other up with worthless things - like wood, hay and stubble. Other people tear the body of Christ down - they'll face God in judgement. But we should be building each other up eternally with the very best stuff, investing in one another spiritually, serving each other, so on. And as much as we do that there is a reward for us. **Read 14**

We are rewarded at the judgment when we stand before God. The judgement is depicted as this fire that purifies the Temple and burns up all the non-sense that we've built up in life. Only what is eternal will stand. And whatever is left standing - all the things we've done to build each other up for eternity - that's what Paul says we'll be rewarded for.

**2 Cor. 5:10:** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

That's what the parable of the talents is all about. God gives us talents - opportunities - to serve him in this life. Some get 5, some 2, some 1 according to our ability. So if you're a 1, invest it. If you're a 4, invest it. So that when you stand before Jesus you will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And then Jesus determines what our place in heaven is based on our work. "You have been faithful over little, I will set you over much." So it doesn't matter if you have 1 or 2 of 45 talents for the Kingdom. Be faithful with what you have and Jesus will reward you accordingly.

**Look at Rev. 22:12-13.** This is Jesus's promise of his return. He's coming back! And that's a really good thing. When I was younger I think I wanted to do some things before Jesus came back so I was never all that excited about his return. I think the older we get, the closer to Jesus we get, the more he changes our heart and we just want off this rock. But notice his promise here. He is coming back, but that's not all. **Read 12-13**

He's coming back with his μισθός - his reward. NIV says exactly that. When Jesus comes again, there's a final settling of accounts that is going to happen. A final analysis of our lives. A final squaring up. A final giving out of reward.

If you're not a believer, this passage is scary because he's going to square up with you too. And it's not going to go well.

If you're just messing around in your Christian walk, this passage is also fearful. Maybe you don't want Jesus to come back just yet because you know you haven't been diligent to serve him the way you know you should.

Can I tell you something? This passage isn't meant to be a threat. It's meant to be a reminder and an encouragement to faithfulness. Our gracious Lord Jesus who gave up absolutely everything to save us from our sin is also so incredibly gracious that he's coming back to give us more than just heaven. He's coming back to give us more than just eternity in his glorious presence - though that would be enough.

He's coming back to give us rewards for serving him well. And just as his mercy and forgiveness has been lavish and amazing, his rewards are lavish and amazing. Do you realize that the amazing grace we have in Jesus didn't stop at the cross. And it won't stop once we're in glory?

**Turn to Eph. 2:4-7.** By the way, one way we know the reward is not heaven itself is because the word means payment for services rendered. If heaven itself is the reward then Jesus is teaching salvation by works. He would be explicitly teaching that heaven is a payment you receive for doing righteous things. But we know heaven is not a reward that we've earned.

**Rom. 4:4-5:** Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

We usually cite **Eph. 2:8-9** about salvation. But there's this little nugget tucked into that whole section that talks about God's grace toward us, not just despite our sin, not just at the cross, but for all of eternity future. **Read**

Did you get that in **Vs. 7**? In the coming ages: for all of eternity future - God's is going to continue to show us more and more his grace and kindness toward us because of Jesus.

Part of that kindness toward us for all eternity is rewarding us for our works here in this life. If that makes you uncomfortable at all, I can understand. "Should we really be motivated to serve God by rewards? Shouldn't we just do it because we do it?" To quote John Piper: those two concepts are not at odds. We can serve because we love him and because we know there will be reward.

I worked outside sales for a while and part of my compensation was salary, part was commission. I liked commission because it was a reward for hard work. I got a big check every quarter. Now, imagine my boss coming up after handing me that check and saying: "Jason, you're selfish, you're just working here because you want the reward." He wouldn't ever say that. Why not? Because my reward and his success are not opposed to each other. They are intricately tied to each other. The more I am motivated for my own joy, the more he wins.

That's how it is with God. The more we strive to serve the Kingdom for his glory knowing he will reward us, the more he is glorified and honored. It's this upward spiral of reward and glorification and joy in God forever and ever. The whole Bible points to this principle of reward for working for the Kingdom basking in the joy of that reward given by the merciful Father for all eternity.

