

## **Go Work in My Vineyard**

### **MATTHEW CHAPTERS 19 AND 20**

*"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake. Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me . . . And I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever"—Psalm 23*

GOD has been and is the Mover and Director of our lives. The theme of Psalm 23 impresses us with the conviction that there is absolutely nothing that we can do of ourselves; that it is only as the Creator gives us the strength, the power, the energy, and the help—day by day—to do His will. This theme is beautifully set before us in Matthew 19 & 20.

The early portion of Matthew 20 has to do with the Laborers in the Vineyard. There have been many suggestions put forth as the meaning of this parable. We do believe that there is a connection between it and the lesson of Matthew 19.

Matthew 20 begins with the conjunction "For." Our attention is thus drawn back to the previous remarks in ch. 19. But let us first review the details of this parable, before considering its meaning and the related incidents.

The householder goes forth early in the morning, and he hires laborers into his vineyard. He makes agreement to pay them each a penny a day. Subsequently the work requires other workers: at the 3rd, 6th, and 9th hours, and again at the 11th hour. In each case he hires laborers to go forth into his vineyard, with the stipulation—

"What is right ye shall receive."

"What is right." They went their way and labored in the vineyard, all of them. Those that were hired early in the morning, those that were hired at the 11th hour—all contributed toward the work which was going forward.

At the end of the day, the householder came and reckoned with those that had labored. He purposely started at the last, and he paid them a penny. That was right and fair in his estimation.

He proceeded to reckon with the other laborers, backwards in point of time, until he came to those that were hired early in the morning—

"They likewise received every man a penny" (v. 10).

These laborers, having observed the whole proceedings, "supposed they should have received more." But everyone received a penny. They murmured; they complained at what was now happening—

"These that were hired at the 11th hour have received equal with US, who have borne the burden and heat of the day!"

They murmured at the good man of the house, who responded from his position of fairness, authority, and goodness in hiring them at all—

"Friend, I do thee no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a penny?"

"Take that thine is and go thy way. I will give unto this last even as to thee. Is thine eye evil because I am good?"

"The last shall be first and the first last; for many are called, but few are chosen."

The lesson for us to learn is that nothing—absolutely nothing—that we can do will ever EARN everlasting life. And any who suppose that their works will save them, are on a wrong foundation.

Truly, works are absolutely necessary, as James emphatically impresses—.

"Faith without works is dead, being alone."

But when we stand in the presence of the Householder, and begin to quibble and question about our position and our rights, and what we have done, and what is due unto us, we shall be on the side of the goats, on the left hand. Our portion will be—

"Go thy way, take that thine is."

And in this regard also the goodman will do what is "right." He will banish all murmurers and complainers.

"And when they had received it, they murmured."

This is exactly what Israel did in the wilderness. They murmured, and Paul warns us—

"Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

"All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition"  
(1 Cor. 10:10-11).

Remember, Israel suffered very bitter and long-drawn-out trials. And yet God punished them severely for murmuring against Him. It is SO easy for us to murmur against God's wise and loving appointments for our discipline, even under far less provocation than Israel suffered.

**Its seriousness lies in the fact that indicates a mind and heart out of tune with God and His purposes.**

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MOVING back to Matt. 19, we find the connecting link. At v. 13 we are given the picture of little children, being brought to Jesus to be blessed—

'And he laid his hands on them.'

But his disciples rebuked those that brought them; to which Jesus responded—

"Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of God."

Unless we humble ourselves as little children, unless we submerge our desires and our seeking for the preeminence, **unless we recognize our complete, entire dependence upon God every moment** (even as a child is absolutely dependent upon its parents for care, for direction, for strength and help)—we have no part in the Kingdom of God.

As little children needing and seeking parental loving protection and aid, we must see our relationship to the Creator.

To illustrate the blessedness of such a class, Christ fulfilled the request of those who brought the children, and laid his hands on them (Matt. 18:3-4)—

"Except ye be converted; and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven.

"Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven."

This very beautiful and instructive incident appears to lay the foundation for the lesson that enlarges in Matt. 19 and 20, which leads to the presenting of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard.

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Next, a young man in the prime of his life, a young ruler, comes and kneels to Jesus—

"Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

He presumed upon what he had been doing. This is brought out in the following verses. But first Jesus clears the picture of his own relationship to goodness, though certainly his righteousness was without reproach.

"Good Master," had been the young man's salutation. But through the perception of the Master, such a salutation in the context implied a reliance upon the goodness as humanly attained.

Jesus' response may give us pause, but understood in relation to the inception and purpose and planning of salvation being of God, this is completely harmonious with the Master's reply, and was necessary to keep all in proper focus upon the Source of ALL goodness—

"We love, because God first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

So Jesus answered him—

"Why do you call me good? There is only One good, that is, God."

