

# Receiving the Reward

by Herbert Henry Farmer

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*Jesus sees the success of the worldly as a sign of their failure and a source of pity, rather than a reward to be envied.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 73:3, Proverbs 23:4, Isaiah 55:8, Matthew 6:2, Luke 6:24

**Topics:** "Worldly Success", "Divine Favor"

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## Description

Herbert Henry Farmer delves into the paradox of worldly success and the perception of prosperity among the wicked, challenging the notion that material wealth equates to divine favor. He emphasizes the internal struggle of envy and materialism that often clouds our judgment when observing the success of the unrighteous. Farmer highlights Jesus' unique perspective, where worldly success is not seen as a reward but as a tragic consequence, urging listeners to reconsider their views on success and the true nature of worldly pursuits.

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## Transcript

"They have received their reward"

(Matt. 6:2).

By demanding that worldliness should not be allowed even worldly success, we land ourselves with an insoluble problem: directly we discover that life does not work like that at all. The prosperity and success of the wicked have been a source of trouble to pious people in all ages. You find the Psalmist, the author of the book of Job, and again and again the prophets, wrestling with it. And, today one is continually meeting folk who are puzzled and rebellious, because they feel that somehow it impugns the goodness and providence of God that so many good people are struggling with poverty and so many worldly people have everything the heart could desire. We need to think the whole thing through again.

Is it not clear that to demand that worldliness should be punished by depriving it of worldly success is to set the same value on worldly success as worldliness itself does? Is it not to grant that worldly success is worth something after all, that to miss it is a real deprivation, a real punishment? If in the end it counts for nothing, why be put out because bad people so often get it? If our desire is to take it away from them and give it to better folk, are we not really in an inverted sort of way congratulating them on having it, agreeing with them, that it is after all a very good thing, worth striving for? This is no quibble. It represents a very serious and solemn fact of our poor, unregenerate, worldly hearts. There is a great deal of denunciation of

the rich which is sheer envy, a great deal of puzzlement and rebellion at life which springs from a materialistic outlook only half redeemed. We say "woe! to the rich," but only because in our hearts we think them happy happier than they deserve! How different the attitude of Jesus! Here again, His amazing originality and purity appear. He stands quite clear of all these fallacies and self-deceptions. To Him the success of the worldly is not an undeserved reward; on the contrary, it is their most terrible punishment, their entirely appropriate doom. He does not envy them it; He pities them rather. He says "woe to them," because He really thinks it is a most dreadful thing to aim at worldly success and get it. It would have been better for them to have aimed at it and not got it. Nowhere, I say, is the purity of His moral perceptions shown more clearly than in this conviction, that the real failure of worldliness lies in its astonishing success, its real woe in its present consolations.

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