

REWARDS OF CHRISTIANS

Jesus teaches in Matthew 6:20, "*Lay up for yourself treasures in heaven.*"

"Lay up **FOR YOURSELF** treasures in heaven." What Jesus taught us to "*lay up for yourself treasures in heaven*" while you are living this life down here on earth. If we do not, we will not have any when we get there. Jesus teaches that we earn our own wealth for heaven for eternity. It may sound startling, but nowhere in Scripture does it teach that anyone else will lay up treasures for you. We are responsible for our own treasures in heaven.

Colossians 3:1-2 teaches, "*Since you have risen with Christ, shift your ambitions to heaven. Inasmuch as your Master reigns there, that is the place to invest. Purpose to be rich in the next life and discount, yea, even ignore the attractions of this one.*"

God knows the luring power of treasure; therefore, He invites us to "*lay up treasures in heaven.*"

A group of teen agers were facing a high wall, when one of them said, "*That wall is too high for me to try and scale. I could never get over it.*" Whereupon one of the other teen-agers grabbed his wallet and tossed it over the fence. The teen-ager, who said he could never get over the fence, immediately, without any hesitation, scrambled over to retrieve his money.

The point is that: "**Treasure made the difference.**" Story books and television stories are filled with daring tales of men who risked their lives for treasure. God knows about this passion, and He uses it. God knows that if we get serious about treasures in heaven, it won't be long before we have **SO** much laid up in heaven that our hearts won't be on anything else. God invites us all to accumulate fortunes **by faith** in heaven, our eternal home.

Another translation of Colossians 3:1-2 is, "*Since you have been made partakers of Christ's resurrection, seek the things above where Christ reigns in power. You must be heavenly-minded, not on the passing things of earth.*"

But, someone says, "*Isn't this what we call **greed**? Isn't it a bit selfish to think of acquiring treasures for heaven?*" The answer is, greed is terrible when it is directed to the things of this world, however, it can be Godly, when it is directed heavenward . . . (Stay with me now and pay close attention!) . . . Looking heavenward is what makes what may appear to be greed "*Godly.*" This desire for "*treasures in heaven*" operates by faith. Faith is what changes the quality of greed and causes it to become something **spiritual**. The difference is the **direction**. Godly greed, operating by faith, is turned heavenward, while "*carnal*" greed is selfish desires toward the things of this world.

A person who is laying up treasures in heaven is depositing his wealth in a bank he **cannot see** . . . that makes it by faith. He earns this treasure serving an **invisible** Lord, by faith. He does all this simply on the Word of His Savior. He believes Christ when He says, "*You won't be sorry when you lay up treasures for yourself in heaven!*" This honors the Lord, because it requires one to trust His promises and forsake the promises of the world.

God created all of man's emotions and these emotions are not wrong. It is only when Satan twists and warps these emotions that makes them into something wrong. It is the direction in which these emotions are used that makes them right or wrong.

Consider the emotions of **hate**. Hate can be good. We need to develop a hatred for sin and things of Satan. God hates sin. When He sees this same hatred for sin burning in His children, He is thrilled. God wants to turn that same hatred aflame in His children. The difference is the direction in which hatred is used. Hatred toward sin is good, however, hatred toward other people is evil.

Hungering for God's heavenly treasure in eternity is good. It honors Him. Jesus taught that we must turn our back on the "god of mammon" (that is, money) in order to **covet** God's heavenly treasures. God is pleased when our **ambitions** are centered in Him. The more we deposit in heaven, the more confidence we show in His promises. Our greed for heavenly treasures is an accurate measurement of our faith in the Word of God.

My wife and I lived for a short while on a campground called "*Hidden Valley*." It was situated in the hill country close to Kingston, New York. Because it was difficult to find, there was a sign at a certain fork in the road, which marked the route to the camp ground. One time, some prankster turned the sign around and it showed the wrong direction into the camp. The arrow showed sincere people the wrong direction.

Satan, too, reverses the arrow, if he can, so that God's blessings are mistaken for heavenly treasure and, by so doing, he attempts to misdirect the Christian's life.

Human nature often seems to make it easy for Satan. Christians seem to believe "*How nice it is that God is so rich and will give us all we can hold, simply because He has so much to share.*" Some Christians seem to feel about God like those who feel their rich relatives have an obligation to share their wealth with them.

