

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

### **Issue 63**

#### **Grace And Rewards**

#### **The Kingdom Series Part 2**

*by Alex Robertson*

In the New Testament, Jesus talks about rewards several times. The parable of the talents and others like it speak of rewards which are given according to work well done. Jesus says, "The Son of man shall come ... and he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matthew 16:27). Paul also clearly refers to rewards, for example in 1 Corinthians 3:14 - "If any man's work abide ... he shall receive a reward". There are many other examples in the New Testament that mention rewards; and rewards, by definition, are earned, worked for, given according to merit.

#### **A contradiction?**

But how can this be? We know that we are saved by grace, "not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9). Grace is the free gift of God. Entering into eternal life, having our sins forgiven and becoming children of God can never be a matter of works or what we deserve. We are sinners and we deserve hell, eternal separation from God. No amount of goodness, diligent work or sacrificial lifestyle can make us worthy.

This seeming contradiction has posed a problem for many Christians, and it is a problem which rarely receives a satisfactory answer. The result is that often the scriptures that speak of rewards are passed by, ignored or explained away. But we cannot afford to just sideline scriptures like that. If there seems to be a contradiction, we should tackle it head on.

#### **The Key**

The key is in understanding the difference between the kingdom and eternity. There are two very different things that happen after Jesus returns to earth. Firstly, Jesus will reign as king on this present earth for a thousand years. But then that era will end, Jesus will "deliver the kingdom to God" (1 Corinthians 15:24), this earth will be destroyed and God will create new heavens and a new earth, where we will dwell for eternity (Revelation 20:11-21:1). In this final scenario, Jesus is always referred to as the Lamb (Revelation 21 & 22), whereas when he comes again he is referred to as the king ("King of kings and Lord of lords", Revelation 19:16) who will reign on earth (Revelation 20:4,6).

The key is this: we gain salvation, eternal life, forgiveness of sins, and become children of God by grace, thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, and that alone. Scripture is absolutely clear about this; it is grace, not works. But we gain a place reigning in the millennial (thousand-year) kingdom of Christ by works, not by grace. A place in the kingdom is conditional on our obedience, on

our service, on what we do with our lives once we have become Christians. Wherever rewards are mentioned, it is to do with the kingdom, not to do with eternal life.

Things may become clearer if we remember that there are two judgements. One is for all people. It is the judgement at the "great white throne" of God. Here it is decided whether each person will go into eternal life or to the lake of fire. The decision is made on one simple issue: whether a person's name is written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 20:11-15). The other judgement is for believers only, and it is Christ, not God, who judges. Paul says that believers "must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

At the great white throne, we depend entirely on grace. My name is written in the Lamb's book of life only because I have accepted the free gift of God's grace, no other reason. But at the judgement seat of Christ, each person is judged "according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10) - in other words, it is nothing to do with grace, and everything to do with good or bad deeds - works.

### **The foundation and the building**

Paul's illustration of the foundation and the building in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 is helpful. Paul tells us that a foundation has been laid in our lives, which is Jesus Christ, but that we have to be careful how we build on that foundation, and that if we build with the right materials which will withstand the fire, we shall receive a reward.

The foundation which has been laid is the fact that our sins are forgiven and we have become children of God, made righteous before him and reconciled to him. This, let us make clear again, is by grace. We cannot do it, only God can do it. But when it comes to building on the foundation, God cannot do it, only we can do it. "If any man build ... let every man take heed how he builds ... every man's work shall be made manifest" (1 Corinthians 3:12,13).

Our building will be tested "by fire", and if it survives the fire, we will receive a reward, which, to emphasize it again, is not a matter of grace but is something given according to what we deserve. So grace and rewards are both seen in this illustration. The testing by fire happens at the judgement seat of Christ, because it is only Christians who have the "foundation" of Christ in their lives, and therefore only Christians who can build.

### **Conditional entry**

Paul also tells us that entry into the kingdom is conditional. In Acts 14:22 Paul urged the believers to press on and told them "that we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God". In 2 Timothy 2:12 he pointed out that "if we suffer, we shall also reign with him", clearly making entry into the kingdom conditional on our suffering on behalf of Christ and the gospel. Of course, this does not necessarily mean being thrown in prison, tortured or martyred for the faith. But it does mean paying a price for being a Christian, facing opposition and difficulties because we make a stand for Christ.

In Romans 8:17 there is another “if”. Paul is talking about the fact that we are children of God (by grace) and he goes on to say “and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together”. We are joint-heirs with Christ - of what? What is Christ going to inherit? He is going to inherit the kingdom. He is worthy to receive power, glory, honour, riches, strength, blessing (Revelation 5:12). He received none of these things the first time he came to earth. He was cursed, not blessed; despised, not honoured; he came in poverty, not riches. Now, he receives blessing and honour only from us as Christians. But when he comes again, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord (Philippians 2:10,11). He will inherit the kingdom - and we shall be “joint-heirs with Christ”, which means we shall also inherit the kingdom, if ... There’s the condition. If we suffer with him. Which means, if we don’t suffer with him, we forfeit our inheritance, we don’t come into what is potentially ours, we miss out.