**Heb. 12:1-2** - Jesus went to the cross, not because it was his duty, but because of the joy set before him! He was looking for the reward on the other side of the cross. And then the author of Hebrews says: Look at Jesus: do that! That's how you're going to have a fruitful life. Look forward to the joy in the next life, the reward that's there!

C.S. Lewis in the Last Battle (Chronicles of Narnia) alluding to heaven: All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

Going back to the illustration from earlier: It's like a kid going to an ever-evolving Disneyland where the rides get better and better every minute. The moment you get off of one ride, 5 better ones are created - with no lines. The food is ever evolving in deliciousness. The firework display somehow gets brighter and brighter. and bigger and bigger. The joy that you feel wells up and up where the overflowing joy you felt just last year feels like utter depression compared to the ever growing joy you feel now. And next year your joy will be a hundred fold again - forever and ever and ever.

Only it's not Disneyland, it's heaven so it's infinitely better in every way and yet somehow it keeps growing in amazement as we gaze at the Lord and bask in his grace and enjoy the eternal rewards he has graciously given us for our work here. Come Lord Jesus with your reward!

And yet Jesus says there is a way that all these amazing rewards he's coming with and we can enjoy in ever increasing magnitude for eternity will be gone. Oh we might get in, but no reward. Now, wouldn't you want to know the thing that might take your reward?

It's not click bait. It's real. **Look** back at **Matt. 6. Read 1**

What will destroy our reward? It's a life that is dedicated to righteous living so that **men** will praise us, rather than the Father. It's someone whose primary purpose for following Jesus and living a righteous life is so that they will hear the praise of men. So that their social standing will increase. Or, turned around, they fear that if their life is not dedicated to Jesus religious people will think badly of them.

Jesus says our motivation for living the Christian life matters. **Why** we do something is just as important as **what** we do. Jesus will go on to say we can give to the poor, pray in the streets, fast from food, spend all kinds of money on the Kingdom but if we're doing it to please men - so that they will praise us - there's no reward for that. Not from the Father anyway.

This danger is often called the fear of man. It's living our lives out of the fear that people will judge us. So we do righteous things because we want people to say "Hey, you're a good pray-er" or "Man, that was awesome how you gave that family some money." Or "Wow, you're really spiritual - you fasted the other day." "Look at her, she's a godly example." Here, Jesus touches on 4 dangers of man pleasing.

1st Danger of man pleasing is a constant battle.

We get that from the very first word in this verse: beware! The word in the original carries the idea that someone needs to be on constant alert, continually be careful, continually be watchful. It's like walking through the Costco parking lot with small children. You're constantly looking around to make sure they're safe, no cars are coming, everyone is together.

In fact, this is the only command in the verse. Watch out! Be on guard for this. Let's be honest, we don't always sit down and think through why we do what we do. I'm reading through a book right now called *When People are Big and God is Small* and it's all about the fear of man. In the book Ed Welch gives some clues that maybe we're living our life so that people praise us rather than God (pg. 15-16):

- Are you over-committed and find it hard to say no to people or your kids?
- Are you a "people pleaser?"
- Are you afraid that if people found out who the real you is they would reject you?
- Do you second guess decisions you made because of what other people might think?
- Are you easily embarrassed? Do you just want to blend in, be a wall flower that no one notices?
- Are you jealous of other people? Or do you look down on other people as inferior?
- Do you hold back on telling others the truth about something because it might ruin your friendship?

These are all symptoms that we fear men rather than God.

"I don't have to watch out because I don't care what people think." Yeah you do. You're probably more susceptible to this than people who acknowledge it. Everyone is susceptible to the fear of man, even rebels. Rebels aren't rebels because they don't fear people or love praise. Rebels are rebels because they love the praise of men who are not in power.

You ever notice how rebel dictators talk about the ills of power, then once they get in power they never want to let it go? You know why? They are scared to death someone might kill them. Kim Jung Un - the rebel dictator of North Korea - demands that people worship him. He loves the praise of men. And he fears man - they're the different sides of the same coin.

Everyone is susceptible to the fear of man. Jesus says we all have to be on guard for this.

2nd Danger of man pleasing is that it is hard to tell. Read 1

You ever seen those old western movies where there's the main street that the cowboys ride down. You've got the bank and the bar and all these buildings that line the street? Well, in real life only one or two of them are real buildings, right? Most of those are just the front face of a building propped up by poles in the back. But from the outside, you can't tell if it's real or not.

