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THE REWARD CONCEPT IN THE
SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of New Testament Exegesis
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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June 1955

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study intends to show the grace of God as it is manifested in the generous, giving, rewarding God. The Gospel message is to be studied and considered in the terms of the giving God.

The modern secular world has an altogether too confused notion of what is in store for God's people in the world to come. Songs and jokes and lyrics all make extremely light of the Christian's reward. In the writer's mind a recent popular song caps them all by way of illustration: The man who was too miserly in this life is going to be rewarded in the life to come with

A rusty old halo, with a skinny white cloud,
Some second-hand wings full of patches;
A rusty old halo with a skinny white cloud,
And a robe so wooly it scratches.

A recent radio speaker described man's beclouded concept of eternal bliss as a "hazy hope of heavenly happiness." There is hardly a sermon in a Christian Church which does not mention some of the promises of God to His people, and rightly so. But the preacher often considers the promise of the happy home above merely as the clinching argument to show that a life of morality is worth the trouble after all.

The writer feels that the frequent use of this concept justifies a study that seeks to understand the true place of

the Christian's reward. One must first ask who the "giver" of the reward is; and then ask the questions regarding the "recipient," the "reward" itself, and the "motivation" behind the reward. To present these questions and to attempt to find the Scriptural answer for them is the purpose of the succeeding chapters.

The word "reward" is at once both too broad and too narrow a term to adequately describe the subject of this paper. The writer is interested in all that God gives, particularly what He gives to His people because of the mediation of His Son Jesus Christ. Therefore the subject under consideration includes all the blessings that God promises to give to any one who becomes a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ. When the word "reward" is used, it will usually reflect the fact that God has promised a gift in return for certain services which He expects. The word "gift" will be used to include all that God gives regardless of any response on the part of the subject. Ultimately the reward and the gift become one and the same thing; both depend solely upon God's grace alone.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND JEWISH SCRIBAL BACKGROUND

The Old Testament

In the first dealings of God with the children of Israel the reward that He promised was not to play the chief role in the activity and response of His people. God gave the promise of the reward out of the fullness of His divine love. It was never intended that the hope of something better was to spur men on to righteous living. Only as the Jewish history progressed did the hope of a promised reward begin to play an ever more important role in the religious response of the Jewish people.

The relation of God to His people is explained in terms of the covenant which He established with them in the wilderness wanderings. The covenant was made by and originated with God; He, as the initiator, stated the terms and conditions under which the children of Israel would become His special people; "That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day" (Deut. 29:12). According to the terms of the covenant all the blessings of fellowship with God would be theirs as long as they remained true to the covenant (Deut. 28:1 ff.). These blessings which God promised in no sense could ever be attributed to the actions of the obedient

people themselves; God is always the cause and source of the blessings which were showered upon the people. The Israelites had been an oppressed people, held in bondage and slavery; "And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage . . ." (Ex. 1:14); they had nothing. Therefore at all times the goodness which they experienced depended upon the faithfulness of God; "I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you into the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you" (Judges 2:1). When the covenant was broken, the people themselves broke it even as God predicted to Moses: "This people . . . will forsake me and break my covenant which I made with them" (Deut. 31:16). Almost facetiously God asks through Jeremiah: ". . . what iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they have gone far from me and have walked after vanity and are become vain?" (Jer. 2:5). God, of course, had given them no excuse for becoming vain, for He says, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that has gone out of my lips" (Ps. 89:34). In any case it was this faithfulness of God that resulted in a reward to those who did keep His covenant. The keeping of the covenant could never earn a reward, however, since it had been God who had made the covenant possible.¹

¹J. F. McCurdy, "Covenant," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, edited by Samuel Macaulay Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), III, 287-89.

In the Old Testament when God's people, within the framework of the covenant, faithfully obeyed his commands, recognized His will, and loyally sought to serve Him, they had peace and prosperity. In a later period the prophets vainly tried to call the Children of Israel to repentance, so that they might renew their loyalty to God and thereby obtain the life of God. Amos preached, "Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live" (5:14). Because the righteous man has remained faithful to God, ". . . it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings" (Is. 3:10).

Connected with the prophet's promise of deliverance for the righteous is a fearful threat for those who are unrighteous: "Woe unto the wicked; it shall be ill with him; for the reward of his hands shall be given him" (Is. 3:11). Man indeed reaps what he sows (Job 4:8). The entire twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy contains a list of blessings for those who are obedient and an even longer series of curses and misfortunes for those who reject the will of God.²

The whole history of Israel is one long fulfillment of these prophecies. When they were wicked, and rejected the Lord, hardship and punishment came upon them (Judges 2:6-23; 13:1; II Kings 13:1-7). When they repented and turned to the Lord for deliverance, the punishment was brought to an end,

²A similar expression is found in Deut. 3:15-20; Lev. 26:3-13; 14-39; Josh. 23:14-16.

and they would receive blessings at the hand of God (Hos. 14:1-9).³

According to the terms of the covenant the original concept of reward in the Old Testament is not presented as the motivation for the required loyalty and obedience. Rather it seems that the reward is one closely knit unit that is bound up with this obedience. Loyalty to God and obedience to His will is not considered as the exceptional condition, but it is rather considered to be the normal relation of the faithful to their God. Therefore the blessings that come are the result of God's generous providing nature, and not the result of the obedience displayed by God's subjects. On the other hand, the punishment which comes from disobedience is the natural enforcement of God's law. A quick view at individual passages could possibly give the impression that God is bargaining with His people, but the fulfilling of legal provisions is not the basis of the reward that God gives, in spite of the many passages that could give that impression.⁴ That there is to be a predetermined amount of "pay" that will automatically accumulate to the people that fulfill certain requirements is altogether foreign to the divine mind. Consideration of the immense and immeasurable value of the gifts

³Otto Kirn, "Lohn," Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche, founded by J. J. Herzog, edited by Albert Hauck (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1902, XI, 606.

⁴cf. Ps. 1:1; 4:1,2; 106:3; 119:1,2; 128:1; Pr. 8:32,34; 14:21; 20:7; 29:16; Is. 52:1,2.

that God promises to His faithful rules out any idea of merit or worth on the part of the recipient.⁵

Therefore the promised reward was not the real motive for doing good in the golden age of the Children of Israel, but they responded to God because of the goodness that God showered upon them. Isaiah bemoans the fact that in his day the people no longer responded to God's goodness: Even the "ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" what God has done for His children (Is. 1:2 ff.). Hosea tells us that (11:1 f.) Israel failed to recognise the God who had delivered them from Egypt and had guided them as a young nation. In Deut. 6:10-12 the people are warned not to turn from God when the promised prosperity becomes a reality. In chapter eight the wonderful blessings of material wealth and prosperity are cited, followed by the exhortation: "When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee" (v. 10). This passage, together with 11:7 ff., shows that the goodness that God had bestowed upon them was to lead them into a closer relation of reliance and dependence upon their God. That God's goodness failed as a motivation to keep His people close to Him, Israel's history amply testifies. Judges 8:34 demonstrates that it was not

⁵Ibid., p. 608 f. cfr. George Bertram, "μικρόπιος," Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, n. d.), IV, 608.

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long before God's goodness was forgotten: "And the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side."

God's love for the Jews is demonstrated time and again by his acts of mercy and generosity, but at the same time he expects to find in them a corresponding feeling of love and concern for their God; "Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:4 f.). "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him; and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul . . ." (Deut. 10:12). "Therefore thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments, always" (Deut. 11:1).⁶

While this is the response that God looked for in His people because of His goodness toward them, yet ultimately it is God who makes this turning to Him possible, for it is He who says, "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give a heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them; and they shall be my people and I will be their God"

⁶Otto Kirn, loc. cit.

(Exek. 11:19,20). "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with thine heart, and with all thy soul that thou mayest live" (Deut. 30:6). In the age of the new covenant it will be God who will enable His people to live up to the covenant: "After these days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jer. 31:33). This only further demonstrates that what God gives comes from the generosity and grace of His nature, and in no way depends upon what puny man is able to do, for it is even God and only God who enables man to do those things which please Him. "For without faith which is a gift of God it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6); "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). These New Testament passages express the same essential nature of God as it was revealed to God's people in the Old Testament.

The alienation of the later period in Jewish history stems from the fact that the consideration of the reward that God gives to His people became for them the chief motive in their lives, rather than the motivation of God's goodness itself. This completely reversed God's purpose in promising a reward. Instead of whole-heartedly serving their God, His people first stopped to consider their own interests. The command to seek and hold wisdom was motivated by the promises that came to those who are wise. Prov. 3:13-26 speaks of the

inestimable value of wisdom because it is more precious than rubies, it offers both length of days and riches and honor, it is life and it offers life, the one that has it shall walk safely, nor shall he ever be afraid. Prov. 4:4 expresses similar sentiments: "He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words; keep my commandments and live."⁷ These passages intended to draw the people back to the wisdom which God gives, but they were often misinterpreted to make it seem that the reward depends upon the action of the individual involved. Other passages also seemed to justify this point of view which laid more stress upon the reward, than on the true appreciation of the wisdom which God gives. From such passages it becomes evident how the Jewish scribes developed various concepts of reward for merit. Eventually certain specific acts were considered to be of special value, for instance the giving of alms. Two passages in Sirach give special prominence to this act of charity and describe what its performance merits the doer. Sirach 3:30,31 states: "A flaming fire doth water quench, so doth alms giving atone for sin. He that doeth good, it shall meet him on his ways, and when he tottereth he shall find a stay." Sirach 29:12,13 is even more explicit regarding the performance of charity and what it produces: "Store

⁷Italicized portions of Bible passages are the author's own addition throughout this paper.

up alas giving in thy treasures and it shall deliver thee from all evil; better than a mighty shield and a heavy spear shall (this) fight for thee against an enemy."⁸

In the course of years not only did the Jews misconstrue the nature of the reward which God gives, but they also became oblivious to the requirements which God had set up for eligibility to receive the reward. As has been already mentioned, the course of the Jewish history was one of fluctuation. Obedience to the will of God brought prosperity and peace; refusal to acknowledge the Lord as the only true God brought punishment and oppression. Following the punishment of the Exile the Jewish people became more conscious of doing the will of God (Ezra 9:1-10:17). But in the following centuries constant political strife caused further oppression and hardship. The situation seemed only to grow worse as time went on. In an attempt to relieve this oppression the Jewish religious leaders called upon the people for more and more rigid adherence to the letter of the law, which they now legalistically divided and subdivided in an attempt to legislate for every condition. Anything foreign was abhorred by the almost fanatical nationalists. They expected that all this would produce peace and prosperity. (When it failed to come, more stress was laid on the reward to be received in the life to come for those who endured the persecution and trials of

Ibid.

this age.) Doubtless, however, the real reason why the deliverance of peace and prosperity did not come, was not the lack of a sterling performance, but rather the lack of a genuine repentance. When God had promised them His blessing, it was promised with the condition that they would repent and turn to Him completely. Solomon's prayer at the completion of the temple in which he envisions a future captivity asks for God's deliverance ". . . if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; and so return with all their heart, and with all their soul, . . . then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place and maintain their cause" (I Kings 8:47-49).⁹

Needless to say there was a comparatively meager response to this plea, and it had to be repeated again and again. The call to repentance appears again in the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1), and in the preaching of Jesus (Matt. 4:17). This reawakening to a real moral consciousness never came, at least among the professionally pious, for they were never willing to trust completely in the grace of God; He also would have enabled them to perform in a God-pleasing

⁹cf. Ezek. 14:16; 18:30; also Deut. 30:2; Judges 10:10,15; II Chron. 15:4; Hos. 14:1 ff.; 6:1.

manner. "And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; That whosoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. And they swore unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets. And all Juda rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the Lord gave them rest round about" (II Chron. 12:12 ff.). God has never been so much interested in the feeble activities which man can produce; He has always been deeply concerned with man's attitude ever against God. Samuel said to Saul, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice . . ." (I Sam. 15:22). God said through Hosea, "For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (6:6); Jesus called the attention of the Pharisees to this passage in Matt. 9:13; 12:7.

