

The Parable of the Labourers (Matt. 19:23 - 20:16)

A Small Group Outline



1. Praise *(Purpose: To worship God)*

- What are you thankful for this week? *(let the group's secretary write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Song Service
 - Sing a few songs of praise to God

2. Pray *(Purpose: To carry each others' burdens and to seek the Lord)*

- What challenges did you have this week? *(write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Go into a season of prayer

3. Review *(Purpose: To learn accountability)*

- Tell us how it went with what you promised to do in last week's meeting? *(e.g. Who did your share you faith with this past week? Who did you minister to? How did actioning your I WILL STATEMENT go?)*
- Where people have failed to fulfil what they said they would, do not be harsh with them but gently encourage them to try again in the coming week. Give them more support by phoning or joining them in the week.

4. Give *(Purpose: To be good stewards of our monies)*

- This is the time to return tithes and offerings. If done electronically, kindly ensure that you get the bank account details of your local church from your treasurer. Don't forget to complete an envelope and to send the breakdown to him/her.

5. Discover *(Purpose: To learn to listen to God, and be obedient to His Word)*

- **Notes for the facilitator**
 - Read *Christ's Object Lessons (COL)*, pp. 390-404
 - **"The truth of God's free grace had been almost lost sight of by the Jews. The rabbis taught that God's favor must be earned.** The reward of the righteous they hoped to gain by their own works. Thus their worship was prompted by a grasping, mercenary spirit. From this spirit even the disciples of Christ were not wholly free, and the Saviour sought every opportunity of showing them their error" (COL 390).
 - **"Peter's question [in Matt. 19:27], "What shall we have therefore?" had revealed a spirit that uncorrected would unfit the disciples to be messengers for Christ; for it was the spirit of a hireling.** While they had been attracted by the love of Jesus, the disciples were not wholly free from Pharisaism. They still worked with the thought of meriting a reward in proportion to their labor. They cherished a spirit of self-exaltation and self-complacency, and made comparisons among themselves. When one of them failed in any particular, the others indulged feelings of superiority" (COL 396).
 - **"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" (COL 396).
 - "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..." (COL 397).

- **"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.... 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" (COL 397).
- **"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" (COL 398).
- **"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" (COL 399).
- **"The Jews had been first called into the Lord's vineyard, and because of this they were proud and self-righteous. Their long years of service they regarded as entitling them to receive a larger reward than others.** Nothing was more exasperating to them than an intimation that the Gentiles were to be admitted to equal privileges with themselves in the things of God" (COL 400).
- "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" (COL 402).
- **"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**" (COL 402)
- **"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"** (COL 40).
 - "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" (COL 402).
 - **"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.... 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" (COL 403).
 - **"Not in our learning, not in our position, not in our numbers or entrusted talents, not in the will of man, is to be found the secret of success. Feeling our inefficiency we are to contemplate Christ, and through Him who is the strength of all strength, the thought of all thought, the willing and obedient will gain victory after victory"** (COL 404).
 - "And however short our service or humble our work, if in simple faith we follow Christ, we shall not be disappointed of the reward. **That which even the greatest and wisest cannot earn, the weakest and most humble may receive.** Heaven's golden gate opens not to the self-exalted. It is not lifted up to the proud in spirit. But the everlasting portals will open wide to the trembling touch of a little child. Blessed will be the recompense of grace to those who have wrought for God in the simplicity of faith and love" (COL 404).
 - *Read Matt. 19:23 - 20:16. Preferably let one person read it. Let everyone then put down their Bibles and get the group to reconstruct the passage in their own words. This teaches the group to be careful in quotation Scripture correctly and to use it as the basis of their discussions.*
 - **Discussion Questions** *(use only a few). The notes in italics after some of the questions below are for the facilitator, and not to be read out to the group.*
 - What does it mean to work in the Master's vineyard? Give practical examples.
 - Even though the reward may be the same for all workers hired at different times, what are the benefits of working longer in the vineyard?
 - The labourers hired later in the day did not make any wage arrangements, but depended on the master's promise of paying them what was right. What did this show about them?
 - Like Peter we can think: What is in it for me if I give up all and serve God? What is the danger of doing things for God merely for reward? How would that spirit negatively affect church life? *(ask one question at a time)*
 - Was the original workers' complaint fair or not? Why or why not?
 - In what ways does God's grace seem so unfair?
 - In what order were the workers paid? What do you think the master was trying to illustrate?

- Why is it dangerous to compare one's own situation with that of someone else's?
- What are some ways that we can avoid developing an attitude that God somehow owes us for all we do for him?
- What would you say to the person who plans to wait until just before dying to come to Christ, in order not to work so hard for Jesus or give up so much?
- What does this parable tell us about the kingdom of God? What should our motive of service be in His kingdom? (*ask one question at a time*)
- **Application Questions** (*select a few depending on your time. One has to be the I WILL STATEMENT*)
 - What practical lesson from this parable would you like to apply in your life?
 - Do you honestly feel at times that God owes you something, or that you deserve certain things from God because of what you did for Him? Elaborate.
 - Have you ever been surprised by God's unexpected generosity in your life? Share an experience.
 - How would you rate your experience in the Master's vineyard? Is it joyous, ordinary, boring, or even burdensome? (*ask one question at a time*)
 - Do you feel you have a grumbling spirit at times in God's work? Explain. If so, how would you like to reverse that? (*ask one question at a time*)
 - I WILL STATEMENT: Formulate an I will statement in response to what you have discovered in the Word. Let the group's secretary also record these in an A4 notebook. Ensure that everyone gets a chance to give their I WILL STATEMENT. You have to be specific. E.g. "I will daily write down 3 things that I am grateful for in working for the Master. My goal is to celebrate the privilege and joy of service in the vineyard."

6. Share (*Purpose: To be witnesses of our faith*)

- Do you have anyone you could share today's lesson with this week? *Be specific.*

7. Closing prayer

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