

Confronting Pastoral Pride

Matthew 19:27-20:16

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This morning's message is going to be a message, I trust, that will be suited to our whole congregation as we worship the Lord together on this day, but beyond that in particular a message that can bring to its conclusion in a fitting way our wonderful shepherd's conference.

One of the things that is steeply distressing about ministry is the existence of jealousy and envy and competition among those who intend to serve Christ. There is frequently the expression of carnality that causes those in ministry to be driven by ambition to achieve something more than someone else, a better reputation, a bigger church, or whatever. And sometimes, sometimes even in a conference like this people can come and go away determined to do something bigger and better and then on the other hand sometimes some would come to a conference like this and go away discouraged thinking their ministry is in comparison to this one, a meager one. All of that is wrong and it's helpful for us to remember that it is God who makes the final assessment of the value of ministry and the worth of the servants in that ministry.

God has built into human life the element of effort and reward. That's the way things are. You work with your hands, the sweat of your brow, you earn your bread, effort and reward. There's a payoff. We're used to that, we live our lives that way. And in Christian ministry sometimes we are driven by the immediate payoff, size, money, complexity, diversity, reputation, influence and when that payoff doesn't come we get discouraged. Well we need to remind ourselves of what the word of God has to say about a true evaluation of a minister. In order to help us with that I want you to open your Bible, if you will, to the 19th Chapter of the gospel of Matthew.

One of the things that Jesus had to deal with with the disciples was carnal competitiveness. The disciples were wrangling all the time about which of them was going to be the most honored, which of them was going to receive the highest accolades, which of them was going to be given the greatest position when the Messiah brought his kingdom. In their minds they were making supreme sacrifices, having abandoned their families, abandoned their livelihood and their career to follow Jesus in this itinerant ministry, which was sustained by charity, having put themselves in a position to leave it all behind and be dependent upon the little meager amount that was given to them to follow someone who didn't have a place to live who actually said, "the foxes have holes, birds the birds of the air have nests, the Son of man has no where to lay his head." This seemed to them a great sacrifice, but the sacrifice was worth it because in the end they assumed that there would be a major payoff and they were always among themselves wrangling about who's payoff would be the biggest.

Certainly those in group one of the twelve, those who were the closest to Jesus, Peter, James, John, and Andrew probably felt like they were in the lead in the race for prominence. And Phillip who sort of anchors group two, the second four in all the four lists of the apostles, probably felt that although he wasn't in group one, at least he wasn't in group three, the sort of non-descripts that included Judas.

They were always quibbling about this even the night that Jesus was betrayed and was going to be taken to be executed they were fussing about which of them was going to be the greatest in the kingdom.

This is not some kind of abnormal thing. This is pretty standard stuff for fallen people, even those who are called to the highest levels of Christian service. Now we see this rather pointedly in verse 27 of Matthew 19. "Then Peter speaking on behalf of all of them, as he did as the leader, answered and said to him, said, 'Jesus, behold we have left everything and followed you. What then will there be for us?'" This comes right off the incident of the rich young ruler.

The rich young ruler was a ruler of a synagogue. And that is to say he was a highly respected man in the community who was made the chairman of the synagogue board, if you will. Young and that's unusual that a young man would attain that kind of status in a highly religious community of Israel, but he was a ruler of a synagogue. He came to Jesus, in just the prior passage, and he said, "What do I do to have eternal life?" And essentially Jesus said to him just two things, "Recognize that you have violated my law, you are sinful and unrighteous, and two sell everything you have and give your money away." Now what Jesus was endeavoring to establish was not just the specifics of confessing that he had broken certain laws nor the specific of giving away his money, but what Jesus attempted to establish was whether the man was willing to acknowledge himself as a sinner and to submit to the lordship of Christ no matter what he asked.