Till about the time of the Exile the Jewish people considered the reward that God gives His people as limited to relief from evil, from oppression and various troubles of this life, plus an abundance of material wealth and prosperity, large families, long life, honor, wisdom, and generally all the things that man could possibly desire on this earth. They understood that God was actually their King, who would

take care of them in every situation. Many of the passages cited earlier present examples of this type of reward.

Ps. 1:3 summarizes those things that God gives to the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord when the psalmist describes him: "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

The greatest blessing for the Jew was the success and prosperity of God's chosen people, both collectively and individually. As yet the majority had not caught the glimpse of a higher and more blessed state in the presence of God Himself. It is not that they were merely materialistically minded; it is rather that their concept of God's reward for faithful obedience was still limited in its scope. It can not be denied, however, that some of the psalmists and the prophets often reflected a realization that there were spiritual values of much higher worth. Asaph for one must have realized that the blessings of eternal fellowship with God were worth more than anything obtainable here on earth, for he says, "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Who have I in heaven but thee; and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee! My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:23 ff.).

The very first clear concept of a reward that includes far more than temporal blessings is expressed in Daniel 12:2,3: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." Here for the first time there appears a definite expansion of the reward which would transcend the immediate ills of life, and in its place is presented a hope of a reward in the hereafter.

The Old Testament picture of the concept of reward presented so far contains the following principles: 1. That God is the giver of the reward; 2. That the reward finds its source in the gracious and generous giving nature of God, and is not the result of any accomplishment on the part of man; 3. That the reward consists largely of temporal blessings which God showers down upon His own peculiar people; 4. That only in the later prophetic period did the hope of reward take the shape of a reward to be realized in a future life. The first two points are especially significant for this study, for they shed light upon the New Testament usage of the concept of reward in the words of Jesus.¹⁰ The mere fact that the Jews as a nation did not always recognize these principles,

¹⁰Otto Kirn, op. cit., p. 609.

does not prove their non-existence, but rather the hardness of their own hearts. The next section brings out the final conclusions and results of Jewish study in regard to the concept of reward.

The Jewish Conception of Reward at the Time of Jesus

The Jewish scholars from the period shortly before Christ up to and including the century or two following Christ reflected a different attitude towards the grace of God as revealed in Scripture. The Jews of this period considered only their own merit and forgot about the gracious giving God, for their idea of the reward was always connected with their doctrine of justification,¹¹ which failed to recognize original sin and original guilt, and relied upon man's ability to fulfill the Law.¹² They were unwilling for a moment to forget the fact that they were Abraham's children; "And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our Father" (Matt. 3:9; compare Luke 3:8). They were the chosen people; "For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God; the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth"

¹¹Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck, "Exkurse zu Einzelnen Stellen des Neuen Testaments," Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlags Buchhandlung, Oskar Beck, 1920), IV, Part 1, 490.

¹²Ibid., p. 4.

(Deut. 7:6). For them God's entire creation centered around the Jewish nation. Every Jew had a free and unconditional pass which gave him all the rights and privileges of God's holy people. Even history could give them additional support for this contention, since God had faithfully delivered His people again and again, in spite of their rejection of His guidance. Such passages as "I am the Lord your God which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God" (Num. 15:41), seemed to imply to them that the God who had done so much for them would certainly continue to look with favor upon them in every situation.

In this warped sense of the relation between man and God lies the explanation for the Jewish misconception of the purpose of the law of God. The purpose of the law for the pious Jew of the day of Christ was not to show man his sin and his need for help, but rather to give to every Jew an opportunity to earn special merit for himself before God. He gave them the Torah because of His special love and concern for them, the children of Israel whom He had chosen. Billerbeck cites actual examples of such rabbinic interpretation and exegesis:

Warum hat Gott uns Gebote gegeben? Nicht damit wir sie tun und Lohn empfangen? T. Sota 7,9 (307): (R. Eleazar b. Azarja, um 100, hat vorgelesen:) Versamle das Volk, die Männer und die Frauen und die Kinder, Deut. 31:12. Wenn die Männer kommen, um zu lernen; wenn die Frauen kommen, um zuzuhören; warum kommen die Kinder? Um Lohn zu empfangen für die, die sie mit gebracht hatten . . . Und sie sollen mir ein Heiligtum machen Ex. 25:8. Warum wird es gesagt? Ist nicht längst gesagt worden: den Himmel und die Erde erfülle ich? (so wird Jer. 23:24 zitiert.) Siehe, was will die Schrift lehrend sagen mit: Und sie sollen mir ein Heiligtum machen?

(Das Gebot ist gegeben worden) damit man für das Machen Loim empfangt.¹³

Again:

Makkoth 3:16: R. Chananja b. Aqaschja (um 150) sagte: Gott wollte Israel Verdienste erwerben lassen; daraus hat er ihnen viel Tora und Gebote gegeben, wie es heisst: Jahve gefiel es, um ihm Verdienst zu verleihen, die Tora gross und prächtig zu machen (so Jos. 42:21 nach dem Midrasch). Tanch 176b: R. Chijja b. Abba (um 260) hat gesagt, dass du ein Opfer vor ihm darbringen sollst? Nur um dich ein Verdienst erwerben zu lassen.¹⁴

In the light of these Jewish opinions Jesus' parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt. 2:1 ff.) must have stood in startling contrast to what was considered the usual reimbursement for a service rendered. To the Jews a reward given by God was in direct relation to the value of the merit earned. They considered that God had given them the law, in order that when they kept any of its commands they might legitimately lay claim to certain of God's benefits. The idea that God gives graciously disappeared, and in its place there arose an intricate system whereby men were given by God an opportunity to earn for themselves the blessings of God. For instance, the deliverance of the children from the land of Egypt had always been regarded as the work of the gracious God who freed them because of His goodness, and this deliverance is frequently cited in the Old Testament to remind the Old

¹³Ibid., p. 492.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 6.

Testament to remind the Israelites of all that God had done: "Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan" (Ps. 78:12 ff.). But the Jews of this later period put the following interpretation upon God's actions. When the time came for God to free Israel from Egyptian bondage, He could not carry out His purpose because Israel had no spiritual credit in their account with God. So God gave them two commandments, the passover command, and the command to circumcise, in the performance of which they might earn the necessary credit, so that God could free them. Billerbeck quotes the rabbinic example:

" . . . gab er ihnen zwei Gebote, das Blut des Passeschlammes und das Blut der Beschneidung, damit sie sich mit ihnen beschäftigten, um erlöst zu werden; denn Lohn empfängt man nur wegen (nach Massgabe) eines Tuns." Mekh. Ex. 12:6 und Ex. R. 19 (81c).¹⁵

According to this line of reasoning an Israelite must first keep one of God's commandments, in order that he might thereby acquire merit before God. Only on the basis of this earned merit can God give some blessing as a reward. On this concept rests the principle, "Die Tora ist Israel nur gegeben worden, damit sie durch sie Lohn erwerben."¹⁶ The following quotation presents the findings of Strack-Billerbeck

¹⁵Ibid., p. 490.

¹⁶Ibid.,

regarding the Jewish conception of the reward that comes to man:

Verdienst und Lohn gehören nach dieser Anschauung unauf löslich zusammen; wo Verdienst, da auch Lohn, und wo Lohn, da auch Verdienst, so auch der Lohn.

Groszen Verdienst folgt groszer Lohn, und je mehr die Verdienste wachsen, desto [491] mehr wächst die Menge des Lohnes. Auf die Grösze und Menge des Lohnes aber kommt es ganz besonders in der Ewigkeit an; denn ihr wird die Herrlichkeitsfülle entsprechen, die dereinst den einzelnen Gerechten zuteil wird. Wehe denn ob der Schande, wenn die Herrlichkeit des einen Gerechten überstrahlt wird von der Herrlichkeit eines andern. So muss denn alles Streben der Gerechten in dieser Zeit darauf gerichtet sein, die Grösze und Menge ihres Lohnes zu steigern, so weit es ihnen nur möglich ist. Auch Gott kommt diesem Bemühen entgegen. Er mehrt nicht bloss die lohnberechtigten Leistungen der Gerechten, wie und wo er nur kann, sondern er hat auch alle Lohnauszahlungen an die Gerechten in dieser Welt nur unter dem Gesichtspunkt geordnet, dass dadurch ihr zukünftiger Lohn nicht geschmälert werde. Darum wird an die Gerechten in diesem Leben möglichst wenig Lohn ausgezahlt, damit er voll und ungekürzt in der zukünftigen Welt zur Auszahlung gelangen kann.

Nur etliche menschliche Leistungen gibt es, deren Verdienst so grosz, dass für sie ein Doppellohn in dieser und in der zukünftigen Welt gezahlt wird. . . . Man sieht es mit Besorgnis an, wenn einem Gerechten in diesem Leben alles nach Wunsch und Willen geht; man fürchtet, er könnte damit seinen Lohn dahin haben. Umgekehrt freut man sich, wenn über einen Gerechten Leiden kommen; man erkennt daraus, dass Gott ihm seinen Lohn unverkürzt erhalten will. Dem entspricht die Theorie, die besonders R. Akiba (†. um 135) ausgebildet hat: Gott bestraft die Gerechten in dieser Welt wegen ihrer wenigen Übertretungen, damit in der zukünftigen Welt keine Strafe mehr durch Kürzung ihres Lohnes kompensiert zu werden braucht, sondern dieser ganz zur Auszahlung gelangen kann. Dagegen belohnt Gott die Gottlosen in dieser Welt für ihre wenigen Verdienste, damit in der zukünftigen Welt kein Lohn mehr durch Verminderung ihrer Strafe kompensiert zu werden braucht, sondern diese voll zur

Vollstreckung gelangen kann. Diese offizielle Lohnlehre der alten Synagoge lässt natürlich keinen Raum für einen Gnadenlohn. Gott und Mensch stehen hier als zwei gleichberechtigte Parteien nebeneinander: der Mensch präsentiert seine verdienstliche Leistung, und Gott erkennt sie an und zahlt den Lohn. Der Lohn selbst daher kein Erkenntnis an und zahlt den Lohn. Der Lohn selbst daher kein Lohn *κατὰ χάριν* "nach Maßgabe der Gnade," sondern ein Lohn *κατὰ ὀφείλημα* "nach Maßgabe der Schuldigkeit."¹⁷

To substantiate the above statements Billerbeck supplies a large amount of evidence from contemporary Jewish sources, which makes it clear that these conceptions actually existed. From these facts it is evident that the Jewish concept of reward is completely devoid of any consciousness of man's deficiency. This is not an unjustified conclusion; various statements in the New Testament itself show that this is exactly the sort of picture that confronted our Lord in His ministry among His own countrymen. The Pharisee over against the publican is a glaring example of self-assurance and self-confidence in one's own achievements (Luke 18:11). The typical response of the Pharisees is demonstrated in their performance of petty tasks to impress men such as almsgiving and ostentatious praying (Matt. 6:1 ff.); "But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments" (Matt. 23:5). "But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 490 ff.

and the love of God . . ." (Luke 11:42 f.). "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth the hearts . . ." (Luke 16:15). They attempted to show their superiority over the other classes of people: "And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto His disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" (Matt. 9:11; compare Luke 5:30). Jesus at the house of Simon the Pharisee is ministered to by a harlot (Luke 7:36). They rigidly held fast to the observation of the sabbath: "At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and His disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day" (Matt. 12:1; compare Luke 6:2). "And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him" (Luke 6:7). They adhered strictly to the traditions of the elders: "Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread" (Matt. 15:1,2). By meticulous probing of the Scripture they apparently hoped to gain the reward of eternal life: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life" (John 5:39). Even the disciples, under the influence of current ideas, expected that recompense was to be made in direct proportion

to the performance, whether it was the performance of sin: "And his disciples asked him, saying, Master who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2), or an act of faithful obedience: "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" (Matt. 18:1); "Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Matt. 19:27).