All has come from God. We must keep this clearly in our minds, as did the Master—that everything that we have, the strength by which we are able to accomplish anything, has come from God—

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;

"He leadeth me beside the waters of quietness;

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;

"Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over:

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

Herein we shall understand the teaching of the Master, and his reply to this young man. We shall be in a position to be part of the Kingdom of heaven.

We thus become the nucleus of that Kingdom of heaven that shall be revealed for all the world to see when the goodness of God upon the faithful is revealed in a multitude of those with childlike disposition.

"Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

This young man had not grasped the lesson that it was not a case of having; it was a case of giving.

When we realize that our lives are for service—God's service—then we shall have properly "entered into the Kingdom of heaven".

If we are seeking, and grasping, and desiring "to have," we have not come near unto the door, let alone have entered.

God must be the Willer and Doer in our lives. He alone has made it possible for us to have everlasting life, by having introduced us to what is written in the Bible, which is His will and purpose.

If we did not know these things, we would be like "the beasts that perish." We would be in outer darkness. It is God then, Who has done it and made all things possible, through him whom we are about to memorialize in the emblems on the table.

It is God Who has hired us for His service in the vineyard. He knows how much work is required of each of us. How thankful we should be at all times, and rejoice at others being given the opportunity of service and blessing, regardless at what hour of the day!

"If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."

Now is the time to enter in, through the door, into the vineyard, in order to enter into life forever. If we do not enter NOW, we are outside, without the court, we are beyond the scope of salvation. We must dwell in the House of the Lord now if we would dwell in His courts forever.

"Keep the commandments."

The young man was quite sure that he had "kept the commandments." He would reason if Jesus knew the hearts of men he would know how he had fulfilled the commands. Therefore in surprise he questioned, "Which?" Jesus then recited them, step by step, and it is interesting where he stopped—

"Thou shalt do no murder.  
"Thou shalt not commit adultery.  
"Thou shalt not steal.  
"Thou shalt not bear false witness.  
"Honor thy father and thy mother; and  
"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Christ had said that the whole of the Law and the prophets hinged on two points—

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself."  
James says (1:27)—  
"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this,  
"To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction; and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

The young man again presumed on what he had done, on his limited understanding of what was required. He was not only a young man, not only a ruler, but he was very rich, "he had great possessions."

"ALL these things have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?"

He was still a young man. He still had great potential. What he lacked was that he was not full grown in stature in the eyes of God and Christ, who indeed knew this young man's heart, knew what he had done, where his heart lay, and how far he was prepared to go.

He had done well, if we accept his statement, "All these have I kept from my youth up"; but he was not perfect or complete, and THIS is what he lacked—

"If thou wilt be perfect (complete or mature), go and sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven."

And the Master did not stop there, but added a searching statement—

*"And come, and follow me."*

It was not a case of having, it was a case of giving—

"Go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor."

It would be an exchange. He would have a treasure in heaven, in place of riches on earth.

Christ is making the application to each of us; true love of God and neighbor—

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.

"For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God Whom he hath not seen?

"And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:20-21).

Christ emptied himself completely of everything he had, even of his life for us, that we might be rich in heavenly things—

"Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

"AND FOLLOW ME."

Are we then ready to follow Christ?

Two young men appear in the record in Matt. 20, who claimed that they were ready to follow Jesus (v. 22), and they did indeed follow him. But their agreement led them through terrible trial.

One lost his life by the sword of the executioner.

The other carried forth the work by God's grace through a long life of burden and heat of the day, and has left a wonderful record for us to consider and emulate.

Whether we are called in the prime of our life and taken away in the prime of life, whether we labor through the morning hours, the heat of the sun, the late hours of the day—we are laboring together with God, with the strength that He gives, and we are simply returning unto Him what He has given.

We have no right to demand more, or question what is given; it is all of His grace. He will do "that which is right."

If we receive eternal life it will far exceed and excel anything that any of us have ever done or are able to do.

Sadly the young ruler was not able to receive the exhortation. He had great possessions, great acquirements; and he went away very distressed. He could not face the fact that he must give up everything and follow the Master. CAN WE?

"How hardly (difficultly) shall they that have riches enter the Kingdom of God!"

Then Christ uses the illustration of the camel going through the eye of a needle, to show the difficulty of a rich man entering into the Kingdom of God, of "entering now."

The riches will mean nothing at the judgment seat of Christ. They will all be as dross, and the possessor will wish them far thence if they have proven a hindrance in the day of inspection.

It is, then, the present that we must be concerned about. We cannot purchase our way into the Kingdom. We must follow the Master and empty ourselves now.

The poor widow who cast into the treasury two mites, gave far more than all the rich who cast in of their abundance. In her case it hurt. That was all she had. She followed the Master and emptied herself. But the rich never felt their giving. Of the disciples we are told they—

"Left ALL & followed Jesus."