You remember the story. He responded that he had kept the law all his life and never broken any of it so he wouldn't acknowledge his sin and then he loved his money so much when Jesus told him to sell all and follow him he turned around and went away. With this fresh in their mind Peter says, "We're not like him." What you asked him to do and he didn't do we did. One day you came along the shore and you said drop your nets and follow me and we did. And you went by the tax table where Matthew was and said stop doing what you're doing, drop it, follow me, and all the thieves and thugs who worked for Matthew scrambled to take his seat. So he was leaving permanently. We, unlike that man, acknowledged our sins, and we dropped everything and we followed you so when do we cash in? We admitted our spiritual bankruptcy. We admitted that we were the poor, prisoners, blind, and oppressed as Jesus identified those who were the ones to receive the gospel quoting from the 61st Chapter of Isaiah. We are the poor in spirit, meek, and hungering and thirsting after righteousness. We came and here we are living our lives of deprivation and dependence on charity along with you. We are bearing the reproach of Christ and considering it greater riches than the riches of Egypt as Moses did. We, along with you, have become poor.

And motivating that in their hearts was this intense messianic concept that the Messiah would come and bring the glorious kingdom and everything promised to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant and everything promised to David in the Davidic Covenant was going to come in all its glory and magnificence and they were going to cash in on all of that because they were the frontrunners by being the chosen disciples. But the way things were going it didn't appear to be what they expected. The Jewish leaders were continuing to mount animosity and hatred against Jesus. The people, who once were attracted to him and drawn to him drifting away. Things were going just the opposite of the way they assumed they should. Jesus is doing nothing to overthrow the yoke of Rome, the Gentile pagan oppressors. And so Peter asks on behalf of the disciples when's the payoff on all of this?

Instant gratification, by the way, isn't something isolated to our generation. Well Jesus and grace, verse 28, said to them, Peter asked the question but he said to them because he knew Peter was

articulating what they all felt, "Truly I say to you that you who have followed me in the regeneration," the times of restitution are also called that's the millennial kingdom, the thousand year earthly reign of Jesus Christ when all the Davidic and Abrahamic Covenant promises are fulfilled, when that comes in that regeneration, that is the regeneration of this earth in the glories of the kingdom, when the Son of man will sit on his glorious throne, which he will, "You also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Now, of course, they'd all be dead by then, most of the martyred and they would have all then been resurrected in the resurrection to come, so in the kingdom they would be in glorified perfection, but they would come back with Christ and they would reign over the twelve tribes of Israel in the glories of the kingdom. That's what I can tell you is coming for you. It's not right now. He could have said to them that's way in the future. For the moment you're going to be martyred, you're going to be hated, you're going to be resented, you're going to be imprisoned and the payoff is way down the road. But nonetheless that is a promise that he did give to the twelve.

And then in verse 29 Jesus adds this: "And everyone," and then he encompasses there all of us; everybody other than the apostles, who has left houses or brothers or sisters, or father or mother, or children, or farms for my name's sake, that is you've embraced him as Savior and there has been a leaving, there's been a disconnect from family and life, society, to whatever degree. Anybody who has come to me in that forsaking will receive many times as much as they gave up, and then this, and shall inherit eternal life.

If you're looking gratification here in this life that's not what he promised you. What Jesus says that if you leave all and follow me, if you abandon everything, and that certainly is true of all believers in one sense, but those of us who minister live that out in a greater sense because literally we are, as far as our whole life is concerned, consumed with this ministry, and he says what you're going to get in the end is eternal life. And they were looking at the immediate payoff and Jesus was promising them something far greater than earthly notoriety, earthly fame, earthly influence, earthly honor. Everybody else he says, verse 29, is going to get eternal life. Folk's eternal life is the big reward. That's the big reward.

And to illustrate this Jesus gives a proverb at the end of Chapter 19. This is it: "But many who are first will be last and the last first." And then down in Chapter 20 look at verse 16. "Thus the last shall be first and the first last." And he repeats it with just a variation in the words. Here is a maxim or a proverb, which is a short popular saying of ancient or unknown origin expressing wisdom. This is coined by Jesus, no doubt. It's a very simple statement. The first will be last and the last will be first. Now there's been a lot of discussion about this. It appears on the surface to be a riddle and for that reason it has baffled some Bible students through the years, I think really without cause.

I remember when I was riding one time with my youngest son, Mark. I think he was in junior high at the time and I was thinking about that statement and I wanted to kind of give him a little quiz about it. We'd never discussed it and I said to him as we were riding along. I said, "Mark, there's a statement in the Bible that says that the first shall be last and the last shall be first. What do you think that means?" He said, "Oh that's easy, Dad." I said, "Really?" He said, "That's easy." He said, "That means everybody ends up the same. The only way the first can be last and the last can be first is if everybody's equal. It's got to be a dead heat," he said. And I said, "You know you're exactly right. It's just that simple." It's just that simple. The only way that the last can be first and the first can be last is if they all cross the finish line together. And that is exactly what Jesus wanted to convey. In the end we're not going into the kingdom in ranks. There's not a first and a second, there's not a gold medal, a silver medal and a bronze medal. It's a dead heat. We all win and the prize is eternal life.

