

## **LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD**

– *JULY 5.* – *MATTHEW 20:1-16.* –

**"He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." – MATTHEW 5:45.**

THIS parable is difficult of interpretation so as to make all of its facts find fulfilment. The Great Teacher gave it as a parable of the Kingdom; hence we know that it applies to the experiences of the Church during this Gospel Age. If we were to apply the different intervals mentioned to different epochs in this Age, we would have difficulty; for the Apostles and others, called early in the Age, did not live and labor throughout the entire period. Again, in so applying it, we would face the proposition that only those at the beginning of the Age had definite promise as respects a reward – that all others got merely the assurance that they would receive what would be right.

Another difficulty which we would encounter in interpreting the parable is how to apply the murmuring of those who were first called and last rewarded. Other Scriptures show us that the Apostles and others first called in the Gospel Age will experience their resurrection change before those who will be living at the Second Coming of Christ. St. Paul declares that the dead in Christ shall rise first, and that then those of us who are alive shall be changed. Furthermore, it would be unthinkable that the Apostles and others of the early Church would murmur at the reward to be given them.

All of these difficulties must be borne in mind when we attempt to find a solution of this parable that would fit the experiences of the Church as a whole during the Gospel Age.

If we attempt to apply the parable to the individual experiences of God's people, we have trouble also. Applying it thus, we might say that those who begin a Christian life early, and are found faithful in the Lord's service at the evening-time of life, would be the ones first called and promised a reward. Others coming in later, and serving the Lord's cause with only a portion of their time, strength and talent, would correspond to those who heard the later call – some even at the eleventh hour. If we interpret the parable as meaning that all these will get a similar reward regardless of the time spent in the Master's service, we would still have difficulty with the fact that those called earliest murmured, complained, were dissatisfied.

On the contrary, we are surely convinced that any who would murmur against the Lord's will and His just and loving arrangements for His people, will never obtain the Kingdom reward beyond the veil. We may feel assured that any who receive the Master's "Well done" and the resurrection change will be far from murmuring. They will rejoice and be glad, and feel more than rewarded for every little service and sacrifice. How then can we apply this parable consistently, in harmony with the teachings of other Scriptures respecting the reward of the Kingdom class? We can think of only one way, and that is to apply the parable entirely to present-life experiences of the Kingdom class, especially of those who will be living at the close of this Gospel Age.

### **PARTLY APPLICABLE TO THE JEWS**

For sixteen hundred years and more the Jews waited for the First Coming of Messiah and the blessed opportunities which then would come. When Jesus began His ministry, He preached, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," and gave the Jews the privilege of entering into it. That privilege was a "penny," or a reward for their faithful endeavor to keep the Law all their lives. But when the offer of the Kingdom was promulgated, some publicans and sinners

were attracted – some who had previously neglected God's service and labors in the vineyard. These new laborers were received by the Lord Jesus and given an opportunity to become His disciples.

The privilege of discipleship was the penny, or reward. The Scribes and the Pharisees, who had been faithful to the Lord God all their lives, considered that they should have had some pre-eminence or preference over the publicans and sinners; and they murmured at any arrangement as unfair which would not give them the first opportunities of the Kingdom. If publicans and sinners were to obtain the blessed privilege of discipleship with Messiah, then surely, they thought, some still higher favor should come to them. They murmured that Jesus received publicans and sinners and ate with them.

One of the Master's parables was intended as a special reproof to the Pharisees along this line. The prodigal son represented a class of Jews not living up to their privileges, while the elder brother represented those who had continuously sought to be earnestly and actively engaged in the Father's business. When some of this prodigal class received the Message of God's Love from the lips of Jesus and His disciples, and returned to the Father's House and were treated graciously and given the same privilege of sonship as those who had not gone astray, but who had labored faithfully, the elder-brother class was offended. They murmured, and refused to participate in the feast. Thus there were some who were first in opportunity, but who were last so far as the blessing was concerned, and others who were last and least found opportunity for receiving the Divine blessing sooner and more effectively.

### **APPLICABLE ALSO TO CHRISTIANS**

The general lesson of the parable would seem to be that we should appreciate the fact that whatever God has to offer is a gift. We should enter His service with loving loyalty to principle, to

righteousness. If we have served many years, that privilege of service should be esteemed; and our interest in the Lord's cause should make us happy. From such a standpoint of appreciation of the privilege of service, we should be glad to see the Lord's work carried on, glad to see others enter the service and glad to see them get the same reward that we hope for ourselves. Only those who have such a broad spirit, such an appreciation of the privileges of the vineyard, **[R5474 : page 171]** such a sympathy for "as many as the Lord our God shall call" – only these will be fit for the Kingdom proper and in readiness to receive the special privileges of knowledge and opportunity when the Kingdom is ready to be announced.

As the typical kingdom was offered to the Jews in Jesus' day, and as those who were newest in Divine service received the same opportunities for a share in the Kingdom with those who had been long engaged, so apparently it is to be in the end, or Harvest time, of this Gospel Age. Those who have all their lives been seeking to be faithful to the Lord and to serve His cause should remember that they have had that much more of privilege and blessing. If some shall enter the Divine service later, they should be rejoiced with as fellow-servants.

Indeed, all who are servants, according to the Word of the Lord, should be praying the Master to send other laborers into the vineyard, instead of feeling jealous of any others who might come. And as greater knowledge of Present Truth is now coming as a reward to all who labor at all in the vineyard of the Lord, let us not be surprised **[R5474 : page 172]** if this shall be equally distributed to those who have come in recently and to those who have been a long time in the Master's service.