Because the Jews no longer looked upon their God as a gracious, generous, and merciful benefactor, but merely as a cold, calculating paymaster, they in effect cut themselves off from the true reward that God gives. They demanded recompense, and because they demanded it, they became unworthy to receive it.

CHAPTER III

GOD, THE GIVER OF THE REWARD

It does not seem necessary to prove specifically the omnipotence, power, and majesty of the God who gives the reward. That He was honored and revered by Jesus' contemporaries there is little doubt. The Jews even hesitated to speak His name. Matthew uses the contemporary formula ἡ Βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν rather than ἡ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ to cite one example of this traditional awe in which the people held God.¹ In this chapter, however, it is the writer's intent to prove that it is this great, honored, and revered God who is the rewarder of His people. If it can be shown that it is God who gives the reward, the reward automatically takes on a far greater significance. It is also necessary to show that God is the giver, so that man views the reward in its proper setting, and eliminates from his thinking the idea that he has any control over the presentation of the reward.

The Verbs Point to God as the Rewarder and Giver

There are relatively few references where God is explicitly cited as the actual giver of the reward and the bestower of the blessings that man receives. "How much more shall your

¹Alfred Plummer, S. Matthew (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 25.

Father which is in heaven give (δώσει) good things to them that ask him" (Matt. 7:11; compare Luke 11:13). These are the only passages in the Synoptic Gospels where this common verb is used in the active sense to refer to God as the "giver", though Jesus says of Himself, "I will give (δώσω) a mouth and wisdom . . ." (Luke 21:15). In Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard, the lord of the vineyard says, ". . . whatsoever is right I will give you" (Matt. 20:4). In the seventeenth chapter of John Jesus speaks more frequently of His Father as the giver using this verb διδόναι. "As thou hast given (έδωκός) Him power over all flesh, that he should give (δώσει) eternal life to as many as thou hast given Him" (John 17:2). "For I have given them the words which thou gavest me" (John 17:8). "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them" (John 17:22). In these passages it is God who in the last analysis gives (δίδοναι). In addition, αποδιδόναι is used several times in the active voice and clearly indicates that God is the "giver" or "rewarder". "And thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward (αποδώσει) thee" (Matt. 6:4,6). Matt. 16:27, "Then shall the Son of man come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then He [Son of Man] shall reward (αποδώσει) every man according to his works (Matt. 16:27). God, whether in the person of the Father or represented by the Son, is still the giver of the gifts and rewards.

These passages have been presented to lead up to the usual expression that is applied to this God who gives. The

passive form of the verb is by far the most common method to point up the action of the Giver. For *δίδοναι* alone, when used of the God who gives, there are at least a dozen references in the Synoptics where the passive is used compared to the two or three times that the active form of the verb is used.² Two examples are cited: "Ask and it shall be given (*δοθήσεται*) you" (Matt. 7:7). "Because it is given (*δέδοται*) unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 13:11). In all of these passages it is necessary to ask who the giver is, and in each instance the answer must be: God is the giver. This use of the passive voice to express the action of God is again due to the natural reverence which the Jews and these writers had for their God. As has been indicated earlier in this chapter, they were reluctant to use the name of God carelessly, but nevertheless they were always aware of His presence. This attitude is reflected also in other verbs which are used by the Synoptic writers. 1. *ἀνταποδίδοναι*: "Thou shalt be recompensed (*ἀνταποδοθήσεται*) at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14). 2. *ἀφιέναι*: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven (*ἀφιένται*) thee" (Matt. 9:2). "Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven (*ἀφεθήσεται*) unto man" (Matt. 12:31).

²The following passages refer to divine giving in the passive voice: Matt. 7:7; 10:19; 13:11, 12; 19:11; 28:18; Mark 4:11, 25; Luke 6:38; 8:10, 18; 11:9; 12:48; 22:19; in the active voice: Matt. 7:11; 20:4; Luke 11:13; 21:15.

3. κληρονομείν : "For they shall inherit (κληρονομήσουσιν) the earth" (Matt. 5:5). ". . . and shall inherit eternal life" (19:29). "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you" (25:34). 4. λαμβάνειν : ". . . every one that asketh receiveth" (Matt. 7:8). "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward" (Matt. 10:41; compare Matt. 16:24; 19:29; 21:22). These last two verbs, while active in form, still imply that what is inherited or received comes from God. In the Old Testament it was clearly understood that God is the dispenser of the inheritance. Cranfield points out that nachal (translated by κληρονομείν in the Septuagint) is used in the distribution of lands by Joshua and adds these comments: "Joshua's work culminates in the dividing out of the n. nachalah to tribes (Josh. 13:1,7). This is done by lot, i.e. regarded as done by God himself (Josh. 18:6,10)." Regarding the possession of Canaan this author continues: "It used in this connection served to emphasize two things: (1) that Israel's possession of Canaan rests on God's gift, not its own efforts or prowess; (2) its security, permanence and legitimacy, because it originates not in a mere conquest, the result of which may later be reversed, but in God's deliberate allotting."³ Add to this small list some of the

30. E. B. Cranfield, "Inherit," A Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by Alan Richardson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), p. 112.

verbs of the Beatitudes: ". . . they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4); ". . . they shall be filled" (verse 6); ". . . they shall obtain mercy" (verse 7); ". . . they shall be called the sons of God" (verse 9); not to mention the same type of verb that describes God as a judge (Matt. 7:1 f.) and we have a clear pattern that labels God as the doer or giver in these passive verbs, and in the verbs where men "receive" or "inherit."

The writer feels that only as one begins to grasp that it is God who is always in control of all dispensations, that only then can one begin to grasp the true greatness of all that God dispenses. While as far as men are concerned, the attainment of a divine reward is impossible, yet ". . . with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27). Because of what God is, He is able to do what He has promised, and at the same time it is He who can expect a response from His subjects. These points however will be studied in greater detail in the discussion of the term Father.

The God Who Rewards Described as the Father shy

Already in the Old Testament God was designated as the Father of His chosen people (Hos. 9:1; Isaiah 1:2). This placed the children of Israel in a special position of privilege and blessing (Ex. 4:22; Jer. 31:9), and because of this close relation between the Father and Israel or Ephraim His Son, God is "compelled," since He remembers Him still, and his

heart yearns for him, to work out Israel's deliverance from evil (Jer. 31:9,20), and Israel's final salvation in the work of His Messiah (Isaiah 53:10,11).⁴

In the Gospels these same characteristics of the term "Father" of the Old Testament take on an even greater and more significant meaning. The term "God," θεός, is also frequently used in all the Gospels, but never does it become as personal or as real to the individual. "God" is the one who is addressed in formal worship: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10). He it is who receives glory from men: "And they glorified the God of Israel" (Matt. 15:31). Heaven is God's throne (Matt. 5:34). The temple is the temple of God (Matt. 21:12); He it is that gives the commandments: "For God commanded saying, Honour thy father and thy mother" (Matt. 15:4). "God" is the subject of formal theological discussion with the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 12:28; regarding casting out of devils; Matt. 22:16; regarding the resurrection). The term "God" is the more general term; it provided a common ground between Jesus, the Son of God (Matt. 16:16), and the common people, who did not fully understand that Christ was the Son of God; and between Jesus and the religious professionals, the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. However, in this letter

⁴Hans Hinrich Wendt, The Teaching of Jesus, translated by John Wilson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), pp. 184-87.

situation, did Jesus call God: "your Father." He did say to them, however: "Ye are of your father, the devil" (John 8:44).

The term "Father," when used by Jesus includes all that can be said of God, is equal to God, is God, and yet the term suggests a much closer relation between God and the individual believer.⁵ Such a believer need not think of God as a vague something or other "way up there," but, because of what Christ is doing, he can actually say, "Our Father."

Doubtless the character of God as the Father is most clearly shown in what that Father did to make a world of sinners His sons: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Paul, too, recognized the greatness of what the Father has done, for he says, "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4 f.). But of specific interest to this study is the relationship between God the Father and His children who have now become sons through His Son. The value of this situation itself is described by John: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God" (I John 3:1).

In the Synoptic Gospels there are frequent references to the family relationship between God and Christ, and between

⁵Brooks Foss Westcott, The Epistles of John (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), p. 27.

God and man which is expressed in the word "Father" and "Son," and "sons." God Himself declares, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," Matt. 3:17. Already the twelve year old Jesus, recognizing that he was the Son of God, insisted on being ". . . with the things of His Father" (Luke 2:49). Πατήρ μου became a common expression for Jesus to call attention to this essential oneness between the Father and the Son (Matt. 10:32,33; 11:27; 12:5 and many others). It is the Son who fulfills the will of the Father: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). It is the Father who alone knows the Son, and it is only the Son who can reveal the Father (Matt. 11:27). It is the Son who will ". . . come in the glory of His Father" (Matt. 16:27). And no one will have a defense before the Father without the Son: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32).

This family relationship is extended to men who become the sons of God through the work of Christ (Gal. 4:4 f.). John tells us, "But as many as received him [the Son], to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). That God has really become our Father through Christ is brought out by Jesus' frequent use of πατήρ ὑμῶν (Matt. 5:16,45,48, and others). And when this relationship exists, we have at once the

motivation for divine living: ". . . that ye may prove to be the children of your Father" (Matt. 5:45), and the goal toward which we should be motivated. That goal must be the love of God in you which enables you to love your enemies, to bless those who curse you, and do good to those who spitefully use you and persecute you (Matt. 5:44), as well as to love your fellow men, forgiving them even as you ask your heavenly Father to forgive you (6:14). God's children are the ones that do the Father's will (7:21), and it is they who also become the brothers, sisters, and mother of Christ (12:50).

In most instances it is this Father who grants the reward to His children. It is the Father who forgives sin (Matt. 6:14). If alms are not done for the glory of God, the Father which is in Heaven will give no reward (6:1). Your heavenly Father feeds the birds of the air (6:26), He knows the needs of His children (6:32), even before they ask (6:8), and those needs will be supplied: "All these things shall be added unto you" (6:33). The Father reveals (and conceals) His Son: "I thank thee, O Father Lord of Heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matt. 11:25). "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). And it is the Father who gives His Holy Spirit (Luko 11:13), and therefore Jesus can assure God's children,

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give unto you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

The reference to God (*Θεός*) as the giver of any gift is conspicuously infrequent. In Matt. 6:30 God clothes the grass of the field. In Luke 12:28 God (*Θεός*) also is given this task, as well as feeding the birds of the air (12:28), but these are the only passages that can be specifically labeled as the benovolent action of God (*Θεός*).

Neither is the giving of gifts or rewards portrayed as being absolutely or autonomously in the hands of Jesus. In Mark 10:40 Jesus refuses to grant the wish of the Mother of James and John, saying, "To sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give." It must be admitted, however, that Jesus did give His gift of healing to countless afflicted souls who came to Him in their distress. There was the leper (Matt. 8:23), the paralytic (9:6 f.), the two blind men (9:27 ff.), the daughter of the Syrophenician woman (15:21 ff.). Twice He demonstrated His concern for the people who followed Him, and He fed great multitudes of people (Matt. 14:15 ff. and 15:32 ff.). In addition He could say, "Come unto me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

The person of the Messiah can never be really removed from the picture of the giving God, because without the Messiah there is no picture of God. So that even though we can say on the basis of passages quoted earlier in this chapter

that it is the Father who provides for all of creation and rewards those who do His will, yet the Christ, the Son of man, is the representative of the Father. He has the authority to forgive sins as well as to heal which is demonstrated by Jesus' words and actions: "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power (ἐξουσίαν) on earth to forgive sins, (then said he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed and go into thine house" (Matt. 9:6). Jesus assured His disciples, "All power (ἐξουσίαν) is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). In His intercessory prayer Jesus said, "Thou hast given him [the Son of man] power (ἐξουσίαν) over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him" (John 17:2). He it is who ". . . shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his work" (Matt. 16:27). For this reason Jesus can delegate to His disciples the power and authority which is His as the Son of God. He gives them power to cast out the demons, ". . . and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease" (Matt. 10:1; compare Luke 9:1-12). "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). Jesus as the Son can say, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19). "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me" (Matt. 10:40).

