

# You Asked For It!

## Holy Benefits

What information do you request when considering a new job?

Before you start punching the clock what do you want to know?

Hours, wages, dress code, lunch break, vacation package, benefit package.

Near the top of the list is the benefits.

What kind of benefits will you be offered?

Health care, life insurance, travel insurance, sick days.

How will I be benefited by working for you?

Isn't that kind of a backwards way of thinking?

"Hey boss, if I show up for work what are you going to do for me?"

Shouldn't we be more concerned about how we can benefit the company?

Today we begin our "You Asked For It" sermon series.

When I first asked for your suggestions on this series one slip said,

"The benefits of being a Christian according to Scripture."

I'll have to admit that I had a long list of benefits.

There is no shortage of benefits to being a Christian.

Forgiveness, new life, being loved, experiencing peace, heaven.

The chance to experience miracles, absence of poverty, heir to a throne.

A mansion over the hilltop, God's got my back, a crown, blessings.

Being on the winning side, the recipient of all kinds of gifts.

I had this spiritual benefit package all put together.

Who wants to be on God's side this morning?

Who wants to experience all of these benefits?

It's all true, they are all yours.

It is all in the Bible.

God offers them all - He wants to bless your life.

But, as Paul Harvey said for decades, "Now the rest of the story."

Let's see what God's word says about this part of living the Christian life.

Does the bible simply promise the good life?

Or is there more to the story of experiencing God's benefits?

Here is what Jesus teaches on the subject of seeking benefits from faith.

"And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."

(Matthew 6:30-33)

The benefit of seeking God's righteousness and His Kingdom.

We don't become consumed by our own empire.

We live righteously which is possible only in Christ

There is no greater way to live.

"Take your money and go. I wanted to pay this last worker the same as you. Is it against the law for me to do what I want with my money? Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?' 'So those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last.'" (Matthew 20:14-16)

Live a self-less life.

We receive in Christ the benefit of putting God and others first

"Then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons. She knelt respectfully to ask a favor. 'What is your request?' he asked. She replied, 'In your Kingdom, please let my two sons sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left.' But Jesus answered by saying to them, 'You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink?' 'Oh yes,' they replied, 'we are able!' Jesus told them, 'You will indeed drink from my bitter cup. But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. My Father has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen.' When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. But Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.'" (Matthew 20:20-28)

The benefit of serving and living for others and not for ourselves.

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'I tell you the truth, it is very hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. I'll say it again—it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!' The disciples were astounded. 'Then who in the world can be saved?' they asked. Jesus looked at them intently and said, 'Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible.' Then Peter said to him, 'We've given up everything to follow you. What will we get?' Jesus replied, 'I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life. But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.'" (Matthew 19:23-30)

The benefit of sacrifice.

"Be dressed for service and keep your lamps burning, as though you were waiting for your master to return from the wedding feast. Then you will be ready to open the door and let him in the moment he arrives and knocks. The servants who are ready and waiting for his return will be rewarded. I tell you the truth, he himself will seat them, put on an apron, and serve them as they sit and eat! He may come in the middle of the night or just before dawn. But whenever he comes, he will reward the servants who are ready. Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would not permit his house to be broken into. You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected." (Luke 12:35-40)

The benefit of surprise.

We can always be ready to open to something new God is doing.

"When a servant comes in from plowing or taking care of sheep, does his master say, 'Come in and eat with me'? No, he says, 'Prepare my meal, put on your apron, and serve me while I eat. Then you can eat later.' And does the master thank the servant for doing what he was told to do? Of course not. In the same way, when you obey me you should say, 'We are unworthy servants who have simply done our duty.'" (Luke 17:7-10)

The benefit of simplicity.

Who would welcome a life that is less complicated?

Life in Christ is a simple life - single focused - serving our Lord.  
How did you do this week taking advantage of these holy benefits?

Was there a time when you really jumped in the way?

Did you push your rights instead of God's righteousness?

Jesus makes it clear what our motive for serving Him ought to be.

He never honours the attitude, what's in this for me.

He is not moved by our level of satisfaction.

We have never seen Him pamper a disciple.

He does desire to open the windows of heaven on the faithful.

But like a loving Father God disciplines those whom He loves.

He sees the motives of the heart.

He knows why you are here this morning.

Let's listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah.

We read this passage during our prayer time on Tuesday.

It reveals the heart of the Father as He reveals His love for you.

But it all has one aim.

That we live the life of holiness.

That we not be distracted by the thought of a blessing.

