

LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD

BIBLE TEXT: Matthew 20:1-16

LESSON 183 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19, 20)

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Matthew 20:1-16

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.

² And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

³ 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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

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.

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Householder's Employment of Laborers

- 1 An agreement on the daily wage was made with those hired early in the morning, Matthew 20:1, 2
- 2 A second group, hired at the third hour of the day, were guaranteed a wage that was right, Matthew 20:3, 4
- 3 A third and fourth group were hired with the same assurance, Matthew 20:5
- 4 The fifth group were hired under the same guarantee, at the eleventh hour of the day, Matthew 20:6, 7

II The Wages Paid at the Day's End

- 1 The steward was instructed to pay the laborers a penny apiece, beginning with those hired last, Matthew 20:8, 9;

Matthew 19:30

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

Matthew 21:31

³¹ Whether of them twain did the will of *his* father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

Luke 13:30

³⁰ And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.

- 2 The first group complained because they had received no more pay than those who worked but one hour, Matthew 20:10-12

- 3 God's evaluation of our service is not necessarily the same as man's, Matthew 20:13-15;

1 Corinthians 4:2

² Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

- 4 Servants rewarded according to the divine rule received their compensation for the quality of the work done, not necessarily the quantity, Matthew 20:16;

Revelation 2:10

¹⁰ Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

NOTES:

God's Vineyards and Harvest Fields

Among the many word pictures that God has given us in the Bible to illustrate deep Scriptural truths are those of that most beautiful scene of our whole year: the reaping of grain and gathering of the fruit of the earth into the garners. These pictures are given to teach us about the harvest of the world, when the precious fruit of the earth — the redeemed of all ages — will be taken to their eternal Home.

¹³ But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

¹⁴ Take *that* thine *is*, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.

¹⁵ Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

¹⁶ So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

God has spoken to us concerning the necessity of faithfulness and obedience to His commands, through the parable of the two sons who were told to go into their father's vineyard. One of the sons said he would go, and then did not; and the other said he would not go, and then went.

God has told us, in the parable of the householder who let out his vineyard to husbandmen, of the final judgment that will come upon all those who reject His own Son, Jesus Christ. These husbandmen refused to give the servants of the householder the fruits that were properly his; and when the only son, and heir, was finally sent to collect from them. they killed him.

God has referred, in several parts of the Bible, to the work of spreading the Gospel as work in a harvest field (**Matthew 9:37** ³⁷ Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly *is* plenteous, but the labourers *are* few; **Luke 10:2** ² Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly *is* great, but the labourers *are* few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. **John 4:35-36** ³⁵ Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. ³⁶ And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. **Galatians 6:9** ⁹ And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.). In this lesson He has taught us some sublime truths by using the picture of men being hired for work in a harvest field and being paid at the end of the day according to the agreements made when they went to work in the field. We can see that this parable speaks of the work of spreading the Gospel in this present New Dispensation.

The Holy Spirit's Work in the World

In the Old Dispensation God let out His vineyard to the nation of Israel, binding them to Himself by a Covenant that they might be a holy nation, a peculiar people, and a kingdom of priests — messengers of the Everlasting Covenant — to bring the Gospel tidings to the whole world (**Exodus 19:3-6** ³ And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; ⁴ Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and *how* I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine: ⁶ And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These *are* the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. **Deuteronomy 5:2-3** ² The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. ³ The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, *even* us, who *are* all of us here alive this day.). We have already seen how they miserably failed in their calling, withdrew from, and broke, the Covenant God made with them; and, finally, killed God's only Son who was specifically sent to them. In this New Dispensation. the Holy Spirit is personally doing a great deal of the "vineyard work," for it is He who is reproofing the world "of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."