In spite of the fact that Jesus does grant to His disciples certain powers, the evidence still shows that it is God the Father who cares for and protects His children and also provides them with a reward for their service to Him. The open, giving hand has been the traditional liturgical symbol of God the Father. It was this concept of the Father that Luther had in mind as he wrote his explanation for the First Article of the Apostles Creed.

Since the reward is from the Father, and not from man, the reward that He gives is of far greater value than any human reward. Jesus says, "Take heed that you do not your alms before men, to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 6:1; compare 6:2 ff.). This admonition carries weight because the reward of the Father is priceless in itself and eliminates the thought of any other reward. It so far out-values the gift of an earthly father to his children that Jesus can say, "How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him" (Matt. 7:11).

Matt. 7:11 also emphasizes the certainty of the gift which comes from the Heavenly Father: the Father is sure to respond to the needs of His children, and His children can have complete confidence that God the Father will give them what He has promised. "Again I say unto you, that if two of you agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is

in heaven" (Matt. 18:19). Therefore it is to the Father that we address our petition (Matt. 6:9), even though He already knows our needs (Matt. 6:8).

That it is the Father who grants the reward also assures us that He will justly reward our service to Him, for God keeps His promises even to those who grumble at His goodness: "Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?" (Matt. 20:13). Nor will any deed of those who love Him escape His notice, which is demonstrated in the Judgment picture by the sheep at the right hand of God who fed, gave drink, clothed, visited those whom they saw in need (Matt. 25:34 ff.) for the Father even sees those things which are done in secret service to Him (Matt. 6:4,6,18).

Even though we know that the reward of the Father is a priceless reward, and that it will be certainly and justly administered, yet it remains wholly under the gracious sovereignty of the Father. It is a reward prepared for the "blessed" of the Father from the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34), and He distributes that reward as He sees fit and according to His good pleasure. He can say to the grumbling laborer, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (Matt. 20:15). While the presentation of any gift or reward is solely the Father's responsibility, yet it is this God who is *ἀγαθός* and will dispense His blessings accordingly. Only those who do not receive God's grace in vain but take

CHAPTER IV

THE RECIPIENT OF GOD'S GRACIOUS GIFTS

The Recipient

Even the self-interested recipient who has no concern for or about God can receive certain benefits. It is not necessarily true that only a child of God can receive divine blessings. Actually God gives many gifts to those who have never known Him. Jesus says, "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). Even the men of the world enjoy the benefits of this life in abundance. Though they may think that by their efforts and ability they have reached heights of worldly wealth and prosperity, in the end it all stems from the grace of God. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world and all they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1).

Possibly even many of the people who were healed by Jesus may never have come to accept Him and commit themselves to Him as their Savior. Some may have only been interested in securing the benefits of His power and that was all. There is the story of the ten lepers, where only one out of ten acknowledged the grace he had received from Christ (Luke 17:11-19). Matt. 4:23; 8:16; 9:35, and other passages speak of the multitudes who were healed by the lavish grace of God, yet nothing is told us of how many understood the

work and person of Christ. Outright rejection of Christ, however, did cut off the blessings of His healing: "And he did not many mighty works there [Nazareth] because of their unbelief" (Matt. 13:58). Men who are apart from the true God can receive blessings for civil righteousness; this is demonstrated by Paul's healing of the father of Publius. Publius had shown kindness to Paul while Paul was shipwrecked on the Island of Malta (Acts 28:7,8).

God rewards even those who do not recognize Him as God according to the principle: "The laborer is worthy of his hire." This does not mean that God is limited in his generous giving only to what man deserves, but it does mean that He will always give man at least what he deserves. Jesus' parable of the laborers in the vineyard shows both God's fairness and his generosity (Matt. 20:1 ff.).¹

The true recipient, however, does not serve his own selfish interests. The recipient who has been redeemed is in a special relation to God's grace. Here God presents his blessings of grace according to the following principle: "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have" (Luke 10:18; compare Mark 4:25). In this instance the saying of Jesus is spoken in connection with hearing; in

¹Lotto Kirn, "Loh" Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche, founded by J. J. Herzog, edited by Albert Hauck (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1902), XI, 609.

Matthew 25:29 and Luke 19:26 it is given as the reason for giving the one talent of the unfaithful servant to the one already having the largest sum. In Matthew 13:12 Jesus uses this principle to explain why the disciples have received a fuller revelation of God's redemptive plan. It is clear, in any case, that only those who have received and appropriated the divine blessing of repentance and faith in Christ will be entitled to a fuller understanding of all that Christ has done and will do for their eternal salvation.

The recipient of God's grace is described as the one who "has" (in the above passages). What he has is made clear by passages which describe what Christ came to give. The angel prophesied to Joseph that Jesus ". . . shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Jesus gave assurance to Zachaeus when he said, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). It was salvation (Luke 19:9) that Jesus brought to those who needed salvation. Therefore Jesus' work was not ". . . to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13; Luke 5:32). To this end ". . . the Son of man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). He gave His life a ransom for all when He died upon the cross (Luke 23:46). Yet even while dying He could give positive assurance to one who looked to Him for mercy, saying, "Verily, I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). This thief, who in

his dying hour received the salvation of God, became one who "has" (Luke 8:18) and to him was more given, namely, eternal life in the presence of God.

While Christ has brought salvation, only those who depend solely on Christ ever receive it or its resultant blessings. Those who rely on their own ability, as the Pharisees often did (Luke 18:11 ff.), have no assurance of receiving the reward of salvation which only Christ can give. The ones who will receive the eternal reward are those who are willing to acknowledge, after having fulfilled all of the Lord's requirements, ". . . we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). Peter, aware of his own deficiency, cried out, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). He thereby acknowledged his need for what only Christ could give. And renounced any claim to that gift. This same attitude is seen in the sinful woman who anointed the feet of Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Jesus pointedly demonstrates the difference between those who have received the great gift of salvation, because they have a great need for it, and those who have received nothing, because they don't think they lack anything (Luke 7:26-50).

Those who know they lack everything become the "meek" of the beatitudes and they shall indeed "inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5), yes, and more than the earth, eternal life itself. They are the "pure in heart" who look to Christ for salvation,

and they are assured that "they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Their "spirit," too, has become "poor" of all conceit, and to them shall be given the kingdom of heaven (5:3). For the kingdom of heaven is indeed near to him who repents (Matt. 3:2; 4:16). Those who really turn and obey God with the power of Christ enter into the kingdom of heaven before the scribes and Pharisees--even though they be publicans and harlots (Matt. 21:31).

When one does repent, then the rule of God can and does take hold of that person. Repentance is also a God given power, since man is incapable to repent of Himself. As a result of God's reign in the believer there will be an immediate response to His invitation. The procrastination of the chosen wedding guests resulted in their destruction, and the wedding meal was served to others who accepted the invitation (Matt. 22:210). Those who can be classed with the ones who "have" (Luke 8:18) will become hungerers and thirsters after righteousness and they will be completely filled (Matt. 5:6). Like Matthew they will answer the Lord's call at any time: "And he arose and followed him" (Matt. 9:9). Those who have let God rule their hearts will have no need to ask for a sign as did the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 16:1-4), as well as the scoffers beneath Christ's cross who said, "Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe" (Mark 15:32). Christ himself changes the hearts even as Jeremiah predicted, "I will put

my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.

. . . . And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord" (Jer. 31:33 f.).

In the light of God's rule in the hearts of men there becomes visible a whole pattern of service which is the natural result of man's return to God. The first response is an eager willingness to serve Jesus Himself on the part of those who have begun to share in the blessing of the kingdom. Some of the women of the Gospel history are excellent examples. There is the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with ointment (Luke 7:38 ff.); there are Mary and Martha, each of whom served the Lord in her own way (Luke 10:38 ff.); and there is the woman who anointed Jesus' head with precious spikenard (Mark 14:3 ff.). (This woman has received a tribute throughout the ages as her special reward according to Jesus' prophecy, verse 9.) According to Luke 8:1-3 there were many such who served Jesus at no little sacrifice of their own goods.

The willingness to forgive one's brother should come as a natural result, in the second place, of the forgiveness that one has received himself. Peter's question, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" deserves the answer of Jesus, that forgiveness

for one's brother is limitless: "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:21 f.). Such a response is necessary, or the forgiveness of God Himself is rejected (Matt. 6:14 f.).

The one who has benefited from God's grace in Christ will, in the third place, be ready to serve the poor and needy wherever they are and without consideration for who they are. The sheep at God's right hand are the ones to whom God says, "For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger and you took me in: Naked and you clothed me: I was sick and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me" (Matt. 25:35 f.). All who respond in this way to the needs of their fellow man are simply following Jesus' own directive: "But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind" (Luke 14:13). The parable of the good Samaritan shows that those who would serve Jesus must go all out in their service to their neighbor (Luke 10:25-37). In each case, those who have compassion on their fellow men do so without any thought of profit or reward. In the judgment scene the righteous do not even recognize the description of their own activities (Matt. 25:38,39). The invitation for the feast goes to those who are unable to repay the kindness in any way. The point in the parable of the good Samaritan would be lost, if he had served his neighbor with the hope

of gaining a reward.

Finally, the one who "has" at least a small portion of the understanding which God gives will go the full limit in his service and be willing even to love his enemies. "I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you" (Luke 6:27,28; compare Matt. 5:44).

In short, the response that is demanded is radical and complete. Only by such a complete reversal in the lives of those who have come to know Christ can men really be called sons of the Father (Matt. 5:45 and Luke 6:35). Ordinary courtesy is not enough. Jesus asks, "For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same" (Luke 6:32 f.; compare Matt. 5:46,47). More than what people without Christ can accomplish is absolutely imperative. In the end, perfection itself is the only goal that is acceptable: "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Anything less than such a radical return to God through Christ is ruled out by Jesus' words: "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Such a one will not only be a true son of the Father, but Jesus can call him a brother: "For whosoever shall do the

will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:50; compare Luke 8:21).

Consequently Jesus can say of those who have accepted Him, "Ye are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13), and "Ye are the light of the world" (verse 14). To men such as these, who have received God's grace and have let it affect their entire lives, to such men comes the reward of God.

The twelve disciples of Jesus are recipients of the reward in a special sense, because a larger portion of the mysteries of God have been revealed to them. Jesus told His disciples, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven: but to them it is not given" (Matt. 13:11; compare Luke 8:10). In response to Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ of God, Jesus says that this was revealed to him by the Father (Matt. 16:17). The transfiguration of Christ gave the disciples a further understanding of Jesus (Matt. 17:4 ff.). They were entrusted with power over evil spirits and all infirmities of the flesh, and to preach the kingdom of God (Luke 10:1 f.).

Since the disciples had received more, more was expected of them, as Jesus points out, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of them they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48). These disciples were men who had received five talents from their lord and who had put those talents to work to earn five more talents. Subsequent Church history as recorded

in the book of Acts gives ample testimony that the response of these disciples who had received more was in direct relation to what they had received. The one disciple who failed to respond deserves the judgment of Jesus: "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes" (Luke 12:47).

On the other hand, Jesus can say of that servant who has responded in measure that he has received, "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath" (Luke 12:43 f.). This is the plan that Jesus has for His disciples who have responded completely to His call. Jesus says to them, "Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration 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" (Matt. 19:28).

The True Recipient Has Special Qualifications

The response of the follower of Jesus as it has already been described is the basic qualification for the reception of the reward; this response has two characteristics: it is a response that is full of faith, and it is a faithful response.