On this circumstance they now raise a question, which fits the consideration. They also had to learn the lesson of works. They were amazed at what they had heard and witnessed in relation to the young man, and it raised a cloud in their minds in relation to themselves—

"They were exceedingly amazed."

The Greek word for this expression is **ekplesso**, and conveys the idea of being smitten, or struck out—

"Who then can be saved?"

Christ replied—

"All things are possible with God."

God knows each one. There have been those who have been poor and who have rendered faithful and diligent service. There have been those who were rich who have measured up to what was required, using their riches for God. But in each category there have been those who have failed.

"All things are possible with God" with those who will work with God, whether rich or poor in this world's goods.

But it is only through God's work with us and IN us. It is not for us to measure ourselves in relation to what we have done, nor to feel that we have apprehended. Paul said—

"I count not myself to have apprehended, but I press on toward the mark of the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus."

The lesson still had to be pressed home to the disciples. Peter had said—

"Behold we have left all and have followed thee. What shall we have?"

Jesus answered—

"You that have followed me, in the regeneration, shall sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel, when I come into my glory."

**You will also have a wonderful blessing at the present time.**

Though we may lose father or mother or sister or brother, by accepting the Truth we gain far more. We gain that great family, the glorious innumerable company of witnesses who have gone to their rest before, who have served and offered their lives, and who sold all that they had for the Pearl of Great Price. But they also had tribulation—

"There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, for my sake, and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an 100-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters—with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

"But many that are first shall be last; and the last first" (Mark 10:29-31).

The parable in Matt. 20 ends on exactly the same note—

"So the last shall be first and the first shall be last:

"For many are called, but few chosen."

Many laborers have been in the vineyard over the long 6000 years of the operation of the purpose of God in the earth. A selection from amongst these is being made to stand on the right hand.

The nature of the tribulation which would be experienced was to be patterned in the coming events in the life of Christ. It was after the following statement that Christ queried the young men if they could partake of his baptism and drink of his cup—

"We go up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of men, and he shall be crucified, but he shall rise again the 3rd day."

We have the picture of the two young men, James and John, of whom we have taken notice, now requesting—

"Lord, that we may sit the one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left in thy Kingdom."

They already had the assurance that they would sit on a throne judging a tribe of Israel. But Christ could not assign the position of close association on right or left hand to anyone at that time.

Again the lesson of first and last had to be learned. Again it was to be a giving of their lives and not a having. The decision of having, and their relation thereto, must wait upon the Father's will.

Having is only secondary to doing the will of God. The glory is God's; man's is only a reflection thereof, consequent upon the understanding and wisdom of Him Who has made all possible.

*"They thought that they should have received more, and they received every man a penny."*

Jesus' answer was—

"You shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with:

"But to sit on my right hand, and on my left is not mine to give.

"But it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father."

Can we measure up to this understanding of the laborers? Do we seek the lust of possession, or the pure joy of loving service? Can we in patience wait for that portion which has been prepared for us if we are faithful?

We will manifest that we can, if we indeed drink of the Master's cup of affliction, and become dead to the world by baptism into his crucifixion of the flesh and resurrection to his new way of life.

The other disciples chide these two partners for asking for the preeminence. Christ's answer may imply that they inwardly were desirous of such positions themselves. Upon several occasions this matter of rank and position in relation to Christ had arisen amongst the disciples. They still must learn that greatness in God's eyes was predicated on humility and service—

"And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them,

"What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?

"But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves who should be the greatest" (Mark 9:33-34).

This lack of perception continued with the disciples right up to the Passover night in which the memorial feast was instituted, and when he was betrayed.

At the very time when the Master was trying to impress their minds with the love of God, the meaning of the Passover as the great self-sacrifice of love, its fullness in him, and the agony he must endure for them and mankind, we read—

"And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest" (Luke 22:24).

Sufficient was the fact and the assurance that—

"I appoint unto you a Kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me, that ye may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom."

His reply is to all, the disciples and ourselves—

"Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them."

That is the world. That is their philosophy. Grasping; climbing up one over the other. But with you it shall not be so—

"Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant,

"Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

"Why callest thou me good? There is One good, that is, God."

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THE chapter concludes with two blind men: the Jew and the Gentile, taken out of the Jewish and Gentile stock in type. We (as Gentiles) are the one blind man. We have had our eyes opened, at our request—

"What will ye that I do unto you?"

"Lord, that our eyes may be opened!"

Our eyes have been opened that we might enter into life. It is before us: the life patterned in the example of Christ.

Only a few more days of labor in the vineyard remain. We are in the 11th hour class. We have the assurance that the householder will soon return and reckon with his servants.

We have the understanding that the reckoning will be done in the presence of all the laborers, and that what is right they shall all receive, and that there will be no murmuring or complaining amongst those on his right hand—

*"These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect"*  
(Heb. 11:40). —E.F.H. January 1971 Berean