Let us rather rejoice in the Lord's ways. Let not our hearts be angry because of His graciousness to those who have come into the service even during the eleventh hour. Are they not brethren?

Under the terms of the Golden Rule should we not wish them to have the same blessings that we enjoy? Any aloofness on the part of those who have been longer in the Lord's service – any feeling on the part of such that they must have more manifestation of the Lord's favor now – is evidently wrong. The Lord would have us more like unto Himself. And this is the suggestion of those who have selected the Golden Text for this lesson. Be ye like unto your Father; for He is kind to the unthankful. "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." – Matthew 5:45.

### **LESSONS OF THE GOLDEN TEXT**

More and more we are learning that in a very large and important sense our forefathers during the Dark Ages lost the proper conception of God's character and of His Plan for human salvation. Instead of picturing Him in the creeds as loving and gracious, they portrayed Him in very different colors. The creeds of the Dark Ages, which have been handed down to us, have given us colored and distorted views of the teachings of the Bible. Only in recent years are Bible students beginning to discern this fact. Nearly all people of intelligence have now cast away the creeds as irrational in the general trend of their teaching – in their representation that God from the beginning purposed a Hell of fire and everlasting torture for nearly all His human creatures, numbering thousands of millions, and a Paradise of bliss for only a saintly handful, an elect few.

But alas, while we have been realizing the errancy of our creeds, and have been discarding them, many of us have failed to notice how different their teachings are from the teachings of the Bible! But the Bible is being sought after again. The colored creed-spectacles which distorted our view are being broken to pieces. We are learning to read the Bible in its own clear light, and a blessing proportionately is coming to us.

Notice, for instance, this text: "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven." Brother Calvin, Bloody Mary, and thousands of others during the Dark Ages, committed horrible atrocities in the name of religion, in the name of Jesus, in the name of the Father, thinking that they were copying God, being like their Father in Heaven. But alas, they knew Him not aright! They had been following demon-drawn pictures which represented the almighty, gracious God, the Father of Mercies, as most devilish in His plans and arrangements for His human creatures. Now we are seeing what Jesus really meant when He said, "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven." Now we are including the remainder of His statement: "for He is kind to the unthankful"; and "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

Two of the very noblest of Jesus' disciples caught the wrong thought, even though they were for awhile personally present with the Master. How much more should we excuse those who, during a long period of energetic creed-making and of neglect of Bible study, lost all proper conception of the Divine character!

The two disciples referred to were James and John, the sons of Zebedee. When the Lord and His disciples had run short of food, James and John went to a city of Samaria to purchase bread. The Samaritans inquired why Jesus did not come to their city to heal the Samaritan sick, as well as the Jews. When they learned that His mission for the time was exclusively for the Jews, they were offended and said: Buy your bread from Jews, then; we will sell you nothing. Then it was that James and John, indignant that their Master, the Heir of all things, should be thus dishonored, asked permission of Jesus to call down fire upon the Samaritans, to consume their city. These disciples thought that they had the spirit of God. But Jesus said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

And if these two dear disciples needed to be corrected – needed to be shown that they had a wrong spirit in wishing to destroy the Samaritans – how much more would Jesus' reproof be appropriate to those who in the name of God would consign all opponents to an eternity of torture!

But such were some of us, in our ignorance, in our superstition, in our creed-intoxication – as a result of drinking the wine of false doctrine. (Revelation 17:1-5; 18:3.) Thank God for the deliverance! Praise His name for the saner views coming to His people! The dawning of the Morning of a New Dispensation is giving enlightenment. The Sun of Righteousness is rising; the hobgoblins of the past are fleeing before its illuminating rays. "Tell the whole world these blessed tidings."

### **THE GLORIOUS CHARACTER OF OUR GOD**

Now when we read our Golden Text we see that it tells us that as our God is gracious, loving, merciful, kind, even to the unthankful, even to the unjust, even to sinners, so we should be kind, generous, loving, should do good unto all men as we have opportunity, and especially to the Household of Faith. This view of God appeals to our hearts; and the more we study this God of Love, the more we realize that He is the only loving and true God, and that all of our previous misconceptions were unreal, unloving, untrue – gods of our own manufacture – and the more do we see that civilized lands have made creed idols with pen, type, ink and paper, more horrible than any which the heathen ever made of iron, stone, brass or clay.

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." If the ideal of his heart, the God that he worships, is cruel, vengeful, hateful, devilish, it would be a miracle if that man or woman worshiping such a false deity would not become more or less contaminated and be led into more or less of wrong thinking and wrong doing. But when we get before the mind's eye the loving and true God as our

ideal, we are more and more changed and transformed day by day as we discern our Maker's gracious character. Unconsciously we copy this high ideal, and more and more become transformed through the renewing of our minds, and more and more prove the good and acceptable and perfect will of God in our daily lives.

Let us hold fast that which is good – the sure Word of God. Let us discard the human theories of the Dark Ages, which greatly misrepresented to us the Divine Message. Thus we shall be giving heed to the Master's words: "Ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free."

---

"Who trusts in that Word has the sweet hope of life,  
An end of confusion and error and strife.  
Its grace it imparts to the truth-seeking soul,  
Who humbly submits to its righteous control."

=====