"Full of faith" describes the manner in which the recipient receives the blessing of God. Because of the faith of the woman with the issue of blood she was healed (Matt. 9:22, Mark, 5:25, Luke 8:48). Because the blind man had faith, he received his sight (Mark 10:52; Luke 18:42). Because of the faith of the Samaritan leper, he was cleansed (Luke 17:19). In each of these instances Jesus Himself remarks that they have received the blessing because of their faith; "Thy faith hath made thee whole." At the same time the narratives give no indication that there was merely a temporary ^{or} turning to Jesus involved in this faith; rather the joyous and whole-hearted response of true disciples is certainly indicated. The blind man followed Jesus and glorified God (Luke 18:43); the Samaritan leper returned, glorified God and gave thanks to Jesus (Luke 17:15 f.). At the same time there is a hint at an even greater blessing, namely, the forgiveness of sins. From Jesus' use of a similar expression in Luke 7:50, where He has just pronounced the forgiveness of sins upon the sinful woman, this conclusion does not seem out of place. If Jesus' first words to the paralytic could be: "Thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. 9:2), it seems only natural that Jesus would offer the same comfort and forgiveness to all who come to him in faith.

The kind of faith that is most highly recommended is the faith of a child who with no arguing or reasoning simply accepts the promises of God at face value. Therefore Jesus

says, "Of such [little children] is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14). In fact without the faith of a child there is no hope, for Jesus continues, "Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (verse 15; compare Matt. 18:2 ff.).

A childlike faith is a faith that is willing to rely completely on God's goodness and providence for the things of this life. Such a faith heeds the admonition of Jesus: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34), and will take confidence in His command and promise: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things [food, clothing, and shelter] will be added unto you" (verse 33). One with such a faith will rely on the Father in heaven who certainly can satisfy the needs of His children far better than an earthly father (Matt. 7:11). With this faith, which comes from God alone, the believer will be equipped to lay up for himself spiritual treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:20).

Hand in hand with the quality of faith which comes from God is the quality of faithfulness which is expected by God. This is probably the most difficult qualification for a disciple to meet, yes, without God it would be impossible for him to be faithful at all. The twelve disciples, chosen stewards (Matt. 10:1 f.), who had the greatest opportunity

to learn true stewardship, were all unfaithful in the hour when Christ needed them most (Matt. 26:56), in spite of the previous warnings and prayers by Jesus (Matt. 26:31). The prayer of Jesus saved Peter from total despair and the terrible fate of Judas (Acts 1:16-19).

This faithfulness Jesus enjoined upon His followers through certain parables. In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins Jesus emphasizes faithful preparedness (Matt. 25:1 ff.). In the parable of the wise and foolish builders Jesus emphasizes an active and faithful response to His message and words (Matt. 7:24 ff.). In the parable of the talents Jesus allows no disguised unfaithfulness, and commends only those who have demonstrated their faithfulness in actual deeds. Constant readiness and watchfulness for the return of the Lord is an additional mark of the faithful servant (Luke 12:36 ff.).

A further mark of the faithfulness which must be found in the recipient of the reward is the willingness of a servant of the Lord to renounce any and everything which might come between them. This even includes the sacrifice of life itself, for Jesus says, "He that findeth his life [temporal prosperity] shall lose it [eternal life], and he that loseth his life [earthly ties] shall find it [the life which Christ gives]" (Matt. 10:39; compare Matt. 16:25). The rich young ruler considered earthly possessions to be worth more than the life which Jesus offered, and consequently he failed to

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gain the life with Christ and eventually lost his possessions as well (Mark 10:17 ff.). "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:16). But Jesus offers encouragement as well: "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, parents, or brethren or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" (Matt. 19:29).

Closely connected with the voluntary renunciation of any thing that can separate the servant from his lord is the persecution that a servant of the Lord has to undergo for the sake of His name. The faithful believer does not give up hope at the prospect of suffering for Him, but he trusts confidently in the Lord's promise: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you" (Matt. 5:11). According to Jesus, persecution will surely come, for the disciple is not above his master; and the Master was persecuted and reviled (Matt. 10:23 f.). He predicted, "They shall lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake" (Luke 21:12; compare Matt. 24:9). Even though ". . . ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake," Jesus says, "he that endureth unto the end shall be saved" (Matt. 10:22).

The renunciation and particularly the persecution of Christ's servants and disciples will lead to opportunities for confessing Christ's name: "And it shall turn to you for a testimony" (Luke 21:13). That disciple who does confess the name of Christ, whether in the face of persecution or otherwise, is displaying the mark of a faithful servant. Jesus says of him, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32; compare Luke 12:8).

The recipient of God's reward may therefore be classed in one of two groups. The first category includes those who serve God as servants, doing no more nor any less than what has been agreed upon. They will receive their pay correctly, justly, fairly, and honestly, receiving no more nor any less than what has been bargained for. The second category includes those who respond completely to the will of the Father even as a little trusting child, and they shall receive a reward without measure.²

2Ibid.

CHAPTER V

THE GRACIOUS REWARD AND GIFTS OF GOD

God's Providential Care

The gracious and generous nature of God is demonstrated in His giving gifts to friend and foe alike. God's love is distinctive in that He loves those who are really His enemies. This love is most clearly defined in the great gift of His Son to a lost world. John says, "God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The task given to Jesus by God was to "seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19:10), namely, those who are without God. This is God's love that ". . . while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Jesus makes it clear that if you are going to be like your Father which is in heaven, then "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44), for that is the extent to which the love of your heavenly Father also reaches.

This love of God for sinful man which is so great that it causes Him to give man His only Son, also manifests itself in the daily existence of man, whether that man has accepted the Son or not. Because of this love of God all men benefit,

for Jesus says, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). In fact God in His love cares for all of creation. Jesus points to the birds of the air: "They sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matt. 6:26). The lilies of the field are clothed in the most beautiful fashion because of God's providence even though they are of little lasting value. In spite of a sparrow's little worth God does not forget him (Luke 12:6; compare Matt. 10:29). These passages show God's concern for insignificant members of His creation. This concern of God for His creation accounts for the divine providence effective in the lives of men who do not recognize Him as their God. This providing activity of God for seemingly insignificant portions of His creation, as well as for men who do not even recognize Him as God truly demonstrates the greatness of God's love. Jesus Himself draws the only possible conclusion from such love: ". . . shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" (Matt. 6:30).

The followers of Christ are immediately in an altogether different relationship from those who do not know Him. The true believers have very definite promises of succor in time of distress. God will provide for all the needs of those who look to Him for aid. To that end Jesus gave health and healing to those who looked to Him for strength. A few examples will serve to demonstrate this fact: Two blind men

cried to Jesus for mercy; they were healed according to their faith in Him (Matt. 9:29 ff.). The man sick of the palsy heard Jesus say, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house" (Mark 2:10); he was healed. The woman with an issue of blood received healing when she merely touched the hem of Jesus' garment (Mark 5:25 ff.). Matt. 4:23,24 tells how Jesus went about Gallilee ". . . healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people." This special gift of health that Jesus gave to untold numbers was at the same time a reward for their faith in Him, and also the means whereby they were brought to faith. The disciples of John were convinced by the mighty works of Jesus that He was the Christ (Matt. 11:5). The man who was born blind was led to seek God by the healing of Jesus (John 9:36).

The mighty works of healing that Jesus performed while He walked on this earth are no longer common today, but God still gives us assurance that He will satisfy all our needs and most of our wants, whether it is health, or food, or clothing or shelter. What can a believer expect from God? In a general way he can expect to receive that for which He asks. Jesus says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matt. 7:7,8). This unqualified promise of Jesus is followed with the statement: "If ye then, being evil, knew how to

give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (verse 11). God's promises are full and free, but it is necessary for man to be willing to receive what God gives with firm confidence in His ability to do it, for Jesus says, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. 21:22). According to these passages God wants to give His children whatever they desire. One may be sure that any petition which He does not grant is not a "good thing" (Matt. 7:11), or He intends to grant a blessing that is even greater than the request.

Specifically, He promises to take care of all our needs: "All these things [food, drink, clothing] shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). Since He knows them (Matt. 6:8,32), we can be certain that He will provide for these needs, even as He takes care of the birds (6:26) and clothes the grass of the field (6:30). God's earthly blessings are abundant and sufficient to meet the needs of His people. It is not God who withholds His blessings from men, but it is man who fails to recognize God's goodness and over-estimates his own needs. Paul's statement to Timothy is strictly in keeping with the thoughts of Jesus. He says, "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (II Tim. 6:8). Jesus puts it this way: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34).

Experience seems to show that there are times, though, when even God's people are hungry, naked, and afflicted with many and serious ills. This in no way detracts from the God who watches over His children; for He who numbers the hair of one's head (Matt. 10:30), and even sees an insignificant sparrow fall (verse 29), will also be constantly near His own. It may be possible that even a believer can go hungry, that a believer can be without necessary clothing, that a believer can be ill and apparently without the providential care of God, even as it is possible for a sparrow to fall to the ground; but it is impossible for a believer to be "without the Father" (10:29), who guides the life of every believer. God will always take care of His children's needs and give them bountiful blessings, but those blessings cannot and must give way, if necessary, to an ever greater blessing, the full reward of salvation in the presence of God. For this reason Jesus could say to His disciples: "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment" (Luke 12:22 f.). God's providence is necessary but it is relatively insignificant to the great and final blessing that is given to those who accept the redemption of God's Son. This blessing is of prime importance, and Jesus bids His own to seek first the kingdom of God and all other needs, which are of little importance, will surely be supplied (Luke 12:31).

God's Spiritual Care

God's most important gift satisfies man's only real need. In order to get a fuller understanding of what this gift all includes it is necessary to look at the various descriptive phrases that are used in the Gospels and to determine their relation to each other.

The blessing of God to His faithful disciples that is really of importance can be considered either as a whole series of blessings which are more or less interconnected, or it can be considered as one all-inclusive gift of God which is finally summed up in the gift of the "kingdom." The gifts that God gives will first be considered as individual blessings; it will then be shown how all these blessings result in the final blessing, the rule of God in the hearts of men.

God's gifts or gift or reward must always be considered in the light of repentance, faith, and the forgiveness of sins. Actually these, too, are gifts of God. These, too, show the rule of God in the heart of men. In the Gospels there are frequent references to the need for repentance (Matt. 3:2,8; 4:17; 9:13), but only in Acts and the letters of Paul is the fact that God even gives this repentance fully and explicitly brought out. Peter gave all credit to the God who exalted Jesus ". . . to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). The apostles and brethren concluded when Peter reported on the conversion of Cornelius: "Then hath God also

to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (11:18; compare also Rom. 2:4; II Tim. 2:25; Heb. 6:6). This gift of repentance enables a man to see the true character of his sinful nature and to recognize his need for further divine assistance.

When the repentant soul is directed toward Christ for the assistance, God gives him faith whereby he is enabled to cling to Christ as His only hope. Even the disciples recognized that they were dependent on another for their faith. They prayed to Jesus, "Lord, increase our faith" (Luke 17:5), because they had often seen how weak their faith was (Luke 8:25). Again, in the period following the death and resurrection of Christ, the apostles made it clear that faith, too, finds its source in God alone. Peter definitely states that the lame man walked by his faith ". . . which is by him (Christ)" (Acts 3:16). Paul says that men are to live ". . . according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3; compare I Cor. 12:9; II Cor. 10:15; Gal. 3:23,25; 5:22; Eph. 6:23; I Tim 6:12).

This is the picture of the God-made disciple: one who has recognized his shortcomings, experienced genuine remorse because of his transgression, and who now turns with full and complete confidence to the God who has sent His Son to pay his debt of sin. On the basis of this relationship which is the essence of the true disciple, the rest of God's blessings continue to flow as a natural consequence of that which God has

already done. God's blessings and His rewards come to this believer and disciple not because of anything in the disciple, but because of what God has begun in him, and because of His great love which compels His to continue presenting His own with ever fuller and more complete manifestations of His love.

