

A Closer Relationship with God-Part 5
Motivated by Christ's Rewards at His Return
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If you have your Bibles, I'd like you to pull them out, open up to Hebrews chapter 10. Try to wrap up five weeks here in the last paragraph or so as we look one more time at the distinction that we've seen many times in the book of Hebrews, the difference between the two currently available components of the Christian life.

We've seen early on in the book of Hebrews that we have this primary component of being justified. Theologians have given it that title, being made right before God. That because of repentance and faith that we can step into a real and genuine relationship with God, our sin is no longer accounted to us, and we are now rightly adopted into the family of God because of the work of Christ. And in Hebrews, we've seen many times this secondary component that's available to us now that theologians like to call sanctification, which is an ongoing process. Justification you should be able to look back at and say, yeah, that was when it happened, and God got a hold of me, and I repented of my sins, I put my trust in Christ. There was my justification before God. But that day then started this process of sanctification. And that is a process of growing in the Christian life, becoming more connected with God, growing deeper in my relationship with God, understanding him better, becoming more productive, being more fruitful in the Christian life.

The writer of Hebrews, as we saw in the middle part of the book, had illustrated these two components by using the Old Testament tabernacle as an illustration. And he said, it's much like that inner sanctum, that holy of holies. It was excluded to us because of our sin, and we had a representative go in, but he was imperfect, and all the sacrifices. But because of Christ, it's as though now we can actually enter in to the presence of God. It's as though that because of Christ, we've actually been made right before God. We are now justified before God, and we can have access to a relationship with God.

But what's interesting here in the latter part of Hebrews chapter 10, if you look again at a little bit of the context in verse number 19, not only do we have this access, this boldness to be able to enter in because of this work of Christ that he's done for us, but the Bible goes on to say here in verse number 22 that just because we're in, it's not over, and that's not enough. Now we have this ongoing exhortation to continue to draw near to him. What a great spatial analogy. Okay, you're in with God, but that's not enough. Don't just be content with being in. Now the Bible says we need to be in a process, a continual process, of drawing near to God, a process you might refer to as sanctification.

Then we've looked at the rest of this text. If you look back up to where we've been the last four weeks, we've seen there's several motivations for this. A good church can be a motivation for this. The fear of God can be a motivation for this. Even looking back at our earlier days of Christian growth can be a motivation for us. But when it comes to sanctification and really drawing near to God, becoming a more productive and ardent Christian, he really saves the most basic motivation for the last few verses here, the last five verses to be specific.

Take a look at it in verse number 35. He tries to motivate us to continue with this ardent and ambitious track, this quest for drawing near to God. He says, "Don't throw away your confidence." I mean, you've seen those early stages of growth that we talked about last week, those earlier days of devotion, and that should spur you on. But now don't throw away your confidence, and here

comes the reason. Underline it. “Because it will be richly” what? “Rewarded.” Because there’s some rewards attached to this. And it’s not just a little reward. It’s a rich reward. Literally, if you’ve got your Greek New Testament there, it’s the word *megas*. We get the word mega from it. It’s the mega reward, the big reward. It’s not a small thing, it’s a big thing, and it will be richly or greatly rewarded.

“So you need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” And that comes with all the rewards that Jesus talked about, that the New Testament apostles talked about, and even the Old Testament prophets often spoke of. There will be a reward for this. And if you think you’ve got a lot of time for that, think again. Verse 37, he says, “For just in a very little while, he who is coming will come and he will not delay.” And then all that time for drawing near to God, all that investment, all that sanctification process, all your efforts in growing and drawing near to God, the opportunity will be done.

That’s a quote, by the way, from Habakkuk 2:3. He goes on to quote the rest of the passage, at least the next verse. He says, “But my righteous one is going to live by faith.” If you’re going to be one who is drawing near to God, who’s not only a Christian but drawing closer to him, there’s got to be this most important ingredient, this key ingredient, and that is that your life is full of a trust, the ability to see what other people can’t see, the willingness to step out by faith and do what God calls us to do.

Now, if you shrink back when he returns, then he’s not going to be pleased with that kind of person, Habakkuk 2:4 says. And the writer of Hebrews comments, well, we’re not like that. I mean, that group, that’s not the part we’re a part of. We’re not those who shrink back and are destroyed. We’re waiting and anticipating the return of Christ. We’re those that trust him and were saved. And not only saved, we are, verse 35 and 36, we’re given what has been promised. We are greatly rewarded for that progress in the faith. There is great reward.

Now we struggle with this, and I hope you found the worksheet and you pull it out. And there are a few things we need to jot down this morning, particularly the first point that is so important as it relates to the subtitle, as it relates to the context, and the whole reason for these last five verses being here. We’ve got to recognize that there’s something to this concept of motivation, and unfortunately, with all the myths and all the wrong teaching I think a lot of us grew up with, we struggle with this. That’s why the first word is there. You need to let something happen here. You need to let, let’s jot it down this way, eternal rewards motivate you.

