

"Understanding the Spiritual Lesson"

What Jesus is 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

"Life May Be Inequitable, But God Isn't"



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. Every 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. We enter into His glorious Kingdom through the Blood Of The Lamb and His Grace Alone.

"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?"



Ezekiel 18:25

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 Ezekiel 18:25, 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.

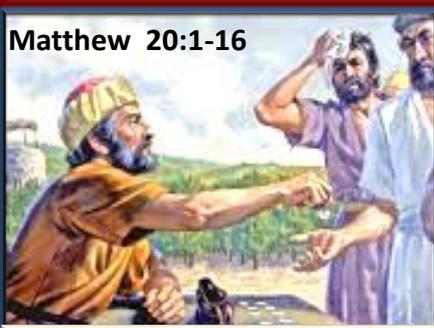
"The Owner of The Vineyard Is Accused Of Being Unfair"

The Parable Of The Laborers In The Vineyard



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 Jesus illustrates to us in the parable in Matthew Chapter 20:1-16. As you read this parable try to see this parable through your spiritual lenses.

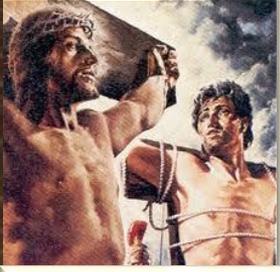


Matthew 20:1-16

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will

pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. **Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'** But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So The Last Will Be First, And The First Will Be Last."

"Entry Into The Kingdom Is His Work Alone"



The story concerns some laborers who complain that others, who did not work as long as they, were paid an equal amount. In other words, they saw their own labor as worthy of compensation but considered their companions' labor to be inferior and less worthy of reward. Jesus ends the parable with the statement, **"The last will be first, and the first last."** The most direct interpretation, based on the content of the

parable, is that all believers, no matter how long or how hard they work during this lifetime, will receive the same basic reward: eternal life. The thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43), whose life of service was limited to a moment of repentance and confession of faith in Christ, received the same reward of

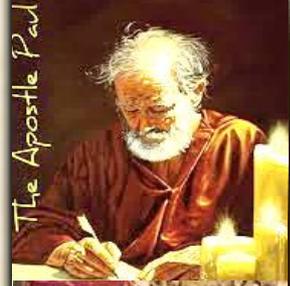
eternal life as did Timothy, who served God for years. Of course, Scripture also teaches that there are different rewards in heaven for different services, but the ultimate reward of eternal life will be given to all equally, on the basis of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

"God's Ways Are Not Our Ways"



Judas Iscariot

There are several ways in which **"The first will be last and the last first"** holds true. There are some who were first to follow Christ in time yet are not the first in the kingdom. Judas Iscariot was one of the first disciples and was honored to be the treasurer of the group, yet his greed led to his undoing; Paul was the last of the Apostles yet the one who worked the hardest **"Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death."** (2 Corinthians 11:23). There are some who were first in privilege yet are not first in the kingdom. Based on the terms of the New Covenant, the Gentiles had equal access to the kingdom of heaven, although they had not served God under the Old Covenant. The Jews, who had labored long under the Old Covenant, were jealous of the grace extended to the Gentile **"newcomers"** **"So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous."** There are some who are first in prestige and rank yet might never enter the kingdom. Jesus told the Pharisees that the sinners they despised were being saved ahead of them: **"Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you"** (Matthew 21:31-32).



The Apostle Paul



The Tax Collector



"Jesus Confronts The Pharisees"



"The Adulterous Women"