

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

First Quarter 2023: *Managing for the Master—Till He Comes*

Lesson 12 “Rewards of Faithfulness”

Read for this week’s study

Hebrews 11:6; Isaiah 62:11; Romans 6:23; John 14:1–3; Revelation 21; Matthew 25:20–23; Romans 8:16–18.

Memory Text

“ ‘His lord said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” ’ ” (Matthew 25:21, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Reward for Faithfulness
- III. Everlasting Life
- IV. The New Jerusalem
- V. The Settling of Accounts
- VI. Eyes on the Prize
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “In various places the Bible talks about our rewards, what we are promised through Christ after the Second Coming and this terrible detour with sin is once and for all over and done. What are we promised, and what assurance do we have of getting what we have been promised?” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. Why does the Bible talk about the rewards, if we are all undeserving recipients of God’s grace? How can this be a motivating factor, depending on stages of faith?
3. Jim C. Collins, the leading Management and Leadership guru said: “Get involved in something that you care so much about that you want to make it the greatest it can possibly be, not because of what you will get, but just because it can be done.”
4. Why do we need to please God, and how does He reward those who earnestly seek Him (Hebrews 11:6)? (Sunday’s lesson)

5. Monday's lesson focuses on the fact that it is either eternal life or eternal death, a case of all or nothing (Romans 6:23 & John 3:16). How do you understand John 14:1-3 in light of Revelation 21 & 22?
6. Tuesday's lesson speaks about the New Jerusalem from Revelation 21. What attracts and fascinates you in this description? Why does it have thick walls when there are also gates that are always open? What is the significance of the various images? Why is it important that the history starts in a Garden, but ends in a City? How is the New Jerusalem presented also as a familiar place at the end of the journey?
7. Thursday's lesson concludes the quarter with keeping our eyes on the prize (1 Timothy 6:6-12 & Romans 8:16-18). The Stewardship Vision for the SDA Church around the World makes some interesting reading (Friday's lesson).
8. Wednesday's lesson discusses the parable of talents from Matthew 25:14-30 and the settling of accounts. Why is the parable important in the context of money and possessions? Why do you think that the author chose this parable rather than the parable of the last judgement (vs. 31-46)? That parable clearly insists that there is accountability for the management of material resources, which cannot be avoided by more money and more power and that none of us is immune against this. Besides, it shows that the accountability has to do with the fabric of human neighborliness which is essential to safety and well-being and that indifference towards those without resources is incompatible with being a follower of Jesus.
9. There is always a danger that people will regard Christianity as a kind of heavenly exam. God has given us a textbook to study; rules to keep and things to do (and avoid doing). One day He will come and set the final examination and see who passes and who fails. There will be especially good things in store for people who get good grades or marks, and likewise, especially bad things for people with bad grades. It is easy to read the parable in such a way that it reinforces that impression (and Christians throughout the centuries frequently did!) But this misreads the story, and the whole of Jesus' ministry which was a protest against such a view of religion.
10. How can we end the quarter in a way that inspires people, rather than inducing anxiety and guilt? How can the followers of Jesus be motivated by the economy of *generosity* rather than the economy of *greed*? In financial matters it is so easy to compare ourselves to others, but that leads to envy, greed, depression, and decreasing amounts of compassion. Every day, week, month or year, we are all given new opportunities. The question is: "What are you going to do with the opportunities that God gives you?"
11. The master is coming back, but he is not coming back to settle the accounts, or to catch us. When he comes back, all will be able to see what we did with all the opportunities that were given to us. We want Jesus to put his arms around us and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant! I am so proud of you! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master's happiness!" Our master wants nothing more than to share his joy not just with his servants, but with his sons and daughters and with his friends.

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

And look at the rest of the book of Job. Did Job show himself to be a trustworthy friend of God? Did he trust God because he was being richly rewarded or did he seem to be utterly abandoned and yet he still trusted God? And the book ends with God saying, “Thank you, Job, you’ve said of Me what is right.” Job was God’s friend all the way through, and God could then turn to the heavenly court and say, “Do you need any more evidence about the falsity of Satan’s charges and the trustworthiness of My friend Job?” {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #8, “The Most Costly and Convincing Evidence” recorded March 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/8MMCAG>*

If you were ever asked to explain why you obey God (assuming that you do), what answer would you give? Would you say, “I do what I do as a believer, because God has told me to and He has the power to reward and destroy”? Is that why you don’t lie and murder? Nothing wrong in those things themselves, but it upsets God when you do that—and that is a dangerous thing to do. This might be all right for a beginner or for a little child, but it makes God’s laws seem so arbitrary. They have no sense in themselves. That kind of obedience does not speak well and truly about our God.

Would you rather say, “I do what I do as a believer, because God has told me to, and I love Him and want to please Him”? Is that why you don’t steal or commit adultery? It is not that you see anything wrong in these things in themselves, it’s just that God doesn’t like it when we do that. He has been so good to us, surely we owe it to Him to do the things He has asked us to do, whether they make sense or not. Again this does not speak well of God. It might be a little improvement from obeying out of fear or desire for reward. But it still smacks of arbitrariness. It still does not speak well of God, though that is often thought to be the antidote for the first answer.