And then in order to illustrate that Jesus tells a riveting and unforgettable parable in Chapter 20. It's like this, he said, "The kingdom of heaven," this sphere of salvation where God rules over those who are his through faith and by the work of his Son, "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner," an oicobdespotes, ruler of the house, somebody who possessed an estate and "he went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard." This particular owner of an estate, it's his own, verse 15 he says, "My own," in referring to that which he gave as pay. It's my own, it was his estate; it was his money, his enterprise. "He went out to hire laborers for his vineyard."

I'll just give you a little bit of the agrarian background for this. In the fertile plain areas of Israel, it's even true today, such as the Plain of Esdralan, the Valley of Megiddo, the Sharon Valley, the Jordan Valley, places like that the grain is the major farm product. But on the mountain slopes, which there are many in the land of Israel, vineyards have been through history the most popular crop. To put a vineyard on the steep slopes of Israel is not an easy thing to do. First of all the mountains are just literally filled with rocks. The Rabbi's used to say that when God dumped the rocks on the earth he dumped most of them in Israel and in order to make the land fertile and to allow the plants to go down and to receive the water and the nutrient out of the soil you have to get the rocks out and that worked to the benefit of those who were building the vineyard because all of the rocks then were used to make walls, terraced walls, which they built by hand. The steepness of the slopes on which the vines grew made the toil immense to produce a vineyard. Once they were terraced, then they were planted, and there grew the grapes. In Spring they prepared the soil, typically, because that's when the growing of the plant really began and then in the summer they went back and they pruned it and they tied the branches to produce the greatest amount of grapes and when September came it was time to harvest because it was October when the rains came and would destroy an unharvested crop. So harvest in September was a very very important and a hasty time. And at that time the farmer would go into town, into the marketplace, and there would always be there a large number of day workers, day laborers, the lowest people on the socio-economic ladder and he would hire them to do the harvest for the time that it took to get it in. And so that's what you see depicted here, very very familiar to the Jewish people.

Now the workday went from 6 a. m. to 6 p.m. It was a 12-hour workday and September in Israel is hot, very very hot. It's a rigorous thing to work a 12-hour day outside in the sun climbing up and down the terraces of the vineyard to harvest and haul grapes down and go back up again. But these day laborers desperately needed to work. Day laborers were the lowest class of workers in Israel, as they are even today. Unskilled, unemployed, except for a day at a time, as some workers even now loiter on corners in various parts of our area hoping somebody will come along and hire them. That's what they did in the marketplace in Jesus' day. Life for them was, to put it mildly, desperate and precarious. If they didn't work, they didn't eat and neither did their children. Slaves and employees who had a permanent relationship had steady jobs even if the pay was slight, but they were cared for and they could depend upon it day in and day out, but day laborers were never certain of a meal. They were the poor of the poor. Pay was low and even when they did work they got minimum for their efforts.

Way way back in the Old Testament, way back in the Pentateuch, the books of Moses, God expressed his concern for day laborers. In Deuteronomy it says, "You shall give him his hire on the day he earns it before the sun goes down because he is poor and sets his heart on it lest he cry against you to the Lord and it been sin in you." And God says that day laborer is to be paid the day he works because if you don't give him the money that day he can't buy food for his family for the day

to follow. And in Leviticus 19:13, "The wages of the hired servant shall not remain for you all night until the morning. It is a sin not to pay a man at the end of the day that he works." This choice of parable that Jesus uses here is very vivid and very familiar to the Jewish people.

That sets the stage so the landowner goes into town and in verse 2 he agreed with the laborers a certain number of them, this is interesting, for a denarius for the day. He sent them into his vineyard. They were thrilled. They didn't normally get a denarius. That was a full day's wage for a noble employee in some enterprise. That was a full day's wage for a Roman soldier. That was not minimum wage. That was not what day laborers usually received. Very fair, even generous. They were so happy that he was willing to pay them a denarius that they went immediately into the vineyard at 6 a. m. to work their 12 long hours in the heat.