And that’s hard for a lot of Sunday school grads because they struggle with that concept. Wait a minute, I don’t know about that. I mean, be motivated by rewards? That sounds like some kind of spiritual greed or some kind of church-related materialism. It sounds crass. It sounds mercenary. I don’t want to be motivated by that. I mean, aren’t we all just going to toss our crowns at his feet? And so, you know, I don’t know. That just sounds kind of base, and I don’t want to be motivated by reward.

That’s our first little thing we’ve got to work through. If we’re going to be motivated by reward, the second thing we’ve got to put to rest is something I’ve often called celestial communism. Remember that? You’ve giggled at it from time to time. We’ve got to put that to rest for sure. And I know we’ve talked about it, and I’ve addressed it, and I’ve kind of disdained it from the platform, but we’ve got to look in Scripture. Are we okay to recognize that there’s some kind of spiritual capitalism that takes place in God’s arrangement in our sanctification, that if we invest in it and if



we draw near to him, he is now storing up for us some kind of benefit in heaven that we'll get to enjoy?

That kind of sounds like a quid pro quo. If you do this, I'll do that. Now, I know salvation is all about grace, and I realize that even rewards will be graciously granted and multiplied to us, but you're telling me that God is going to keep track, and based on that, he's going to reward me? Well, we need to get through that whole kind of mythic idea of heaven that makes us think that if God is gracious, well, then everybody gets the same thing.

And you parents, some of you really, you know, sappy parents, like to treat your kids that way too, right? Everybody gets the same. And I say that because sometimes that's not right. Our kids are performing at different levels. Sometimes our kids need to be treated differently because they behave differently. And we need to recognize that God is a God who's unlike our kind of reticence to treat people the way that they have acted and behaved. Sometimes we're reticent to do that, but God says, no, that's not how I operate.

As a matter of fact, the Bible has a lot to say about rewards, and it should be something that motivates us. Some people think, well, it's an ungodly motive. Well, if it's an ungodly motive, God sure seems to be doing it a lot. I mean, look at this passage we just read. Verse 35, that should put it to rest. We are not to throw away our confidence, that Greek word, that ambition, that willingness to step forward and keep moving forward, because that will be richly rewarded, greatly rewarded.

That ought to be enough right there, but if it's not, look across the page at chapter 11. Right there in the midst of defining what faith is all about is not only a confidence that God is a God who exists. Look at verse 6. Oh yeah, he exists, and if you're going to have faith, you've got to believe that he does. If anyone, let's just read the whole thing, "And without faith," verse 6, "it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must"—now these are requirements—number one, believe that he exists and that he," what's the word, "rewards those who earnestly seek him."

Are there rewards involved in the Christian life? Does God see work as something that he now brings a benefit, a compensation for? Absolutely. God is seeing this as something that should drive us forward. And you can't even have biblical faith until you recognize that God is a rewarder of those who seek him. It's a biblical concept. It's all over the Scriptures.

As a matter of fact, that's exactly what Jesus was trying to teach us in Matthew chapter 6. And you don't even need to turn there because you know the passage, but you should at least jot it down, verses 19 and 20. And he said, you know, the problem with us is not that we want to achieve something great. It's that we are always trying to achieve something great in the wrong domain, that we're always trying to store up for ourselves things. We're wearying ourselves for things that really won't even last.

If you were up at men's retreat last year—how many guys were up at men's retreat last year at Lake Arrowhead? Ooh, look at that crowd. We had like 250 guys up there. Do you remember the illustration that we painted all weekend long, the difference between building the house and building the boat? Remember that? That whole distinction was exactly what Jesus was getting at in Matthew 6 when he said, you know what, if the floodwaters are going to flood everything, and I've got a house and a boat, I ought to be investing in the boat because the house is going to be underwater soon.



Now, I've got to live in the house until the floodwaters come because let's just picture it this way. It's kind of a dry dock. Everybody's got—we're all living in Blythe with a house and a boat in a dry dock. Okay, picture it that way. Not a pretty picture, I realize. And every time I say that, I had someone at the door last week say, you know you're on the radio in Blythe, they say. For those of you listening now on the radio in Blythe, we love Blythe, California. That's why I bring it up in illustrations all the time. See, radio, they can't see my face right now, so that's how that works. Blythe. We love Blythe. I'm going to be pastoring in Blythe one day, I know.

They did. They said, I was driving through Blythe. Someone told me at the door, "I was driving through Blythe, turning the radio stations, and there you were, Pastor Mike." And that wasn't enough. He had to say, "And you were talking about Blythe." I thought, oh no.

Where were we? You got a house in Blythe. That's where we were. And you got a dry dock. And you're either building your house or building your boat. Now, here's the thing. You all got to build the house because we're living in the house. But the floodwaters are coming. And one day, everything you invest in the house is going to go away. Only what you do in walking out in your backyard and investing in that boat, that's all that's going to matter because eventually the house will be under the flood of God's judgment. And all that you do that really is focused on eternity, that is done for the kingdom of God, that's all that's going to last.