But it must not be felt that the Holy Spirit is now working on the earth for the first time, for when God saw that the wickedness of man was very great, in the days of Noah, He said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man" (Genesis 6:3). From this we can see that the Holy Spirit had already been striving with men, reproofing them of their sin, and seeking to bring them to repentance. The Psalmist also realized the value of the Holy Spirit and the terrible despair that would follow if the Holy Presence was withdrawn from him, for he said: "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy

spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11). It was the Spirit of God who dealt with the Israelites, instructing them, and attempting to lead them into God's perfect way; and it was the Holy Spirit whom they vexed when they rebelled and turned toward their own ways (**Nehemiah 9:20** ²⁰ Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. **Isaiah 63:10-11** ¹⁰ But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them. ¹¹ Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him?).

In a certain sense, we can say that, particularly in this New Dispensation, the Holy Spirit is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. In the Old Dispensation the Law was given to the Jews as a schoolmaster to lead them to Christ, that they might lead the world of sinners to Him. And in a certain measure the Law given on Mount Sinai is still operative for this purpose, for by it many are convinced of their need of salvation and of Christ's redemption. But, actually, the Law has been completely fulfilled in Christ and in His incarnation; the sacrifices of its ceremonial worship being fulfilled in Christ's death, and its commandments and ordinances fulfilled in His life and teachings.

We who live in this Gospel Dispensation can be the privileged recipients of the Holy Spirit to a greater extent than any Old Testament saint. Because of this we can see that 'the Holy Spirit is not only personally going through the earth reprovng men of their sins and wickedness in the greater measure in which He is working today, but He is also dealing with the world of sinners through the Christians who have received His fullness into their hearts — who have literally been baptized with Him. The Holy Spirit and the Bride of Christ are the agencies God is using to extend His invitation to sinners today (**Revelation 22:17** ¹⁷ And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely).

The Christian's Work in the World

There is, therefore, a greater measure of the Holy Spirit in all God's operations toward mankind in this dispensation, a fact which is also demonstrated by the words of Jesus, who said the Holy Spirit would not come until He had ascended to Heaven. The Holy Ghost came down ten days after Jesus ascended, and baptized the disciples who were tarrying in the upper room in Jerusalem. And we can thank God that He is doing the same today.

We have seen that, in the former dispensation, the "Householder" — God the Father — let out the care of the vineyard to others; but in this New Dispensation we can see that He and His Son Jesus Christ, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, are personally pressing the work of winning souls for the Kingdom upon those who are aspiring to be members of the invisible Church — the Bride of Christ. There are many people who are standing idle today, and to these God is calling, bidding them to come and work in His vineyard as He tells them of the shortness of time and the scarcity of the workers. He is continuing this work even to the very end — through the eleventh hour of the day — that as many precious sheaves as possible may be spared the destruction that will come at their life-day's end.

God turned to the Gentiles when the Jews finally rejected Him, but He has never made a covenant with any particular nation of Gentiles — as a nation — like that which He made with Israel! He has never asked them, as a nation, to be a kingdom of priests, or a holy nation, or a peculiar people! But the individuals who have responded to the call for service in His vineyard have been thus

gloriously commissioned, because they came under the terms and provisions of the Everlasting Covenant made with Abraham, and these individuals are now fulfilling the work of spreading the Gospel.

When the Lord sent out the seventy disciples, two by two, He said: "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would, send forth labourers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2). When the householder found men standing idly in the market place, He said, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?"

We may say that we are now living in the eleventh hour of this age, when the harvest truly is great and the laborers few. There is no place for idleness in the Lord's great vineyard, then or now. The world is His vineyard and every one whom. He calls is summoned for the purpose that that person should go to work in the Master's vineyard and not draw back as did the Jews in the former dispensation.

A Christian is not called to sit with folded hands, "at ease in Zion." We must not grow "weary in well doing." "Many are called, but few are chosen," because they do not respond to the call and go to work for the Lord. Everyone born into the Kingdom of Heaven is a laborer for God in some capacity. There is no exception!