Jesus says that's how it is with fear of man. It's not like fear of man shows itself in obvious sin - although it can. Jesus says beware of practicing what? Righteousness. Which means that a person who does something because they fear God might be doing the exact same thing as the person who fears man.

It's like the western movie: some of the buildings are real, some are not but they look exactly the same.

This is why as a church we can't just assume people are doing okay because outwardly they look good. Remember when Samuel went to Jesse's house to anoint the next king of Israel and he's seeing all of David's older brothers and they all look good and strong and Samuel's like "It's got to be one of these boys!" What did God say? These aren't the one "For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (1 Sa 16:7).

It's the heart that matters. It's the heart God cares about.

I remember a pastor telling me a story of a guy in his congregation who came to church on a regular basis with his tithe check in his front shirt pocket. The dollar amount line was always on top facing out so everyone could see what he gave - it wasn't an accident. One morning the pastor actually took the check from the guy's pocket and flipped it around and put it back in the pocket. Giving is good. But why was he giving? Who was he trying to impress?

On the other end of that spectrum I've seen where churches pass the bag for the offering and people will put their hand in the bag even though they have nothing to put in there just so they look like they're giving something. Why do they do that? Fear of man.

Do we pray differently in public than we do in private?

Do we speak differently to our family in public than in private?

Do we drop hints at the good things we do, or accomplishments we've made, or how we've served?

It's the fear of man. It's man pleasing because it brings us a type of reward. **Read 2, 5**

And here's the thing: it's not wrong for people to see us doing good things. **Read 5:14-16**

God wants us to do righteous things. He wants people to see our good deeds. But the goal is so that people go: Wow - God is glorious! Not so that they say: Wow - I am glorious!

"Well, if my heart isn't right should I just go sin instead?" Of course not. That doesn't make any sense. You know what Jesus wants? He wants us to do our righteous deeds to please God. Which means that sometimes people won't be pleased. Sometimes people will accuse us of *un*righteousness. But what matters most of all is that our chief goal in all that we do is to please God no matter what comes.

3rd Danger is the praise of people is satisfying.

In chapter 6 there's this back and forth between rewards. You're either rewarded by God or you're rewarded by people. Why use the language of reward? Because rewards are satisfying. They entice us to act. That's why every grocery store, gas station, you name it has some kind of rewards program. We are hooked on rewards. Pleasing people is a reward.

If we're just brutally honest, we like pleasing people. We like the reward we get when other people notice us and compliment us. Tell us how good we are or how proud of us they are. Maybe you like public recognition, maybe you like private recognition.

Or maybe it's that we don't want to be publicly shamed where everyone scorns you. The reward is no criticism. We just don't want to let that one person down - a parent, a friend, a coach. You don't want to fail, you just want to keep the peace. You don't talk with your spouse because you just don't want another fight.

People talk all the time about how they just don't want any drama in their life. They'll do anything, avoid anyone, avoid every hot topic, do whatever people want, or walk away from people because they don't want drama. That's a reward, too.

Faithfulness to God will create drama. We will lose praise in this life. But when we stand before Jesus we will hear: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your master." (**Matt. 25:23**)

4th Danger of man pleasing is the consequences are eternal. **Read 1**

It has been said that what we do in this life echoes for eternity. What we do here and why we do does have serious eternal effects.

**2 John 8:** Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.

**Rev. 3:11:** Called to guard carefully what we have so no one takes our crown.

**1 Cor. 9:27:** Paul says he disciplines himself so that after preaching to others he is not disqualified.

I want to end by being very clear: a Christian cannot lose his salvation. But he can lose his reward.

As Randy Alcorn says: Salvation is accomplished in the past, rewards are promised in the future. Salvation is free, rewards are earned by faithfulness. Salvation cannot be lost, rewards can be lost. Salvation is the same for all Christians, rewards differ among Christians. Salvation is by faith, rewards is by working for God's glory.

My encouragement to you this morning: Make sure your righteousness life is lived for the glory of God alone. The reward for pleasing men is cheap and fading. The reward from God is massive and eternal.

Look to Jesus and live for Jesus, who is coming with his reward.

**Pray**