Satan's suggests that our Heavenly Father is rich, (Of course, there's no question about that), however, the question is: "Is God obligated to give His children His treasures?" The answer is "**No!**" God knows that it is always better when people make their own way.

Many Christians do not seem to be interested in Christ's invitation to "*Lay up for yourself treasure in heaven.*" They don't think much about what heaven will be like, or interested in investing in eternity. However, no one will be able to say God didn't make it clear when Scriptures like John 6:27 teaches the Christian to, "*labor for that which endures unto eternal life.*" Matthew 6:33 teaches to, "*seek ye first the kingdom of God.*" God's Word is very serious about Christians laying up treasures for themselves in heaven. Christ means to reward His servants for sacrifices they have endured in His Name. He not only calls us to another life. but He also invites us to compete for a place in this new life.

Salvation is only part of heaven's appeal. God means for us to work to get ahead in the next life as surely as men compete to get ahead in this life. Matthew 19:29 teaches, "*And they [that is, those who live faithfully for Christ] shall receive an hundred fold AND (plus) inherit everlasting life.*" Note: the double character of this promise Jesus gives: "*Eternal life AND 100 fold.*" These are two separate matters. It is wonderful to be saved from hell, to be rescued from the fate awaiting those who die outside of Christ.

I am not minimizing salvation, but, rather, I am saying that salvation is *only* the **beginning point** of a whole new life. Salvation is a birth process. It **starts** life. The new-birth does not relieve a man from the responsibilities of that new life. Does a birth into any life automatically guarantee one a future position in that life? The answer is "**No!**" An individual must always make his own way, here in this life and in the life to come.

Getting a man into heaven is God's part. What the man does with that privilege is up to him. With the Lord's interest rate so high, no one of us should end up without treasures. However, Satan deceives Christians into thinking that God will somehow equalize the difference between those who obey Him and those who don't. Satan wants us to believe that, by some miraculous means, God will reward those who have lived wasted lives along with those who have been faithful to Him.

Satan is clever about it. It is no small trick getting otherwise sober believers to think that those who squander life's opportunity will fare as well as those who go "all out" in living for Jesus. Satan wants us to believe, "*Sure, I know a person has to work to get ahead in this life, that he must be industrious and conscientious, however, **in heaven** it will be different. Jesus does it all. He is so rich, that you will have all you want because you are God's child. So forget about investing in Christ. It isn't necessary. There's wealth in abundance in heaven. There will be more than enough for all who reach there and God is so generous we do not have to worry about how we live down here. God will see that we have everything they want. Isn't that what heaven means?*"

This sounds Christ honoring, doesn't it? But, that is the very reason that makes it so tricky. Christians enjoy hearing that. They want to believe it. If Satan can keep them thinking that until they die, he can fill heaven with those who have no treasure laid up there. Satan knows human weakness. His suggestions always appeal to our lower natures. We want to believe that God is so rich that He will **give** us treasure in heaven.

When one accepts Jesus Christ as their Savior, they become "**citizens of heaven**" and, because one has "*citizenship in heaven*" it is natural to suppose he is automatically entitled to the wealth of heaven?

But is that kind of reasoning ever right?

Let's suppose that an immigrant comes to America. It is true that America is an extremely wealthy country. However, when an immigrant becomes a citizen of the United States, is he automatically entitled to the wealth of America? Citizenship in America is a wonderful thing. One has an amazing package of rights which comes with this citizenship. A lot of people would pay a big price for citizenship in America if it could be bought, **but it is not for sale**. It comes as a **gift** to those born here, or qualify under the immigrant law. Citizenship in America does not mean America does not have any poor people. The point is, citizenship does not **automatically** make all Americans rich. We may be the wealthiest of all nations, yet we have slums and ghettos. America has her paupers. A wealthy country does not mean each inhabitant is rich.

Many are **BORN** citizens of heaven (when they are born-again), however, does that make them rich in the treasures of heaven? Will the wealth of heaven be **automatically** transferred to every child of God? Will every Christian have a glorious, beautiful mansion waiting for them in heaven, and (spiritually speaking), will they have a fat bank account in heaven? I think not, a

man must work more diligently to receive heaven's treasures in eternity, than he does to receive earth's treasures in this life.

