

Di223 We Believe

Lesson Di223-10 The Wages of Sin

What is the difference between a gift and wages? A gift is not earned. Someone else pays for it. The reason most people work is not just for the joy of working, but to gain wages for work done. People often refer to “an honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work.”

Now Zacchaeus was a tax collector in Jesus’ day. He lived in Jericho, a very ancient city, which had been rebuilt by Herod the Great. It was located about 24 kilometers (15 miles) northeast of Jerusalem. Zacchaeus was a Jew, but he collected taxes for the Romans who were in power over Jewish territory. The Jews hated such tax collectors, and indeed, many of them demanded more tax money than necessary. They would often get rich by a “dishonest day’s pay for dishonest work.”

It seems that this chief tax collector had heard about the miraculous works that Jesus had done throughout Israel. He knew Jesus was coming to Jericho that very day. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but he was short and could not see over the crowds of people. Being a creative man, he ran ahead and climbed a fig tree in order to get a good look at Jesus as he passed by that way. When Jesus came down the road, he stopped under that very fig tree and looked up. Jesus said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So Zacchaeus came down at once and welcomed Jesus gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.” But while Jesus was sitting in the tax collector’s home, Zacchaeus stood up and declared, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Zacchaeus was rich, but he couldn’t buy God’s gift of eternal life. He had to repent and accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior (Luke 19:1-10).

We all earn spiritual wages for how we live our lives. The apostle Paul explained to the Romans: “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). What do you think of when you hear the word ‘sin’? Sin is breaking God’s law or disobeying what he has told us to do. It is being wrong, even in attitudes and thoughts. Sin is falling short of the glory of God. The glory of God is most clearly seen in Jesus. If Jesus were standing here in the flesh, could you say you are like him? None of us could. We all fall short of God’s glory.

We are each responsible for our own sin. We are born with a tendency to sin. We would rather do things our own selfish way than God’s way, and that is the heart of sin. When we commit our first sin, we break the relationship with God that he intends. Our sin separates us from the holy God. If we choose to reject God while we are alive, that separation will exist for eternity. We will experience separation from God, not only today, but also forever in hell.

But God has good news for us. “The wages of sin is death, *but*....” Paul’s word ‘but’ is important. It indicates that there is hope for us, even though we have sinned and deserve death and hell. Our wages should be death, *but* God has a gift for those who receive his Son as Savior. We see what God did to make up for what we have done. God came to demonstrate his love, fulfill his purpose, and give us eternal life. This is his salvation plan.

Some people try to earn God’s favor and eternal life by doing good deeds, living moral lives, or going to religious events. Suppose you bought a special gift for a close friend to show how much the person means to you. How would you feel if the friend refused to accept the gift without first paying you for it?

God feels the same way about your trying to earn eternal life. Eternal life is a gift, and we can do nothing to earn it. God wants to give us the gift of eternal life for the same reason anyone gives a gift—because he loves us. Eternal life is a relationship with God that starts now and continues forever as we follow him.

The way we receive God’s salvation and eternal life is by accepting Jesus Christ, God’s gift to us. The only way to bring God and his people together was for God to give his only Son to die for our sins on a cross. Jesus left heaven to be born as a human being like us, in order to save us. He suffered temptations. He was like us, except that he never sinned. Christ is Jesus’ name that means Messiah, King, and Anointed One. Heaven’s King allowed himself to be crucified on the Cross for our sins.

Imagine that you’re found by a judge to be guilty of a crime. After the judge pronounces you guilty, he takes off his robe, comes down to the bailiff, and pays your fine out of his own pocket. In the same way, God pronounces you guilty. But, he paid the price for your sin by coming to the earth in the person of his Son, Jesus. You should have to die for your sins, but he died in your place.

Jesus died and then rose from the dead, defeating death, hell, and Satan. He is the first to ever rise from the dead to live forever. The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is Lord over everything. How do you get this eternal life that Christ offers you? For Jesus to be your Savior and Lord, you must trust your whole life to Him. Most people come into this new relationship through a prayer of repentance.

Our memory verse explains: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

Our *Statement of Faith* for this lesson is number five: “We believe mankind’s only hope of salvation is through the shed blood of Jesus, the Son of God. The gift of eternal life is received when we repent of our sins and confess our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

This lesson is **important** because it teaches that each of us has earned the wages of our sins. We deserve death and eternal separation from God. But God loves us. He wants to give us eternal life—life with him that lasts forever. We only have to repent and ask Jesus to forgive us

of our sin. We can't earn eternal life—God will freely give it to those who believe on Jesus as Savior and Lord.

The **main truth** of this story is that everyone has sinned and is in need of a Savior. God gave his only Son as our Savior. Our part is to repent, believe on him, and receive the gift of eternal life.

Let's **review** this lesson:

1. What is sin? [Pause.]

A. If you said that sin is breaking God's law or disobeying what he tells us to do even in our attitudes and thoughts, you are right.

2. What is the result of sin? [Pause.]

A. If you answered, "The result of sin is separation from God," you are correct.

3. What is God's gift to us and how do we receive it? [Pause.]

A. If you said, "God's gift to us is salvation and eternal life and we receive it by accepting Jesus Christ as our Savior," you are right.

Your **assignment** is to begin to memorize our fifth *Statement of Faith*: "We believe mankind's only hope of salvation is through the shed blood of Jesus, the Son of God. The gift of eternal life is received when we repent of our sins and confess our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." Also, please learn the memory verse: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9). Share with at least two other persons about the wages of sin and God's gift of salvation.