

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Last Will Be First

Scripture: Matthew 19:30-20:16

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As you know, when I originally preached through the gospel of Matthew, it took eight years and several hundred messages. And when I went back and wrote the commentary on Matthew, it took four volumes and nearly 2,000 pages to cover this gospel. In fact, when I was down in San Palo, a pastor there said, "Did you ever finish Matthew?"

And I said, "Yes." He said, "Did you ever finish the commentaries?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I only have volume one. Could you send me the rest?" And I said I would. And it's been hard for me to reduce this wonderful gospel to twelve messages. So in a sense, I welcome the opportunity to reach into Matthew and pull out another one, another passage.

Preached many years ago. Most of the time, you know, I realize that when I go through a book, it'll be once in my lifetime and once in yours and we'll never go back there again. And so I relish the opportunity to go back. And I want to go back to chapter 20. Matthew 20.

One of the great faithful prophets of the Old Testament was Ezekiel. And Ezekiel spoke to the people of God who were in Babylonian exile. One of his emphasis was to remind them - to remind them of the sins of Judah, which brought about that exile. And among those sins which caused that 70 years of exile in Babylon, among those sins was one which he points out in his prophesy, chapter 18, where twice in that chapter he says this.

"You say the way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, oh house of Israel is not my way equal? Are not your ways unequal?" Israel had accused God of being unfair, unequal. And Ezekiel said, "That's one of your sins. You've said God is not fair." That sin has since been committed many times by many people, who when things in their life don't go the way they think they ought to go or the way they would like them to go, accuse God of being unfair.

When somebody else appears to prosper and they suffer, they may look to God and consider Him inequitable. And so it certainly wasn't the first, nor was it the last time God has been accused of being unfair or unequal in His treatment of His people. It is that very issue which is the theme of this chapter. And it may be well to say at the very start that God defends Himself against this accusation a number of times in Scripture and a number of times in the New Testament. And at least half a dozen times in the New Testament He defends Himself against this accusation by saying He is no respecter of persons.

That is to say, He treats all people equally. Certainly when it comes to His own children and when it comes to applying the benefits of salvation, there is absolutely no inequality. It is sin for believers to accuse God of being inequitable in His treatment of His own. It is that marvelous truth that is illustrated in the parable in the beginning of chapter 20. Let's begin in chapter 19, the last verse, which should be the first verse of chapter 20.

"But many who are first will be last and the last first." Here's why that's true. "For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius, for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in their marketplace."

"And to those he said, 'You too go into the vineyard and whatever is right, I will give you.' And so they went. Again, he went out about the sixth and ninth hour and did the same thing. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day long?' They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You too go into the vineyard.' And when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages beginning with the last group through the first.'"

"And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a dinereas. And when those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more. They also received each one a dinereas. And when they received it, they grumbled at the landowner saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour and you've made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the scorching heat of the day.' But he answered and said to them, 'Friend, I'm doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a dinereas? Take what is yours and go your way. But I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own or is your eye envious because I am generous? Thus, the last shall be first, and the first last.'"

So you see this parable is bracketed by the same statement. verse 30 of chapter 19, verse 16 of chapter 20 say the very same thing. "The last shall be first, the first last." That set of brackets defines what the parable in the middle is about. It's all about being last and being first. Now in examining this passage, I want to point to four things. The proverb itself, the parable which illustrates it, the point of it, and then some principles. Let's look at the proverb.

It is a proverb or a maxim. It is a truism, a short, pithy popular saying of ancient and unknown origin expressing wisdom. That's a proverb. And the Lord apparently coined this proverb and likely used it very frequently. Compare Luke 13:30 for another use of it. And here it is obviously the point of the parable. Now the parable is a riddle in a sense and so is the proverb.

When you read the proverb, you say to yourself, "What does that mean?" And this proverb has baffled some Bible students through the years, and I think that's unnecessary. I think reading the parable explains the riddle with just some basic things to understand.