And by the way, you're going to live in that boat for the rest of eternity. And I'd much rather float through eternity on a decked-out cherry Bayliner yacht with a memory of a home that really wasn't all buttoned up than to have great memories—and they'll be foggy, trust me, Isaiah says they'll be foggy—great memories of a wonderful house, rowing my way through eternity in a little dinghy, you know. Because whatever you get is what you've got.

And the Bible says you ought to be motivated—here's what I'm trying to say, Matthew 6:20—to store up for yourselves treasure in heaven where neither moth can eat it up, rust can't rust it out and destroy it, and thieves can't break in and steal it. And that's only what can happen to your riches in this temporal experience, not even to mention what 2 Peter 3 says is going to happen, and that is, in time when God has the angel blow the trumpet, it's all going to get burned up.

And the Bible says, why would you weary yourself to collect stuff for this earth? "Don't store up for yourselves treasure on earth." Riches bad? No, if you got them, great. 1 Timothy 6, be generous with them. But the real issue for your life and mine is what are we doing to build the boat? What are we doing to invest in the yacht? What are we doing to invest in eternity? Because that concern for our future position in the kingdom is not some kind of sinful, carnal, earthly desire for advancement. No, that's a biblical thing, which, by the way, you parents seem to think is virtuous, only if it works in the context of your kids and their homework.

And somehow we disconnect when we get to church and think, well, that's a crass thing if we're thinking about it for eternity. No, just the opposite. I mean, really what we're doing with our kids to say, do your homework, work hard, take those tests, study hard, we're doing it really so that they'll have some kind of better placement in this temporal world. And I'm all for that. That's a good thing. But ultimately, when we come to church and say, well, I'm in the kingdom and I'm in the presence of God, and what does it matter? We're all going to go to heaven. Well, we're all going to get there with a whole different estate. Your estate will be different than mine. Your estate will be different than hers. Her estate will be different than his. And the Bible says, why aren't you

worrying about that? Why aren't you thinking about that? You ought to store up for yourselves treasure in heaven.

If you ever motivate your kid by trying to say, if you do this, something good will come of that, then you are playing right into the basic motivation of God in this passage. Keep doing it. Keep going, because it'll be richly rewarded. And you use that as a parent. Your bosses use that with meritorious raises after annual reviews. And you know what? None of that is sinful. None of that is pagan. Ultimately, it reflects the economy of God.

And God says, you work hard in drawing near to me. You work hard in, verse 36, doing the will of God, and you will get what he promised. And that is, the harder you work, the more you invest, the more you give yourself to God and his will, you know what? The better it'll be for you in eternity. As a matter of fact, you will store up for yourselves treasure in heaven.

Now, some people say, no, I know, I just think if God is really gracious, we're going to get to heaven, and once we walk through those gates and we're going to be in this place called the new Jerusalem, and there's going to be a long line of pegs with all these keys, and all this is going to be a bunch of track homes, and you pick anyone you want. There'll be garages over here to pick up your transportation, all six-cylinder cars, that's it, different colors, use your color, but you know, it's all the same because God is gracious and he treats all of us the same.

And the response to that is, no, he doesn't. And let me prove it to you. Turn in your Bibles, if you would, to the end of the book of Revelation. I want to turn there first of all not to your and my response or God's response to us, you and me. I want to turn first of all to Revelation chapter 20 where God calls the non-Christians before him and he judges them, and I want to see how he judges them because here's the real question for you. If you think God is communistic with heaven, I want to ask this question: is he communistic in hell? Would that be right?

Let me pose the question this way. Would it be just of God to punish every sinner the same? No, by the same standard perhaps, but not the same. I hope my non-Christian grandmother is not going to suffer in the same way that Mussolini or Hitler was. I don't want Charles Manson and my friend who just happened to, you know, live a nice, cool life, but he rejected—I don't think that they should be punished the same. One tried to kind of fit in and do well. I mean, he said no to embracing God, but then this guy, he tried to make the way—I don't want—that doesn't make sense. That would not be just of God.

And let me just assure you, whether that helps you or hurts your case in your memory of those that you know, the bottom line is when, in chapter 20, verse number 12, the dead—that means the non-Christians—are called before God, there will not be communism in the lake of fire. There will not be equality. Because here's what it says, verse 12: "I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened." The books were opened. That's more than one. "Another book was open." That's number three at least. "And that was the book of life."

Now you know how the book of life works in the book of Revelation. If your name's in it, good, you got a reservation. If your name's not in it, not good. See, then you know you're in the right judgment line if you're here at the great white throne judgment. So verse number 12, I know that if your name's not in the book of life, then you're here. Now you're going to be judged. "The dead were judged"—now underline these words—"according to what they had done, as recorded in the books."

Now the books are going to record what people do. And according to the Gospel of John, when Jesus talked about the Pharisees, they would not only be judged by what they've done, they will be judged against another book, what God said they should have done. And so you're going to have the standard—that is God's word—you're going to have the book of recorded deeds—that's the second book—you have the book of life to decide whether or not that's the judgment you qualify for, and then you will be standing there before God, and he'll say, here's what you should have done, and here's what you did, and you will be judged according to what you've done.

