

## GOD'S PAY DAY

Matthew 16:21-28 Text vs. 27 *"The Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what they have done."*

Our lesson this morning is most revealing. It's about rewards. And knowing Rewards will be given should make every believer want to become a better and more productive Christian. But there's a big difference between the doctrine of salvation for the lost, and the doctrine of Rewards for the saved. Salvation is *"a free gift of God. You can't earn it! It's not of works."* Salvation, eternal life, is received by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. But Rewards are for those who already have believed and are given *"according to works."* *"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every person according to his works."* (Mt. 16:27)

When that day comes, Christ will repay each Christian according to what he or she has done. The clear implication is that those who have lived for themselves alone will be repaid with judgment. Those who have taken up the cross of self-denial to follow Jesus will receive a reward. Yes, every believer receives eternal life. But not all believers will be rewarded with the *"crown of life"*. Rewards will only be given to those who *continually serve Him*. When you live by faith, you walk in the favor and blessing of God. You're in fellowship with Him. Your life is pleasing to Him. The apostle James 1:12 says Rewards are to be given to *"the one that endures temptation. For when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to them that love Him."*

When you look at that verse closely, you will discover the believer finds strength to overcome temptation through difficulties. You endure hardships because of God's love. Without His love in your heart, you might become bitter. You might even become critical and *lose* the crown of life! But you can have success enduring hardships if the love of God has been put into your spirit by the Holy Spirit. And to receive this *free gift of God* you must have an enthusiastic love for the Lord. And Jesus made it even clearer when He described the death of *self*. That is, who you are. How you live your life! *"Whoever would save his, or her, life will lose it. However, those who willingly lose their lives for Jesus' sake will find true life"*. (Mt.16:25)

A preacher was standing at the church door shaking hands as the congregation departed one Sunday morning. He took a man by the hand, pulled him aside and said, *"Sam, you need to join the Army of the Lord!"* The man replied, *"Preacher, I'm already in the Army of the Lord!"* The preacher looked puzzled and said, *"Then how come, Sam, I don't see you except at Christmas and Easter?"* . . . . *"I'm in the Secret Service."*

And speaking of the Army, several years ago a young man was called up to go to Iraq after we had declared war on Saddam Hussein. The problem for this young man was, he didn't want to go! He said he hadn't joined the army to go to war. He'd joined because of the medical benefits. The pay. Free college tuition. Insurance. Now, something's wrong with that kind of thinking!! One of the primary functions of the military is to prepare for war. Armies don't exist just to pass out benefits. Those are perks! Armies exist to deal with conflicts. Defend the people. Fight the enemy. And hopefully, win against an evil force. But there are some people who join up hoping for a free ride. That kind of attitude will undermine the military of any nation.

And that same kind of attitude will undermine any church. Too often, people join a church for the benefits. The church looks at a person and says, *"You look like a Christian to us. So, join us. Watch over out for us, and we'll watch out for you."* So, while membership in a church doesn't guarantee that someone is a Christian, they still expect Jesus to *"be there"* for them when they need Him. But they're never there for Him when He needs *them!*

Now, going back to our Gospel lessons of the past few weeks, Jesus had been with His disciples for two years. He'd been training them. Teaching them. Exposing them to God's power. They had listened as He shared His teachings. Told His parables. They saw Him heal the deaf. Have the mute speak. The lame walk. They even saw Him raise a little girl from the dead. He fed 5000 men, along with their wives and children, with 5 barley loaves and two small fish! They were out in a boat in a storm on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus came walking to them on the water, climbed in the boat, and stilled the storm by simply saying *"Peace be still"*. He sent His disciples out to villages to preach. And to heal. And to cast out demons. But now, His time on Earth was getting short. His arrest and crucifixion in Jerusalem were only a few weeks away. Jesus had to make it clear to His disciples just how serious was the task He had given them. So, the first thing He did was to lay the foundation of their allegiance to Him.

Remember last week when He asked, *"Who do men say that I am?"* And they replied, *"Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."* (Mt 16:13-14) And then He asked: *"But who do you say that I am?"* Never at a loss for words, Simon Peter stepped right up and said: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* (Matthew 16:16) Jesus praised Peter for that and then explained that He had one final battle to fight. He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things there at the hands of the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law. And then be killed. But on the third day, He would be raised to life! Peter objected. Matthew 16:22 tells us Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. *"Never, Lord!"* he said. *"This shall never happen to you!"* You see, that wasn't what Peter had signed up for. To Peter, Jesus HAD TO LIVE... He wasn't supposed to die!!!