Now I've been in some races in my youth. I'm not in any races anymore. But when I was young, I used to run track. I used to run races. I ran in my high school years, I ran the sprint events. I ran in everything up to one foolish afternoon I ran the 800 meters or 880, as it was known then. I ran the 400 meters. I, one time, had to run a distance race or one or two times when I was involved in a decathlon meet. But I used to run. I used to run races. And to figure out what is meant here, I just sort of look back to my athletic background. The last first and the first last.

Now the only way for the last to be first and the first to be last would be if they all crossed the finish line in the dead heat. Right? I mean, if you're last, you're last. But if you're last and first, and if you're first and last, that means you end in a dead heat. The only way to be first and last at the same time is to cross the finish line altogether. If there are ten people in a race and they're all first and they're all last, it's a dead heat.

The first are last and the last are first because everybody finished the same. Very simple. In fact, I remember driving to church the week I was preparing this sermon many years ago. And I had my son Mark who was just young at that time. And I was discussing this parable with him. And I said, "What do you think it means?" And he responded to me, "That's easy Dad. It means everybody finishes the same." And I hadn't even explained the profound meaning.

It was so obvious. And that is the intent of the parable. It is to demonstrate one simple point. That everyone will finish equally. That God is no respecter of his own. That God treats all of his own equally. Proverb is very simple and very straightforward. The illustration is graphic and frankly, unforgettable.

Let's move in to the parable. From the principle to the parable. It is a fascinating picture. Verse 1. "For the Kingdom of Heaven." Now remember again, this is the sphere of salvation. The Kingdom of Heaven is the spiritual realm where those who are the children of God exist. The realm of salvation, the sphere of salvation. The sphere where God rules over the redeemed, where God rules through the grace of salvation.

So he's illustrating how it is among the saved, among the redeemed, among God's people in his Kingdom. It's like this. It's like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. It's like a man who is an Oikadespetez, a house ruler in the Greek. A manager of the house. Likely in this case a man who owns this estate because down in verse 15 he says, "I can do with my own whatever I want."

So here is a man who owns an estate. He owns the land. And the land includes a vineyard. The scene is not imaginary. It is very real to the Jewish listeners. In fact, in the fertile plain areas like Esdrelon and the Sharon Valley and the Jordan Valleys, the grain field was the major enterprise. But on the mountain slopes which dominate the land of Israel, the vineyard was the most valuable property, and frankly required the greatest amount of labor.

The steepness of the slopes on which the vines grew best greatly increased the toil. You had to take out the rocks and you had to build a flat surface terrace and there was just a lot of work. They were terraced, hand laid stone walls where there - even the fertilizer and the additional soil had to be carried on men's shoulders up these slopes. In spring, they prepared the soil. In summer, they pruned and tied the branches. And in September, the grape harvest came. And in many cases in Israel, it's still going on.

Close on the heels of the harvest came the rain. And if the harvest is not gathered quickly, the rain comes and destroys everything. So harvesting grapes in Israel was a hasty enterprise. And you really never had enough manpower to do that in terms of a permanent staff. So you needed very quick part-time labor. Every available man had to be hired to get him into the harvest, to get that harvest in before the rains came.

Now a Jewish workday started at 6:00 a.m. and it ended at 6:00 p.m. They had a 12-hour workday and they did it six days. So at the start of the long workday, the owner went to find laborers for his harvest. Obviously, as I said, he wouldn't have enough in his normal workforce to do this kind of intense labor that had to be gathered so rapidly. This is an important historical note, by the way.

Hired laborers in ancient Israel were the lowest people on the social ladder, the lowest class of workers. They were basically unskilled. They were untrained and they were unemployed except for a day at a time. They were day laborers. Life for them frankly was somewhat desperate and precarious because they had to work in order to eat. If they didn't work, they didn't eat and neither did their families.

Slaves and servants had steady jobs. And even though they might have been somewhat poor, they could share in family benefits. The day laborers were never certain and even had to provide their own place to live. Because the pay was low, they lived in a bare subsistence level. God himself, by the way, was very much aware that there would be people at that level of the social ladder and He was very concerned about how such poor people in the land were treated so that the Old Testament gave very specific laws for the care of day laborers.