That we live a life that cannot possibly be lived apart from God.

**"Even the wilderness and desert will be glad in those days. The wasteland will rejoice and blossom with spring crocuses. Yes, there will be an abundance of flowers and singing and joy! The deserts will become as green as the mountains of Lebanon, as lovely as Mount Carmel or the plain of Sharon. There the Lord will display his glory, the splendor of our God. With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands, and encourage those who have weak knees. Say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, and do not fear, for your God is coming to destroy your enemies. He is coming to save you.' And when he comes, he will open the eyes of the blind and unplug the ears of the deaf. The lame will leap like a deer, and those who cannot speak will sing for joy! Springs will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams will water the wasteland. The parched ground will become a pool, and springs of water will satisfy the thirsty land. Marsh grass and reeds and rushes will flourish where desert jackals once lived. And a great road will go through that once deserted land. It will be named the Highway of Holiness. Evil-minded people will never travel on it. It will be only for those who walk in God's ways; fools will never walk there. Lions will not lurk along its course, nor any other ferocious beasts. There will be no other dangers. Only the redeemed will walk on it. Those who have been ransomed by the Lord will return. They will enter Jerusalem singing, crowned with everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear, and they will be filled with joy and gladness." (Isaiah 35:1-10)**

The benefits of being a Christian are abundant.

But since "You Asked For It", the greatest benefit is the awesome miraculous privilege of surrendering everything to God.

We don't put our faith in Christ for what we can get from Him.

We don't live the Christian life just for the gift of eternal life.

We don't come to Christ by faith and ask, "so, what's in it for me?"

**We live in Christ and under His Lordship, for others.**

That is the essence of the Covenant relationship we enjoy with God.

God invited Abraham to walk faithfully with Him.

Through him God would be able to bless all the nations of the world.

But Abraham began before any blessings by trusting God completely.

He trusted even to the extent of laying Isaac on the altar.

And it was then that the promises God made freely flowed.

**Can you honestly say you have laid everything on the altar?**

Can I?

Do I put limits on my surrender?

Have I kept some things in life excluded from God?

Are there areas of my life where I am living for myself?

This is not a sermon on tithing.

But I think how we spend our money illustrates the point.

Have you brought all the tithe to the Lord this summer?

Our finances say we have not been faithful as a congregation.

We have drifted farther and farther each week off the approved budget.  
We are falling behind in our general operating account.  
We have had to borrow from designated funds to cover operating expenses.  
And yet we have the audacity to ask God to bless us.

We come to Him as James' and John's mother did.

Oh Jesus bless my ministry, make it the best.

Give us special privileges.

And Jesus says can you surrender everything to me?

Can you trust Me with your finances?

I want to bless you in so many ways if you would just trust Me.

It is in that surrender you discover that the Lord provides your every need.

There is an eternity of benefits from being a Christian.

Some are experienced in this life, some only in heaven.

But they don't come from being a Christian.

They are the fruit of being Christ-like.

The benefits of being a Christian are not a reward.

**The benefits of being a Christian are a result of humble and holy service.**

They will never be experienced if Jesus is clouded by any desire besides Him.  
Not all of us were living in the year 1961.

But we all are probably aware of a speech that was delivered January 20<sup>th</sup> 1961.

It was the Presidential Inaugural Speech of John F. Kennedy.

In his speech he made a statement that has been quoted ever since.

Can anyone repeat that quote?

**"And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."**

Does anyone know the next sentence of his speech?

**"My fellow citizens of the world, ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man."** (From JFK 1961 Inaugural Address)

That ought to be the spirit of every disciple of Jesus.

"Jesus, I follow You today not for what I will receive from You.

**"Jesus I follow You so that through me others will benefit."**

I close with some lines from prayers by Stanley Hauerwas.

I read these prayers while I was on Sabbatical this summer.

**"Oh we so long to be capable of trust. We are so tired, so bored, by our cynicism. So yes, dear Lord, we pray that You will make us truthful servants so that we may say to ourselves and one another, 'You can trust me.' Amen."**

**"Sustainer of all life, infuse our lives with the joy of Your Spirit. ... Wrench our closings open so that we will not fear suffering, and so learn that it is only through our suffering that You make us Your agents. Compel us, make us free so that we manifest the joy of friendship with You and one another. Amen." (Prayers Plainly Spoken, Stanley Hauerwas, pp 103, 132)**

That, my friends, is the benefit of being a Christian.

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Closing Song - How Great Is Our God