Could you say this? “I do what I do because more and more I am finding it to be right and sensible to do so. How I admire and revere the One who so advised me and even commanded me in the days of my ignorance and immaturity,” hastening to add, “being still somewhat ignorant and immature, I am willing to listen to this God and to heed His commandments when He asks me to do something beyond my present understanding.” That says that God is not arbitrary, but that everything He has asked us to do makes such good sense, we should want to do it anyway. If you can say that, then truly God’s law is not a threat to your freedom, and you thank Him for it. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #12, “God’s Law is No Threat to Our Freedom” recorded April 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/12MMCAG>*

Lou: Here's an intriguing one: "Would we lose our freedom if God always rewarded the righteous? If righteousness always pays off—"

Graham: Ah, that might explain why He does what He does sometimes, as with Job in Scripture. It's true. If every time I did what was right, God would reward me, see what that would do in the way of motivation? Then I do what I do because God has told me to, and He has the power to reward and destroy. I think that would produce obedience number one. And so even at times like Job, we're not rewarded right away and we love God anyway? That friend of God was able to say, "Though God slay me, yet will I trust Him."

Lou: And that would be like the obedience number three you talked about earlier. If He commands me to do something beyond my present understanding, I can trust Him even when it appears that righteousness is not rewarded. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #12 with Lou Venden, "God's Law is No Threat to Our Freedom" recorded April 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/12MMCAG>*

Think of it meaning so much to God that He would even resurrect the wicked! Who would suffer more than God, seeing all His children resurrected? The wicked ones? Why would He do this? The price must be worth it. It must be apparent to the whole family that God is not the one who takes anyone of His children's eternal life away. He does not do that. He never said, "Obey Me, or I'll kill you." We do not live with that kind of a God.

Or, "If you disobey Me, I'll discipline you." There's a lot of that in scripture. But do you discipline your children because you hate them? Do you discipline them to the point of destruction? Does it do any good to kill your son and say, "I hope that's taught you a lesson"? It wouldn't do any good. That's not discipline. "Whom the Lord loves, He disciplines."

The death in the end is no discipline. It is the inevitable and awful consequence of God leaving His children to reap the natural results of their own rebellious choice. And if we have any doubts about it at that time, we now can watch the wicked die, as the angels watched Jesus die. We didn't watch that. We read about it. The universe watched and got the message. In the end we will watch the wicked die, and we can look in the face of Jesus, still in His human form. And how do you think He will look? He will be crying. Hosea 11, and all these other places. And if we don't feel the same way, a mistake was made in letting us in. We'll all feel that way. "How can we give you up? How can we let you go?" But we know it leads to death. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Romans, recorded May 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/61MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/62MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Lou: Graham, I want you to comment on this question of God's wrath. I can hear somebody saying this evening, "But doesn't the Bible talk about God's wrath, many, many times? God's anger?" Can you give me about a forty-five second response on that?

Graham: When we talk about why Jesus had to die, we can do more with this. But I wouldn't want to leave tonight without having the question pretty well resolved. If you take all sixty-six books and look at the references to God's wrath all the way through, you'll find so many places that will say God's wrath is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choice. It is not like our anger. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #2 with Lou Venden, "What Went Wrong in God's Universe" recorded January 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/2MMCAG>*

Further Study with Ellen White

God bids us fill the mind with great thoughts, pure thoughts. He desires us to meditate upon His love and mercy, to study His wonderful work in the great plan of redemption. Then clearer and still clearer will be our perception of truth, higher, holier, our desire for purity of heart and clearness of thought. The soul dwelling in the pure atmosphere of holy thought will be transformed by communion with God through the study of Scriptures. {COL 60.1}

The work of grace upon the heart is not an instantaneous work. It is effected by continuous, daily watching and believing the promises of God. The repentant, believing one, who cherishes faith and earnestly desires the renewing grace of Christ, God will not turn away empty. He will give him grace. And ministering angels will aid him as he perseveres in his efforts to advance.— Manuscript 55, 1910. {Ev 287.3}

The Lord Jesus came to our world, not to reveal what a God could do, but what a man could do, through faith in God's power to help in every emergency. Man is, through faith, to be a partaker in the divine nature, and to overcome every temptation wherewith he is beset. {7BC 929.6}

Where there is not only a belief in God's Word, but a submission of the will to Him; where the heart is yielded to Him, the affections fixed upon Him, there is faith—faith that works by love, and purifies the soul. Through this faith the heart is renewed in the image of God. {AG 137.5}

Saving faith is a transaction by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. Genuine faith is life. A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power. {DA 347.1}

Holiness is wholeness to God. The soul is surrendered to God. The will, and even the thoughts, are brought into subjection to the will of Christ. The love of Jesus fills the soul, and is constantly going out in a clear, refreshing stream, to make glad the hearts of others (MS 33, 1911).