In Leviticus 19:13, it says, "The wages of the hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning." In other words, the day he worked, he had to be paid because that was the only way he

could feed his family. He couldn't carry his wages over until the next day. And in fact, in Deuteronomy 24:15, it says, "You shall give him his hire on the day he earns it before the sun goes down, for he is poor." I love this. "And sets his heart on it, lest he cry against you to the Lord and it be sin in you."

It was an iniquity not to pay that man at the end of the day in which he did his work. So this parable is a vivid story that could happen in any Jewish town on any day during the harvest. Hired laborers would do this. They would congregate at some point in the marketplace, around the marketplace, and they would wait there for someone to come along and hire them. That sets the stage.

This man went out early in the morning before 6:00 to hire laborers for his vineyard. And he would go to the marketplace of the town nearby. And verse 2 says, "When he had agreed with the laborers for a dinereas for the day, he sent them into his vineyard."

Now a dinereas was not normal day worker pay. It was better than that. It was a very fair wage. In fact, it was a very generous wage. It was standard pay for a skilled employee. It was standard pay for a Roman soldier. It was generally accepted as fair wages, not low, very generous. And both owners and workers agreed on this wage.

Now early they may have had some choice. In other words, they may have said, "Well, you know, there's some other men coming to hire men. And maybe we oughtta wait and find out if somebody's gonna give us a better price, better wage." But this was good and they immediately signed up. The wage was attractive. And so he sent them into the vineyard at 6:00 a.m. to get to work.

And then verse 3, he says, "He went out about the third hour and saw others standing in the marketplace." It's now 9:00 a.m. And he realizes by now that it's gonna take more men than he's got. So he returns because he needs more help. And he finds some men - notice this - standing idle in the marketplace. This doesn't mean they were willfully idle. If they were willfully idle, they'd be in their bed. They're idle because nobody has hired them. They're just unemployed.

And to those verse 4, he said, "You too go into the vineyard and whatever is right I will give you. And they went." This is no time to be negotiating. They're just glad he needs more. Oh, they knew what he had paid those earlier ones if they had been there from the beginning. The word would have circulated that these men were going to work for a dinereas a day, a very generous wage. They're not gonna negotiate.

They're willing to take whatever this very generous man will give them. The day is going by fast and they need to earn as much as they can. With no discussion of price, the day being partly gone, their options are limited. They can't afford to do anything but take what is given. And off they go to work. They're filled with satisfaction just to be able to earn something. Well, it gets to be noon and the man

is in need of more.

So verse 5 says, "Again he went out and about that sixth hour." That would be noon. "And then the ninth hour." That's three in the afternoon and he did the same thing. The process is repeated and you can be sure that these men were really glad this late in the day to have this kind of opportunity to earn something, the day fast passing them by. And then most notably of all, verse 6. "And about the eleventh hour he went out." This would be 5:00 in the afternoon. Found others standing, said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day long?" They said to him, "Because no one hired us." He said to them, "You too, go into the vineyard."

He's a gracious man and when he finds out that the reason they're there is simply because no one wanted them and no one hired them, though they were willing to work. He hires them for one hour. They had waited all day. They stayed there all day. They didn't give up hope. They're now desperate feeling no opportunity would come at all, but hoping against hope, they stay in the marketplace. And he says, "Just go and whatever's right, I'll give you." And they'll take anything they can get.

And then verse 8. "And when evening had come." It's now 6:00. "The owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages.'" Let's stop there for a minute. This man is gonna follow the prescription of the Old Testament. Leviticus 19, Deuteronomy 24. The day has ended. He calls the steward. That steward would be the foreman, the one who manages the labor force. Says, "Get them in line in accord with the Mosaic Law, and we're gonna pay them."

But here's the key that unlocks the whole parable. Verse 8. "Beginning with the last and then moving to the first." Line them up, start with the ones that worked an hour and then move to the ones who worked 12 hours. And obviously, we're getting to the proverb and its meaning. The first, go to the last part of the line. The last come to the first. Here's where proverb and parable touch.

