

## Rewards

Before we delve into today's topic I'd like to say just a few words about pope Francis' visit to the U.S. and his speech to congress last week. First of all, if you listened to or watched the news about this event, you know that **Revelation 13:3** is being fulfilled in a very dramatic way, the whole world is undeniably wondering after the beast, the word wondering meaning "to admire." It's absolutely heart-sickening to see our once Protestant nation turning so heartily toward the acceptance of Catholicism, but we've known for many years that this would happen, so no surprise, at least it shouldn't be.

I was watching the news as a Vatican adviser and one of the Cardinals was being interviewed regarding the pope's visit and they addressed the pontiff as "the holy father, his eminence, the world's greatest moral leader, and the prince of peace." Pardon the expression, but I wanted to throw up, especially when I saw House speaker John Boehner unable to hold back tears because his fondest dream was being realized as the pope addressed his fellow congressmen and congresswomen. And I find it interesting that now that he has reached his career goal of getting the pope to come, he's stepping down from his position and retiring at the end of October this year. Another faithful Catholic has performed his duty well.

Friends, we are not just losing our Democratic Republic, it's already lost! When you consider all the Catholic leaders in the House and Senate, and five of the 9 Supreme Court justices being Catholic, and our dictator President who's obviously sympathetic to it all, as well as to radical Islamists, and the hundreds of thousands of devotees to the papacy that were craning their necks just to get a glimpse of their beloved leader, you can't come to any other conclusion than the end of all things is at hand, and that the United States of America will never be the same from this day forward. Things have been going downhill for some time now, but this latest event marks a turning point for America.

In the pope's speech he talked about forgiving the past, obviously referring to the past atrocities of the inquisition, about ecumenism, without using the word, about climate change, and I explained what's behind that last month, and about the Golden Rule of all things, for which he got a standing ovation. What hypocrisy! And let me remind you of the claims of the papacy itself when Pope Gregory VII said, "The church had never erred, nor would it ever err, according to the Scriptures." We need to understand that the papacy has not changed, no matter how loving and humble the pope seems, and that its goal to undo all that Protestantism has done has not changed. It's a whole new ball game now that America has been so accepting and tolerant of the greatest cult on earth. And by the way, the real work of the papacy is taking place behind the scenes rather than the pope explaining it's true intentions in speeches to congress and the United Nations. It would indeed have been interesting to be a fly on the wall in some of his private meetings.

This past week's event should be a call to each one of us to get very close to Jesus, because now that the papacy is being so warmly patronized by a so-called Protestant nation, from now on the last movements in the great controversy between Christ and Satan will be rapid ones. So be warned.

Now for today's topic. As I was studying about the difference between the true gospel and the Babylonian gospel, I ran across a very interesting and enlightening statement; it's found in ***Signs of the Times, December 23, 1886***, but before we read, let's invite the Holy Spirit to be our teacher this morning.

***Signs of the Times, December 23, 1886***, "Every false religion that has ever been invented has been based on the Cain principle, that man can depend upon his own merits and righteousness for salvation."

So, every false religion has at its core the false idea that people can add something to a free gift; that they can disregard God's explicit directions and do things their way; that they can come to God and say, "See God what I have done, isn't that good enough? You don't have to shed your blood for me, I'm just fine, and can handle this salvation thing all by myself." And you can probably think of other ways people come to false conclusions about how to be saved, but they are all connected to human effort; the Cain principle.

Now, people read statements like the one I just read a minute ago and conclude wrongly that since our own goodness and right doing can't save us, the things we do don't matter, but I want you to notice that it does not say that our good deeds and our obedience are unimportant. The testimony of inspiration teaches that in the true gospel faith and works will be in their proper order, and both are very important.

In **Ephesians 2: 8-10**, and a few other places in the Bible, it makes it very clear that we are saved by grace through faith and **not** of works, but we're also told that works will follow genuine faith, because **Verse 10 of Ephesians 2** says, "*we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.*" In other words, once the new birth experience has begun, good works will happen as fruitful evidence that we are in the way of life; that we are traveling the narrow way that leads to the kingdom of God and not the broad road to destruction. So what I'd like to discuss this morning is how our works relate to the reward that each one who is saved will receive when Jesus returns.

Notice what Jesus says in **Revelation 22:12**: "*And behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*"

I think this verse is talking about more than the reward of eternal life or eternal death, and we'll see that as we go along. This verse also says that when Jesus comes, **every** man will be rewarded, but I don't want to focus on the reward of the wicked this morning, but on the reward of the

righteous, because hopefully that's who I'm talking to. However, we need to understand that our reward is not based on anything we have done in our own strength, because apart from Christ we have no strength. Jesus very clearly said, "Without me, you can do nothing", and He meant exactly what He said. Without Christ we are a peeled zero, and you can't get more nothing than that.

