

**“And this Gospel ,”  
shall be preached...”**  
Matthew 24:14

**Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God**

## **DOES GOD RESPECT YOUR EFFORT?**

*by Michael Swagerty*

You're sitting in front of the television set, your feet comfortably propped up, and you're watching your favorite program.

You're just getting into the most spellbinding part, when the telephone rings. Now you don't like to be interrupted, but you get up anyway, mumbling to yourself, and walk over to the telephone.

“Hello.”

The voice at the other end says, “May I speak to Mr. Jones?”

“Yes. Who's this calling? What do you want? I'm in a hurry.”

“This is God calling from the third heaven . . .”

Now that probably reminds you of a comedy routine. But let's say it actually happened. Just what would go through your mind, if God really telephoned you from heaven?

Then He says, “I want to tell you what I think of your efforts as a Christian!”

Suddenly you think you are about to go into shock. You think about the fact you haven't been praying or fasting enough. You haven't even studied the Bible like you should have. But then God continues: “As your Creator, I want to tell you how much I really *appreciate* your efforts.”

### **“I really appreciate your efforts”**

In three specific areas God appreciates and respects your efforts as a Christian: your efforts to

overcome, to qualify to be in His family; your efforts toward His work of preaching the Gospel; and your efforts toward each other as brethren in God's Church.

I don't want anyone to get that pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-bootstraps mentality and subsequently develop a big ego. Let's look at the positive aspects of God's appreciation.

When Daniel had fasted and prayed (Daniel 10:2-3), an angel came to him. Verses 10-12: “And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands. And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent. And when he had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling. Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.”

God did not consider that Daniel was not perfect, or that he had made mistakes. Our attention is directed to this: *from the first day* that Daniel set his heart, God began to hear his words. God considered his attitude. And how may this apply to you?

Not long ago, I visited a man who had been listening to the World Tomorrow broadcast and

reading our literature. He knew a fair amount about our beliefs and so he had called me, a minister, wanting to know how to become a member of the Church. What was required of him? He kept asking this repeatedly.

So I really told him. We talked about the Sabbath and how it relates to his job, the Holy Days, the three tithes, clean and unclean meats, the full meaning of repentance and baptism, and the sacrifices he probably would have to make. His employer had already told him that if he wanted Saturday off (to keep the Sabbath) he was going to be fired. He was unmarried, and his parents had already threatened to throw him out of the house. Although his countenance began to sink, he was just like Daniel—determined. He had set his mind to understand the truth of God, begun to correct and chasten himself, and he was not going to give up now. It didn't matter what it cost him to make those changes.

When God looks down and sees you with that type of attitude, He appreciates your efforts.

Abel was murdered. Noah was laughed to scorn for trying to tell people a flood was going to drown them. Job, suffering from very painful boils, having lost all his possessions, was left to sit on an ash heap and scrape himself. But did God not appreciate their efforts? No, He very much appreciated the fact that they stuck with it.

### **So You Want Proof!**

II Chronicles 16 is one of the most inspiring passages of scripture I know of. Verses 7-9: "And at the time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him . . . Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the Lord, he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."

The word "perfect" here does not mean doing everything right before God. Rather it means complete or whole. Asa's heart was not divided in this instance—half one way and half another. Nor need yours be. And if you have the same kind of attitude that Asa had, God's eyes are open to you and He will make help available for you when the going gets tough.

Many years ago I knew a lady who very earnestly wanted to be baptized. And yet, she did not feel right about being baptized until she could give up smoking. She tried everything: chewing gum, eating candy, tapering off by counting 20 per day down to one, etc. Nothing worked. Finally, she came to the place where she said, "I just can't lick this habit. The only way I ever will is if God does something for me, where I just hate the taste of these cigarettes so much that they just make me sick." She really prayed about it. And do you know, the next morning, as her custom was, she had a cup of coffee and as usual just couldn't pass up the temptation to grab a cigarette. But before she even took a drag, breathing the smoke off the lighted end literally made her vomit. And even to this day, she can only remain in a smoke-filled room for a few minutes until she starts to get nauseated.

The idea of this story is, God was concerned for her and God appreciated her effort of trying to overcome.

The parable of the prodigal son clearly illustrates the fact that God certainly appreciates the efforts of those who work to fulfill the gospel commission. God particularly respects somebody who has been in His Church for many years and has stood fast through thick and thin.

Luke 15:11-13: "A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of the goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living."

We are going to see from this parable how God the Father will look on those who would sin, sow their wild oats, and temporarily fall away, but when they recognize their mistakes, repent, and come back, how much God is willing to forgive and to welcome them back with open arms.

### **The Prodigal Son Today**

Let's say two people were baptized ten or fifteen years ago. They have been members of the Church of God for many years. One member, about five years ago, along with several other people, left God's church for different reasons. This person said, "Hey, we're under grace now! We don't have to keep the Law of God. Why should we worry

about keeping the Sabbath and the holy days and tithing and all these things?" So he takes the tithe that might have gone into God's Work, the second tithe that might have taken him to the Feast of Tabernacles, and the third tithe that might have helped the widow, and squanders it all on riotous living.

