

## Heavenly Rewards

One evening after a particularly difficult day with my two little sisters, my father pulled me aside. He looked me in the eye and said, "Peter, it's important that you learn to be nice to girls, because one day you'll be old enough to marry a girl. And if you marry a girl, you'll get a great reward."

Because I was only seven, I pictured Hot Wheels, Frisbees and lots of money—Gold!

Scripture tells us that the streets of the New Jerusalem, the streets of Heaven, are paved with gold. Scripture also informs us that the whole law is fulfilled in "one Word." Galatians 5:14, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." I suspect that's the reason most folks think you ought to be good. You ought to love 'cause you'll get the gold. You ought to be good 'cause you'll get the New Jerusalem.

I vaguely remember an old Twilight Zone episode. If my memory serves me correctly, a couple of bank robbers got their hands on a time machine that was good for one trip into the future. So of course they robbed a bank, stealing an immense amount of gold. Then they took all the loot, hopped into the time machine and travelled into the future. Great plan! But when they arrived in the future, gold was as cheap as asphalt. Folks in the future had learned to make gold. They paved their streets with gold.

As I write, people are launching rockets at each other in the Middle East. Of course there are all sorts of complicated reasons for that, but at the heart of the matter is a desire to occupy Jerusalem. "Jerusalem" means "City of Peace." As I write, people make business deals, file lawsuits and tell "white lies"—they abuse other people—in order to "occupy the city" and get the gold. As I write, religious folks do all sorts of "good deeds" in order to get the gold. As I write, little boys are trying so hard to be nice to little girls, so that on Christmas morning, they'll get the gold. They'll earn a reward.

The Bible does talk about "rewards." And I suspect that's why most religious folks try so hard to be "good." But is that "good?"

We kill people to capture the City of Peace... but what's the City of Peace?

We "love" people to earn a reward... but what's the reward?

At the end of the Bible in The Revelation, John sees the "New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." She's actually built with people. She's a living Sanctuary. Isn't that ironic? We kill people to capture Jerusalem and Jerusalem is people.

Jesus said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." That means it is "at hand," like you could reach out and touch it. We religious folks often love people to avoid Hell and get to Heaven. In other words, we often use and even abuse people to get Heaven... but Heaven is people.

We use people to get things, like gold. Rather than use things, like gold, to get people. We use and abuse people to gain a reward... and people are the reward.

Perhaps, we're surrounded by Heaven, but don't have a capacity for Heaven. When I was seven, I was surrounded by girls, but didn't have a capacity for girls...

But my father suspected that I would develop that capacity one day, especially if I didn't learn to hate them, that day, when I was seven.

Now I need to confess: My Dad didn't really tell me those things that day. At least he didn't tell me those things in those words, but he could've. At seven, I tried to be nice to girls so I wouldn't get in trouble and my parents would give me rewards. Perhaps you're nice to folks in order to avoid Hell and get to Heaven. But maybe people are Heaven? So you should be nice to people, but not so you can get some other reward. Perhaps you should be nice to people to learn to love your reward.

Perhaps Love is its own reward.

By my junior year in college, I was working really hard at being nice to girls, one in particular ...but not to get the gold. Actually I used all my student loan money to buy some gold, cause I planned to use the gold to get the girl. And I did. I put the gold on her finger and received quite a reward... a reward that I did not have a capacity for, or a desire for, when I was seven; a reward better than anything I had ever imagined; a reward that made me forget all about Hot Wheels, Frisbees and even gold.

Perhaps Love is its own reward. Or I should say, "His own reward." Scripture says, "God is Love." Maybe I ought to learn to love people, so I can learn to love LOVE, which means to love God. God is my reward.

When the New Jerusalem comes down as a bride adorned for her husband, we learn that Jerusalem is us... and our husband is God. That's some reward! I suspect we'll dance on streets of gold and not even notice the gold.

And yet right now, "Heaven is at hand." And so it really is important to love people and so learn to love LOVE... because you'll get a reward. People are the reward. Love is the reward. The Love in people—His City—is the reward.

And if that's disappointing... well, trust your heavenly Father, little boy. Trust your heavenly Father, little girl. Trust Him and you will change. "We love because He first loved us." Trust Him and you will not be disappointed. You'll dance on streets of gold and not even notice the gold.

Never use a girl to gain the gold. Use all your gold to gain the girl. The Gospel Story is that God has used all creation and sacrificed himself to gain you. Isn't that something? You are Love's reward. You, in love with Love, are God's reward. And He is your reward. Love is your reward. Don't just use Love; don't just use God, to gain Heaven. He is Heaven and you won't be disappointed.

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