

Series: Parables
Title: Last First, First Last
Text: Matthew 19: 30-20:16
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The Lord Jesus told the rich, young, ruler to sell all that he had, give it to the poor, come and follow Christ and he would have treasure in heaven. He went away sorrowful for he had much riches.

Then, speaking on behalf of all the apostles,

Matthew 19: 27: Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

In this gospel age, the apostles were the first called, out of the whole church.

Matthew 19: 28: And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

When the Son of man was regenerated and arose from the dead he sat down “**in the throne of his glory.**” The apostles, like all believers, were made by Christ kings unto God and each of the twelve [Paul replacing Judas] sat upon a throne, as gospel preachers. They judged the twelve tribes of Israel by the gospel they preached to them. Remember the Lord told the Pharisee’s John 12:48: He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. Another evidence he is speaking of this present gospel age is because he is speaking of this present gospel age in what the Lord says next. To check Peter and the apostles from feeling to haughty about themselves Christ everyone shall receive this reward.

Matthew 19: 29: And 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,

Mark 10:29 adds, “now in this time.” Luke 18:30 adds “in this present time.” He is speaking of this present gospel age. So the thrones of the apostles are not literal thrones any more than the hundredfold is a literal number. The meaning is: the privilege of serving with Christ in his kingdom as he calls out his sheep IS the reward itself, compared to a throne, a reward which outnumber—a hundredfold—what any man leaves behind.

Matthew 19: 29:...AND---In addition to that reward of serving Christ in this life, the Lord says that Peter and the apostles, as well as all other believers, will have a reward in the world to come. **Matthew 19: 29: and shall inherit everlasting life.**

Application: Brethren, there can be no greater reward than the privilege of serving with Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior, as well as inheriting everlasting life in his presence forever! Christ says that everyone, that Christ shall call, from the first to those called long after them, will be partakers together of the same common reward of his grace. Then to check us from engendering a mercenary spirit our Savior adds this statement:

Matthew 19: 30: But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last *shall be* first.

Proposition: Christ shall give to each one he has called the same reward: justice—as we serve the Lord in this present time and when we inherit everlasting life with him. But many who consider themselves to be first [mercenaries] shall be last in hell; while all [notice he does not say many here] all those who consider themselves last [true believers] shall be first in heaven.

Title: Last First, First Last

In chapter 20: 1-10, the Lord gives a parable—an earthly story—to illustrate this. His parable will be our text.

I. THERE IS A HOUSEHOLDER WHO HAS A VINEYARD—Matthew 20: 1: 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.

The kingdom of heaven—the church of God—is represented as a vineyard. God the Father AND Christ our Savior, are one, the Householder. Both are one in this work of salvation. Notice the vineyard belongs to the Householder—“**his vineyard.**” God’s church is of his planting, his watering, his fencing; The fruits of it are to his honor and praise all according to the riches of his grace. The laborers represent two kinds of professors who labor in the cause of Christ.

II. THE HOUSEHOLDER CALLS LABORERS INTO HIS VINEYARD—V1: [the Householder] went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

Went Out Early

The Householder “**went out early.**” Before the foundation of the world God the Father chose who he would be gracious unto—who he would call to serve in his kingdom by grace. He chose Jeremiah then he called him.

Jeremiah 1: 5: Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

He chose Paul then he called him.

Galatians 1:15: But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace,

The First Called

But our Savior will tell us later that not all who are called are chosen. The “called but not chosen” are represented in these who are called first—**1: he went out early 2: And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.** These first laborers bargained for their wage. It was early in the day. These went to work for the highest bidder.

These represent professing believers who are in fact hirelings, mercenaries, who appear to serve the cause of Christ but who, in fact, are not sent of Christ in grace, but who labor for filthy lucre, for selfish gain, who seek wages for their labor.

The Last Called

Now notice, those called last—**v3: And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, 4: And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will**

give you. And they went their way. 5: Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. 6: 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? 7: 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.

These represent true believers—chosen and called. Each of these were “**standing idle in the marketplace.**” All Christ’s true servants are found idle—dead in our trespasses and sins. Until a sinner is truly called by Christ himself, into the service of our Lord Jesus, a sinner’s entire life amounts to “**standing all the day idle;**”

All unregenerate sinners combined—no matter how benevolent—contribute nothing to the purpose for which this world was created. Whosoever is not the servant of Christ Jesus is contributing nothing toward glorifying God our Savior in his kingdom through faith. There is only one activity upon earth which is really activity—serving the kingdom of God in the cause of Christ. Every other effort of human strength is—in its source and its aim—only busy idleness. It is to be under the prince of the power of the air in his prison house of slavery.