Well as the hours passed by early in the morning it became apparent to the landowner that there weren't enough workers to get the harvest in and so in verse 3 it says, "He went out about the third hour," that would be three hours added to 6 a. m., 9 a.m. "He saw others standing idle in the marketplace." They weren't idle in the market because they were lazy, they were idle in the market because no one had hired them, but they were still waiting hoping against hope that maybe, even though the workday had begun, somebody would come and need extra help and so they were still there. And so the third hour he saw some more and he said to those, verse 4, "You too go into the vineyard and whatever is right I will give you." There was no discussion; there was no negotiation. The day is escaping them. They aren't in a position to negotiate. Whatever he wants to give they'll take. And believe me they knew that this was an honest and a fair and even a generous man because they would have been there when the original negotiations with group one went on, the word would have buzzed around that a certain landowner had hired these people for a denarius. And he said, "I'll do what's right by you."

And then in verse 5, "He went out about the sixth hour," that's noon, half the day is gone, "And then he went out again three hours later," and it's 3:00 in the afternoon and there are only three hours left in the workday, "And he did the same thing." And then amazingly he doesn't feel like he's able to accomplish what he wants to for the full day and it gets very late in the day and "At the 11th hour," verse 6 says, or about then "he goes out," it's 5 o'clock, "and he found others standing."

Now you can imagine it's a sad day for that group. They're still there. It's 5 o'clock, hope is well nigh gone, they waited all day, no one has hired them. He said to them, "Why have you been standing idle all day long?" They say to him in verse 7, "Because no one hired us." He said to them, "You too, or you also, you go into the vineyard."

5 o'clock? Guys have been working eleven hours, nine hours, six hours, and here come some guys swinging in at 5:00. They're going to work an hour. By then it's cool. It's like Southern California over there, hot in the daytime, breezes off the Mediterranean cool it in the evening, just as the coastal breezes cool our area in the evenings, and they come in at 5 o'clock. They aren't in a position to negotiate either. They're just glad to work and they know it's completely at the discretion of the man, but they know he has a reputation for being fair.

Well, evening comes in verse 8. 6 o'clock arrives. The owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, "Call the laborers, pay time." He's going to do what Leviticus and Deuteronomy said, what God told him to do. Pay them at the end of the day. And he says, "Pay them their wages. Begin with the last group." The group that came at 5 o'clock get in line. I guess they figured they'd get 1/12 of a

denarius. Well amazingly verse 9 says, "When those hired about the eleventh hour came each one received a denarius." Amazing that is a whole day's wage and more than a day laborer could expect. And you can image the guys who worked twelve hours at the end of the line are saying, "This is a denarius an hour." Such a deal, right? They're getting cranked up about this. This could be like two-weeks pay. Well when those hired first in verse 10 came they thought that they would receive more and they each received a denarius. They're standing in line buzzing around cherishing through this process a silent expectation that they're going to get more than anybody else and they got the same. So in verse 11, "When they received it they grumbled at the land owner." Murmured. It's an onomodipactic Greek word egogudso. And then they get really dramatic and they say in verse 12, "These men have worked only one hour and you have made them equal to us who have born the burden in this scorching heat of the day." Really laying it on thick! The literal Greek here is we've endured the scorcher. It is a scorcher today. It is a burner. Often applied to what we know as Santa Anna winds, which is very much a similar phenomena. It's called a sirocco. It comes out of the east and blows hot wind across that is made even hotter by coming across the desert scorching the flesh, parching the lips, drying the throat. How can you pay these guys who came out here in the cool of the evening the same as us who endured the scorcher?

The reply is marvelous. Verse 13, "He answered and said to one of them," whoever their spokesman was, "Friend," actually in the Greek it's sort of a slangish work that means fella, "I'm doing you no wrong." I'm doing you no wrong. "Didn't you agree with me for a denarius?" Didn't we say that's what's going to come? "Take what is yours, go your way." But I wish to give to this last man the same as you. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?" And here's the problem. "Or is your eye envious because I'm generous?" I'm telling you talk about a rebuke to the disciples. This is really a rebuke to the disciples. If I gave all of you eternal would you begrudge that eternal life to somebody that you don't perceive in your mind was as worthy as you? That's not my problem, that's yours. The only issue here was jealousy, envy and that's exactly what was going on. That is the only issue and Jesus is exposing even among the apostles and, of course, beyond that to the general carnality that invades the kingdom the reality that there can be envy and jealousy that makes us discontent with the fact that we are all going to the same end to receive the same glorious eternal life.