But during that same time in the past, the other member is faithful. He serves in the church parking lot during services, rain or shine. He sacrifices for the special offerings when the Work has financial need. He drives miles out of the way to bring somebody to services who has no transportation. Did anybody ever really thank him? Probably not.

Now we come to today. The individual who left five years ago and squandered all his living on himself has come back into our fellowship. Everybody is patting him on the back and so happy to see him. But this annoys the one who stayed in. Because it does not seem fair. It just does not.

Luke 15:17-24: "And when he came to himself . . . he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

Personally I hope and pray that all the people who have left God's Church will one day be back.

Verses 25-29: "Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant." He was angry when he found out what was happening. ". . . therefore came his father out, and in-treated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee."

"That's right, I waded through the mud puddles of the parking lot, and I always responded to calls for special offerings, and generously too, I picked up those widows that lived ten and twenty miles out of my way, and I prayed and I studied long and

hard and diligently and I fasted. I have held firm all these years."

Verses 29-31: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he [the father] said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." "Everything I have is yours." "I appreciate what you have done."

### Something Beyond Salvation

Hebrews 1:1-2: "God . . . hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son [Jesus Christ], whom he hath appointed heir of all things." Romans 8:16-17: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: 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."

Do you see what that verse says? We in God's Church, the ones who have God's Spirit, who have repented, been baptized, had hands laid on us, received God's Spirit and have held firm, are heirs along with Jesus Christ of everything God has. That kind of magnificent reward shows how much God appreciates our efforts.

At the end of the Millennium, we will inherit *everything* with Christ. Starting on this earth we will be kings and rulers in God's kingdom, after that one thousand-year period and the judgment period after that, we will branch out into all the universe, and share *everything* with God and Jesus Christ. That is what we will receive in appreciation from God.

I Corinthians 15:58: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, *forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*"

Hebrews 6:9: "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that *accompany* salvation, though we thus speak [though we correct you]. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." Paul encourages us to not

give up, not to quit. So when you sacrifice to serve somebody else, remember God will not overlook your effort.

I know a man who must drive an hour to get to church each Sabbath. Maybe some of you have to drive further, but to complicate this man's situation, there is a widow who lives about 20 minutes down the road in the opposite direction, who has no other way to get to church. So this individual drives 20 minutes in the opposite direction, picks her up, drives 20 minutes back to his house, picks up his family, and then drives to church an hour and 40 minutes total. And when he comes back home, of course, he repeats the whole drive in reverse— week after week, month after month, year after year.

I asked the individual one time, "Don't you ever get tired of doing this?" His reply really made me think. "Well, I suppose if I stop to think about it," he said, "I could get sore about it. But you know, there are certain things you have to do and if you don't dwell on their undesirability, you don't get into a bad attitude."

Now you can apply that to a lot of things. Maybe for you, keeping the Sabbath is one, the annual holy days another, tithing or praying. But do you know when human beings really get into trouble? It's when they start talking about their problems, and talking themselves right into negative opinions and bad attitudes.

Let me give you another example. I called on an individual one time to provide transportation to an annual holy day for a lady and her three children. It made the car kind of crowded, but he was more than happy to do it. But then, although it wasn't required of him, after the holy day service was over, instead of just rushing them home, he took the four of them out with his family to the best restaurant in town for a nice supper at his expense—and they all fellowshiped and had a good time.

### **God Repays As If We Made a Loan**

Proverbs 19:17: "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he [God] pay him again."

Maybe you never realized you could make a loan to God. But that's what the proverb says. When

you help somebody in need, you make a loan to God. And that which God has received He will pay to the lender again.

Of course, that doesn't mean that one should only give to the poor with the expectation of getting his money back (or more). Not at all. But God is faithful, generous, spiritually able to repay—even in financial terms in this life. And he never forgets!

Acts 10:1: "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band . . ." So here was an Italian, and in the early days of the New Testament church, there wasn't yet a place in God's church for anyone but Israelites—because it had not yet been revealed to the apostles that Gentiles could also be saved.

Verses 2-4: "[Cornelius was] a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God." God did not forget. God saw his dedication to the poor. He heard his prayers. He saw his zeal, and was only waiting for the right time to reward this man.

Verse 5: "And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter . . ." And then you can read the rest of the story about how this man was baptized and how God opened up the door for Gentiles as well as Israelites to be a part of His Church.

But have you ever wondered sometimes: "When is help going to come for me? When is God going to pay me back some 'loan' I made to the needy?" The answer is that you never really know when the help is coming. And you never know why it was delayed.

We all need to think about that in service to other people. You're probably not going to get many pats on the back, not many people will say, "Thank you." But don't let that turn you aside from well doing because God does not forget. God does appreciate your effort.