The first gift that God grants to those who trust in Him is the forgiveness of sins. It is a gift which is granted by God Himself: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matt. 6:14). This is a fact generally acknowledged even by the scribes and Pharisees who, skeptical of Jesus, said, "Who can forgive sins but God only?" (Mark 2:7). It is a gift which we are directed to ask for in the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our sins" (Luke 11:4), just as the unmerciful servant pleaded for and received mercy from his lord: "I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me" (Matt. 18:32). Therefore we can be certain of receiving forgiveness because of the promise: "For everyone that asketh receiveth" (Matt. 7:8; compare Matt. 21:22).

Some may feel that such a reward or gift is of doubtful value. Such an attitude is not the fault of the gift or the giver but is entirely the fault of those who receive. That it is of the highest value is obvious from the fact that Jesus could tell the victim of the palsy, "Be of good cheer [take courage], thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. 9:2). Forgiveness of his sins came before the healing of his disease, for Christ recognized that the forgiveness of his sins was of cardinal

importance. One person at least considered the forgiveness of her sins to be of infinite value. It is told how she came to Jesus with a box of ointment ". . . and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment" (Luke 7:37 f.). Jesus gave the explanation for this woman's devotion when he said to Simon the Pharisee, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" (verse 47). The value of the forgiveness of sins cannot be measured; it must be realized. Only those who recognize that the cost of the forgiveness of sins is beyond price, only those who see that Christ's death alone could buy forgiveness of sins, only those understand that the forgiveness of sins is a truly great and priceless gift.

The value of the forgiveness of sins is further seen in the next gift which the forgiveness of sins makes possible, namely, sonship with God. The requirement for sonship with God is perfection: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). This perfection is the sum of all godly virtues which must be found in believers if they are to be called sons: they are peacemakers (Matt. 5:7) and lovers of enemies (5:45). Such perfection is not found in this world apart from Christ who alone can enable sons of the devil to become sons of God.

St. Paul points out the benefit that lies in sonship: "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). An heir can consider himself the prospective owner of the possessions of the testator. The full value of such future possessions cannot be estimated before the sons actually inherit those possessions. Just as we do not fully comprehend God, so also is it impossible for us to know all that He will give. But most certainly the value of the future inheritance can never be over-estimated.

Those who are God's sons and His heirs are heirs together with Christ (Rom. 8:17) and can be called the brothers of Christ. For someone to say that he is the brother of Christ would indeed be presumptuous, if he arrived at that conclusion because of something in himself. But Jesus calls men His brothers when, by God's power, they are able to do the will of His Father. "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt. 12:50). The brotherhood of Christ has significance only in the light of the forgiveness of sins which He has earned for men. Those who do not need forgiveness of their sins, who do not need Christ, are consequently unimpressed by the blessing of Christ's brotherhood with sinful men.

Because Christ's brotherhood is important to all who trust in Him, they also can take real comfort and assurance from Jesus' words to His disciples as He ascended into heaven: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"

(Matt. 28:20). Already He had promised His disciples that His presence assures an answer to their request from God; then He said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). In the face of all problems and difficulties the believer can rely on the ever-present Christ, his brother, for strength and encouragement. Since He has overcome all sin (John 8:46) and temptation (Matt. 4:1 ff.), no believer need fear their attacks any longer. In this is the value of the brotherhood of Christ for men.

Closely related to the comfort and encouragement which His disciples receive by Christ's continual presence is the promise of additional power and support in the person of the Holy Ghost. His activity is noted already at the time of Christ's conception and birth; Jesus was conceived of the Holy Ghost (Matt. 1:18,20); Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost (Luke 1:41); Zechariah prophesied with the power of the Holy Ghost (Luke 1:67) Simeon received from the Holy Ghost the promise of life till the birth of Israel's salvation (2:25 ff.). The future work of the Holy Ghost was predicted; John foretold how Christ would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16); Jesus encouraged His disciples not to worry about what they would say in times of persecution; "For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say" (Luke 12:12; compare Matt. 13:11); He also would call to their remembrance

all that Jesus had taught them (John 14:26). The primary function of the Holy Ghost, however, would be to carry out this work after the ascension of Christ into glory. The prophecies and promises were fulfilled: the Holy Ghost was given (Acts 2:4); the Holy Ghost did fill the disciples with great and varied powers: namely, to speak in other tongues (Acts 2:4); to answer accusers (4:8); to punish enemies of righteousness (13:9 f.); to prophesy (19:6); and the Holy Ghost gave the disciples their authority and assignments. Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the Holy Ghost (Acts 13:4); the Holy Ghost makes men overseers over His flocks (20:28).

The Holy Ghost is the priceless gift of the Father to the children whom He loves. The greatness of this gift is in direct proportion to the greatness of God Himself. No human father would give his child a stone instead of the bread for which the child asked, a snake for a fish, or a deadly scorpion for an egg; a father would give his child the very best food that he could afford, and he would give only that which would be to the child's benefit. Jesus, then, speaking to such human fathers, says, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost) to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13). God is good; the gift He gives to His children far surpasses the best that a man can offer to his son; God's gift is His Holy Spirit.

These gifts which a disciple and follower of Christ receives, namely, the forgiveness of sins, sonship with the Father, brotherhood with Christ, His continual presence, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, these gifts at the same time give eternal life to the believer.

To understand the essence of ordinary life is difficult in itself. Eternal life is even more difficult to comprehend fully. In the Old Testament physical life was considered to be the highest good, better even than wisdom and honor; "Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left is wisdom and honor" (Proverbs 3:16); "And Satan answered the Lord, and said, skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life" (Job 2:4); "For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion" (Ecc. 9:4). "Life" is the word for happiness, and to receive a long life is to live till a "good old age" (Gen. 15:15; 25:8; Judges 8:32).¹

Genesis 2:7 tells us that ". . . the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." God is the source of life. Before man sinned he lived his life in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). Life originally included the "image of God," but sin destroyed the image of God in the

¹Gerhard von Rad, "šāw," Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, n.d.), II, 844.

life of man. The punishment for sin, however, is really not death or the cessation of life, but rather the curse of God which rests in the corruption of that life; the pain of child birth, a sense of shame, the toil and sweat of labor (Gen. 3:16 ff.). This is made clear in that God shut out Adam and Eve from the garden lest they partake of the fruit of the tree which could have prolonged this imperfect life (2:22 f.).²

Yet even the life that man has is a gift of God, and is nourished and sustained by God; "For with thee is the fountain of life" (Ps. 36:9). God let the Israelites go hungry for a time that He might make them ". . . know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live" (Deut. 8:3). These words were quoted by Jesus to confound the evil's temptation (Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4).

The life which is more than bread (Matt. 4:4) and more than eating and drinking (6:25) includes a certain fellowship with God: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire beside thee" (Ps. 16:11), and this life is received by faith: "The just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4). This life takes on eschatological significance in the words of Daniel: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and

²Ibid., p. 846.

some to shame and everlasting contempt" (12:2), so that the true life is a life after death and a life that endures forever. II Maccabees 7:9,14,23,36 are passages which express this same idea.³ The question put to Jesus by both a lawyer and a young ruler, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25; 18:18), reflected Jewish interest in the attainment of the life after death.⁴

Most significant for this study is the fact that the eternal life is a gift of God. The disciple who has left all for the sake of Christ ". . . shall inherit everlasting life" (Matt. 19:29); he shall "receive . . . in the world to come eternal life" (John 10:28); "Thou hast given him the Son power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him" (17:2); "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23); "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (I John 5:11).

Since it is a gift of God, its worth is without question. But its value as a gift of God becomes comprehensible when we recognize the demands laid on those who seek this life.

³ Cf. George Bertram, "ζωή," Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, n.d.), II, 854.

⁴ Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, "Das Evangelium nach Matthäus," Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922), I, 808.

Jesus told the rich young ruler, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:17). Perfect obedience to the will of God is again insisted upon by Jesus. Eternal life must be of great value if a Jewish lawyer, a scholar, thought it worth while to work for it (Luke 10:25). Eternal life must indeed be priceless if it is worth more than the loss of a hand, or a foot, or an eye (Matt. 18:8 f.), if it is of greater value than the closest relative or dearest possession (Matt. 19:29). In the final analysis nothing equals life: "For what shall a man be profited, if he gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shall a man give for his life?" (Matt. 16:26).

Eternal life, viewed from a more positive aspect, is a priceless gift since it is life. Life can only be described in terms of Him who has life, the Christ who died, yet who lives after having overcome death. Christ can say, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). St. John says, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4).

Jesus explains, "For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26). Later He adds, "I am the bread of life" (6:35); "I am the way the truth and the life" (14:6). Christ is life; His resurrection proves that this is no idle statement: "He is not here: for he is risen as he said" (Matt. 28:6). In Christ death itself is destroyed: "His grace . . . is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath

abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (II Tim. 1:10). In the resurrection of Christ "Death is swallowed up in victory" (I Cor. 15:54); life has defeated death; Christ has extracted death's sting and has taken away the victory of the grave (verse 55). Not only is God the "living God" (Jos. 3:10), but He is indeed the God of the "living": "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. 22:32). God is life, and to live is to have God.

The Gospel of John again and again speaks of God's redemptive blessings in terms of life. The passages found in his Gospel bring out this concept more clearly than any passages of the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus, as quoted by John, makes it most clear that the life of Christ exists only for that man who accepts Christ: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life" (3:36). Again: "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life" (5:24); also: "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (6:40; compare 10:10; 11:25; 17:3; 20:31). This life, which is a gift of God, comes only to men who believe in Him; but at the same time it is available to all who believe in Him.

The Synoptic Gospels present the *Σωη'* concept with other points of emphasis. Those who have this life have fellowship with God because they are the sons of God. Jesus calls those who have been made worthy to receive the resurrection "sons of God" (Luke 20:36), ". . . and they are as the angels in heaven" (Matt. 22:30), who ". . . always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10). This relationship is a permanent relationship. The angels ". . . do always behold the face of my Father." This life is called eternal life or everlasting life (Matt. 19:29; 25:46). In this life there is no death: "Neither can they die anymore" (Luke 20:36). The life that God gives is an eternal and everlasting sharing in all the blessings of heaven. In the eternal life man will experience true joy. To His faithful servants the Lord says: "Enter into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:21). This eternal joy of the future life will be enhanced by the presence of all the saints, whether Jew or Gentile, who will come from every corner of the globe, and who will sit down together with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 8:11; compare Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, Luke 16:22).

The eternal life which will be fully revealed includes a sharing in the glory of God Himself, and in the glory of His Son. Jesus promises, "Then after the judgment shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43). Moses had a foretaste of this glory of God when

he was allowed to come near to God (Ex. 24:2), to commune with Him (25:22), and to see the glory of God (33:22 f.), but not the face of God (33:20), the glory which was reflected in the face of Moses (34:29) and terrified the people (34:30). The three disciples were made aware of true heavenly bliss on the mount of transfiguration. Christ appeared with the glory of God in the fellowship of Moses and Elijah, who also appeared in glory. This glorious splendor was revealed to these men, who fell down in holy awe and reverence before their Lord (Luke 9:29 ff.). Peter was quick to recognize that to be in the presence of God's saints in glory was a great privilege: "Master, it is good for us to be here" (9:33).⁵ Jesus gave these disciples a preview of the eternal life with God. They no doubt readily appreciated the significance of this glimpse of glory. They remembered Moses' great desire to see the glory of the Lord: "I beseech thee, show me thy glory" (Ex. 33:18). They recalled that Isaiah's prophecy of the new age included this promise: "They shall see the glory of our Lord, and excellency of our God" (Isaiah 35:2), and they remembered the promise of Isaiah 66:18. They no doubt shared some of the current rabbinial ideas such as Kittel quotes from Franz Hauer (The Lord speaks):

⁵Peter may have preferred to prolong the heavenly bliss because of a disinclination to face the problems of the coming months.