Somebody says, "Well, I want what's fair." I don't think so. Fair goes that way. Fair is hell, eternal judgment. And are you going to be jealous and envious because God is equally gracious to another undeserving sinner in the same way he is to you? Does it bother you that you spend your whole life in a hard place serving the Lord ministering in the scorcher and somebody receives Christ on their deathbed and you both get the same eternal life? Does it bother you? Look, Jesus said they all have the same need. They all have the same need. And so I gave them because it's my prerogative what they needed. Is it my compassion that bothers you? Is it my kindness that bothers you? Look, we're not apostles. In the end we're all going to wind up, no matter what kind of ministry or what kind of enterprise or how hot the sun was or how cool the evening was during our labor, how short the time, long the time, hard the task, easy the task, we're all going to end up receiving the same eternal life. It's a dead heat.

That's pretty clear. In effect he says to the disciples and to all of us, what are you hassling about? Your eternal life is not dependent upon how hard you work or how long you work or how tough the job was. You're going to receive eternal life at the end so enjoy what it is that you've been given to do for the time you've been given to do it and the temperature in which you've had to do your work. This is God here in his kingdom. The laborers are those who belong to him. Their hours of work is the

time and the conditions of their service. The evening is eternity. The final pay is eternal life. And the steward really, the landowner is God and the steward is Jesus Christ who in his grace gives us that eternal reward. And the bottom line is that everybody who comes into Christ's kingdom, whether you're preaching the sermon or sitting in the pew, everybody in Christ's kingdom, no matter what their service is like, is going to end up with eternal life. There's no place for competition.

You say, "What about my crowns? I've been told I have some crowns." Well so do I. So do all of us. And the Bible talks about crowns. It talks about the crown of life, the crown of righteousness, the crown of rejoicing, the incorruptible crown, but I want you to understand what that means. The crown, which is life, we all get. That is eternal life. The crown, which is righteousness we all get, we're made like Christ in his perfect righteousness. The crown, which is incorruptible we all get. The crown of rejoicing, the crown, which is rejoicing, in the Greek, we all get because we'll all rejoice forever about our life and our righteousness and the incorruptibility of it. Well, you mean that we're just all going to get the same thing? Yeah, that's right.

Now, I need to just take you to one other passage because it is true that even though we all enter into the same eternal life, and what else could you want? What does eternal life bring to you? We'll all be in the Father's house. Right? You grew up singing songs about mansions in heaven. Yeah, there's no mansions in heaven. There's only one house. It's the Father's house and we have rooms in it. I'm not four blocks down to the right and two blocks to the left. I'm in the Father's house. In my Father's house are many rooms. One house! We'll all be in the Father's house.

We will all be the bride of the bridegroom. We will all inherit the whole inheritance as joint heirs in Christ, Romans 8:17. And here's the real shocker. We'll all be like Christ, I John 3:1-2. What else do you want? Well you say, "Do we get like stripes on the robe or a small tiara wouldn't be bad. I mean is there any recognition for anything that we've done that's unique?" Yes there is and I want to encourage you about that, I really do.

So turn to I Corinthians Chapter 4 and we'll just finish up there. I Corinthians 4: Paul says, now look, let me address this question of evaluating a ministry, evaluating a man, particularly a person in ministry. That's the context here. How are we to understand our personal rewards? How are we to understand the true evaluation of our ministry? Well here's how.

Verse 1: "Let a man, let any human regard us like this:" If you're going to look at me, Paul says, and you're going to look at the apostles whether it's Peter, or whether even including Apollos that he's been talking about, you're going to look at any of us, here's how we want you to view us, "as servants of Christ." View us in a low manner not a high one. There's a lot of words in the New Testament for servant. This is my favorite. Hoopeirataes. Hoopeir meaning under, ataes having to do with a word to row. View us as an under rower and the imagery here is very vivid.