Now that makes us think, okay, the judgment of God is fair. That's why the judge stands there and meets out different penalties in the Orange County Courthouse than he does for a business. Everybody's the same? Everybody's not treated the same in the lake of fire. And that, I think, helps us understand, okay, that makes sense.

Now invert it. If he is not just, if he treats everybody the same in the lake of fire, is he just if he treats everybody the same in the new Jerusalem? No. And let me prove it to you. Turn to the last chapter, chapter 22. We're not talking now about, excuse me, retribution. We are talking now about God's rewards. This is a positive word. Look at Revelation chapter 22, drop down to verse number 12. This should be easy to remember. Revelation 20:12, Revelation 22:12. Okay, look at verse 12 again of chapter 22. "Behold," Christ says, "I am coming soon." Is that in red letters? Christ himself is coming back. "My"—here's a positive word—"reward is with me, and I will give to everyone"—now underline this phrase—"according to what he has done."

That's perfectly inverted. Now these are easy to remember. Revelation 20:12, Revelation 22:12. Here's another easy one to remember. Proverbs 14:14, which actually combines both of those verses together. Proverbs 14:14. Don't need to turn there. I'll quote it for you, but here's what it says. It says that the faithless will be fully repaid for what they have done, and the good man will be rewarded for what he has done. The faithless rewarded for his ways; the godly man, or the person that trusts in God, you know what? They'll be rewarded for what they've done. The same standards will apply. If you've done wrong, you will be retributed. If you've done right, you will be rewarded.

Now, how do I know whether I'm going to be judged? Because all of us have done right and wrong. Well, because if your name's in the book of life, you get to be rewarded. If your name's not in the book of life, unfortunately, you have to pay for your sin. Now here's the deal. If God is not unjust so as to treat everybody the same, then certainly he's not unjust to treat everybody the same in the new Jerusalem. He certainly doesn't treat everybody the same on the earth. Why would I think he would treat everybody the same there?

God is a God who's definitely going to respond to people in distinctive ways based on our work, in this case verses 35 and 36 of Hebrews 10, on whether or not I'm persevering in doing the will of God, or verse 35, whether I have that confidence, which is a very positive, active word. I'm ambitious and moving forward and tenacious in the Christian life, drawing near to God and doing his will, loving God and good deeds. We've seen this throughout this text. And it comes down to a God who says, you know what, I'm going to reward it. And if you are a godly person, because this is a godly motivation, you will be motivated by rewards. And you should be. Crass? No, it's not crass. Ungodly? No, it's not ungodly.

Which, by the way, you press this far enough into a real thoughtful place in your thinking, it will be startling for you. As a matter of fact, let me give you some more passages. And we don't have time



to turn to any of these, but just at least jot these down. How about Luke chapter 12? Jesus tells a parable in Luke chapter 12. I'm sorry, Luke 16. Jot down these passages, okay? This is the list: Luke 16:11, Luke 19:17, Luke 22:30, Matthew 5:19.

How fast are you? Luke 16:11. I'm sorry, Matthew 5:19. Well, if you'd say them right, Mike. Luke 16:11, Luke 19:17, Luke 22:30, Matthew 5:19. Did I say it wrong? Luke 16:11, Luke 19:17, Luke 22:30, Matthew 5:19. Is that what I said? One of the five times I think that's what you said, Mike. Yeah. Okay. That's what I said.

Now again, you know, you've got to be Bereans. We don't have three-hour preaching sermons. Thankfully, you don't applaud. We don't do that. So we can't fully develop this concept in Scripture, but you've got to know, it's all over the place. And here's where I'm going with this. If you press this concept far enough in the Scripture, you start to come to some startling conclusions.

For instance—and again, church, unfortunately, it's so two-dimensional sometimes, and it's so simplistic, and we only get to the Sunday school level, and in doing so, we start to make assumptions that are completely unbiblical. For instance, we know that things like materialism and greed are wrong, right? So we say, well, if you want to get rich, that's a bad thing. And the Bible's clear about that. And then secondly, we say, well, if you want to be powerful and you want to be some powerful people and have authority over people, well, that's wrong. And so that's not good. And then, you know, if you want to just have fun and you want to be full, if you want your life full of pleasure and carousing and seeking good times, well, that's not good.

So Christians shouldn't want to be rich, and they shouldn't want to be powerful, and they shouldn't want to have any pleasure in their life because that's all wrong. So you come to church and you expect this sermon about anything that relates to power, riches, or pleasure. No, no, no, no, no, no. Don't do that. You feel that feeling, just fight it, rebuff those feelings because that's bad.

No, no, no, no, no, no. All of a sudden now—and I just gave you four examples in Scripture, I just listed those, right?—here are examples where God is saying, listen, my concern isn't about you wanting to be rich. My concern is about you wanting to be rich with all this world stuff, and it's so temporary, and it's not going to last. That's dumb. I want you to have, here's what Jesus said in Luke 16, true riches, talking about eternity.