Im kommenden Aeon, wenn ich meine Schekina zum Zion geführt habe, werde ich meinen $\gamma\iota\iota\zeta$ enthüllen für ganz Israel, und sie werden schauen und werden leben in Ewigkeit.

From Berakot 34a the following is quoted:

Sie sitzen mit ihren Kronen auf ihren Häuptern und erquicken sich an dem Glanz der Schekina, denn es heisst (Ex. 24:16): Sie schauen Gott und so asien und tranken sie.

This is the glory which Stephen saw by the power of the Holy Ghost shortly before his death (Acts 7:55). In this glory of God and of His Son Jesus they crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8) all believers participate: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4); "Who the Lord Jesus Christ shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21).

Part of this eternal life and glory which is yet to be revealed is the privilege of God's own to see His face. Not even Moses was permitted to see God face to face, for God said, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (Ex. 33:20). But the followers of Christ shall both see God and live. Jesus clearly promises this in the words of the Beatitude: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Actually to see God is the height of fellowship with God. (The angels enjoy this privilege already according to Jesus: "Their angels do always

⁶Gerhard Kittel, "δοξα," Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer, n.d.), II, 253.

behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.") Only those who have found favor in His sight will ever be able to see God.

Because Moses had found favor with God (Ex. 33:17), God said, "Behold there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen" (Ex. 33:21 ff.). The expression to "see God" is, of course, closely connected to the expression to "see the glory of God." Yet actually to see God is a far greater thing than to see His glory. For men have seen the glory of God: The Israelites saw God's glory reflected in the face of Moses (Ex. 34:29 f.); the disciples saw the glory of God on the mountain of transfiguration, but no man has seen God's face. John says, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18), because only ". . . he which is of the Father, he hath seen the Father" (6:46). On the other hand, those who have come to faith in the Son of God also have, through the eyes of faith, seen the Father. Jesus said to Philip, "Have thou not known me Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father!" (John 14:9).

The kingdom of God is the sum of all of God's spiritual blessings. It has already been demonstrated that God's gifts or rewards fall into several categories, but at the same time there is a close connection between all of God's blessings. They are interdependent; they work together. Ultimately whatever God gives to His followers comes under the heading: The Kingdom of God. Kirn says, "The reward is regularly the bestowal of the kingdom of God."⁷ Ritschl maintains that ". . . the reward means participation in the kingdom of God."⁸ According to Billerbeck, Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven as a Messianic gift of salvation, salvation itself.⁹ Plummer declares, in connection with the first beatitude, that the position of the first and last beatitude ". . . indicates that the possession of the Kingdom sums up all the other results of the blessed dispositions that are mentioned."¹⁰

A study of the words of Jesus cannot but lead to this conclusion. The kingdom of God is not only the highest good,

⁷Otto Kirn, "Lehn," Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche, founded by J. J. Herzog, edited by Albert Hauck (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1902, XI, 608.

⁸Albert Ritschl, Die Christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung, third edition (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1889), II, 33.

⁹Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, op. cit., p. 181.

¹⁰Alfred Plummer, S. Matthew (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 63.

but it is the sum of all good, because "This Kingdom is the rule of God"11 and "The idea, underlying all, is God's gracious manifestation in the world This gracious purpose was . . . individualized, and the Kingdom actually established in the Messiah."12

The rule of God can be considered as a blessing or a reward inasmuch as the kingdom of God includes all that God has done and continues to do, and will do for His people. It is the culmination of God's activity for men. Man's repentance is the first trace of the rule of God effectively at work. In repentance man's rule is changed from self-rule to God-rule. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). The coming of the kingdom and the preaching of the kingdom is the call to repentance. It was John's proclamation: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). Jesus continued that proclamation (Matt. 4:17) and directed the disciples to go ". . . to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and as you go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 10:6 f.). This proclamation was hope to troubled souls, for in the kingdom of God the power of sickness, sin, and the devil is destroyed. "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils,"

¹¹Ibid., p. 25 f.

¹²Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), I, 160 f.

Jesus said to his disciples (Matt. 10:8); by these things the nearness of the kingdom is proved (10:7 compare 12:28).

The kingdom expressions also bring out the close relationship between God and His people. In Matthew 13:38 the good seed of the kingdom parable is called the "children of the kingdom." Concluding the parable, Jesus says, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (13:43). As sons of the kingdom they are also heirs of the kingdom and all that God promises to give to his heirs. The sons of the kingdom, likewise, have fellowship with the Son and share in His reign; they shall "see the Son coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:28).

The kingdom of heaven is therefore at the same time another expression for the eternal glory which God promises to His subjects. In the kingdom is the real joy, for the Lord of the kingdom says to his faithful servants: "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." The blessed who inherit the kingdom prepared for them (Matt. 25:34) are the righteous who enter into eternal life (25:46).

In the last analysis the kingdom of God is the entire Messianic gift of salvation, it is salvation itself. This is a far cry from the rabbinical concept of the kingdom. They felt that it depended upon man to come under the rule of God by recognition of, and subjection and obedience to His will. His rule resulted in salvation in so far as men became subject to it, and fulfilled its demand, but God's rule was

never salvation itself. The difference here is the difference between Law and Gospel: the one demands, the other gives.¹³ According to the words of Jesus the kingdom is God's saving gift to man.

The basic idea in the kingdom is the ruling concept; however, this ruling is not limited to the rule of God alone, but the reward for faithful disciples is that they shall also share in the rule of God. This is part of the disciple's enjoying the fellowship of God and His Christ, but it is also more than that; here the disciple actually participates in God's divine ruling. Jesus clearly says to His disciples: "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" (Matt. 19:28). Plummer says in a footnote to this passage, "'Judging' does not mean sentencing the wicked, which would be painful work, and no reward, but rather ruling the good."¹⁴ That this reward for faithful service is an opportunity actually to share in God's ruling activity is further brought out by the parable of the householder who faithfully carries out the duties that his Lord has assigned to him. Jesus' own verdict for such action is clear: "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler

¹³Herman L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, loc. cit.

¹⁴Alfred Plummer, op. cit., p. 270. Cf. Judges 3:10; 10:2,3; 12:9,11,13,14.

over all his goods" (Matt. 24:46 f.). The invitation of the King at the day of judgment gives the most conclusive evidence that the reward for God's faithful includes the right and privilege to rule with God: "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). Plummer comes to the same conclusions:

This King not only comes in His kingdom, but has kingdoms to bestow, which have been waiting throughout all time for their proper sovereigns. And the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High' (Dan. 7:27).¹⁵

That disciple who has accepted the gracious call of the Savior and has responded with faithful service receives a clear and certain promise: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things" (Matt. 25:21). Sharing in God's rule is the significant reward that God bestows upon all His true disciples; it is not limited to the twelve who enjoyed the blessed privilege of working personally with Jesus. Plummer comments on the parable of the laborers in the vineyard: "The reward is open to all true workers for Christ without distinction. To have been earliest on the field confers no exclusive right to special blessings."¹⁶ The other passages which have been cited also show that the

¹⁵Alfred Plummer, op. cit., p. 350 f.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 272.

disciple who serves will indeed share in God's ruling activity.

In considering the kingdom of God as a reward or gift of God to His faithful followers, the assumption is not made that this completely covers the entire relationship of the believer to God's ruling activity in his life. The kingdom is a much broader term that includes more than the list of blessings that have been attributed to it in this paper. But considering those aspects of the kingdom which can be termed the reward or gift of God, the disciple cannot help but be overwhelmed by the unspeakable greatness of the love of God who has bestowed upon His own such a priceless gift. The value of the individual gifts which are included in the kingdom help to shed light on the value of the kingdom as a whole. This value is emphasized by the frequent references to the "blessed" in close connection to the kingdom itself and the gifts which it includes. In this term as used so frequently by Jesus there is a real unifying concept for all those elements which are connected with the Christian's reward.

Μακάριος is a word peculiarly suited to describe the state or condition of the recipient of God's gift or reward. In the classical Greek usage *μακάριος* describes the happy condition of the gods who are without earthly trials and troubles, and it can describe the dead who have passed into the painless life of the gods. Even though this word was not

limited to this usage among the Greeks,¹⁷ and in spite of the fact that in the Septuagint it was used to refer to happiness generally,¹⁸ in New Testament usage μακάριος still retains a strong flavor of this original meaning. It is true that writers of the Old Testament were aware at least that God is the dispenser of all blessedness, but to them blessedness described a more general condition of God-given prosperity in the various activities of life.¹⁹ The predominant idea in the New Testament is the unique religious joy which comes to men through the participation in the redemption of the kingdom of God.²⁰ All goods of earthly value do not compare to the blessedness which applies to him only who has this highest gift, the kingdom of God. This alone is what the pious hope for, and when they have it they are truly blessed. Blessedness consists in this that exiled men are made citizens of the new kingdom and are made partakers of all those things which the citizenship in God's kingdom includes. It is true that this blessedness involves a complete reversal in the character, desires, and pleasures of the new

¹⁷Friedrich Hauck, "μακάριος," Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer), IV, 365.

¹⁸George Bertram, "μακάριος," Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Kohlhammer), IV, 367.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 368.

²⁰Friedrich Hauck, op. cit., p. 369.

citizen. The true blessedness which comes with the kingdom changes the human evaluation of pleasure into divine appreciation of heavenly joy. This blessedness comes as God's reward which Jesus reckons to the pious sufferers for His cause who are described as *πτωχοί* (Luke 6:20), or *πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι* (Matt. 5:3), *πεινῶντες* (Luke 6:21) and *πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην* (Matt. 5:6), *κλαίοντες* (Luke 6:21), *πενθούντες* (Matt. 5:4), in opposition to unrepentant rich men, and proud self-righteous "models" of piety (Luke 18:9). God wants a simple, merciful response (Matt. 23:34 ff.), and not mere legal adherence to the letter of the law: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13), nor self-righteous external purity: "Ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess" (23:25). The blessedness of the Christian reward is sure to come to him who receives the revelation of God with true faith: "And blessed is she that believeth: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45); "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona:" for receiving the revelation of the Father (Matt. 16:17). In spite of the strangeness of the revelation ". . . blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me" (Matt. 11:6). Blessed also is he who does not depend upon false supports for faith, such as "seeing" (John 20:29), who readily hears His word (Luke 11:28) and responds to it: "Not everyone who says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of

heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21; compare 7:24 ff.).²¹

Truly the disciple and believer of Jesus Christ is a blessed heir to all the possessions of God's kingdom.

The Reward, a Future Reality but a Present Hope

According to the Synoptic Gospels, God's gifts of eternal life, divine glory, and the kingdom of God in its most complete sense are always pictured as blessings to be realized in the future age. Eternal life particularly is connected to the hope of the future in the Synoptics; and, according to Bultmann, it can be interpreted in this way for the entire New Testament.²² "Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life" (Matt. 7:14). "It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed . . . with one eye rather than . . . to be cast into hell fire" (18:8,9). "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (19:17). "He shall receive . . . in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10:30; compare Luke 18:30). In the Gospel of John such a future connotation is permitted but is not entirely demanded by the words of Jesus which are quoted. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: he that believeth not the Son shall not see life" (John 3:36). In this passage both the present and future concepts of life

²¹Ibid., p. 369 ff.

²²Rudolph Bultmann, op. cit., p. 866.

are implied. Bultman puts it like this: "Eternal life is present insofar as the hope of it rests upon what has happened in Christ."²³ Christ is the source of life for the believer as well as life itself (John 1:4), and inasmuch as the believer has Christ he has life. By faith in Christ the believer has ". . . passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Peter says that God ". . . hath begotten us again unto a lively hope (ἐλπίδα ζωῆς αἰώνου) by the resurrection of Christ from the dead" (I Peter 1:3). Paul adds: "That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7). There is no disagreement between the Scriptural writers. They all envision eternal life as something to be grasped in its fulness in the future. But because of its certainty as a future blessing it becomes for them a living hope during their present existence.