So he pays those who started at 5:00. And then he pays those who began at 3:00. And then those who worked six hours, having begun at noon, and those who worked nine hours, having begun at 9:00. And the last batch who started at 6:00 are last. The more normal rule, which we like to live by, first come, first serve won't do. In fact, the whole thing becomes shocking in verse 9. "When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a dinereas." Whoa.

I mean, a dinereas a day is incredible. But a dinereas an hour, that's mind-boggling. A whole day's wage for one hour. And we can assume that he paid the ones that started at 3:00 the same thing and the ones who started at noon the same. And the ones who started at 9:00 the same. Generosity is wonderful. Now, the all day gang are starting to get excited. "What are we gonna get?"

And their curiosity kind of runs away with them and they begin to imagine that they're going to get more. In verse 10, "When those hired first came, they thought they would receive more. And they also received each one a dinereas." They had cherished, by the way, all through this process, they had cherished the silent expectation that when their turn came they would receive more....more....because they'd worked longer. And when that didn't happen they could not contain their disappointment.

So verse 11 says, "When they received it, they - Greek word, egingoozoed. They egingoozoed. It's an onomatopoeic word. It means they mnmnmn - mumbled, grumbled. And they grumbled at the landowner saying, "These last men have worked only one hour and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden in the scorching heat of the day." Literally, in the Greek, the burner of the day. I mean, this was a scorcher and we've been out there 12 hours. By the way, burner is often applied to the hot east wind that scorches the flesh, parches the lips and the throat. And if you ever been in the land of Israel in the summer, you've felt it. The evenings cool down, it's much like California.

One hour of work from 5:00 to 6:00 is a lark. It's absolutely insignificant compared to 12 hours through the burner of the day and the scorching, drying, irritating wind. How could they be equally paid? The reply is absolutely marvelous. But he answered, verse 13, and said to one of them, "Friend, etirus." Frankly, it's usually a rebuking term. Today we might say it this way. "Fellow - listen fellow. I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a dinereas? Didn't we agree on this? Wasn't I faithful to what I promised you?"

Well, the answer of course is yes. Back to verse 2. "He had agreed with the laborers for a dinereas for the day." Verse 14. "Take what is yours and go your way. But I wish to give to this last man the same as to you." The only issue here was competitive jealousy, envy. They were still standing there holding the coin in their hand too stunned to leave and hoping that their pleading would get them more, that their murmuring would get them more.

When Jesus says, "Take what is yours and leave." Nothing's gonna change. In verse 15. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?" It's not illegal, is it? It's not unjust. It's not unfair, is it? Of course not. They received what was promised. They were paid in full by the one who had a right to give what he wanted and did give it. They hadn't worked all day. But listen to this. They hadn't all worked all day, but had the same need. So he met that same need with his generosity.

And he says to them, "Is your eye envious because I'm generous?" Are you just envious? Are you just jealous? Does my compassionate kindness to others irritate you? What an indictment. And then the Lord reiterates the proverb. "The last shall be first and the first last."

Well, you can see how He illustrated it. Everybody finished the same. Everybody got the same pay. Everybody got the same dinereas. So you understand the proverb and you understand how the parable illustrates it. Now let's move to the point. What's the point? What's the spiritual message here? What is it saying of spiritual significance? What's it teaching us?

Well, what it's saying is that the last shall be first in the sense that those that came into the vineyard last to work and those that came in first to work will all receive the same reward. What is it talking about? It's not a teaching on economics. It's not a teaching on wages and employee benefits. It's a parable about the Kingdom. It's a parable about the spiritual dimension. It is not an allegory. It is a simple illustration made to make one spiritual point.

And what is that one spiritual point? Follow me and I'll show you. The householder is God. The vineyard is the Kingdom. The laborers are believers in the Kingdom. The day of work is time. The evening is eternity when we receive our reward. The wage is eternal life. The steward is Jesus Christ who was given the task of rewarding His own.

