

The Reward of the Righteous

Sunday, November 13th, 1988

Matthew 20:1-16

“For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.”

I would like you to turn today, to the Book of Matthew Chapter 20. This is a very familiar passage of Scripture. In fact, a friend of mine recently was subpoenaed as a witness in a very important court trial. The trial had something to do with a church, a school, the Federal Government, wages and things like this, even the judge on the bench was familiar with this parable.

He asked my friend if he could interpret the parable in Matthew Chapter 20. My friend said, “I can.” So, the judge sat, listened, and had the lawyers sit and listen and all the court, while this man interpreted the parable of Matthew 20. It is very important.

I will tell you this; it may answer some questions that you may have on your mind and heart. I think I will call this message: “WHAT ABOUT REWARDS IN HEAVEN?” Just about all the preachers are preaching about rewards in heaven. They are talking about cabins and castles, crowns and stars. They are talking all about these different rewards that we will receive when we get to heaven.

They say that some folks are going to live in mansions, some in cabins. They say that some are going to have seven or eight crowns and some none. What does the Bible teach about rewards in heaven, the degrees of glory? Is there such a thing? You will find the answer right here in Matthew 20. Let me read it.

When you want to interpret the Scripture, first, find out who is speaking, to whom He is speaking. What is the subject? That is vital. Who is speaking? To whom is He speaking? What is the subject?

You will notice that Chapter 20 begins with the word, “*For,*” therefore what? That is not the way to begin a new thought is it, or a new subject? When the Bible was written, it wasn’t written in chapters and verses. Did you know that? It was written in epistles, books, and paragraphs. There were no chapters and verses. It is translated from Hebrew and Greek into English and other languages.

The Bible was put into chapters and verses so we could find things and conveniently find and remember things. I will show you in a moment that this parable begins in this preceding chapter. It doesn’t begin right here.

Let me read it to you, “*For the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers for to work in his vineyard.*” He went out about 6:00 in the morning, very early. “*When he agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, (Roman penny a day), he sent them to work in the vineyard.*”

He went out about the third hour. That is about 9:00 a.m. He saw other men standing idle in the marketplace. He said, “*Go work in my vineyard and whatever is right I will give to you, and they went their way.*”

He went out the sixth hour (which was 12:00 noon), the 9th hour (3:00 p.m.) and again at about 5:00 p.m. in the evening. Each time he went out he did the same. These fellows that were working in the vineyard had been out there since 6:00 a.m. Others had been out there since 9:00, 12:00, and 3:00. And now, it is 5:00 p.m. in the evening, one hour before dark.

He went out and found some men standing in the marketplace and he said, “*Why are you fellows standing here idle?*” They said, “*Nobody has hired us.*” He said, “*Go ye also into my vineyard and whatever is right I will give you.*”

So, when the evening was come and work was over, around 6:00 p.m. the lord of the vineyard said to his steward, *“Call the laborers from the vineyard and give them their hire beginning at the last.”* He is talking about the one who was hired at 5:00 p.m. He wanted them paid first, then the ones hired at 3:00, ones hired at 12:00 and ones hired at 9:00. *“The ones that were hired first this morning, pay them last.”*

Those who were hired at the 11th hour received the same wages; everybody got a penny. Those who were hired at 5:00 p.m. received a penny even those hired at 3:00, 12:00, 9:00, and 6:00. When the fellows that had been working all day in the vineyard thought that they should have received more than these other fellows. They worked longer. But every man received the same.

When they received it, they murmured. They found fault with the goodman of the house. They said, *“These last people that you hired at 5:00 p.m. have only worked an hour.” You have made them equal with us and we have borne the heat of the day.”*

He answered one of them and said, *“Friend, I did thee no wrong. Did you not agree with me to work for a penny, is that not correct, a Roman penny?”* They said, *“Yes we did.”* The goodman said, *“Take that which is yours and go your way; I will give unto the last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do with my own what I will? Is your eye evil because I am good?”* So, *“The last shall be first, and the first shall be last, for many be called and few are chosen.”*

As I said to you, this parable that I just read to you has its beginning back in the preceding verses in Chapter 19. Our Lord Jesus Christ is speaking and He is speaking to His disciples. He gave them this parable. There is a reason for it. Here is the reason:

If you will go back to Chapter 19, there was a very wealthy young man who was approached by our Lord. He said to the Lord, *“Good Master, what good thing shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* You know the story; the Master told him, *“If you want to do something, if you want to gain eternal life by doing something, by working then keep the Commandments, keep the Law, live perfectly.”*

