

Well Done, Thou Good and Faithful Servant

Often when a star athlete of a winning team is being interviewed after a game, the athlete will try to share some of the glory with his teammates. While the attempt to recognize another person's contributions is certainly a noble gesture, our society does not evaluate the worth of an individual as God does. The person who cleans up the locker room after the team is finished dressing may be using his talent of cleaning to the fullest extent possible, but will never receive the recognition that the athletes do, at least here on earth. While we don't positively know the ultimate value of anyone's work until judgment day, it appears that many of the people who go through life with little recognition here on earth will be stars in heaven because they were faithful with the talents God gave them.

The rewards of money, power, and recognition are handed out on a basis that even the world has to admit do not always reflect a person's true worth. The Christian church does much better overall than the world at recognizing true value, but the church struggles with this problem, too. A friend of mine once told me about a leader of a church organization who asked him how he thought certain members of a \$5000 club should be recognized. The members of this club had each donated \$5000 or more to some worthy church project. My friend told him (satirically) that they should get some people to play silver trumpets for this group, but a plain room should be set up somewhere else for the poor widows who could only contribute a mite. To God, the dollar amount of the gift doesn't matter as much as the desire to use the resources and gifts that He has given us for His kingdom.

God has given each of us abilities. Some of these are passed to us naturally through the physical realm through genetic characteristics inherited from our parents, some are learned from other people, and others are given to us supernaturally. God wants us to use the gifts He gives us. A musician or artist using his ability to the fullest will reflect what the Psalmist (19:1-4) says is the glory of God in creation. The same applies to those with abilities in every occupation and aspect of life. But the Holy Spirit also gives us gifts that come to us supernaturally. These gifts are given to unite the church, draw others to Christ, and strengthen our own relationship with God.

I Peter 4:10 tells us "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (NIV). Each of us has been given a gift. We here on earth have the opportunity to use these gifts in a special way for God's kingdom. While there are certainly gifts that will be used in heaven, we here on earth are in a situation where we have a great opportunity for their use. In our world, the kingdom of darkness is in all out war against God. Pain and needs, both physical and spiritual, are everywhere and the resources to meet them are being hoarded by those trying desperately to find security outside of God. Sinful nature infects even those who would serve God and must be dealt with, painfully at times. Those who are faithful with the gifts God has given them under these circumstances will be accorded special recognition in heaven. In 2 Corinthians 4:17, Paul reminds us "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (NIV).

The temptation to want to seek worldly success here on earth is a temptation which is deadly. The Psalmist (73:2-4, 17a) says "But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man. They are not plagued by human ills. ... Till I entered the sanctuary of God. Then I understood their final destiny" (NIV).

Do you look at others who are perhaps your age and see those who have established themselves in a career or a business or in some other way that gives them notoriety? Do you wish God had given you that security instead of all the struggles you have? But, using the gifts that God gave you to feather your own nest instead of build the kingdom of God is a real danger to the soul. Many times even some of the good pleasures of this life must be passed up because they would interfere the work necessary to advance the kingdom of God.

Even with all the enjoyment available here, is there anything that can compare with what it will be like when upon arriving in heaven to have Jesus greet you by saying, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant"?

The idea of rewards in heaven is often puzzling to the child of God. He knows that all his abilities and everything he possesses, even his faith, is a gift from God. He also knows the sin that dwells in his own heart. Even the deeds which he does that others view as good are often done from motives that subconsciously are mixed with the desire to win approval in the eyes of other Christians or fulfill his own need for a sense of accomplishment and worth.

Yet, the Bible clearly teaches the fact that believers will both be forgiven and rewarded. Rewards are an encouragement to the believer, a reminder that what God values is different from what the world values.

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