### **Missing out**

What does it mean to miss out? In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul says that if our work (building) is burned up, we shall “suffer loss”. He is careful to point out that we ourselves “shall be saved” - our eternal salvation is not in view here. That is secure. Our building may have been poor but our foundation stands sure. Our names are in the book of life, by the grace of God. But there is something called “suffering loss”. In the parable of the talents, there are rewards, but there are also punishments dealt out to unfaithful servants, for disobedience, for laziness, for work badly done. The man who buried his talent was thrown out “into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30). Words that we don’t like to hear; and we often assume that this is talking about hell. But I don’t think so. Jesus does speak about the lake of fire in other places: he talks of unquenchable fire, where the worm does not die, and of torment in the flames. But the language here is quite different. “Outer darkness” is not fire, and “weeping and gnashing of teeth” is not torment. “Outer” means outside of somewhere, it means exclusion. Darkness means “not in the light”. And “weeping and gnashing of teeth” seems to me to be summed up in the word “regret”. I believe that born-again, saved Christians can miss out on the kingdom if they refuse to take up the challenge of discipleship, if they disobey the commands of Jesus, if they live their lives to please themselves and satisfy their own desires. Jesus is very stern with these servants (who can only refer to Christians). They will not lose their salvation, but they will miss out on the kingdom. They will be cast out, excluded, away from the light, and they will have bitter, deep regret because they have forfeited their inheritance, reigning with Christ, for pleasure and treasure on earth.

### **The challenge**

When we pass over or ignore the verses in scripture about rewards, we miss the strong challenge that is given us. There will be Christians who “suffer loss” and miss out on the kingdom because they were not challenged and warned, because they joined the crowd who ignored these scriptures or explained them away, instead of confronting them. But it’s time to face facts. What will Christ have to say to you at his judgement seat? We’ve all seen the poster that says “If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” But this brings it home rather sharply: if you have to be judged on what you have done with your life since becoming a Christian,

and the consequence of that judgement is entry into the thousand-year kingdom of Christ or exclusion from it, will there be enough hard evidence to win you a place in the kingdom? Or will you be one of those who ends up “suffering loss”?

Paul’s phrase “suffer loss” brings to mind a similar phrase in Philippians, where he says that “what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ ... for whom I have suffered the loss of all things ... that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:7,8). Paul wasn’t willing to “suffer loss” in the kingdom. He wanted to make sure that his building was with gold, silver and precious stones. But that cost him. In order to not “suffer loss” in the future, he “suffered the loss of all things” during his time on earth. His testimony shows how much he suffered for the sake of Christ; but he knew it was worth every second.

Discipleship is radical and costly, but there is a precious reward at the end of it, reigning in the kingdom. When you became a Christian, that inheritance became potentially yours. You are a joint-heir with Christ; you too can reign with him - but only if you will pay the price in this life. Grace is free, but if you want rewards, you have to work for them. Eternal life is free, but if you want to reign with Christ in the kingdom, the price you have to pay is obedience to the radical commandments of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Hearing and believing is not enough. Our house will not stand the storms. Only the “doing” of obedience makes a solid building. May your house stand the test!

## **EXPERIENCES FROM LIFE**

*by Joanna Barratt*

### **Could God Say “Thank You”?**

“Grace and Rewards” - what a subject! Does this make you feel uncomfortable? Sounds very much like what the Mormons would be preaching, doesn’t it? Well, maybe they’ve got a point. Lazy Christians would like to brush to one side nasty scriptures which talk about ‘works’ because it would mean doing something practical. They would have to completely change their lifestyle and begin to do things in secret for the love of God instead of openly for the praise of men.

Ask yourself this question ... “Am I of value to anyone outside my immediate family and place of employment?” I say ‘immediate family’ because obviously, if you are a mum, your husband and children rely on you for all the cooking, cleaning and household chores you do. If you work for your living, your boss and colleagues need you to do the job you are being paid to do. But are you of value to anyone else? Would anyone miss you if you were no longer around?

## **Faithfulness is not enough!**

Two ministers were talking about a member of one of their congregations who had passed away. "She will be sorely missed", said one. "Why is that?" asked the other. "Well, she was very faithful", was the reply. "What did she do?" "Oh, she didn't do anything, but she sat in that same seat every week and was very faithful?" The member did nothing other than warm the same seat week after week, and because the seat was now vacant the minister said she would be 'sorely missed' and that she had been very 'faithful'. Is that what God is looking for from us? Do you think we shall be greeted with a "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord" if all we have done is faithfully warmed a church seat week in and week out? I don't think so.

Some time ago I was reading a bedtime story to my 2 youngest children, Izaac and Tamar, from a Children's Bible. I had reached the very last story in the book about facing God and the great books being opened. When I read that we would all be judged according to our works here on earth Izaac looked alarmed and asked me to explain what that was all about. I told him that all our deeds, both good and bad, will be revealed when we stand before the judgement seat of Christ to give an account for what we have done on this earth.