Well, he said, *“I’ve done that.”* The Lord exposed his covetousness, his greed, his self-righteousness and his selfishness by saying, *“Go sell what you have and give it to the poor.”* What the Lord is saying is, “You are a rich man and your next door neighbor is doing without. You have plenty of clothes and people around you are naked. You have a lot of food and people around you are starving. You don’t love your neighbor as yourself, and you haven’t kept the law. *“Go sell what you have and give it to the poor.”*

“This young man turned and walked away for he had great riches and great treasures.” Our Lord said, *“Go sell what you have; give it to the poor; take up your cross and follow Me, and you will have treasure in heaven.”* No, he wanted his treasure on earth. He had great wealth and great riches. He turned and walked away.

Now then, the apostle Peter remembering what the Lord said to that rich young man in verse 27 of Chapter 19, the apostle Peter walked right up to the Master and he said to Him, *“Master behold we apostles have forsaken all that we have and followed you; what will be our reward?”* What shall we have? Do you see this? Are you with me?

The Master just said to that rich young man, *“Sell all you have; give it to the poor; follow Me and you shall have treasure in heaven.”* The young man turned and walked away because he had great riches. That is when Peter said, *“Lord, behold, we (the apostles) have forsaken all and followed you; what shall we have?”*

Now, the disciples didn't have the wealth that young man had. They didn't have the treasures that young man had. All that they had they had given up. They had given up their boats, their vocation, their labors, their families and friends. They had left everything. They denied themselves and followed Christ, while others rejected Him and denied Him.

These disciples denied themselves and they followed Christ. They literally had forsaken all. Now, Peter is asking; *“What reward shall we have? What part will we play in the Kingdom; what shall be our reward?”*

This is no small matter to these disciples. Our Lord didn't treat it lightly. He answered them very candidly, very positively and very tenderly in verse 28. Talking to His disciples, He said; *“You that have followed Me.”* They indeed had. They had given up their works and they had walked with Him. They had given up their families and walked with Him. They left all they had and they followed Christ.

He said, *“You men, (you twelve), that have followed Me in the regeneration, (the word here is the reformation), when the Son of Man shall sit on His throne of His Glory; you shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel.”* What is He saying to these twelve apostles? *“In the regeneration, when the Son of man sits on His throne in His glory; you shall sit on thrones also and judge the twelve tribes of Israel.”*

This is not the grace of regeneration; I know that because in the new birth, the apostles have no part. I know that this is not the resurrection of the last judgment. Peter has no right to be judging sinners because he was a sinner himself. John has no right to be

judging sinners. The apostle Paul has no right to be judging sinners or sitting on the throne of God.

“God has committed all judgment to His Son.” So, He is not talking about the twelve apostles sitting on twelve thrones in the resurrection at the great White Throne judging anybody. What our Lord is talking about was right then and there, that was the day of reformation.

As John the Baptist said, *“The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”* The Lord Jesus after He had died on the cross was buried and rose again, sat down at the right hand of God. He is the King. He is the King Priest. He reigns.

You see; the old tabernacle is gone. Christ is our Tabernacle. The old high priest is gone. Christ is our Priest. Do you see that? The old atonement is gone. Christ is our Atonement. The old covenant is done away. Christ is the New Covenant.

This is a new day. This is the regeneration. *“This is the day that the Lord hath made.”* These twelve apostles had a particular office and service in that day. The Lord commissioned them, empowered them, and gifted them. He made them apostles.

There aren't any apostles today; there weren't but twelve. Those twelve apostles were ones who had seen the Lord, who received their message directly from Him and who had supernatural, unusual powers to raise the dead, heal the sick, and restore the blind and the lame. They had unusual powers.

They even wrote the Scriptures. They judged Israel. They judged all men. We read their words with authority. Christ said to His twelve apostles, *“He that heareth you heareth Me. You speak for Me. When you go into a town and they won't receive you, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them. What you bind on earth will be bound. What you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”* These twelve apostles had power.

Paul wrote to one of the churches and said, *“You better straighten yourself up; you don't want me to come down there.”* I couldn't say anything like that. I'm just a man like you, a sinner saved by grace. I preach the gospel. I'm not an apostle. There aren't any apostles today.