And I know that you guys on this earth are trying to be powerful, and you want to be first, and you want to be the greatest on earth and all that, but that's really silly, and it's stupid, and it's short-sighted, and don't want to do that. But you should want to be great in the kingdom of God. And I want you to have real greatness one day. And he talks about the disciples and judging the 12 tribes. He talks about parables and giving authority over one city or five cities or ten cities. He says, man, that's what you should want.

Or pleasure. Think about that throughout the Scriptures. Think, oh no, that's not good. No, you know what Scripture says? That ultimately there are pleasures, eternal pleasures, at his right hand, and it's there forever, and it's something that we should desire. And ultimately, if you look at that close enough, it starts to become a startling revolutionary concept that when it comes to wanting to be rich or to have power or to have pleasure, God is saying, I'm all into that. But it's really not here. It's not about this life. This is all short-lived stuff. Stop looking at it as it relates to the house in the front yard. Start looking at the dry dock in the backyard in that yard. Store it all up there because

that's where you're going to be living forever. And I want you to be rich and powerful and have a lot of pleasure, but it's all about there. That's the eternal kingdom, and I want you to focus on that.

See, a lot of us go, wow, that's a new thought. That's pretty ambitious. That's pretty—wow. And does God give me permission to do it? He not only gives you permission to do it, he thinks something is wrong with your Christian life if you don't have that desire. You and I ought to desire that. Why? Because God desires it for us, and he says if you work hard, if you work hard on this thing called sanctification, if you draw near to God, if you do his will, if you'd invest in eternity, there will be rewards forever. You will be richly rewarded for that.

And all I'm saying, first word on your outline, let us be motivated by that. Let yourself, tell yourself, that God wants us to be motivated by that. Crass, selfish? If it's crass, selfish, and ungodly, it's sure interesting that God does it over and over and over again. "I'm going to reward you. Be faithful. Hang in there. Keep going. You'll be richly rewarded." Do I want to live for God's glory? Absolutely. Do I want to be generous with what God gives you? Absolutely. But you know what? There's something in us that God has given us, a godly, virtuous desire to achieve and to move forward and to make progress and to attain, and all of those things are godly. It's just the problem, he says, stop doing it here. Stop worrying about it here. "Don't worry yourself to get rich." That's the problem here. If you get rich, great, fine, but it's not about that. Can you spend more time working on the boat and less time working on the house? That's all God's trying to say to us. Because I want you to be rich there. I want you to be handling true riches. The faithless will be fully repaid for their ways. The good man will be rewarded for his. Let's clear out all these myths in our minds and let ourselves as Christians be motivated by this godly motivation of eternal, lasting, and forever rewards in the new Jerusalem.

Don't throw away your confidence. Back to Hebrews 10. It will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you've done the will of God, you'll receive what he has promised. And that's not just a one-time, vanilla, generic, plain-wrapped kind of thing. It's all in varied stages.

And I know people—and I know this is written by a pastor for several reasons—but this one completely makes sense because pastors hear it all the time. "You know what? That sounds great. I want to invest in the kingdom. I want to seek first the kingdom of God. I want to store up for myself treasure. But you know what? I've got a lot going on in my life right now. I'll get around to that, Pastor. Right now my kids are really young, and we're really busy with that. You know, when I retire I'm going to have that financial, you know, nut there, and I'll be able to live off of that, and that'll be great. Then I can give my attention to all those important kingdom things. And you know what? If I can just achieve and get that raise and get that new, then I'll do it."

He says, what are you thinking about? You don't know how much time you have left. Look at the urgency of verse number 37. "For in a very little while, he who is coming will come, and he will not delay." And when he comes without delay, that means it's over, folks. No more time to invest in the kingdom. And whatever you built out back in the dry dock is all that you have. That's it. That is your inheritance in the kingdom.

And the Bible says you ought to get to it now. Do not let anything get in your head or in your mind or in your way that gives you that sense that you've got time to invest in God's things later. He wants you to invest in God's things now. Say that one ten times as fast as you can.

Number two—there it is. Thank you. Save me with the slide.

Get to investing now. You've got to get to it now. Why? Because you don't have a lot of time. "Well, I might." Well, you're right—you might. But here's the thing about the return of Christ. He wants us to not be surprised. And the only way not to be surprised is to always be expecting it. And that means we've got to live with urgency, on the balls of our feet, ready to go, serving him and faithfully doing it so that when he comes back he finds us in that state.

Now I've got to turn you to one passage. There's several that Jesus threw out to his disciples, but let's turn to one. Matthew chapter—no, no. Let's go to the Luke passage. Luke chapter 12. He's also thinking Mark 8, but let's not go there. That's a parallel passage.

Luke 12. Luke chapter 12. Luke chapter 12.

Jesus is trying to get that sense of urgency in his disciples. And they're all sitting around there listening to the teaching, and Christ says in verse 35—drop all the way down to verse 35—Luke 12:35. He says, "Be dressed ready for"—what's the word?—"service."