It is the glory of the eternal life which is clearly a blessing to be received in the future age. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43). This will take place after ". . . the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels . . ." (16:27; compare 24:30 f.). In the new age the disciples will be rewarded for their endurance and renunciation by being permitted to share in the rule of Christ when the ". . . Son of man shall sit upon the throne of his glory

²³Ibid.

... (19:28). In all these instances the glory of Christ will be given to, and be seen by men in the age following the second coming of the Son.

The full and complete blessings of the kingdom of God will be presented only after the second coming of the Son of man in glory. It is a time in the future when many who come from the east and west shall "sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11). The children of the kingdom are the seed which is gathered into the barns at the harvest of judgment day (Matt. 13:37ff.), and at that time the children of the kingdom shall "... shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father," (13:43). This will all take place when the Son of man shall come in His kingdom (16:28). The description of judgment day when the Son of man shall come in His glory with His holy angels to sit upon the throne of His glory to judge all nations and particularly to reward His own (Matt. 25:31 ff.) clearly presents an event which is to take place in the future. Jesus points to the kingdom in its final completed state when he says to His disciples, "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (26:29).

Many passages refer to the kingdom as already being established in the present age. When the devils are cast out "... then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28). From the time of John the Baptist, who "preached the kingdom

of God" (Luke 16:16) and its nearness (Matt. 3:2), men press into it (Luke 16:16), which shows that the kingdom already exists for those who accept the rule of God in their hearts: "Behold the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).²⁴ All of this, however, does not change the basic idea that the reward of the kingdom is a reward of the kingdom is a reward to be given at a future time when the rule of God is fully recognized and accepted following the judgment of all men by the Son of man. The parable of the seed (Matt. 13:37 ff.) and the parable of the net cast into the sea (13:47 ff.) present this truth: the kingdom of God exists now for those who have accepted Christ, but at the end of the world the kingdom of God will be clearly defined, and a permanent separation will take place when the righteous inherit eternal life, while the wicked are cast out into eternal destruction.

Although the reward will not be received by men until the consummation of the age, nevertheless we are assured that this reward is ready and waiting for God's sons even now. The kingdom which the blessed of the Father will receive has been prepared for them "from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). In John 14:2 Jesus gives His disciples a similar word of comfort: "In my Father's house are many

²⁴For a full discussion of the exegetical problem in this passage see Paul M. Bretscher, "Luke 17:21," Concordia Theological Monthly, XV (November, 1944), pp. 730-36; and "Luke 17:20-21," Concordia Theological Monthly XXII (December, 1951), pp. 895-907.

mansions: if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." Kirn points to various passages to show that the reward is already prepared: "Rejoice, and be glad now for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:12); "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . ." (Matt. 6:20); it can be stored there now; "Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" (19:21); in the face of persecutions, "Rejoice ye in that day and leap for joy, for behold your reward is great in heaven" (Luke 6:23).²⁵

Since the kingdom and the eternal reward is already waiting for the heirs of eternal life, it is understandable how the intense hope of the Christians and disciples would bring the future reality of heavenly glory and bliss into the immediate context of their life. They felt that the final coming of the Lord would be soon. They were constantly aware of the nearness of this coming of Christ. The two sons of Zebedee were eager to secure their place in His kingdom (Matt. 20:20 ff.; Mark 10:35 ff.); the disciples hoped that Pentecost would usher in the glorious kingdom of God (Acts 1:6). Jesus had also given several prophecies to excite their anticipation. In Matthew 16:17, Jesus seemed to be describing His second coming when He said, "There be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man

²⁵Otto Kirn, op. cit., p. 608.

coming in his kingdom" (compare Mark 9:1). The disciples who wanted to know when all this would take place (Matt. 24:3) were given the signs of the end and then told: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" (24:34). They had been warned, however, that ". . . of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels, but my Father only" (24:36).

The reward of the redeemed, therefore, is already prepared and waiting for them, but it will be presented to the righteous at the final coming of Christ, the hour of which is known to God alone, but which is imminent for all men and eagerly awaited for by those who have accepted the rule of God in their heart.

CHAPTER VI

THE REWARD AND ITS PURPOSE

The Reward Demonstrates God's Love

In the second chapter of this paper it is brought out how God's covenant was established with His people because of His love for them. The children of Israel were themselves helpless bond-servants when their God delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh. He owed them nothing for anything that they had done for Him. He had done everything for them. His covenant which in placing certain demands upon the people only gave God a greater opportunity to bestow His blessings bountifully upon them. In no sense can it be said that the Israelites were now able to earn that which God gives.

In the age of the New Testament the picture has changed very little. The covenant which God had established with His people still stands. But the people had misinterpreted God's love and mercy and had attempted to justify themselves before God to the extent that they rebelled against God. God then sent His Son into the world to bring repentance (μετάνοια) and salvation. The reward that is promised in the New Testament is, therefore, an appreciably greater reward because it contains the promise of full participation for the redeemed in the new kingdom of God in contrast with the fallen kingdom of David. Such a reward for an otherwise sinful people has

been made possible only through the great love that God has for His people, a love that compels Him to give His only Son. God's gifts in the New Testament, from the forgiveness of sins to the eternal fellowship with Him in heaven, are all given or promised to show this love.

It is this love which man needs because his helpless condition has not improved. God's love comes especially to, and only to those who are spiritually bankrupt. The kingdom can only come to the poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3); the righteousness of God can only come to those who are starved for it (5:6); the comfort of the fulfilled kingdom comes to those alone who mourn for their failure to keep God's covenant and who turn to Christ (5:4). Only such as these can be called "the meek," and they shall inherit the earth (5:5); only those who depend upon Christ and the covenant which He has kept are the pure in heart; and for giving all the credit to God alone, they shall receive the reward of an eternal vision of God (5:8). For this reason the kingdom of God itself, and the final blessings of that kingdom will be presented to the publicans and harlots before those who pride themselves in self-achieved piety. The picture of the Pharisee and the publican will always be the same. The one who relies upon the love of God to bestow His righteousness will go down to his house justified rather than the one who is still trying to keep the covenant in his own strength (Luke 18:9 ff.).

It is the love of God which prompts Him to give gifts and to promise rewards to men; it is no mere effort on His part to repay men for their services.¹ In the paternal relationship of God to His children lies the real motive for His bestowing His gifts and blessings upon them. A child receives great blessings from a loving father; but a father who has a child that is handicapped mentally or physically will go even further out of his way to make that child's life at least a little bit more comfortable. God's children are handicapped spiritually; He has gone all the way to make their spiritual life complete. From giving a covenant, to sending His Son, to bestowing a reward, God's love continues to shower down divine blessings upon those who look to Him as their Father.

The Reward Directs His Disciples

While the reward that God gives is primarily a fuller expression of the love that He has for His people, at the same time it serves a very practical purpose in the lives of those people. Jesus, first of all, uses the concept of the reward to direct His disciples to true piety. Jesus speaks of the two kinds of rewards which come to men (Matt. 6:1 ff.) in order to bring home to His disciples the nature of God-pleasing service. Probably no other method could have made

¹O. Michel, "Der Lohn in der Verkündigung Jesu," Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie, 1931-32, p. 51.

the point of the discussion more obvious. The impiety of hypocritical "good works" is demonstrated by the goal which they are to achieve. True piety is theocentric, not anthropocentric, which Jesus proves by showing that it is the Father who bestows His gracious reward upon those who serve Him. It is true that a reward is promised in these passages to those who do serve, but it is not necessarily true that the disciples are to work because of the reward which is promised. In this instance, as in every other instance, whatever a disciple does, he does with the power and strength which God gives. The promise of the reward only reaffirms God's love and goodness. The disciple who understands the value of God's reward will no longer pursue the activities which can at best produce a more earthly reward. His life will be directed away from man, and what man can give toward God, and what God does give.

The Reward Aids Men to Endure

The reward that God gives serves yet another purpose: as a helping motive for patience and endurance in the face of adverse circumstances. Jesus used the concept of reward in close connection with predictions of future persecution (Matt. 5:10,11; 10:22; 24:9) to encourage His disciples to bear up under them. Various writers recognize the promise of the reward in this sense as a legitimate motivation for continuing in the way of the Lord. Plummer says, "During the

time of growth, and in moments of weakness later, the thought of the rewards which God has promised to those who obey may come in as a legitimate support and stimulus."² Kirn recognizes this purpose of the reward, but he emphasizes that it is only a helping motive--something to hold before one in moments of oppression and tribulation, it dare never become the chief motive for such endurance.³ He points out that the real motive for Christian service is the disciple's aspiration to be like God: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matt. 5:9); "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (5:45); "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (5:48). "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke 6:35). It is his devotion to Jesus and his appreciation of the Gospel that spurs him on: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matt. 5:11); ". . . he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it" (10:39); "Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospels shall save

²Alfred Plummer, S. Matthew (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 91; cf. p. 158.

³Otto Kirn, "Lohn," Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche, founded by J. J. Herzog, edited by Albert Hauck (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1902), XI, 609.

it" (Mark 5:35). The forgiveness of his sins is the motivation for his response: "I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?" (Matt. 18:32 f.; compare 6:14 f.).⁴

God definitely has not offered His reward to men in order to give them a goal toward which they must exert themselves. Nor is the promise of a great reward intended to be the motivation for righteous and God-pleasing service. Any such idea is ruled out by the description of startled amazement which is found in those who do receive the reward. Not only do the righteous on the day of judgment not expect a reward, but they also cannot even remember performing any services which would ordinarily have merited a reward (Matt. 25:37 ff.). Whatever is done by the faithful servants of God is done merely out of an awareness of what God expects and a conscious realization that one's best service is never really sufficient. "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all these things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). As Michel says in this connection: "Das Motiv des freien, gütigen Lohnes, das wir sonst vorgefanden, fehlt hier ganz."⁵ The one who has responded to the

⁴Ibid.

⁵Michel, op. cit., p. 52.

slightest need of a disciple shall just as surely receive God's reward as one performing a great deed of charity. It is not the promise of reward which moves men to respond to the wishes of God or His ministers; men respond because He is God.

In view of all these considerations the reward that God gives, far from being a mere motivation for action, really demonstrates anew the grace of our God who "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). God's gifts and rewards, in the writer's mind serve their greatest purpose in providing a real demonstration of divine greatness, greatness which is reflected in every phase of the reward which God gives.

The Promise of the Reward is a Gospel Message

In the light of the material presented so far there seems to be no valid reason for refraining from proclaiming the wonderful message of all that God has promised to His disciples. The Christian's reward is good news, even as Christ's redemption is good news. Jesus is the Savior who shall save His people from their sins: that is the Gospel. Jesus is also the King, who shall lead His people to eternal life in glory: that, too, is the Gospel. The second statement, however, can also be termed the "reward." In the last analysis the promise of the reward is nothing else than a continuation and expansion of what God has begun in Christ. The final reward is God's finish of what was begun in Christ.

Jesus unhesitatingly spoke again and again of all that would be given to His disciples for accepting Him as their Savior. He did not seem concerned about the possibility that they might begin to work only for the promised reward. This could have been a serious problem even for Jesus, since it is hardly possible for a man to work for a reward and still work for Jesus. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). This danger faces the preaching of every phase of the Gospel, and not just the preaching of the reward. Therefore, just as it is necessary to preach the Gospel, so is it also necessary that the Gospel be preached in its fullness; no link in the chain of divine truths dare be broken lest there be some who fail to recognize the true greatness of the love of our God.

The preaching of the Christian's reward should be done with boldness and confidence, for by telling men what God will do for them, as well as what He has done for them, the preacher of the Gospel presents a full and complete Gospel message to comfort troubled souls. What Jesus has done brings men to salvation. What Jesus is still going to do sustains and keeps men for the life which is yet to be revealed in all its glory for men who have been saved by Jesus.

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