

## The one about work

**Matt 19:27 – 20:16**

### The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

**Jesus had promised a man treasure in heaven if he followed him (v. 21; compare 6:20) but the man preferred to keep his treasure on earth (19:22).**

- The Rich, young ruler of 19:16-22 was like many today who want God to affirm that we are *religious enough* without costing us anything more than we are willing to offer him!
- This unfortunately for many is not the Gospel's requirement – we cannot be half-hearted when it comes to God. We cannot treat it like some adopted hobby. For Jesus it is all or nothing! Life or Death!

**Mtt 16:24-25** *"Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."*

### LESSONS FROM THE CONTEXT:

#### 1. Some people have major barriers to overcome if they are going to be saved (19:23-24)

- Jesus apparently employs a common figure of speech when he speaks of a camel passing through a needle's eye, making the point that the rich and powerful could barely enter the kingdom at all because of their riches and power.
- This statement shocked the disciples because they like many of their contemporaries viewed wealth as a mark of God's blessing. They assumed that Jesus' standard for people who were not rich was even stricter, so if the rich could hardly be saved, *who then can be saved? (19:25)*
- **STUFF CAN GET IN THE WAY OF SALVATION...**

**Dear Lord,**

**I have been re-reading the record of the Rich Young Ruler and his obviously wrong choice. But it has set me thinking. No matter how much wealth he had, he could not-- ride in a car, have any surgery, turn on a light, buy penicillin, hear a pipe organ, watch TV, wash dishes in running water, type a letter, mow a lawn, fly in an airplane, sleep on an innerspring mattress, or talk on the phone, If he was rich, then what am I? (P. Brand, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, p. 61).**

## 2. Salvation is only possible if God intervenes!

- Only God can take the idol of wealth from the heart and replace it with a selfless love for God and his fellow men!
- Only God can take a life, distorted and abused by sin and transform it into a life made whole and healthy by the saving grace of God
- Salvation is a miracle of God. It is being "*born again*"(Jn 3:3), becoming a "*new creature*" in Christ Jesus(2 Cor 5:17).

## 3. God does not despise our sacrifices in his service and they will not lose their reward (19:25-30)

- The disciples emphasize that they have forsaken all to follow Jesus, and he does not dispute their claim (vv. 27-28; 4:22).
- Faced with loss of possessions, the rich young man walked away (19:22); the disciples had not done that! Leaving work; family and land to follow Jesus had not been easy and would not be forgotten
- These disciples would have their reward. God will multiply their resources (19:29) with a new and larger family than the one we have left behind, and one which is willing to share its resources with one another (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35). (Note also specifically to these twelve who forsook their livelihoods to follow Jesus' call, Jesus promises that they will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28).

## THE PARABLE - 20:1-16

- As ever in the teaching of Jesus, this parable has a sting in the tail! - *But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.* (19:30)

### **To illustrate this point he relates a story which would sound familiar to the hearing of those who listened!**

- A rich landowner was gathering in his grape harvest and he needed workers. He went down to the marketplace at 6:00 am, the beginning of the working day, where those who were seeking work waited in the hope of being selected and he hired men, agreeing to pay them the going rate for a day's wage – "*a denarius*"
- At the *third hour* around 9:00 am, the "sixth hour" (12:00) and the "ninth hour" (3:00 pm) he hired some more workers agreeing to pay them

*whatever is right.* He did the same at the **eleventh hour** (v. 6) around 5:00 pm).

- At the end of the twelve-hour workday the owner pays his workers and, *beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.* "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. Perhaps the owner realizes that an hour's fraction of a day's wage would not sustain a family and so he is generous!
- Quite understandably those who had worked all day complained as it was simply not fair that the owner had made the late-arrivers *equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.*'
- To which the landowner responded, *'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'*
- So those who had worked all day lost nothing; justice was served and what they were objecting to was not justice but mercy!
- Now Jesus hearers would have considered it admirable and pious to give wages to those who were not expecting it (*Job 12:3-4; p. Baba Mesi`a 6:1, 2; compare Jos. Ant. 20.219-20*). In **v15 envious** (literally, *have an "evil eye"- sting*) compares unfavourably with the landowners generosity and the offering of a polite title, **Friend** is used to shame one who has arrogantly presumed on another's grace (*22:13; 26:50*).

## LESSONS FROM THE PARABLE:

### 1. God rewards his servants according to grace not merit.

- The disciples were quick to remind Jesus of all that they had sacrificed to serve Him but had not yet fully appreciated all that he would sacrifice to serve them! They would soon learn that it is highly inappropriate to compare their sacrifice with his. (c/f Peter who later denied Jesus for fear of losing his life! Paul in Philippians 3).
- **C.T. Studd (1860-1931)** missionary in China, India, and Africa said **"If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him."**
- **Studd** was an amazing man - How could I spend the best years of my life in living for the honours of this world, when thousands of souls are perishing every day?
- **Studd** held himself in low esteem at times – **"I am getting desperately afraid of going to heaven for I have had the vision of the shame I shall suffer as I get my first glimpse of the Lord Jesus; His majesty, power and marvelous love for me, who treated Him so meanly and shabbily on earth, and acted as**

though I did Him a favour in serving Him! No wonder God shall have to wipe away the tears off all faces, for we shall be broken-hearted when we see the depth of His love and the shallowness of ours.

- **Studd** counsels: "Let us not glide through this world and then slip quietly into heaven, without having blown the trumpet loud and long for our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Let us see to it that the devil will hold a thanksgiving service in hell, when he gets the news of our departure from the field of battle".
- **Too easily we sing –**

*"Forbid it Lord that I should boast, save in the death of Christ my God,*

*All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine that were and offering far too small,*

*Love so amazing so divine, demands my soul, my life my all"*

## **2. Those who expect God to be fair rather than merciful are in for a shock!**

- The lesson in Jesus' parable is of unmerited grace! Some people who listened to Jesus believed that God should reward them for their faithfulness. Thus salvation for them was not a gift but a wage for services rendered! (e.g. The Pharisee of last week's parable in Luke 18)
- The gospel however is about salvation given not as a wage but as a gift – **Rom 6:23** *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in<sup>[b]</sup> Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**The Bible delights in telling us that God "does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities" (Psa 103:10)**

- It's a good job he is UNFAIR at times!
- Contrast that with the Rich man in the parable of *Luke 16*, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the

*dead goes to them, they will repent.'* "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'*"* He clearly got what he deserved!

So as we reflect on this parable of Jesus, we can say, sometimes God is not fair and we should be glad about that! Indeed if we all got what we deserved we'd be in trouble! Salvation is not about getting what we deserve it's about receiving mercy. Jesus took what we deserved, and gave us what we don't. He satisfied God's sense of fairness and received our wages for us so that we could receive the wages of His death – eternal life, forgiveness, and peace. Sometimes God is not fair! Thank God!