Notice the Householder said to these, “**Why stand ye here all the day idle?**” Every true believer—true servant of Christ—before he is called by Christ—is made to know we are servants of sin—we stood idle in Satan’s marketplace all our days.

Notice,—**v7: They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us**—Every true believer is made to confess our sins to the Lord.

Jeremiah 3: 12: Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger forever. 13: Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God.

Notice—**v4 And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.** When a sinner is made to know his sin by Christ and called by Christ by free and sovereign grace he goes forth serving Christ in faith, trusting Christ will provide what is right—just.

Now, sinners are either: servants of sin or servants of righteousness—no middle ground.

Romans 8: 8: They that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 6: 17: But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. 18: Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

A Reward of Love and Grace

Be sure to get this: Christ told the apostles that in this gospel age their reward would be that they would be kings carrying forth the riches of his gospel whereby he would judge the world. And everyone who follows Christ shall receive a hundredfold in this life as we serve Christ.

Sinners saved by grace have the reward of simply being privileged to serve our Master. These who were idle went forth delighted to be employed in the business of such a gracious householder.

2 Corinthians 5: 14: For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: 15: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

Illustration: Take marriage: if you said to your fiance I will marry you but only if you tell me what reward I will receive for doing so? That would be insulting. **Take motherhood**—Mothers do you speak of compensation, of pay, when that child in loving affection wraps their arms around your neck or do you speak of rewards when you are up all night carrying for your sick child. Is not the object of your love all the reward you seek? To speak of some other reward would profane that love and belittle the reward you have in that child himself. **Take a 1st responder**—they run into a firey house and save some helpless victim. Is that not reward enough! Would it not pollute your service to demand a reward from the one you served?

Service which serves in love for the object it serves is its own reward. And service to Christ—especially after we have been forgiven so great a debt by Christ himself—forgets self as much as any of these lesser services I just mentioned.

Now reverse those illustrations: what if the bride said to the husband, who provides all for her, “what is my reward?” Would we say that to Christ our Husband? What if the child, provided for by the mother, said, “what is my reward?” Would we say that to our heavenly Father? What if the victim pulled from the fire demanded a reward from the 1st responder? Would we demand such of Christ who pulled us from the fires of hell?

Our reward brethren is to be: chosen of God our Father in divine election, to be redeemed by Christ who loved us even when we were enemies and enmity against him, to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit even when we were dead in sins. To be the least of all saints, the chief of sinners, yet called into the service of so benevolent a Master as Christ our Lord is the reward.

We do not need a certain wage declared to us as the first laborers did. Believers labor in faith, in hope and confident trust. We make no bargains with Christ; we look for nothing but what Christ of His free abundance is pleased to give us.

Spiritual Rewards

Believer this hundredfold he gives us is not the health and wealth prosperity that hirelings crave and preach about.

In this lifetime, Christ gives us, not what we could dare to ask or think, not what we deserve for our sins, but “what is right;” according to his righteousness. He gives us what is right because he emptied himself, shedding his blood for each child he calls, justice demands it is right that he give us full, abundant pardon from all our sins.

We are given joy in the Holy Ghost: peace of conscience that we are righteous in Christ and he remembers our sins no more. We are given the sense of God’s love; we are given contentment in Christ knowing he shall provide all we need and that he is our strength above all material things.

Philippians 4: 11: Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content....¹³ I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

The man who forsakes his possessions and friends and family for Christ’s sake, finds that Christ provides “a hundred,” more fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters. We have the reward of being thought worthy to suffer for Christ and the cause of his gospel. We have the great reward to watch Christ call his lost sheep

into his marvelous light. The reward of grace is infinite, it is Christ Himself, Who hath said, **“I am thine exceeding great reward.”** Losing all for Christ is the greatest gain there is! And what have you really given up?

Philippians 3:8: Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

In addition, our Master provides us with all things necessary for the labor he has called us unto. And what a good provider he is.

Illustration: Wanting to work for Mr. Frannk White because he was the best to work for, he provided the best equipment. So it is with the believer toward Christ our Master.

All our gifts and abilities needed to serve God are the gifts of his free grace – (Eph. 4:7).

Ephesians 4: 7: But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

- Every ability and talent he gives
- Even every opportunity—have you ever wanted to serve more but did not know what to do? Then a door opened!
- The time given to serve is his gift—some are called in the 3rd hour, 6th, 9th, 11th.

Ephesians 5: 15: See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, 16: Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Illustration: George Whitfield asked an old minister once, “Are you not wearying for heavenly rest?” The old minister answered, “No, certainly not.” Whitefield surprised asked, “Why not?” The old servant said, “If you sent your servant into the field to do a certain work for you and you provided everything for him and promised to give him rest and refreshment in the evening, what would you say if you found him idle and discontent in the middle of the day, saying, ‘I wish it were evening’? Would you not bid him be up and finish his work, and then go home and enjoy the promised rest? So it is that God requires of us that, instead of looking for Saturday night, we do our day’s work in the day.”