That was the very point of the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16). Those who don't care about serving Jesus will have a place in heaven all right, however, what will be their treasures, if they don't store any up there?

Citizenship in heaven can be compared to citizenship in the United States. A precious package of rights go with each citizenship. There is a "**SALVATION PACKAGE**" which is received when one is born into the kingdom of God.

1. **Eternal Life**
2. **Sonship**
3. **Righteousness**
4. **Forgiveness**
5. **The Holy Spirit**
6. **Authority**
7. **Inheritance**

These are things WE COULD **NOT** DO FOR OURSELVES, but, rather, they are rights given to us. They cannot be earned, but, rather, they are **bestowed** on each of us when we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior.

The rights of American citizenship are bestowed on one at birth. Every Christian has **every spiritual blessing** CONFERRED on him at the moment he is "*born-again*." The benefits of salvation **come down** from God, but our treasure is "**laid up**."

Someone may ask, "*Doesn't the statement, 'inheritance in Christ,' suggest treasures?*" Most people automatically associate an inheritance with wealth. So, when Scripture speaks of an "*inheritance in Christ*," we assume it has to do with a fortune. We hear of people dying and leaving estates to heirs, however, people do not inherit any kind of "*treasure*," fortune or position in Christ. The sons of God are not made wealthy by a will. What does the Bible say about heirs?

Romans 8:17 states, "*And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*"

The Contemporary Version states, "*Together with Christ we will be given what God has promised. We will also share in the glory of Christ, because we have suffered with Him.*"

Some Christians just look at this passage of Scripture on the surface, accepting their first impression, without digging any deeper into God's Word to find out just what is it that we inherit. They believe that we jointly inherit some vast fortune when we are joined with Christ. Of course, there is no doubt that "*joint-heirs*" means sharing some kind of an inheritance. But the question is, "*What does **Christ** inherit?*" When we answer that question, we'll know exactly what it is in that we share with Christ. Jesus walked the earth in a body, appearing as an ordinary man. However, He was no less the great **I AM** spoken of in the Old Testament and He said so in John 8:58. Though men were allowed to put Him on a cross, He was no less than the Eternal God in

human form. True, He divested Himself of outward majesty for the time of His humiliation, but He **DID NOT** divest Himself of His Divine Being. He would then have ceased to exist. He appeared as a Carpenter, but He was still Deity. During all of His earthly sojourn, He was still **GOD!**

And, because of this, when Christ died He did not **INHERIT HEAVEN**, that was already His as the Sovereign of Glory. When He died (that is, when His body died) He **resumed** what He laid aside when He stepped into the human stream. He took again what He had left behind. He did not "*inherit*" the Glory of Heaven because that was His already.

What then is His inheritance? - What is it that we are to share with Him?

The inheritance of the Lord is "*earthly*." If it is something He **inherits**, it must be *earthly*. **WHY?** Remember, what He inherits from His **Father**, He inherits in the role of a SON. It is as the **SON** that He inherits from His Father. And Jesus' role as **SON** has to do with the earth, not heaven. What is it that He inherits on earth? He inherited the privilege of returning in **POWER** and **GLORY** to set up His kingdom. Jesus is coming back, however, He is not coming back as the suffering Lamb of Calvary, but as the roaring Lion of Judah. The Carpenter is coming back again, but He is returning as a **KING!** Jesus Christ will appear a second time, not in humility, but, rather, He will arrive in the clouds as the **GLORIFIED SON** of God to rule on earth. The earth will behold the same Jesus coming, but this time "*in the glory of HIS FATHER with the holy angels*" (Mark 8:38).

Don't miss the fact that He is **STILL** in the **role of the Son** and, having fulfilled all that was required of Him by His cross, He returns to be **HONORED** on earth as He is in heaven. And, now, He invites us to be joint-heirs, to share His kingdom with Him.

Jesus said in Matthew 25:34, "*Come ye blessed of **MY FATHER** and inherit the kingdom of God prepared for **YOU!***"

That is our inheritance prepared for us! The "*come ye,*" in Matthew 25:34, is Christ's invitation to **SHARE** in His earthly inheritance as "*joint-heirs*" with Him.

This takes place on earth!