And all of that comes together to mean this. All who come into Christ's Kingdom to serve Him no matter how long, no matter how short, no matter how hard, no matter how easy the circumstance, will in the end equally receive the same full reward. What is that reward? Eternal life, eternal glory, eternal Christ likeness. Those who come first to God will receive no more than those who come last. Those who come last will receive no less than those who come first.

Jesus is saying that the eternal benefits of the Kingdom of God are the same for all who are subject to the rule of the King whenever and however may be their place or time of service. It's a tremendously encouraging thing. Life may be inequitable, but God isn't. And eternity won't be either. Ever believer, no matter when converted or what manner of service or for how long will receive the crown which is eternal life spoken of in James 1:12. Will receive the crown, which is righteousness spoken of in 2 Timothy 4.

How wonderful it is to realize that the same glorious eternal life will be given to the penitent thief as was given to the faithful apostles. The same eternal life will be given to that sinner who near death turns from a life of wickedness to embrace Christ as is given to that missionary who spent 50 years in a jungle in deprivation and difficult labor. The person who received Christ on a deathbed after a life of wickedness will receive the same glorious eternity as one who all his life served Christ and died a martyr.

It's a tremendous truth. Beloved, God is not unequal. We're all gonna enter into the same eternal life. Some of us came early. Look at the apostles. This parable really in some ways was for them. Do you remember that after Jesus, just prior to this in chapter 19 had confronted the rich young ruler

in this context?

And He told the rich young ruler that the way to eternal life, of course, was to recognize his sin and to be willing to obey Christ and he turned away and wouldn't do that. Do you remember that after that Peter spoke back in verse 27 of chapter 19? And Peter said to him, "Behold we've left everything and followed you. What then will there be for us?" These greedy guys. Hey, we left everything for you. We left everything to follow you. Surely the implication is there's something more for us than these other folks that you're evangelizing.

And Jesus responded to that by showing Peter and the rest of them that no matter whether they had left everything and followed Him for a long time or whether they came to Him at the very end of life, they would all receive the same eternal reward. I suppose those disciples in some ways are like the people who came at 6:00. At the very beginning He called them and they came and they knew that the reward then was eternal life. They knew that. That's what He told them.

They knew it was a Kingdom. Certainly they loved Jesus and believed in Him and continued to follow Him. But they were still pretty shallow and very selfish. I mean, look at the text after the parable. Look at verse 17. "As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the 12 disciples aside by themselves on the way. He said to them, 'Behold we're going to Jerusalem and the son of man will be delivered up to chief priests and scribes and they'll condemn Him to death and deliver unto the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify him.'" And on the third day, He raised up.

And Jesus told them about His death and His resurrection. And a mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons bowing down making a request of Him. And He said to her, "What do you wish?" And she said to Him, "Command that in your Kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on your right and one on your left." That's ugly, isn't it? Isn't that ugly? It's ugly enough to wish that. But to con your mother into asking for it. Come on guys. James and John.

You know what they were saying? "We've endured the burden and heat of the day here. And when this Kingdom comes, we'd like to have the chief's seats if we may, please. We want our wages to exceed the others." That's pretty stern teaching in that context, isn't it? And He's telling them what they need to hear and they're so blockheaded that immediately after that they do this.

And they're saying, "We've already left everything and we've endured three years of deprivation in the hard work of harvest. And we've been out there in the hot wind and we've felt the persecution and the hostility." And - it's true. They had. "And surely when the Kingdom comes, we who have been the most intimate with you and born most should get the most. We've given the most."

Surely they'd get something better than the guy at the end of chapter 20. They were going out from Jericho headed to Jerusalem. And two blind men stood by the road here and Jesus was passing by

saying, "Lord have mercy on a son of David." And the multitudes sternly told him to be quiet. "Shut up you beggars." They cried out all the more saying, "Lord have mercy on a son of David." Jesus stopped, called them and said, "What do you want me to do for you?" They said, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened." Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

They were saved. And the disciples probably thought, "Well, those beggars jumping on the bandwagon at the last moment here. Surely we should get more than they." It was precisely this kind of selfish, envious confused perception that our Lord is dealing with here. Later on, admittedly - here's a footnote. The epistles deal with rewards for our service. But this is not about that. It's not about the character of heavenly service.