Peter looked at the Lord after that young man had walked off, and said to the Lord; *“We apostles have left everything; we apostles have left everything and followed you.”* In this day of denial, in this day of crucifixion, in this day of hate, in this day when you are

despised and spit upon and hated of all men, *“We followed you.”* Now, *“What are we going to have?”*

Our Lord said, *“Behold, I say unto you, ye that have followed Me in the regeneration”*, (in the reformation, in this day of the revelation of the Kingdom of God when all of the Old Testament types, shadows and pictures are fulfilled; you will be judges, you will be authorities. You will be men gifted. God will use you mightily).

Not only the apostles but, *“Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.”* All who believe, all who pay the price of discipleship shall receive a hundred fold, houses, brothers and sisters. Mark said, *“Right now at this time and in eternity, everlasting life.”* Do you see that?

We are blessed now. I have many homes. I can go to places all over this country and stay in homes and eat at tables. I have brothers and sisters, mother and fathers. I have friends everywhere. Brethren, every believer is a part of a huge, great family.

What I have is yours. What you have is another believer’s. Yes, He said, *“Everyone is blessed.”* Look at verse 30: *“But, many that shall be first shall be last, and the last shall be first.”* You disciples are special; you are apostles, men of power and gifts and you are special.

Let me tell you this, *“You first trusted in Christ; you first heard the gospel, you first preached the Gospel.”* I’m telling you this, I’m warning you against you falling into a legal spirit of merit, position, power, and award. *“The first shall be last and the last shall be first.”* Beware of calculating rewards, crowns, and positions in a kingdom where such a legal spirit is entirely out of place. That is when the Lord gave that parable.

Watch this, my friend; are you with me? This rich young man couldn’t part with his riches and follow Christ. The disciples did, what they had they parted with. They were hated and despised. They were all martyred except John who died in exile. Peter said, *“We’ve left everything and followed you; what are we going to have?”* He said, *“You are special; you are somebody. God has honored you, and God is going to use you.”*

Let me tell you this Peter, in Chapter 20: 1; *“The last shall be first and the first shall be last for I say unto you, a certain man had a vineyard and he went out into the marketplace at 6:00 a.m. in the morning and he hired some men. He told them that he would pay them a penny. At 9:00 a.m. he hired some more and he said that he would pay*

them what was right. He never repeated the penny again, he said; "I'll pay you what is right."

He hired some people at 5:00 p.m. and they went out to work. When the day was over he went to the steward and said, *"Call them all in from the fields, from the vineyard and start paying them and give them all the same thing; give them all a penny. Pay the last first, and the first last for verily I say unto you, Many are called but few are chosen. Many that be first shall be last and the last shall be first."*

My friends; all the children of God are loved with the same love. All the children of God are chosen by the same grace. They are all redeemed by the same blood. They are all justified by the same Spirit. They all wear the same wedding garment. They all wear the robe of Christ's Righteousness. They are all called to the same heaven and to the same hope and glory. They are all Sons of God. They are all joint-heirs equally with Jesus Christ.

Some of these people who were hired came in early in the morning and said to the Master, *"Those fellows who came in last, you made them equal with us."* My friends; in the Kingdom of God that is true. We are all equal in Christ, because we are all complete in Him.

You see; Christ is our Wisdom and I have as much wisdom as you do, spiritually. The fellow that has been saved by Christ when he is 60 years old has the same wisdom, the same righteousness, the same redemption and the same life and sanctification. *"We are complete in Christ."* We are all the same.

There are no degrees of glory. There are no literal crowns and stars, cabins and castles in heaven. Our Lord said, *"In My Father's House are many mansions."* The word *"mansions"* does not mean a literal castle or mansion, it means dwelling places. That is what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, he said; *"If this earthly tabernacle or tent be dissolved, I have a dwelling place, a building not made with hands (It is not made of sticks and stones or marble, but spiritual), eternal in the heavens."*

All of God's children are the same. There are no degrees of glory. They are not passing out rewards in heaven to those that work the longest or serve the hardest or those who gave the most. We are redeemed by grace alone.

Let me show you something. It is true that on this earth all believers are not called to Christ at the same age. Paul said of Timothy, *"From a child thou hast known the Holy*

Scriptures that are able to make thee wise unto salvation.” Saul of Tarsus, (Paul) was 40 years old before God saved him.

When a man is saved? When it pleases the Lord to do so. Even if He wants to call one at 12 years of age, that is fine, like those He called at 6:00 in the morning. If He wants to call one at the age of 25 at 9:00 in the morning or call one at 40, that’s fine. If He wants to call one at 12 noon or call one at 55 or 60 at 3:00 in the afternoon, that is fine.