And that's what's our text is teaching today: *"If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life, for My sake, will find it."* (Matthew 16:24-25) It's as if Jesus had said, *"I've called you to a war! And in that war, you will face the possibility of death."*

That's what worried that young man about going to Iraq. He knew that once he was in the trenches, he would face suffering. Danger. He could even die! He didn't want that! And here Jesus was telling His disciples – and us – THAT'S what you signed up for!

John Wesley once said, *"Give me a hundred men who love nothing but God, and hate nothing but sin, and I will shake the whole world for Christ."* It doesn't take many. But it does take someone who will decide to be faithful.

In December 1944, the German army launched an unexpected attack known as the Battle of Bulge. It was a surprise attack by German forces on Allied troops in Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. The battle lasted for a month and ended with an Allied counteroffensive forcing the German withdrawal. Led by General George Patton, it was the largest and bloodiest battle fought by the United States in World War II. The Nazis had driven deep in behind the Allied lines. Their objective was to deny further use of the Belgian Port of Antwerp to the Allies and to split the Allied lines. *The Bulge* was the last chance for the German Army to create a situation that would force some form of negotiation that might have blocked the invasion and the destruction of Germany itself. That did not happen! James Jones, writing about the American troops said, the Americans decided to be faithful against that attack. *"Not one little road intersection battle that happened would have had a profound effect on the German drive. But hundreds of Spur-of-the-Moment little battles at nameless bridges and unknown crossroads had the effect of enormously slowing the German push. Those little die-hard, 'one man stands,' alone in the snow and fog without communications, would prove enormously effective, and out of all proportion to their size."*

And that's where we are today with the church. We're fighting a war *out of all proportion* against our enemy. Satan! If we beat him, we win! And the ONLY way to beat him is to win our little *Spur-of-the-Moment battles*. Yes, it can be overwhelming at times, standing on a lift thirty feet high in the air pressure-washing the roof of the church. Pressure washing the sides of the church every year. Unloading a big box truck every Wednesday morning at 8:30 AM loaded with food which needs to be sorted and prepared in an hour to distribute to over 120 families in our community. Serving on a church committee. Singing solo special music during worship on Sunday. Driving people to their doctor when there's no one else to do it. Providing funds for Abused Women and Children. Funding a school in Baja, Mexico. Helping someone make repairs to their home after a storm when they cannot do it physically anymore. Preparing dishes for our Sunday lunches. Asking if there's anything you can do? Sometimes, you may think what you're doing doesn't make much of a difference. It doesn't seem like anybody cares. It's small. You can feel like you're doing it all alone!

It's when we turn hearts around and have the lost want to become born-again believers in Jesus and become a part of the church. That's when we win! We must bring them to Jesus to be saved. We must do this! That's the challenge for you, as a soldier for Christ. You joined up when you became a part of this church. It's a big job.

*Keep soldiering on* is a phrase that's often used to encourage someone to continue working hard and sticking through difficult times. It's a phrase used in the military that's become a popular saying used in everyday life. Use the phrase *keep soldiering on*, use it to encourage someone who is struggling. Someone who's going through a tough time. Use the phrase *keep soldiering on* to encourage them to keep on going. *"I know things are tough right now, but you just need to keep soldiering on. You'll get through this."* If you are working hard to achieve a goal, or overcome a challenge, use the phrase on yourself to *keep soldiering on*. It will help you keep your own determination! *"I've been working on this for months, but I'm going to keep soldiering on until it's finished."* Use it when you're writing to someone who's going through a difficult time. You might write, *"I know things are tough right now, but just remember, keep soldiering on. You're stronger than you think."*

Overall, that phrase *keep soldiering on* sends a powerful message. It's one of staying power. It has strength. Whether you use it to encourage someone else, or whether you use it for your own experience, it's a phrase that can inspire. It can motivate you to keep going, even when things get tough. So, the next time you need to offer words of encouragement to someone, or to yourself, remember - *keep soldiering on!* And you *"shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him."* It's by your faithfulness that God wins your battles for you. Because . . . . *"The Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory, with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what they have done."* AMEN