

October 11, 2015

REWARDS

Matthew 6:1-4

We are blessed! We are blessed in order to be a blessing. And yet, I think sometimes, we would rather be more blessed than be the blessing. We, in our Fallen human state, with its ego-driven nature, want to be recognized...especially when we have done something extraordinary. Back in the 1960s, when we first heard Andy Warhol's famous quote – "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes," it implied, in many respects, this drive for recognition. Contrast the Warhol quote with something Alexander Pope said just over 200 years earlier: "Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame." Meaning that it is better to do something good without anybody knowing it, and, it should be an embarrassment to seek fame for what we've done.

Jesus said, "*Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before others, to be seen by them.*" (Matthew 6:1a) Part of the issue is motive...wanting to be seen, rather than just doing acts of righteousness because they are the right thing to do. Jesus called it hypocritical to toot your own horn, or, "*announce it with trumpets,*" when you did something generous. It was, to Him, a matter of seeking earthly honor. Who are we trying to impress? God? He is the creator of this glorious universe! We can't impress God!

I do want to say that there is little wrong with receiving honor in this life. We feel privileged to show gratitude to heroes; to those who have, in fact, gone out of their way for the benefit of others; and to those who have sacrificially done something that may have exceeded their common abilities. The problem is that it can be overdone. Just ask Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Jim Collins, the first men who flew to the moon. The fame they received was overwhelming.

It's on Holly Boulevard from Gower Street to LaBrea Avenue and on Vine Street from Yucca Street to Sunset Boulevard that we have the Hollywood "walk of fame," where many movie stars have stars with their names embedded on the sidewalk. There's also Grauman's Chinese Theater on Hollywood Boulevard where we can also find the handprints of many celebrities in cement in its forecourt. One day, it will all disappear. There are also sports halls of fame and music halls of fame, where we can all go and find out who's been famous! Do you remember the song by Dr. Hook and the Medicine Show about "making it" on the cover of the *Rolling Stone Magazine*? Yippee!

Fame. Recognition. Honor.

Some may seem, from a worldly point of view, to deserve it more than others. But Jesus says, we should not seek it. Earthly rewards mean nothing to God. James Dobson, the wonderful head of the Christian organization, *Focus on the Family*, had been an award winning tennis player in college. One time, when he went back to the school where some of his trophies had been in a huge showcase along with dozens of others, he found out his had been tossed, they were in the dumpster out back. It was a moment of awakening for him that, eventually, our earthly glories will arrive on the ash-heap of history. And he was aware that these trophies actually meant nothing to God. And if you do seek some sort of recognition, Jesus says, "*You will have no reward from your heavenly Father.*" (2a) Now, on the other hand, there is nothing wrong (unless it is overdone) to show recognition and honor for others. In fact, Paul said in Romans 12:10, "*Outdo one another in showing honor!*" Still, our motive for doing something honorable should be because it is a good thing to do, not in order to be recognized.

We should do things as Alexander Pope suggests, "by stealth!"

Your gracious deeds like giving to the needy (or *giving alms*), as Jesus says, should be done in secret! "*Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing!*" (6:3) In other words, don't let anything hold you back. Your left hand may not want to let go of what your right hand wants to give. Keep it secret. That way, because you did good for righteousness' sake, "*your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you!*" (v. 4)

There *will be* rewards, though! It says so. Consider what Paul said in Galatians 6:7-10: *“A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, will from that nature reap... destruction! The one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life! Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up! Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers!”* Jesus said, *“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back!”* (Luke 6:38)

There *will be* rewards. But they will come from God, and they will be far better than any earthly recognition. What we should seek is the words: *“Well done, good and faithful servant.”* (Matthew 25:21, 23) Jesus also said, *“Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.”* (Matthew 20:26-27) *“The Last will be first, and the first will be last!”* (Matthew 20:16)

The issue, here, related to the idea of good stewardship is that, though we do not seek earthly rewards for the ways we can be a blessing, by being a blessing we will receive eternal rewards. Why? Our trophies will become gifts before the throne of God! We will be able to crown Him with many crowns!