{6BC 1076.2}

The whole universe will have become witnesses to the nature and results of sin. And its utter extermination, which in the beginning would have brought fear to angels and dishonor to God, will now vindicate His love and establish His honor before the universe of beings who delight to do His will, and in whose heart is His law. Never will evil again be manifest. Says the word of God: "Affliction shall not rise up the second time." Nahum 1:9. The law of God, which Satan has reproached as the yoke of bondage, will be honored as the law of liberty. A tested and proved creation will never again be turned from allegiance to Him whose character has been fully manifested before them as fathomless love and infinite wisdom. {GC 504.1}

God does not force the will or judgment of any. He takes no pleasure in a slavish obedience. He desires that the creatures of His hands shall love Him because He is worthy of love. He would have them obey Him because they have an intelligent appreciation of His wisdom, justice, and benevolence. And all who have a just conception of these qualities will love Him because they are drawn toward Him in admiration of His attributes. {GC 541.3}

The destiny of the wicked is fixed by their own choice. Their exclusion from heaven is voluntary with themselves, and just and merciful on the part of God. {GC 542.2}

God does not force the will of His creatures. He cannot accept an homage that is not willingly and intelligently given. A mere forced submission would prevent all real development of mind or character; it would make man a mere automaton. Such is not the purpose of the Creator. He desires that man, the crowning work of His creative power, shall reach the highest possible development. He sets before us the height of blessing to which He desires to bring us through His grace. He invites us to give ourselves to Him, that He may work His will in us. It remains for us to choose whether we will be set free from the bondage of sin, to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God. {AG 313.5}

It is the glory of the gospel that it is founded upon the principle of restoring in the fallen race the divine image by a constant manifestation of benevolence. This work began in the heavenly courts. There God decided to give human beings unmistakable evidence of the love with which He regarded them. He "so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. {CH 222.1}

The Teacher from heaven, no less a personage than the Son of God, came to earth to reveal the character of the Father to men, that they might worship Him in spirit and in truth. Christ revealed to men the fact that the strictest adherence to ceremony and form would not save them; for the kingdom of God was spiritual in its nature. Christ came to the world to sow it with truth. He held

the keys to all the treasures of wisdom, and was able to open doors to science, and to reveal undiscovered stores of knowledge, were it essential to salvation. He presented to men that which was exactly contrary to the representations of the enemy in regard to the character of God, and sought to impress upon men the paternal love of the Father, who “so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” He urged upon men the necessity of prayer, repentance, confession, and the abandonment of sin. He taught them honesty, forbearance, mercy, and compassion, enjoining upon them to love not only those who loved them, but those who hated them, who treated them despitefully. In this He was revealing to them the character of the Father, who is long-suffering, merciful, and gracious, slow to anger, and full of goodness and truth. Those who accepted His teaching were under the guardian care of angels, who were commissioned to strengthen, to enlighten, that the truth might renew and sanctify the soul. {FE 177.1}

Live in contact with the living Christ, and He will hold you firmly by a hand that will never let go. Know and believe the love that God has to us, and you are secure; that love is a fortress impregnable to all the delusions and assaults of Satan. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.” Proverbs 18:10. {MB 119.2}

The salvation of the human race has ever been the object of the councils of heaven. The covenant of mercy was made before the foundation of the world. It has existed from all eternity, and is called the everlasting covenant. So surely as there never was a time when God was not, so surely there never was a moment when it was not the delight of the eternal mind to manifest His grace to humanity. {FLB 76.4}

All the heavenly intelligences were watching with intense interest the warfare that was going on upon the earth—the earth that Satan claimed as his dominion. Every moment was big with eternal realities. How would the conflict end? The angels looked for the justice of God to be revealed, His anger to be aroused against the prince of darkness and his sympathizers. But lo, mercy prevailed. When the Son of God might have come to the world to condemn, He came as righteousness and peace, to save not merely the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but all the world—every son and daughter of Adam who would believe on Him, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. What an exhibition of the love of Jehovah! This is love without a parallel. {TMK 19.3}

The years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character.—GC 678 (1911). {1MCP 252.1}

There immortal minds will study with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. There is no cruel, deceiving foe to tempt to forgetfulness of God. Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the grandest enterprises may be carried forward,

the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized; and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body. {SR 432.2}

Sin and sinners are no more, God's entire universe is clean, and the great controversy is forever ended. {SR 433.2}

As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings. {COL 333.1}

Looking unto Jesus we obtain brighter and more distinct views of God, and by beholding we become changed. Goodness, love for our fellow men, becomes our natural instinct. We develop a character which is the counterpart of the divine character. Growing into His likeness, we enlarge our capacity for knowing God. More and more we enter into fellowship with the heavenly world, and we have continually increasing power to receive the riches of the knowledge and wisdom of eternity. {COL 355.1}