This is about the reality of eternal life. Rewards are discussed later. But they're not on the basis of the time of service and they're not on the basis of the difficulty of service. They're on the basis of the motive. How do you know that? 1 Corinthians 4. "God will reward every man according to God's knowledge of the secret motives of his heart."

Now our Lord had answered Peter so graciously back in chapter 19. He said - verse 28, "Truly I say to you, you who have followed me in the regeneration when the son of man will sit on his glorious throne, you'll also sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel. And surely everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for my namesake shall receive many times as much and inherit eternal life."

But you'll notice He says, "You'll inherit eternal life." I mean, there isn't anything more you can get. You're gonna get eternal life. Be careful that you don't get envious of somebody else and that you don't think you deserve more because the last are gonna be first and the first are gonna be last, which means you who came in first aren't gonna be in the end receiving anything more than those who came in last.

With God it's absolute equality. Absolute equality. We all receive eternal life. Tax gatherers and harlots who come in at the end of their life are gonna stand with missionaries and martyrs who gave their all. All believers will be equally given the blessedness of glory. We'll all live in the Father's house. Nobody's gonna be down the street eight blocks and four blocks to the right. We'll all be part of the bride adorned for the bridegroom. We'll all inherit the whole inheritance. We'll all become like Christ. We'll all live forever in the celestial city. We'll all manifest the glory of God. We'll all take on the image of the Savior. It's a wonderful thing.

Now, to close, let me pull some principles together that come out of this tremendous truth. And this ties it right down to where we live and says so much about this whole matter of God's goodness to us.

Number one. God initiates salvation sovereignly. You see that in the whole parable. He came into the marketplace of man and selected those He wanted to come and serve in his Kingdom. Jesus said that to the apostles in John 15. "You have not chosen me." But why? "I've chosen you." He picks who He wants.

Secondly, God establishes the terms. He set the terms and they agreed, quite unlike the rich young ruler. He set the terms. They came on his terms. The terms of the Gospel have been established. Jesus set them. God set them. You come on those terms.

Another principle that rises out of this, God is continually calling people into his Kingdom. There was a beginning during the day. And the day, remember, is time. There was a beginning when he started doing this and there will be an end. And the work is continuous; the work of redemption goes on and on and on and on. And Jesus said that. "I work and my Father works." It goes on. He's continually doing, going into the marketplace of humanity and selecting those He wants to come and work.

A fourth truth comes out of this. God redeems those who are willing. And that's the other side of His sovereign choice. They were there. They were available. They were willing. They knew they were dependent. They knew they had nothing apart from this. They were not the rich. They were not the self-sufficient. They were not the satisfied. They were the poor and the meek and the beggars and those without resources who would take whatever the master would give.

Another principle rises out of that is this. God is particularly compassionate to those who have no resources. When you think about the fact that there are not many noble and not many mighty, God could have sovereignly done anything he wanted. Why them? Well, God has this unusual compassion for those in deep need. And I have to admit that I, as I read that parable, one thought lingers in my mind and it is this thought.

Does this guy who owns this place not know how many people it takes to harvest? Why does he have to keep coming back? Surely you could say, "You know, there's x number of pieces of land and it takes so many people working so many hours to pick so many grapes." I mean, why does he keep coming back? The only answer to that is that he represents God and he's coming back not because he needs more workers, but because he has such compassion.

A sixth point that comes out of this is that all who came into the vineyard worked. There were no deadbeats, no freeloaders. There weren't two people working and four supervising. And what is the work? Evangelism. That's what it is. Harvest, harvest, harvest. I mean, that's the work isn't it? That's the only work we do here really that we couldn't do in Heaven. I mean, we could praise in Heaven and we could worship in Heaven and we could live those holy lives in Heaven. And we could fellowship. Oh, won't we fellowship like crazy in Heaven when we're all perfect and we won't have to

confront anything. We'll just enjoy everything.