In ***Welfare Ministry, page 316*** it says, "What we have accomplished has been wrought solely through the grace of Christ, and no reward is due us from God on the ground of our merit."

And so, we should understand from the outset that whatever reward we do receive will not be based on things that we have accomplished on our own, or that we have earned. When we get to heaven we will all understand that our designated position will be directly related to what Christ did in us and through us. But that being said, we also need to understand that we have free will to reach a high or low "grade point average" as it were, depending upon how we applied ourselves here in the school of Christ.

You may have heard people say that they would be happy to simply be a doorkeeper in the New Jerusalem just as long as they can be there: and they will be happy with that position if that's where they're assigned! If that's where God puts them, they will be perfectly happy at that post of duty because they will know that that is a fair reward, because God is fair. But at the same time they could just as well have had a higher position had they cooperated more fully with God during this life. So, there's a principle that operates in this life concerning the life to come, and that is: we will get out of it what we put into it. This is not only true with earthly accomplishments, but spiritual accomplishments as well.

For instance, generally speaking, a person who struggles through school and graduates will be able to secure a better paying job and a happier life than the one who drops out too early. Both will work and live in the same world, but their reward will not be the same. Their position in life will be directly related to the effort put forth, and it will be no different in heaven. And the thing is, just as you can go back to school at any age to better your situation, so you can do the same in the spiritual realm. If you are not satisfied with your present spiritual knowledge and attainments, you can apply yourself to become more proficient. You can hone your talents and accomplish more for the Lord while there's still time, which will also directly relate to your heavenly reward.

Notice what it says in ***Testimonies to Ministers, pages 428, 429***, "Every good deed done by the people of God as the fruit of their faith, will have its corresponding reward. As one star differs from another star in glory, so will the believers have their different spheres assigned them in the future life."

Do you think the thief on the cross will receive the same reward as the apostle Paul? Of course not! But, they will both know that God is fair, won't they? And they will humbly accept with gratitude whatever place He assigns them. But how different it could have been for the thief had he not

entered into bad company. It's true that he will be in heaven, Jesus said so, but the place assigned him will not be what it could have been. The reward he receives will not be as great as that of others who have had a long history of faithfulness, and yet, he will be perfectly satisfied.

I'd like to read something about this thief that became an ex-thief in just a matter of a few hours in company with Jesus. *Desire of Ages, pages 749-751*, it's a bit lengthy but well worth the reading.

“To Jesus in His agony on the cross there came one gleam of comfort. It was the prayer of the penitent thief. Both the men who were crucified with Jesus had at first railed upon Him; and one under his suffering only became more desperate and defiant. But not so with his companion. This man was not a hardened criminal; he had been led astray by evil associations, but he was less guilty than many of those who stood beside the cross reviling the Saviour. He had seen and heard Jesus, and had been convicted by His teaching, but he had been turned away from Him by the priests and rulers. **(I wouldn't want to be in the shoes of those priests and rulers when they receive their reward, would you?)** Seeking to stifle conviction, he had plunged deeper and deeper into sin, until he was arrested, tried as a criminal, and condemned to die on the cross. In the judgment hall and on the way to Calvary he had been in company with Jesus. He had heard Pilate declare, ‘I find no fault in Him.’ He had marked His godlike bearing, and His pitying forgiveness of His tormentors. On the cross he sees the many great religionists shoot out the tongue with scorn, and ridicule the Lord Jesus. He sees the wagging heads. He hears the upbraiding speeches taken up by his companion in guilt: ‘If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us.’ Among the passers-by he hears many defending Jesus. He hears them repeat His words, and tell His works. The conviction comes back to him that this is the Christ. Turning to his fellow criminal he says, ‘Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?’ The dying thieves have no longer anything to fear from man. But on one of them presses the conviction that there is a God to fear, a future to cause him to tremble. And now, all sin-polluted as it is, his life history is about to close. ‘And we indeed justly,’ he moans; ‘for we receive the do reward of our deeds: but this Man hath done nothing amiss.’

“There is no question now. There are no doubts, no reproaches. When condemned for his crime, the thief had become hopeless and despairing; but strange, tender thoughts now spring up. He calls to mind all he has heard of Jesus, how He has healed the sick and pardoned sin. He has heard the words of those who believed in Jesus and followed Him weeping. He has seen and read the title above the Saviour's head. He has heard the passers-by repeat it, some with grieved, quivering lips, others with jesting and mockery. The Holy Spirit illuminates his mind, and little by little the chain of evidence is joined together. In Jesus, bruised, mocked, and hanging upon the cross, he sees the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. Hope is mingled with anguish in his voice as the helpless dying soul casts himself upon the dying Saviour. ‘Lord, remember me,’ he cries, ‘when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.’