This is our privilege—our reward—to reign with Christ as kings, spreading forth his gospel far and wide. He has provided everything. Our service to him is **“reasonable service.”** (Rom 12: 1)

Luke 17:10: So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was **our duty to do.**

III. YET, CHRIST PROMISES THERE IS A REWARD WHICH AWAITS US AT THE END OF THIS GOSPEL DAY—V8: 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.

Broken and Contrite Hearted Believers

Every true believer considers ourselves the last of the last, least of the least—and we shall be the first called to inherit eternal life with Christ himself!

1 Thessalonians 4: 16: For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17: Then we which

are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

All Shall Receive What is Righteous

All who labor—both the false hireling and the true believer—shall receive what is just—**v9: And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. 10: But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.** The equality of the penny represents the equality of God's justice. The reward given to all from God is not ARBITRARY, but in accordance with the strictest justice.

The Last First

The last first—**v9: When they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.** These did not work a full day—yet they received a full day's wages. Can you imagine the joy of these who trusted the Householder, who served him feeling as though they were rewarded simply to be called, then to be given a full day's wages though they did not work a full day? These did not murmur.

True believers say, "why would our Lord reward us based on what we left behind?—his irresistible grace is the only reason we left anything and followed him. Why would he reward us on the length of time we served?—he set the time. Why would our Lord reward us based on our ability?—he gave the ability. Why would he reward us based on how we ministered to his saints—it was he that ministered to his saints using us earthen vessels. "The power is of God not of us."

Application: Believer, we shall inherit eternal life because it is our just due—not because of our labor—but because of the accomplished redemption of Christ our Householder, because everything we have he gave it. Washed in his blood he is pleased with our feeble labor, which is not worth mentioning.

The First Last

The first last—**V10: But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. 11: And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, 12: 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.**

Now it is plain. These thought themselves first. They had little interest in the work. It was no reward to them to have been able to do twelve times as much as the last hired. These had the hireling's spirit. They had been longing for the shadow. They had been keeping count of all they did all day long, counting their wages all day long. The mercenary never has enough.

The mercenary complained that he had to serve so long, in the heat of the day, and he envied these who served less time. But the true follower of Christ, called first will from the bottom of his heart, pity his fellow laborer who only got to serve Christ one hour. It will be impossible for a believer whose delight it was to serve the Master, to envy another who was called later in his life.

IV. LASTLY, LET'S HEAR THE MASTER SPEAK—V13: But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

What is Right for the First?

The mercenary—those serving for rewards who think themselves first—will receive from God exactly what they wanted because it is their just due. In this life they have their reward.

Matthew 6:2: Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, **They have their reward**....5: And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, **They have their reward**....16: Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, **They have their reward**.

And in the life to come—**v14: Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee**. The mercenary will take what is his—justice—and go his way into everlasting destruction.

What is Right for the Last?

Also, God will give the same—justice—to those who are last—**v14:...I will give unto this last, even as unto thee**. Christ will say to every true blood-bought believer, **v14: Take that thine is, and go thy way**. Yet justice demands the broken and contrite heart, resting in Christ, must receive everlasting life.

Illustration: My dear sister in Christ, Sue Whitehead—leukemia, body decayed, suffered a stroke and entered glory Friday morning. When she closed her eyes in this body of death and opened them perfectly conformed to Christ's image she beheld Christ in all his glory, open his everlasting arms to her, and say, **"Come, take that thine is."** I do not think for a minute she said, "But I supposed I would have more than Christ!" Neither shall any true sinner—who knows what he is by nature! And my sister Sue has at least one son that Christ has saved. She arrived first; her son will be arriving in glory later. I expect she was delighted to hear Christ say, **"I will give unto this last, even as unto thee."**

Is It Not Lawful?

Besides all this—**v15: Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?** The Judge of all the earth shall do right for the righteous and for the wicked. God shall reward his saints according to the merits of Christ Jesus, which has been freely given unto us by his grace, because it is just.

Romans 8: 17: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. 18: For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

And he shall reward the mercenary with hell for it is just. **v16: So the last shall be first, and the first last:**

The Only Difference is Grace

And the one thing that makes the believer to differ from those who perish forever in hell is God's grace—**v16:...for many be called, but few chosen**.

Application: Now if you are Peter and the apostles—who were truly called first by the Lord—at the beginning of this story you would have put yourself in the place of these called first. But when you realized the mercenary spirit of these first laborers then you realize the foolishness of asking, "what shall we have therefore?" Then in your heart you see yourself as the least! Right where we need to always be! For the first shall be last and the last first.

Amen!