If God Almighty, in His good pleasure, chooses to wait until a man or a woman is 75 years old to save their soul by hiring them in the evening at 5:00, they will walk into heaven crowned, robed, loved, received and glorified as much as that one that is saved at age 15 or 20 years old. That is what Christ is teaching in this parable. Men are saved when it pleases the Lord.

It is even true on this earth; I know that all believers do not have the same offices. They do not have the same gifts. No sir! The Holy Spirit gives gifts according to His will. He gives some the gift to preach, but He gives it. He gives some the gift to sing, but He gives it. He prospers some financially so that they can support more than others. He is still the one who gives it. *“You can receive nothing except it be given you from above.”*

“What do you have that you didn’t receive? Who made you to differ?” The Holy Spirit gives gifts as He will. Let me tell you something, in glory all of these gifts cease. I’m not going to be a preacher in glory. You’re not going to be a deacon in glory. These gifts cease in glory. *“We know in part; we preach in part; For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”*

You don’t think someone is going to be running around heaven talking about a good sermon that he preached. He will look at that sermon and say, “Boy; that was terrible!” It is so far beneath the knowledge that we will have then, and the glory that we will have then. This is nothing! Are you going to take it up there? Paul said, “What I heard up there I can’t even tell you down here in your language; you couldn’t understand it.”

It is true that all believers do not have the same measure of faith. There is little faith, great faith and much faith. We all don’t have the same matter of growth but *“We are complete in Christ.”*

If there is a steel post in the ground and there is a little vine and a big vine wrapped around it, and you move the post, both of them will fall. It doesn’t matter if you have

little faith or great faith, long faith or short faith; it is Christ, the object of faith, that keeps you and not your faith.

It is true that all believers do not have the same opportunity to service. Some of you men work in steel mills, coalmines, railroads, Ashland Oil and other places. Some of you men are physicians, some are lawyers and some of you work in stores.

I have all day to study the Word, to go out and preach, to bring these messages. Why should I be rewarded more than you? Without you I wouldn't have this program. Without that church in Ashland supporting our ministry, I wouldn't be here today preaching to you.

We are all His servants. We serve where He puts us and with the gifts and abilities He gives to us. But we are still unprofitable servants.

I will tell you this; this business of rewards in heaven turns my stomach. It is contrary to God's grace; it is contrary to the Scripture; it is contrary to the glory of God and it is contrary to kindness; it is contrary to love; it is contrary to the teachings of Christ.

When this life is over and the prophets, apostles, missionaries, pastors, deacons and all of God's little children, the folks that have been in a long time and the folks that haven't been in for so long are gathered before Him, will be saved by Christ, redeemed by Christ, robed in the Righteousness of Christ, accepted in the beloved and will be one in Him. *"The first shall be last and the last will be first."*

That is what our Lord is showing in that parable. You better learn it. You will still have people say, "You made them equal with us." Well, God called me when I was 24 years old; that is when I learned the Gospel. I baptized a man not long ago who was about 70. Now then, I've enjoyed knowing Christ all of these years; it has been a blessing. It has not been a chore. It has not been a difficult time. I have already received a blessing.

How can I talk of sacrificing for Christ in the light of His sacrifice for me? I've never resisted unto blood. It has been a joyful life and it has been a happy life. It has been a rejoicing time. You might say, "What did you give up for Christ, preacher?"

Well, I gave up my unrest and got His peace. I gave up my guilt and received His grace. I gave up my misery and received His mercy. I gave up my poverty for His plenty. I gave up my sorrow for His joy. I gave up my rags for His Righteous. I never gave up anything. I never have, and you haven't either. Everything we have we have received. It has all been a blessing.

You are asking God to reward me for what He did? I'll preach a little but *"It is not I; it is Christ in me."* You may sing a little; it is not you, it is Christ. Somebody else serves or somebody else takes care of the building; it is not you, it is Christ.

I will tell you this; "It is disturbing to me to think that any believer would covet a higher place in heaven than somebody else. What happened to this business of *"I'm less than the least of all the saints?"* What happened to this business of, *"I'm the chief of sinners?"* What happened to this business, *"I'm not worthy?"*

How can you want a larger mansion, a bigger crown than someone else? Is it so that you can brag? I will tell you who is going to have the crowns; Jesus Christ is going to have the crowns and they will be on His head.

When this passing life is o'er
When my days shall be no more
And I stand with Christ in glory
Looking over life's finished story
Then shall I know how much I owe.

It is not what He owes me, but how much I owe Him.