In some of the big wooden ships of those days they had rowers who moved the ships along. Some of you have seen them in ancient depictions and read about them in history. The larger ones had rowers and under rowers and under rowers. Three levels of galley slaves down in the hole of the ship who never saw the light of day but in the stinking, smelly, sultry, burning, humid, heat of those ships in the Mediterranean area did nothing but pull their oar hour after hour after hour in utter and absolute anonymity. And the last thing anybody would think to do would be to exalt and honor an under rower, a third level galley slave.

So Paul says when you assess us from the human view would you just put down that he pulled his oar? That's all. In anonymity a non-descript nobody in a stinking hole of a ship that never saw the light of day and had nothing to do with the direction of where it was going, he just pulled his oar. Please, he's saying, don't name a city in Minnesota after me or a cathedral, for that matter, in London. Just say he pulled his oar.

Somebody might say, "Well I pulled my oar but I was novel at it." The Lord doesn't even want your inventiveness Nexpraysays. You can also regard us not only as galley slaves of Christ, but you can regard us as stewards of the mysteries of God. We didn't invent any of this. The steward is one, recanamas, who manages something for someone else. What we said wasn't ours, what we did wasn't of our own invention, when it comes to a human evaluation just remember this: I pulled my oar faithfully and I took good care of the mysteries. Do you know what those are? New Testament truths, the doctrines hidden in the Old Testament revealed in the New. I took care of the truth that was given to me. I pulled my oar and I cared for the truth. That's all.

And what is it that the Lord wants? That's our identity. But what's our duty? Verse 2: So in this kind of setting, in this kind of case he says, "It's required of stewards that one be found faithful, trustworthy." Just do what you're told. Just pull the oar and take care of what has been entrusted to you. In the end of the day when you've done that you've done only what you ought to have done. Right? That's why Paul says, "Look don't honor me," I Corinthians 9, "for preaching the gospel. Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." I'm under orders. Pull your oar. Be a steward. And then Paul says, "That's how to view us, no more than that." The question of honor cannot be decided here.

So in verse 3. This is so insightful to Paul. "To me it's a very small thing that I should be examined by you." Another way to say that, I really could care less what you think of me. It doesn't matter to me. I don't need to be the preacher of the year. I don't need to be honored. It doesn't matter to me what you think of me. You say, "Well that's not polite." Well, if you understand the heart of Paul you understand this is true humility. It doesn't matter what you think of me. In fact, not only does it not matter what you think of me, talking to the Corinthians, "It doesn't matter what any human court thinks of me." I really don't care. I don't care what you think of me, I don't care what anybody thinks of me at any human level making any evaluation and I'll go further than that, I don't care what I think of me. "I don't even examine myself." I don't care what you think of me because you don't know my heart and you could be, and this is true of the Corinthians, you could be jealous of me, envious of me, and so you're biased by your attitudes and you can't make a pure evaluation of me, 'cause you don't know what's in me. Nobody does. You want to know something? I don't even examine myself. Why? This is interesting.

Verse 4. Because even when I'm conscious of nothing against myself, even when I look in there and say, "Hey, you're doing pretty well, your conscience is clear, as it says in I Corinthians 1:12, "I can't find anything in myself that I could be against, yet I am not by this acquitted." You can't judge me. Nobody else can judge me, and I can't judge myself. You tend to be biased against me. I tend to be biased for me. Neither of us has objectivity. So why should I be looking for you to give me honors and all that and why in my own heart should I be seeking them as if I was something unique?

End of verse 4 is the key. "The one who examines me is" whom? "The Lord." Verse 5 puts it simply. "Therefore stop passing judgment." Stop being the evaluator of ministry. Stop being the evaluator of ministers. Stop that. Back in Chapter 3:4 he says, "Some of you say I am of Paul." Paul is my hero.

"Others of you say I am of Apollos." And then he says are you not mere men? You can't evaluate them. Who are you to pick the better of the two?

And then he goes to saying, Verse 5, "Who is Apollos? Who is Paul? Servants." And then in verse 6 he says, "I planted Apollos watered, but God gave the increase." I pulled my oar, he pulled his oar, we dispensed the mysteries of God and God did what God can do and only God can do. So verse 7, "So then neither the one who plants, Apollos, nor the one who waters, or Paul the one who waters, Apollos is anything."