But the work is evangelism. It's harvest. And everybody does it. Everybody is called to work. We don't all work as well as we should, but the work is there and if we are in the Kingdom, we are at the work.

Another principle that comes out of this is overwhelming. And it is this. God gives all of us more than we deserve. God gives all of us more than we deserve. You know the truth? The people that worked 12 hours didn't deserve a dinereas. It was very generous. The rest didn't deserve it either. So everybody's really in the same boat. Nobody deserved it. The people that worked one hour didn't deserve it. Neither did the people that worked 12.

There's really no argument here about the generosity of this landowner. God gives us more than we deserve. If you gave the Lord 60 years of service, would you deserve Heaven? You wouldn't deserve it any more than the man that gave him 15 minutes of service. And then there's that one sort of overwhelming lesson that humility and a sense of unworthiness is the only right attitude. Humility and a sense of unworthiness is the only right attitude.

There's no place for envy. There's no place for jealousy. I mean, it is absolutely ludicrous to say, "I hope when I get to Heaven I'm gonna get more than you." But that's what the disciples were doing. No place for that. No room for us to act the part of the older brother.

In the story of the prodigal in Luke 15, his brother comes home from a life of sin, repents, the father throws a feast. And what is the older brother's attitude? He is what? He's angry. He's jealous. You say, "Well, what right did he have to be jealous?" None because the truth of the matter is everything the father gave to the prodigal, the other brother already had. I mean, he just gave one feast to the prodigal. The other brother ate like that every day. There's no place for jealousy. There's no place for envy. There's only a place for humility that recognizes our absolute unworthiness.

And then the last point and the main point. All eternal reward is by grace. Length of service, difficulty of service, no factor. Works are irrelevant in the matter of eternal life. And I can feel that some of you are saying, "Oh, but what about my crowns? I want my crowns." Well, you'll get a crown which is life. You'll get a crown which is righteousness. You'll get a crown which is incorruptible. We'll all get them.

Well, what about my rewards? What about my rewards? Well, when you've gotten them all, if we understand the 24 elders right, you're just gonna take them and throw them at the feet of Jesus, right? And you'll be back to a dead heat. Oh what grace. We should still be down in the marketplace. We are unskilled, incompetent, the lowest on the social ladder. God in his mercy comes into the marketplace and gives us all what we don't deserve. And some day when we all get

to glory, we'll all be made like Christ. We'll all inherit eternal life. We'll all receive the same wonderful, generous gift.

God's ways are equal. Listen, equally gracious, right? We don't deserve any of it. We should just be humble and thankful for that kind of grace. And the truth is in the end it puts God's great grace on display. He is glorified by his generosity. We are the recipients of divine sovereign grace that treats all sinners equally and undeservedly graciously.

"Father we thank you that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That when we were ungodly and deserved nothing, where sin increased grace abounded all the more. It must have grieved the heart of Jesus to see the ugly competition among the disciples. And certainly it would grieve you ever to see that in our lives to think we deserved more than somebody else. It's all grace. And if you hadn't come into the marketplace and found us in our misery, we'd still be there. Thank you for taking us and giving us such undeserved blessing, such immense privilege as to be a part of your Kingdom and receive the eternal life. Thank you for letting us labor in your Kingdom. When nobody deserves anything anyway and no human work makes any contribution, surely it is all equal, equal grace. We are humbled by this kind of treatment. Your ways are equal. Equally gracious. And we praise you for that. Lord help us to realize how undeserving we are of anything, let alone eternal life. And receive the gift with humility and be willing - be willing to take the humblest grace in your Kingdom. For we know what you said. The least in your Kingdom is in fact the greatest. May you be pleased Lord with our humility in the face of such kindness. And we ask these things in our Savior's name. Amen. We ask these things in our Savior's name. Amen. Kindness. We ask these things in our Savior's name. Amen. Kindness. We ask these things in our Savior's name. Amen. Kindness. We ask these things in our Savior's name. Amen. Kindness. We ask these things in our Savior's name. Amen. Kindness. We ask these things in our Savior's name. Amen. Kindness."

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