Which again, unfortunately, the graphics sometimes lead us to thinking that it's all about some emotional internal feeling and I want to connect with God on a mountaintop with my hands raised up. And you know what? Drawing near to God involves that—definitely an ardent devotion, an earnest seeking of God. But when we earnestly seek God, you cannot get close to God's heart—your heart with his—without him burdening you, lading you with that sense of what his heart's agenda is. Therefore he's going to push you into service.

See, that's why in verse 36 back in Hebrews 10 it was all about when you've done the will of God. It's a doing thing.

And so the text says, listen: be dressed ready for service. Keep your lamps burning. Keep working at it. Don't turn the lights out and go to sleep, as Mark 13 says. Don't let him find you sleeping. Like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet so that when he comes and knocks, immediately you can open the door for him. Why? Because you weren't expecting it—you were anticipating it.

Now look at the concept of rewards intertwined in this passage. "It will be good for those servants whom the master finds watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve." Who's that? The master will. "And he will have them"—who's them?—the servants—"recline at the table, and he will come and wait on them."

You want to talk about rewards? Just try and get the master of the universe, the God of the world, the creator of riches and power and pleasure, say, "Now I want to serve you." That's going to be an amazing thing. And by the way, it'll all be graded based on what you have done.

And the Bible says, listen, it'll be good if you're busy and working and serving and watching because he's going to dress himself to serve you.

He says it again, verse 38: "It will be good for those servants whom the master finds ready, even if he comes at the second or third watch in the night." And the problem is the longer it gets from the promise we start thinking, well, it's not going to be anytime soon.

And the Bible says in 2 Peter 3—which is a good cross-reference to jot down—he says, you know what, it doesn't matter if it's been a thousand years. It doesn't matter how long it's been. It doesn't matter, Jesus says here, if it's the third or fourth watch of the night. You ought to always expect it. As a matter of fact, when you least expect it, you ought to expect it.

Verse 39: “But understand this, if the owner of the house had known the hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.” The thief doesn't make an appointment with you. And Christ says that's how it's going to be with the return of Christ. When I come back, he says, you've got to be ready.

“So you too,” verse 40, “must also be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” Do you expect him at two o'clock this afternoon? No, not really. I hadn't thought about it. Well then that's when you ought to expect him. Right before the Super Bowl. And you won't even get to watch it. Ha!

Listen, he wants us to always be ready. And that means that I am active in service and I'm active in anticipation. And I realize my time is not forever. Do not let anything get in the way and say, “Well, I've got time to invest in eternal things and kingdom things later.” You don't know that. As James said, even if it's not the return of Christ, it could be your own demise. You're like a vapor—here today, gone tomorrow. Who knows how long you've got left?

And I'm telling you, if you drop some of your earthly pursuits, if you stop worrying about some of the earthly things on the house and you go out to the dock and you start working on the boat and you start saying, “I'm going to invest in eternity,” and then if two weeks from now we get launched up into the sky and we're both shooting up toward Christ, I'm going to look over at you and say, “Told you so.” See? That was good for you to get to work on this now.

And you and I ought to be working as though he's coming back in two weeks, two days, two hours, and two years, because you ought to always expect it. That's the only way not to be surprised by this, which should be a motivation for us to get to work. Start investing now.

Now if you're still in Luke 12, I know the next question you're going to ask is: how? What? What do I do? What are you trying to say? How do I get to investing? What does that mean? Think about God more? What do I do? Well, if you want to build the boat, here's what you've got to do. Here's an example, at least.

Peter asks, verse 41—are you still in Luke 12?—41. Peter asks, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us or to everyone?” Which, by the way, is a great question about eschatology, and that's a whole other sermon, but you've got to figure that one out.

I shouldn't even have said that. But remind me—on a Q&A week—we need to do a Q&A week. We haven't done one of those for a while. Remember those? We're going to do those. Did you like those? Okay. Oh, one clapper. Okay. Thanks, Mom. We'll do another one. We will do another Q&A sometime, and then you can ask me about that, Luke 12:41.

But anyway—Luke 12:41. The Lord answered—not directly, and often he's that way, a bit elusive in his answer. And my answer to that is that in this text there's really both in view, both those who were in the disciples group and those that weren't, as the parable goes on to say. Because there's both a positive example and a negative example. But he says this. He asks this rhetorical question:

“Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?”

Now there’s two people in view here. There are some that would be called to do it and do it well, and there would be others that were abdicating their position. And Jesus, I think, is going to have the Pharisees in mind later. I could prove that in another sermon. But he’s going to be thinking about those Pharisees, and they were blowing it. Guys like Nicodemus—they should have known this stuff, and they didn’t. It’s like, you’re not in the Word. You’re not studying those Isaiah scrolls. You don’t know these things, and you’re a teacher of Israel. Remember those slam words from Christ in John 3?

But then there was Peter, who would stand up and be a faithful pastor in the church. And after that little denial thing in John 21, remember what he says when he says, “Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?” And Peter says, “Well, I like you a lot, I like you a lot, I like you a lot.” You remember every time Jesus responded to him? “Well, if you like me a lot, then”—what was it?—“Feed my sheep.”