Just remember we're nothing, we're nothing. Third level galley slave pulls your oar, steward of the mysteries of God with the discharge of a responsibility that is immense and we need to be faithful and trustworthy with that, there is no human court that can render a true decision as to the honor of our service. Of course, "every way of a man is right in his own eyes," the proverb says, I think it's Chapter 21, but God weighs his heart. So Paul says this: "Stop passing judgment," verse 5. Just wait 'til the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness.

The true evaluation, listen to this; the true evaluation of a man is what is now in the darkness. Can't see it. You don't know it and even he isn't discerning enough to know it. It doesn't mean you don't know when you're sinning, but you don't know the true purity of your own heart, or impurity. And the final analysis only one knows it and he alone will pass that judgment. He will bring to light the things that are hidden in the darkness that nobody sees and nobody knows and here comes the key. He will disclose the, what's the next word? Motives or intents. And then each man's praise, that's your personal reward. We all get the same eternal life, but in that eternal life each man will receive specific unique individual praise. That's the individual reward. Some capacity for or some element of service that is unique for us and each man will receive that praise from God based upon not the size of his ministry, not the influence of his ministry, not his popularity, but based upon his motives. What was in his heart? Not how many people were in his church. What was in his heart.

Then Paul says in verse 6, "Now these things brethren I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes." And he did. He said Apollos, I planted and Apollos watered. He had figuratively applied these things to them and said in one who plants is nothing and one who waters is nothing and that's the way it is. "And the reason I did that," he said, "is so that you might learn what not to exceed what is written" that is not to exceed Scripture teaching on humility, "in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other." Not arrogant on his own, but arrogant in behalf of someone else. Don't become a Macarthurite and certainly don't elevate yourself. You're not in a position to know how the true evaluation before God is going. Verse 7, "For who has the right regards you as superior. And what do you have that you didn't receive? And if you received it then what are you boasting for as if you didn't receive it?" Whatever happened in your ministry was given to you by God, right? The Corinthians were into this. I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, well I am of Jesus, pitting each other against each other and elevating one another and carnality all over the place. Divisiveness. Paul gets sarcastic in verse 8. "You are already filled," he says. "You have already become rich. You have become kings without us."

I remember hearing a pastor say, "In my church I am the king." Well this passage was written for him. And he says in verse 9 to show his own example of humility, "I think God has exhibited us apostles last of all. God made us last, as men condemned to death. We have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise." Just dripping sarcasm. "We are weak but you are strong. You are distinguished; we are without honor. To this

present hour we are both hungry and thirsty," we're not getting any awards, folks. We're not winning any plaques. "We're poorly clothed, roughly treated, homeless, we work, toil and working with our hands. We get reviled and we bless, we get persecuted and we endure, we're slandered and we try to conciliate. We become as the scum of the world. The dregs of all things even until now." No popularity there. Absolutely none. The lowest of the low. That's okay, Paul says, because I don't care what people think. I'm a third level galley slave, an under rower of Christ, and I'm just going to pull the oar that he put in my hands. I'm a steward of God, I'm going to dispense what God gave me to dispense. I'm going to teach and preach what God gave me to teach and preach. I'm going to be faithful to that. That's how it is. Whatever you might think, whatever what some other human court might think, and whatever I might think, in the final analysis is only one person who knows enough to make the right evaluation of my ministry and that is the Lord who examines the heart and someday when I come into his presence he will reveal what no one else has ever known and based upon what my motives were I will receive whatever praise from God is to come.

So we're not in a position to evaluate a ministry. We're only in a position to be faithful, right? And we're all going across the finish line together into eternal life and whatever each man's praise is will be tied not to the size or the popularity of his ministry, but to his motives. So make it your ambition, Paul says, to always be pleasing to him. And to do all that you do, not for your own promotion, but do whatever you do to the glory of the Lord.

Our Father, the testimony of Paul so helpful, so instructive, not just his words but that he lived what he said. Such integrity. And we thank you Lord for his example and the example of Jesus and we even condescended to be hated and vilified and despised and wrongly judged by every human court and then exalted to your right hand by the one judge that matters. We leave the final assessment to you. It doesn't matter to us what people think. What does matter to us is what you think. We want to be faithful and to receive someday for motives as pure as we in the Spirit are capable of having a special praise from you to enrich our eternal service and praise. Thank you in Christ's name. Amen.

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