The Christian's Wages for His Work

There are wages to be given for faithful service. Jesus has told us elsewhere of degrees of responsibility that will be given in the Millennial Kingdom, according to the measure of responsibility we have faithfully assumed for Him during our present-day service in the Kingdom-vineyard. We are also told that there will be various rewards given us, for the Bible declares that they who turn many to righteousness shall shine "as the stars for ever and ever," and that rewards are to be given for "a cup of cold water" given "only in the name of a disciple," as well as the prophet's reward that will be given the person who receives a man of God as such, and the righteous man's reward that will be given for doing service to a righteous man (**Matthew 10:41-42** ⁴¹ He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. ⁴² And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold *water* only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward).

But God's ways are not the ways of man. In our parable we find that the householder paid all his laborers at the close of the day, "from the last unto the first." He did not begin with those who were hired first; but, instead, began with those who went into the vineyard at the eleventh hour. This is a very beautiful picture of the method God will use in rewarding His servants. The Bible tells us that there are first which shall be last and there are last which shall be first.

What a consolation it is to realize that those who were not given the glorious opportunities for service in God's vineyard until the eleventh hour will not be penalized for that fact, if they are faithful to God's call when it does come to them! Some of us have been privileged to serve God for many years, and we have enjoyed and profited from each moment of it. That, in itself, is a great reward for the service we have given, for it is a glorious privilege to do anything for God, even if it is what the world considers a menial task. But when the day comes in which God's eternal rewards are given out, we shall be able to see all those who meet God's requirements given the same eternal rewards, even though they have worked for God only a short while. It is true that this is not according to man's ways; but it is God's

way. And it is the right way!

Employers of temporal laborers measure a workman's wages according to the time he has spent for them and the quantity of work he has done. This is correct for the computation of wages due for temporal work, where the energetic and industrious should be compensated for the energy they have expended and for the time they have given to their work. God's laborers will be rewarded, not so much according to the quantity of the work they have done, nor according to the hours they may have given, but according to the quality of their service for God. Among the factors that determine the quality of our service are the following:

QUESTIONS

- 1 Relate the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard up to the end of their day of labor.
- 2 Who were paid first?
- 3 What attitude did those who were hired first manifest toward those who came at the last of the day?
- 4 Was their attitude justifiable? Had the householder wronged them?
- 5 In what way is God's evaluation of our service for Him different from man's methods?
- 6 Name some of the factors that will determine the quality of our work.
- 7 Can you name other factors which are not specifically included in the lesson notes?
- 8 Examine the service you are doing for God, prayerfully and carefully, to see if it will stand the test of God's examination.

Our faithfulness to God and to His work will no doubt be at the head of the list of these determining factors. Many begin, but only a few continue to the end. Some are happy to do something for God when it is fresh and new, when it makes a great appeal because of its interest to them. But the one who will receive the heavenly reward is the one who will keep at the work when the freshness is gone, when it assumes the aspect of drudgery to some of the others, or when the great majority have lost interest completely. A faithful worker will be present at the proper time and will be one of the last to leave, staying with the work until it is finished. He will not have to be told to do this, but will do so gladly and willingly.

The motive behind our service for God is another great factor that demonstrates the quality of our Kingdom-work. Are we doing what we do for God's glory alone? Or are we doing it for our own personal satisfaction? for our own personal glory? or to be noticed by men? or as a means of obtaining favors from men? In short, is it done only to gratify our own selves in any way whatsoever? Nothing but the purest of motives will produce the quality necessary for an eternal reward!

The manner of our service is also a great determining factor. Are we doing what we do out of compulsion? Or is it done out of pure love for God and for the souls of men? Is there any lack of willingness in our hearts, as well as in our outward attitude toward those with whom we labor, concerning any phase of the work? Are we impatient with the needs that we are called to meet? Are we like the full-day laborers of the parable, who contested the husbandman's decision to pay the eleventh-hour laborers the full day's wage? Is there anything in us that does not abound with the fruits of the Spirit?

God requires the best that is in us. Our second best is not good enough. He gave His all for us! We must give our all to Him! And when we shall have done all those things which are commanded us, we will say, if we are worthy of a reward: "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).