“Quickly the answer came. Soft and melodious the tone, full of love, compassion, and power the words: ‘Verily I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with Me in paradise.’

“For long hours of agony, reviling and mockery have fallen upon the ears of Jesus. As He hangs upon the cross, their floats up to Him still the sound of jeers and curses. With longing heart He has listened for some expression of faith from His disciples. He has heard only the mournful words, ‘We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel.’ How grateful then to the Saviour was the utterance of faith and love from the dying thief! While the leading Jews deny Him, and even the disciples doubt His divinity, the poor thief, upon the brink of eternity, calls Jesus Lord. Many were ready to call Him Lord when He wrought miracles, and after He had risen from the grave; but none acknowledged Him as He hung dying upon the cross save the penitent thief who is saved at the 11th hour.”

(By the way, we're told there will be 11<sup>th</sup> hour workers that will come in during the time when God's destructive judgments are in the land and they will have an opportunity to learn the truth for the first time, while the door of salvation will be closed to those who earlier had had an opportunity to cooperate with God but failed to do so. You can read about that in *Letter 103, written in 1903.*)

The quote continues, “The bystanders caught the words as the thief called Jesus Lord. The tone of the repentant man arrested their attention. Those who at the foot of the cross had been quarreling over Christ's garments, and casting lots upon His vesture, stopped to listen. Their angry tones were hushed. With bated breath they looked upon Christ, and waited for the response from those dying lips.

“As He spoke the words of promise, the dark cloud that seemed to enshroud the cross was pierced by a bright and living light. To the penitent thief came the perfect peace of acceptance with God. Christ in His humiliation was glorified. He who in all other eyes appeared to be conquered was a conqueror. He was acknowledged as the Sin Bearer.”

Now, the reason I read this to you this morning, is because what the thief discovered is what we must discover if we would receive the “greatest reward” and a lesser reward as well. Turn with me to **Genesis 15** and I'll show you what I mean.

**Genesis 15:1** *“After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and (what?) thy exceeding great reward.”*

Just as Abram and the thief discovered, Jesus Himself is our “*exceeding great reward.*” And then once we receive our “*exceeding great reward*”, good deeds will follow, which also have their corresponding reward. Make no mistake, everyone who makes it to heaven will receive this same “*exceeding great reward*”, because they have received Jesus, and in that sense we will all be on an

equal footing, because there is no caste in heaven; there are no differing social orders, because Jesus made it clear when He was here that in Him we are all brethren. And yet there will be differing lesser rewards based on the good works that were performed, the accomplishments attained, and because of our character development while here on this sin cursed Earth.

In some respects this truth is brought out in the parable of the talents in **Matthew 25**, and in **Christ's Object Lessons** Sister White comments on this several times.

Notice what it says on **page 330**: “The Lord, has a great work to be done, and He will bequeath the most in the future life to those who do the most faithful, willing service in the present life.”

Then on page **331** it says, “Many whom God has qualified to do excellent work accomplish very little, because they attempt little. Thousands pass through life as if they have no definite object for which to live, no standard to reach. Such will obtain a reward proportionate to their works.”

Page **332** “Those who are under the instruction of Christ in this world will take every divine attainment with them to the heavenly mansions.”

Page **361** “What we shall be in heaven is a reflection of what we are now in character and holy service.”

Page **363** “We shall individually be held responsible for doing one jot less than we have ability to do. The Lord measures with exactness every possibility for service. The unused capabilities are as much brought into account as are those that are improved. For all that we might become through the right use of our talents God holds us responsible. We shall be judged according to what we ought to have done, but did not accomplish because we did not use our powers to glorify God. Even if we do not lose our souls, we shall realize in eternity the results of our unused talents. For all the knowledge and ability that we might have gained and did not, there will be an eternal loss.”

**WOW!** You're probably thinking I could have gone all day without reading things like this, huh? But friends, God wants us to know the truth and make progress in our character development, and ignorance of these things will not be overlooked. We will be held accountable for what we could have known but neglected to search out.

After reading these things I just had to share my guilt with you, because I'm pretty sure you might have a twinge of conscience like I did because of your lack or neglect. But look at it this way, guilt can be a good thing, because without it we would never change; we would never repent; we would never improve our situation; never perfect our characters, and therefore we would be lost! And so, thank God for guilt, and thank God for the prospect of increased rewards if we apply ourselves. According to **Ephesians 5:16** and **Colossians 4:5**, it is possible to redeem the time, but we really have to apply ourselves.

