

# Parable of the Householder

Lest the disciples should lose sight of the principles of the gospel, Christ related to them a parable illustrating the manner in which God deals with His servants, and the spirit in which He desires them to labor for Him.

"The kingdom of heaven," He said, "is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard." It was the custom for men seeking employment to wait in the market places, and thither the employers went to find servants. The man in the parable is represented as going out at different hours to engage workmen. Those who are hired at the earliest hours agree to work for a stated sum; those hired later leave their wages to the discretion of the householder.

"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."

The householder's dealing with the workers in his vineyard represents God's dealing with the human family. It is contrary to the customs that prevail among men. In worldly business, compensation is given according to the work accomplished. The laborer expects to be paid only that which he earns. But in the parable, Christ was illustrating the principles of His kingdom--a kingdom not of this world. He is not controlled by any human standard. The Lord says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways. . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Isa. 55:8, 9

In the parable the first laborers agreed to work for a stipulated sum, and they received the amount specified, nothing more. Those later hired believed the master's promise, "Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive." **They showed their confidence in him by asking no question in regard to wages. They trusted to his justice and equity. They were rewarded, not according to the amount of their labor, but according to the generosity of his purpose.**

So God desires us to trust in Him who justifieth the ungodly. **His reward is given not according to our merit but according to His own purpose**, "which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." Eph. 3:11. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us." Titus 3:5. **And for those who trust in Him He will do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."** Eph. 3:20.

**Not the amount of labor performed or its visible results but the spirit in which the work is done makes it of value with God.** Those who came into the vineyard at the eleventh hour were thankful for an opportunity to work. Their hearts were full of gratitude to the one who had accepted them; and when at the close of the day the householder paid them for a full day's

work, they were greatly surprised. They knew they had not earned such wages. And the kindness expressed in the countenance of their employer filled them with joy. They never forgot the goodness of the householder or the generous compensation they had received. Thus it is with the sinner who, knowing his unworthiness, has entered the Master's vineyard at the eleventh hour. His time of service seems so short, he feels that he is undeserving of reward; but he is filled with joy that God has accepted him at all. He works with a humble, trusting spirit, thankful for the privilege of being a co-worker with Christ. This spirit God delights to honor.

The Lord desires us to rest in Him without a question as to our measure of reward. **When Christ abides in the soul, the thought of reward is not uppermost. This is not the motive that actuates our service.** It is true that in a subordinate sense we should have respect to the recompense of reward. God desires us to appreciate His promised blessings. But He would not have us eager for rewards nor feel that for every duty we must receive compensation. We should not be so anxious to gain the reward as to do what is right, irrespective of all gain. Love to God and to our fellow men should be our motive.

This parable does not excuse those who hear the first call to labor but who neglect to enter the Lord's vineyard. When the householder went to the market place at the eleventh hour and found men unemployed he said, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" The answer was, "Because no man hath hired us." None of those called later in the day were there in the morning. They had not refused the call. Those who refuse and afterward repent, do well to repent; but it is not safe to trifle with the first call of mercy.

When the laborers in the vineyard received "every man a penny," those who had begun work early in the day were offended. Had they not worked for twelve hours? they reasoned, and was it not right that they should receive more than those who had worked for only one hour in the cooler part of the day? "These last have wrought but one hour," they said, "and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day."

"Friend," the householder replied to one of them, "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."

The first laborers of the parable represent those who, because of their services, claim preference above others. They take up their work in a self-gratulatory spirit, and do not bring into it self-denial and sacrifice. They may have professed to serve God all their lives; they may have been foremost in enduring hardship, privation, and trial, and they therefore think themselves entitled to a large reward. They think more of the reward than of the privilege of being servants of Christ. In their view their labors and sacrifices entitle them to receive honor above others, and because this claim is not recognized, they are offended. Did they bring into their work a loving, trusting spirit, they would continue to be first; but their querulous, complaining disposition is un-Christlike, and proves them to be untrustworthy. It reveals their desire for self-advancement, their distrust of God, and their jealous, grudging spirit toward their

brethren. The Lord's goodness and liberality is to them only an occasion of murmuring. Thus they show that there is no connection between their souls and God. They do not know the joy of co-operation with the Master Worker.

There is nothing more offensive to God than this narrow, self-caring spirit. He cannot work with any who manifest these attributes. They are insensible to the working of His Spirit.

All boasting of merit in ourselves is out of place. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." Jer. 9:23, 24.

The reward is not of works, lest any man should boast; but it is all of grace. "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Rom. 4:1-5. Therefore there is no occasion for one to glory over another or to grudge against another. No one is privileged above another, nor can anyone claim the reward as a right.

The first and the last are to be sharers in the great, eternal reward, and the first should gladly welcome the last. He who grudges the reward to another forgets that he himself is saved by grace alone. The parable of the laborers rebukes all jealousy and suspicion. Love rejoices in the truth and institutes no envious comparisons. He who possesses love compares only the loveliness of Christ and his own imperfect character.

This parable is a warning to all laborers, however long their service, however abundant their labors, that without love to their brethren, without humility before God, they are nothing. There is no religion in the enthronement of self. He who makes self-glorification his aim will find himself destitute of that grace which alone can make him efficient in Christ's service. Whenever pride and self-complacency are indulged, the work is marred.

**It is not the length of time we labor but our willingness and fidelity in the work that makes it acceptable to God. In all our service a full surrender of self is demanded.** The smallest duty done in sincerity and self-forgetfulness is more pleasing to God than the greatest work when marred with self-seeking. **He looks to see how much of the spirit of Christ we cherish, and how much of the likeness of Christ our work reveals. He regards more the love and faithfulness with which we work than the amount we do.**

**Only when selfishness is dead, when strife for supremacy is banished, when gratitude fills the heart, and love makes fragrant the life--it is only then that Christ is abiding in the soul, and we are recognized as laborers together with God.**

However trying their labor, the true workers do not regard it as drudgery. They are ready to spend and to be spent; but it is a cheerful work, done with a glad heart. Joy in God is expressed through Jesus Christ. Their joy is the joy set before Christ--"to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." John 4:34. They are in co-operation with the Lord of glory. This thought sweetens all toil, it braces the will, it nerves the spirit for whatever may befall. Working with unselfish heart, ennobled by being partakers of Christ's sufferings, sharing His sympathies, and co-operating with Him in His labor, they help to swell the tide of His joy and bring honor and praise to His exalted name.

This is the spirit of all true service for God. Through a lack of this spirit, many who appear to be first will become last, while those who possess it, though accounted last, will become first.

There are many who have given themselves to Christ, yet who see no opportunity of doing a large work or making great sacrifices in His service. These may find comfort in the thought that it is not necessarily the martyr's self-surrender which is most acceptable to God; it may not be the missionary who has daily faced danger and death that stands highest in heaven's records. The Christian who is such in his private life, in the daily surrender of self, in sincerity of purpose and purity of thought, in meekness under provocation, in faith and piety, in fidelity in that which is least, the one who in the home life represents the character of Christ--such a one may in the sight of God be more precious than even the world-renowned missionary or martyr. {Christ's Object Lessons 396-403}

2 Timothy 2:15