See, he would be one of these teachers too who was given the position, the charge over the servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time. And there were the Pharisees that were supposed to be doing that—guys like Nicodemus—and they were failing miserably. And there were people like Peter who had to be prompted and chided to do it, but eventually he gets up on the Temple Mount every day, the Bible says, in the early church, and he preached to the crowd.

So you’ve got the teachers who were giving the food, which by the way is where we get the word pastor from—which is not just the New Testament or the Hebrew in the Old Testament talking about the people that were to teach them. The rabbis were the pastors. Pastors were people in the pasture that fed the sheep—the feeding. It was all about teaching the Word of God.

Okay, so he says, with that in mind: “It will be good,” verse 43, “for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns.” Doing what? In this case, giving the food allowance—teaching the people. Now who does that refer to? People that have been given that responsibility, people who are gifted and equipped to do that stuff. So those that are gifted and equipped to do that stuff, it will be good if when Christ comes back he finds you doing the stuff you’re gifted and equipped to do. Do you see where I’m going with this?

That applies specifically to me if I’m a teacher. If God has gifted me to teach, then it would be good for Christ, when he comes back, to find me in the process of either studying, putting a sermon together, or teaching. That will be good because the Bible says, verse 44—here comes the reward—“I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.” Here comes the reward. He’s going to give riches to those people.

Okay, now here’s the deal. You’re saying, “Well, I don’t know. I’m not a teacher.” Okay? Great. Not everybody is. But you do—and you know, you’ve heard the sermons that I preach from 1 Corinthians 12—you know that everybody has been given some kind of enablement to do something for the kingdom of God in the church and outside of the church. You have been given something that has been an enabling from God, a manifestation of his Spirit for the common good.

Now you have been given some kind of enabling. I have been given some kind of enabling. And when Christ comes back, I hope I’m laboring in the Scriptures, in the Greek New Testament, in a



commentary, working on an outline, or preaching on the stage. I hope that's how he finds me. Because the Bible says I ought to be busy doing what God has called me to do. God has enabled you to do something for the good of the church and for the propagation of the gospel in the workplace too—or in your neighborhood, or with your kids. And the Bible says it would sure be good if when he comes back you're busy doing that.

So how do I get to investing? Well, some of you need to figure out what that enablement is. You need to get to work—at least start—and say, "I think it might be." See, and if you think it might be and you're wrong, here's the only danger in that: you'll learn that it's not. See? That's all. "Well, I think I'm a singer. I think I should sing for the Lord." That won't take—that'll take us about fifteen seconds to figure that out. We can call Simon, put him on the line, and we can find out whether you're gifted, right? Bob doesn't need Simon. We'll figure it out. But you've got to try. You've got to get out there and try.

"Well, I think I'm gifted with kids." See? Well great. I sure hope when Christ comes back he finds you preparing or spending time with kids—maybe with your vest on—teaching a Bible verse to my child. I hope that's how he finds you when he comes back. And not going, "Well, I was going to get to that. But right now I was kind of busy in my life trying to make sure I get that raise and advancement. I'm just kind of working toward the 401(k) and getting things buttoned up." Because if he finds you prepping on the house instead of prepping on the boat, it's not going to be good. He wants you to be found faithful, doing what God has called you to do.

What does that mean—quit your job? No. You see your job as something that represents being an ambassador in this world, redeeming that situation for the good of the kingdom. How do you do that? See, we've talked about it. We've preached about it. Look through our tape catalog. We've had that series in Colossians—Taking Christ to Work. Do you remember that? That's a good one to get. And I didn't prep the Focal Point people for that. But we've got to figure out: how can I redemptively go about my work? How can I get involved in the local church to make sure I'm doing what God has enabled me to do in the church?

And if you're doing those things and busy about those things, guess what? I love the last verse, verse 44: "I tell you the truth, he will put him—that person—in charge of all his possessions." That'll be a tremendous day. But don't wait. You've got to start investing now. You've got to step out now. You can't wait. You've got to get at it because it could be over in two days, two weeks, two years—twelve years? I don't know. But the time is not limitless. "For in a very little while, he who is coming will come and he will not delay." And when he does, it's all over.

2 Peter 3:9–13. If I had time—if it were the two-hour sermon version—we'd go to that passage. But at least jot it down and study that this week as you think through the fact that just because he's been delayed, it doesn't mean he's not coming. As a matter of fact, it's all strategic. It's about him fulfilling his purpose in the church and in the world. You better get to investing now.

Okay, well what's it going to take? Well there's a key ingredient. Verses 38 and 39, back to Hebrews chapter 10. If you don't have this, you're not going to go very far. You've got to have this. It's interesting—we often think of the concept of faith as it relates to justification. You need to know that faith is the key in sanctification. You've got to know that.

When it comes to the key ingredient to get saved, the Bible says that's this thing called faith. It's trusting that Christ is in your stead as a substitute and that what he has done now applies to you.



You've got to trust in that. And then when you turn your sights to this thing called spiritual growth and sanctification, guess what the key ingredient is? It's faith. "My righteous one will live by faith."