And let me just say this, I don't believe we will mourn for all eternity because of our short comings in this respect, even though we may suffer an eternal loss. But I do believe there will be a time during the thousand years spoken of in **Revelation 20** when we will feel keenly our lack for not having developed our talents more fully, but I do think that will pass when God wipes away all tears from our eyes, and yet there will still be an eternal loss.

Let's look at a few more texts: **Matthew 5:11, 12**, *"Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."*

This kind of persecution and reward is interesting. There may be no physical pain involved with it, but then again there may be, but either way you will be extremely happy when you endure it; that's what the word "blessed" means.

I remember years ago when I worked in a water heater factory in California. I had been working there for three years and had been an Adventist for about the same length of time. One Sunday morning I got a call from my Sabbath school teacher, a very godly old gentleman, who called, I thought, just to check up on me to see how I was doing, and in the course of the conversation he asked me if the place I worked required me to belong to a labor union, and I said yeah, so? Then he asked me if I had ever read what it says in **Selected Messages, Book 2** about labor unions, and I said no. Then he asked me if I had the book, and I said no. And believe me friends, most Adventists don't, and if they do they're not reading it, and they have no idea what the Spirit of Prophecy says about these things. Anyway, he asked me if I would like to read it for myself, and I said sure, and he dropped the book off to me that very day.

Well, after reading it I became a bit troubled, because it says very clearly there that it's impossible to keep the commandments of God and support a labor union. And so I had a decision to make, was I going to violate my conscience by knowingly breaking the ten commandments and lose eternal life, or was I going to quit my job and depend upon God to find me another one where I could be free from condemnation.

Well, after thinking about it for a few hours and discussing it with my wife, my decision was made. So when I went into work Monday morning I told my boss Wednesday was going to be my last day at work, because that was the end of the pay period, and of course he asked me why I was quitting, and I told him the best way I knew how, that I prized salvation more than my job, and he looked at me very strangely and sort of pityingly for being so foolish.

Well, Wednesday afternoon finally came around, and of course the news about me quitting had gotten around to the guys in my department by then, and as I collected my last pay check and began walking out, several of the men I had worked with for the past three years began to make

fun of me for being a religious fanatic, and so stupid, and calling me things that I can't repeat. But as all this was happening, I had a big old smile on my face, because I knew that I was being persecuted and reviled for Jesus' sake. The people behind me couldn't see my smile, but the people in the other departments could as I passed by, and they couldn't understand how I could be so supremely happy when I was being treated that way, and I have to say, I have never regretted that decision.

There's another interesting thing that happened because of this decision I made, and it manifested itself the next Sabbath at church when I had a talk with the pastor, in fact he didn't treat me much different than the guys at work had done when I told him I quit my job. You see, nearly all the men in the church worked and supported labor unions, and what I had done created a little stir, and the pastor asked, "What would happen to the church if all the men followed your example and quit their jobs?" I think he feared for his job and what the conference higher ups would say should the tithe stop coming in, and I responded by saying, "If all the men in the church had enough courage to actually do what inspiration says, we would be that much closer to the coming of the Lord", don't you think? and that ended our conversation, because what could he say?

Well, I could go on with more detail, but suffice it to say, within just a few days I had a better paying job, and one I enjoyed much more. **Matthew 6:33** is true: If we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; then all of our needs will be supplied, you can count on it, it's a promise that I have depended upon for over 40 years now and I can tell you from personal experience that it's true. And so, we always want to have a conscience void of offense toward God, because it's preparing us for much bigger decisions we'll have to make in the very near future.

**Matthew 19:27-29**, *"Then answered Peter and said unto him (unto Jesus), Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? (How shall we be rewarded for our great sacrifice?) And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration (or in the world to come) when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, (and we could say, or jobs) for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."*

So, is obedience worth it? Is living in such a way that we will not violate our Bible educated conscience worth it? Will our reward be worth whatever sacrifices we might be called upon to bear in this life? I should say so! An hundredfold, and everlasting life; what could be more precious and more worthwhile than that? Absolutely nothing!

**1 Corinthians 3:8-15**: *"Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a*



*wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."*

This last verse is quite interesting. In other words, if a person sees his wrong and sincerely repents, he will be saved, but his lifework will prove a failure. This was the condition of the thief on the cross. He'll be saved, but his whole life was occupied in using building material like wood, hay, and stubble, it's going to burn up. Everything he did in his life will be worth nothing, but he will make it to the kingdom by the skin of his teeth. I want a more abundant entrance than that, don't you? And now is the time to prepare.

