

September 22, 2024

Pathway to the Best Reward

Proverbs 22:1-8; Mark 9:30-37

*“The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches, honor, and life.” (Proverbs 22:1,4)*

I love rewards! I think you do, too. My Sam’s Club card gave me a certain percentage reward on any amount I spent during the month. I also enjoyed rewards from my other cards at restaurants, gas stations, grocery stores, hotels, and on-air trips. It is always pleasant to enjoy these rewards. You also know the importance of recognition and rewards after certain accomplishments. These are worldly rewards. Last week, we were told that we come to church not primarily because of worldly benefits, but because of Jesus' love for us and for who God is! Our focus this morning is on the pathway to the best rewards!

It is natural for all of us to seek riches, honor, and life, but what truly brings a person riches and honor? There are those who act with pride and insolence, who step on whomever they need to get to the top. They use questionable tactics and ungodly ways to gather their riches, which are temporary. However, God gives us wisdom about the place of lasting riches, honor, and most of all, life. These three must come in their trio form for a person to truly be rich and truly be honored. Without life in eternity, our earthly honor will mock us as the ages pile upon the ages. But with life, our riches will not slip through our hands like oil, but will endure for eternity.

According to King Solomon, there are two conditions for the three most important blessings: humility and the fear of God. These two are naturally associated and indeed inseparable. Lowliness of spirit is an indispensable characteristic of a religious life. It is in the valley of humiliation that the sinner first meets with God and comes into a state of reconciliation with Him. The spirit of pride cannot coexist with the fear of the Lord. Humility and pride are mutually exclusive qualities; in fact, genuine humility is the absence of pride. Society views humility as a sign of weakness; however, it is a strength when borne out of one’s submission and walk with the Lord. Humility is a Christian grace, a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Rather than weakness, humility is strength that responds to provocation with restraint and gentleness..

**Humility is the first condition.** It means thinking humbly of yourself. It involves admitting that you are a sinner, acknowledging that you don't have all the answers, and recognizing that you cannot do anything well or right without God's help. Humility is demonstrated by accepting correction, apologizing when you are wrong, avoiding seeking public praise, quietly serving others, being reserved in public, not talking about yourself, and praising others.

**Coupled with humility is the fear of the Lord.** The book of Proverbs teaches us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Without a proper fear of God, we may become prideful and overconfident, leading us away from wisdom. This fear of God starts with understanding who God is and where we stand before Him. The proud forget God, do not seek His help and forgiveness, and fail to show gratitude. In contrast, the humble recognize their dependence on God even for every breath they take. This requirement involves seeking to honor God in all that you do. A humble person strives to obey and please the true God and avoids anything that would dishonor Him.

**Riches are considered the first blessing.** This can be financial blessings, but it also encompasses other valuable things. Many people value things beyond money unless they are

greedy. Spiritual blessings, both in this life and the afterlife, are also part of this. I believe Solomon is referring to spiritual riches, honors, and life in the context of our proverb. Some people preach a "prosperity gospel," but historically, faithful people rarely receive earthly riches as a reward. God's people are not focused on material wealth but on eternal rewards (Matthew 6:24, 33-34). For those who are humble and fear the Lord, God grants spiritual riches that cannot be bought with gold and silver—such as heavenly glory and a meaningful life.

**Honor is the second blessing.** A humble man who fears the LORD will grow in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52). The great God honors those who honor Him (I Sam 2:30; Jas 4:10). A man who fears the LORD will be honored by others, for his conduct will be gracious and righteous (Prov. 18:12; 22:11). People will want to be his friend, and he will be lifted up from among other men by these two excellent and exceptional traits.

**Life is the third blessing.** The senses in which life is meant here include things that cannot be described (1 Cor 2:9). But Scripture does mention an abundant life, a good life, a joyful life, a peaceful life, a productive life, an extended life, and eternal life. And both now and eternity will be spent with God Himself as your friend.

The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is "riches and honor and life." These are the things God promised Abraham when He called him, as well as Solomon after he asked for wisdom. It's also what Jesus promised Peter, who asked Him what he would receive for leaving everything to follow Him. Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

How will you use the wisdom inspired by God and written by King Solomon? You can't attain wealth, honor, and a fulfilling life through any other means. There are no shortcuts to prosperity and success without embracing humility and the fear of God. Despite the many voices offering advice on how to achieve wealth, honor, and true fulfillment, unless they emphasize the importance of humility and the fear of God, they are mistaken. For those who embrace humility and the fear of the Lord, there is enduring wealth, honor, and life. Theirs is the wise path to attaining and retaining these blessings forever.