Our "*joint-inheritance*" with Christ has NOTHING to do with our eternal sonship in heaven, but, rather, it has to do only with the privilege of APPEARING WITH HIM on earth to taste the glory that accompanies His **EXALTATION**. Today we feel the bitter barbs that are yet a part of His humiliation, however, one day we will see our dear Master high and lifted up before all peoples of the world.

How do we share in Christ's kingdom?

The answer is, that when Christ reigns on His earthly kingdom, we will reign with Him. Didn't Jesus teach us to pray, "*Thy will be done, Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.*" Christ's kingdom on earth is an extension of God's will - an extension of heaven.

We will reign with Him!

There will be Christians who will enjoy the **RANK on earth, that they hold in heaven.** "*Rank*" is something that is earned. The rank we have with Jesus on earth during the millennium will be the one for which we have QUALIFIED ourselves for. Our EARTHLY INHERITANCE is being with Christ Jesus on earth. Our RANK (position) is what we have earned. Being with Christ in His earthly kingdom is **INHERITED**, however, what we do with Him there, is **EARNED**. Being with the Lord in eternity is a GIFT, being with the Lord on earth is an INHERITANCE.

No matter where we are, the privilege of being there is either a gift or an inheritance. We can do nothing to make ourselves eligible to BE WITH the Lord any place. Jesus prayed, "*Father, I pray that those whom Thou hast given Me **BE WITH ME**, to behold My glory...*" (John 17:24). The Contemporary Version of this verse reads, "*Father, I want everyone You have given Me to be with Me, wherever I am. Then they will see the glory that You have given Me.*" The matter of WHERE we are, is God's answer to Jesus' prayer request.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 states, "*so shall we ever be with the Lord.*"

Romans 8:38-39 teaches that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The free gifts that are ours when we accepted Christ are:

1. Jesus Christ forfeited His glory in heaven
2. In obedience He came to earth to redeem us
3. He will be rewarded on **earth** for His obedience
4. We forfeit the glory of this life to live for Christ.
5. In obedience we live for our unseen Lord.
6. We will be rewarded **in heaven**.

Jesus has invited us to share in **His reward**, His earthly kingdom. He wants us on earth with Him to witness the glory of His Father.

The privilege of ruling and reigning with Christ in His kingdom is our inheritance!

Satan would trick us into believing the privilege of being with Christ (our inheritance) automatically lays up treasures in heaven. That is just not true! Satan's logic is simple. If he can confound, and confuse, the idea of our inheritance with the necessity for laying up treasure in heaven, he disrupts God's plan for us to "*lay up treasures for ourself in heaven.*"

Why bother "*laying up treasure,*" if we are going to inherit it anyhow?

If Satan can get us to believe that our status as "*joint-heirs with Christ,*" assures us of treasures in heaven, then why should we work for "*treasures in heaven?*"

I don't pretend to understand all about heaven . . . (nor even all about Christ's kingdom on earth) . . . but this I do know, heaven and the kingdom of Christ will be a big, busy place, therefore, there has to be some system of command. All kingdoms require a descending order of powers (administrators) to operate smoothly. Even Satan's kingdom has a hierarchy of powers (Ephesians 6:12). The top positions, naturally, carry the most authority. They will be the **closest to the throne**, just as the cabinet officers are the closest to the president to our country.

I, certainly, do not want to trespass into matters beyond the scope of what the Word of God teaches, but we are assured that there will be "*authority*" given. Scripture teaches that there will be degrees of reward.

There, of course, will not be any disappointment in heaven, however, there will be various aptitudes and intensities of abilities to enjoy the bliss that heaven will afford. There will be ranks, evidently descending order of positions. The higher the rank the closer one will be to Christ. Those who long to be near Jesus throughout eternity, should strive to be faithful to Him in this life. Some will be closer to Jesus than others.

In the story found in Matthew 20:20-23 of the mother of Zebedee's children. It relates how this mother asked Jesus to allow her sons to set one on Jesus' left side and the other on the right side of Him in His kingdom. Jesus' answer was, "*There will be such a place, but it is not up to Me, My Father will give it to those prepared for it.*" You can be sure that eternal nearness to the Lord will be awards for faithfulness in this life.

If you were to pass into eternity at this moment – to go and face your eternal rewards – what would they be? Are you satisfied with what they would be? Your rewards for all eternity will depend upon your faithfulness to whatever it is the Lord has called you to do – and your attitude in forming it.