Bottom of verse 39: we're not those who shrink back and are destroyed. No, we are those who have this thing called *pistis*—faith. It's this Greek concept of trusting and having confidence. It's not the kind of faith that gets the boat in the dry dock. It's the kind of faith that fuels you every day, every week, every month to keep working on it. Do you see the difference? It's a faith that goes beyond trusting God for heaven. It's a faith that fuels a life that invests in eternal things.

When everybody else says, "Why is he doing that?"—like they said to Noah—"Why is he in his backyard building that giant barge? I don't get it." See, because he had confidence in the fact that God had given him a place that would not only be his salvation but his home—for us, it'll be for eternity. So I want to get to work on the boat. I want to invest in eternity. And what I'm going to need is a faith that's more than just, "I want to trust in Christ to be saved." It's a kind of faith that says, "I want to trust in Christ to put into this thing called my Christian life an adornment and investment that will pay off for eternity."

Not only will it bring glory to God. Not only will it bear fruit in this world. It will be something that will be eternal compensation for me. And that's a good investment. And all you Orange Countyers who are into investment—this is the best investment you can make.

Number three on your outline: what do you need? You need an ambitious faith.

Let's cultivate that. Cultivate an ambitious, tenacious, go-after-it kind of faith. Cultivate a kind of trust in God that says it's not enough to be in the Holy of Holies. I want to draw near to God. And to do that is an uphill climb in the Christian life where we are working out our salvation with fear and trembling, striving to be obedient, to be fruitful, to be productive in the Christian life.

And that means you and I are going to need to work at it. And to work at it, people are going to look at you going down the dry dock—and unfortunately, though we see it, they don't see it. They don't have those eyes of faith to realize that what you're working on for eternity makes more sense than you working on your earthly pursuits. And they don't get that.

Why does he leave the office early and put on that funny jacket and go down to the church and teach those kids Bible verses? They don't understand why you'd miss a promotion or miss a client for that. But you say: I'm building the boat. I'm building the boat. I'm building the boat. I'm building the boat. Because if I invest in this, I know this has eternal dividends. I know God has gifted me with kids. I'm going to be there on Thursday nights leading in an Awana program.

Do you see how that's a simple decision, but it's one your coworkers are going to go, "I don't understand it. He's taking his tie off, putting on a funny shirt, and teaching kids the Bible. I don't understand why he'd do that when he could advance so much more in this company if he just put his head in the game and be like the rest of us." It's an ambitious faith that has eyes to see things that your coworkers—and sometimes even your own family members—won't see.

2 Corinthians chapter 4 is a great example of this. It would be good to jot it down—and a great one to turn to. 2 Corinthians 4:16–18. Sometimes when you study passages, especially like 2 Corinthians, you've got to remember the context. "We" doesn't always mean all of us. Paul co-wrote this book with Timothy. They were co-laborers advancing the kingdom. So when he says



“we,” he’s talking about him and Timothy. “Therefore we”—me and Timothy—“do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

And that’s the problem. It’s not about corneas and rods and cones and eyeballs. It’s about focus. It’s about priorities. My schedule, my time, my dollars, my effort. Because the things you can see physically are going away. But investing in a kid’s life, teaching in the youth group, being a counselor in our children’s program, a small-group leader, reaching out with the gospel to neighbors—that is achieving an eternal weight of glory. People won’t understand it. They’ll think you’re crazy.

But when we meet Christ and he girds himself to serve based on what we’ve done, we’ll say: that was the best investment we ever made. It will be worth it. Cultivate an ambitious faith.

And we can learn from those who had it. That’s where Hebrews 11 goes next—the so-called “hall of faith.” I’m going to call it ambitious faith. That’s the next series: Ambitious Faith. Parts one through thirteen. I thought the five-week series was long—wait until this one. And we can look at church history too.

William Carey said we ought to expect great things from God and attempt great things for God.

D. L. Moody once heard that his fourth grandchild had been born. He telegraphed back to his son: “May she become famous in the kingdom of heaven.” What a prayer.

John Wesley said the difference between the highest and lowest estate on earth is nothing compared to the smallest difference in glory in heaven.

C. S. Lewis said if we truly understood the promises of reward Christ gave, we would see that our problem is not that our desires are too strong—but far too weak.

We settle for too little. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 3 it will be a day of varied responses from God. So let us achieve something great for God. Do not be content with saving faith alone. Let us press on for the sake of the eternal kingdom, for the glory of God, and for the good of people’s souls.

Let’s pray.

God, help us as people who recognize these truths on paper, but who will face the real decisions tomorrow—whether we work on the house or the boat. We know we must live here. We must work. We must pay bills and care for our families. But help us not to run after these things like the pagans do. Help us instead to seek first the kingdom. Let us make it the first priority that we are building something for eternity.

And God, we want to serve you faithfully so that you might say, “Well done.” And as your Word says, that you would respond with a rich reward. Help us not to be content merely to be saved people with saving faith, but to press on to draw near to God and do the will of God. We look forward to that day when we see you face to face.



In Jesus' name, amen.