I could see he was really worried because he is full of mischief and tends to get into quite a bit of hot water. He blurted out, "You mean God writes down everything we've ever done ... all the bad things?" "Yes, everything we've done since we became a Christian. God forgives our sins but He makes a note of all the times we've done what He wants us to do, and all the times we have refused to do what He wants us to do. If we do the things that please Him we will be rewarded, but if we don't we'll end up with nothing." I then reminded him of some of the things his big brother had done for God, and the things we'd done as a family - like sponsoring children in Guatemala and the Philippines so that they can be fed nutritious food every week, in the hope that they will grow up to be healthy and strong. The things that God considers to be good deeds are the things we do specifically to please Him, not for the praise of other people, but just for Him, because we love Him. We said a prayer together and then I put them both to bed.

## **A huge surprise**

The next morning I packed the children off to school and ran upstairs to put something in Izaac's room. I thought I had opened the wrong door at first, everything was spick and span. Toys in their right places, clothes put away, and even the Action Man posters which he dearly loved (and his dad did not like at all) had been taken down from the walls and were nowhere to be seen.

When Izaac came home from school I questioned him concerning what he had done. He said he'd decided that he'd better do something quick to let God know that he was serious about being a Christian and had cleared his bedroom of all the things that God might not approve of. This had been a sacrifice to Izaac, but he'd done it out of an innocent and pure heart because he wanted God to be pleased with him.

## **Nigerian Blessings**

Maurice and I recently visited Nigeria. For a couple of years now we have been sending our 'Challenge' bulletin to a Nigerian brother who had himself duplicated hundreds of copies and distributed them in both Nigeria and Ghana. He had been in regular communication with us and asked if he could become 'Barratt Ministries Nigeria' for he was so enthusiastic about the teaching he received from us and wanted to publish it further. We decided it was time to meet him.

It was apparent as soon as we met him that God had planned for Surakat, our Nigerian brother, to cross our path. We stayed in his home and shared wonderful fellowship with him and his wife, Nike. When he first started receiving 'Challenge' he read in one of the issues about the persecution which had taken place in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria, and how many of the Christians had been martyred for their faith. He decided that he would travel the miles to Kaduna to take a look for himself. Sadly, he found the report to be true, but even more sadly was the fact that he found many children, orphans of the martyrs, not being cared for properly by people who would bring them up in a Christian manner. He was burdened for these children and felt the urgency to bring some of them to his home town and build a place where he could take care of them. When he spoke to us of his concern our hearts burned within us and we knew this was something God wanted us to be fully involved with.

## **The first gift**

When we returned we shared with our children all we had experienced. Izaak had done some jobs around the house for a number of weeks and was due a sizeable sum of 'wages' (our children don't get pocket money, they earn any money they get by doing little jobs). He asked Maurice if he could have £1 of what was owed him so that he could buy some sweets, but requested that the rest of the money be put towards the orphanage we talked about building. Without realising it, Izaak started off the fund for these little kids who had lost their parents.

He's not perfect by any means, his teachers will vouch for that, but his heart is soft towards God. Even mischievous kids can make a difference to the Kingdom of God. Look at the little boy who handed Jesus his 5 loaves and 2 fishes - his packed lunch. What help could that have been in a situation where thousands of people needed feeding. He offered his little bit without any embarrassment because he was young and naive, maybe you or I would have considered making a suggestion like that stupid. But Jesus took what he offered, blessed it and multiplied it over and over again until everyone had eaten their fill, and there was still plenty left over.

## **Victory at a price**

We must nearly all be aware of the recent Rugby World Cup victory for England as it was publicised extensively on the television and in the newspapers. Jason Robinson, one of the key England players, hosts a house group which Maurice teaches at on a regular basis. He shared with us his personal amazement at the reception the team received when they returned to England. He knew he was playing for his country, as he and other members of the team had done many times before, but this

particular victory brought glory to our nation as the last time England had won a world sporting event was 1966. The whole England squad were paraded through London in open-topped buses whilst thousands of fans lined the streets to cheer them

(Mordecai had a similar experience to this when he was paraded on a horse through the city of Sushan in Persia, as recorded in the book of Esther). They were invited to a tea party at the palace where they met the Prime Minister and, not only shared tea and biscuits with the Queen, but also learned that she had both seen and been extremely excited by the game. They then had their photograph taken with Her Majesty the Queen of England and her corgi. What an incredible honour for all those men who laid their bodies (literally) on the line week in and week out, in training and in the actual games, to represent their country in Australia.

The Bible says that if we are not ashamed of Christ in this world, he will not be ashamed of us before God. The Queen was pleased with what the England Rugby team achieved and was not ashamed to have her picture taken with them, they had brought honour to her kingdom. If we learn to do what pleases God, and bring honour to His Kingdom, is it possible that one day He could say, "Thank You! Come into the joy of the Lord"?