I share these things with you this morning in hope it will inspire you to serve the Lord more fully, and that it will caused you to stop and **think** about the reward that you have coming; that it might spur you on to use all of your God-given talents and strength to "Labor for the Master from the dawn to setting sun"; that you might receive the fullest reward you're capable of receiving, and then thank Jesus for making it all possible.

On **Thursday evening, June 27, 1889, Charles Spurgeon** preached a sermon in which he said, "Our reward will not be of debt, but of grace; it is grace that made us servants, and grace that will reward us for our service; but no man and no woman shall serve the Lord Jesus Christ here on Earth by following Him, without finding that the Father has some special honor, some rich and rare reward, to give to such soldiers in due time. This is the fighting day, expect nothing now but bullets, bruises, wounds, and scars; but the battle will soon be over, and when the war is ended, the King will come, and ride up and down the ranks, and in that day you who have been most battered and most wounded in the battle shall find Him pause when He reaches you, and He will fasten on your breast a star that shall be of more honor to you than all the metals that have decorated brave men here below. This honor is to be had by that believer who will faithfully serve his Lord; not by any who merely talk about it, or dream of it, or propose to do it, but to those who serve Him by following Him will this reward be given."

Friends, this battle he was referring to is the battle with self, the greatest battle that was ever fought; it's a battle between the fallen flesh and the divine nature that we partook of when we were "*born again; not of corruptible seed, (says Peter) but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abideth for ever.*"

You know, years ago all the churches understood that there's a battle with self that must be fought and conquered if we would be victorious and find a place among the saints when Jesus comes, but

not so much anymore. Nearly all churches today think a one-time conversion is all that's necessary, and that all we need is to believe; even the church that was raised up over 170 years ago to proclaim the truth about these things has been tending in that direction for many years, and that's sad. But that doesn't mean that we have to be a part of it. In fact, God will not hold us guiltless if we knowingly support a church or ministry that isn't clear on this point, but that's a subject for another time.

In **Matthew 5:16** Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and (do what?) glorify your Father in heaven."*

You see, good works are not done to save ourselves, but to make God look good so others will be drawn to Him as the only One who can save. Our good works are an interesting thing; we're not save by them, but we can't be saved without them, and I know that sounds paradoxical, but it's absolutely true. We have to get it in our heads that our greatest reward is Jesus Himself, and that our lesser reward is what we'll receive for what He has been able to do through us.

And so, in the end it's all about Jesus. It's all about Him from beginning to end. He's the alpha and omega, the first and the last, and that doesn't just refer to the fact that He has always been here and always will be, but it also has to do with what He is to us. He not only gave us life from our mother's womb, but He has also given us life eternal, and it's up to us if we're going to retain it or forfeit it by the choices we make and the fruit we bare.

Our salvation has to do with forgiveness for past sins **and** a present and future life of holiness, and both come by faith in Christ. You can read that in **Romans 1:17** and **Acts 26:18**. It's His pardoning grace and His life of holiness that get credited to our delinquent account that will get the job done, and our part is to submit to His will as best we understand it, and the longer we live by faith in the Son of God, the better we will understand it and the more fully will be our submission to it.

Oh how I hope and pray that you will commit your life, right now and forever, to the Lord Jesus Christ as your only hope of salvation and the only basis upon which your reward will be realized. He alone is worthy, friends; He alone will save you; and He alone will reward you according to how fully you have allowed Him to live in you.

In **1 Corinthians 5:10** the apostle Paul said, *"By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."*

And in **Galatians 2:20** he said, *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*

You see, it **is** Jesus living in us from start to finish that will mold us, and fashion us according to His divine image. And get this, all that Jesus has will be ours when we get to heaven! That's right! We will inherit everything! What kind of reward is that? We certainly don't deserve it, do we? No, but that's grace. That's God's grace.

In **Revelation 21:7** Jesus says, *"He that overcometh shall inherit all things (what belongs to Him belongs to us); and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."*

Commenting on this verse Sister White says, "An experience must be gained by each one for himself, or we shall never sit down with the suffering Man of Calvary. It will cost us all we have, but as a reward we shall inherit all things." ***Signs of the Times, September 7, 1891.***

I want to be there, don't you? Not because it's a selfish thing, but because it will make Jesus extremely happy to see you there, that's His reward. **Isaiah 53:11** says, *"He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied"* when He sees you there. If you miss heaven you will miss the reason you were born. Don't let your inheritance slip from your grasp, seize it today by taking hold of Jesus and don't let go until He blesses you.

The apostle Paul, in his salutation to the Corinthians said, *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen."* And I second the motion. Have a great day.