

Sermon Title: The First Will Be Last  
Scripture Text: Mark 10:28-31

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 5-26-19

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This morning, we get to come to some very well-known words of Jesus, very often quoted—not usually quoted in a full sentence, and *never* quoted with reference to the context from which they come; and we're going to see it in just a moment.

Last time we visited the Gospel of Mark, we saw Jesus's encounter with the man that we have, traditionally, always referred to as "The Rich Young Ruler." The Jews of Jesus's day assumed that such a person would have the inside track to heaven; why, he was young and yet he was very accomplished—he'd already risen to be a ruler in the synagogue. He was young but he was very wealthy, and so they figured—that's the kind of person who has the best chance.

Well, Jesus surprised His men by how He responded to the young man; and remember, He dealt with him in a way that we wouldn't probably have shared the gospel with somebody. He said, "You better go sell all you have and give to the poor, and come follow Me!"—not because *that's* the gospel, but because Jesus knew that man's heart, and He knew that, that man owned many possessions, and the possessions owned him; and so He said, "That's your problem, and you have to deal with that."

But we saw this in Mark Chapter 10, starting at Verse 25. Jesus said to His men: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted). He was saying something there like what He said to Nicodemus. He told Nicodemus, "You've got to be born again," and Nicodemus says, "That's impossible! What do You mean—crawl back in my mother's womb and be born again? Can't be done!" (see Jn. 3:1-11) That was the point! It's like getting a camel through the eye of a needle—you *can't do that!*

So, that provoked one of the most important questions in the entire Bible, asked by His disciples: Mark 10:26—"They were even more astonished and said to Him, 'Then who can be saved?' " And then comes the crucial answer in Verse 27—"Looking at them, Jesus said, 'With people it is impossible'—what's the "it"? Being saved. Salvation is impossible! "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

Now, we had to stop there last time, lest we would have stayed through the night. But the truth is, we know more about what happened in that encounter, so I want us to dive back in and see what the disciples said next. This morning, you're going to see that the kingdom of God operates on principles quite different from what we are accustomed to in our fallen world, where we might be tempted to think that the really zealous, rich young guy—well, he's got the inside track. But to follow Christ is to live in light of *eternal* realities and *eternal* rewards, and not be in pursuit of earthly things.

So here's an outline for our text this morning, which is going to go far afield from our text: Number 1—"We left everything." That's our text in Mark, Mark 10:28 through 31. And then, Number 2—"The kingdom of heaven is like...", and we're going to take a side-trip from Mark to the Gospel of Matthew to see something that Matthew recorded on this day, in this incident, that only Matthew recorded. And then, Number 3—we'll say, "So you should...", and we will make some applications from what we learn. I think you'll see, very easily, how it fits together.

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It starts with: "We left everything." That comes from Mark 10:28, picking right up where we left off last time: "Peter began to say to Him, 'Behold, we have left everything and followed You.' " Remember, Jesus said to the guy, "Well, you better sell everything, and come and follow Me," and Peter said, "*We did! We did!*" And he also asked a question, which Matthew included in Matthew 19:27, his parallel account; he says this: "Then Peter said to Him, 'Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?' " You've got quite a contrast set up here, don't you? The rich young ruler was completely tied to his *stuff*; his face fell, he went away sad because he owned much, and it owned him, and he wasn't about to let go. Well, the other side of the contrast is: the Apostles—they had left behind their fishing nets, they'd left behind their tax collecting tables, they had left behind everything; they'd sacrificed everything earthly to be with Jesus and follow Him.

So, if the rich young ruler had missed the salvation-boat entirely, then what was to be the destination of those who had willingly climbed aboard? And Jesus first answers the Twelve; it's Mark 10:29 and 30—"Jesus said, 'Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.' " So, if anyone is tempted to think like the rich young ruler, and come to the conclusion: "I'm not willing to follow the Lord because it's going to cost me something"—well, you need to think again; that's the point here.

The earthly costs *may be great*. Jesus taught that following Him might cost you not only your possessions—it might cost you relationships with father, mother, brother, sister, extended family, friends. There may be people who reject your commitment to Christ, and therefore they reject you. But understand: whatever it costs you, even if that *is* "persecutions"—and Jesus *promised* there would be persecutions for those who followed Him (Matt. 5:11-12; 10:34-36; Jn. 16:33; cf. 2 Tim. 3:12)—understand: you can *never* out-give God.

And by the way, you don't need to be an Apostle to get in on the rewards that God will give generously to those who are faithful to Him. How *will* God reward you for serving Him faithfully, even if it comes to very deep personal sacrifice—time, money, earthly relationships, earthly possessions? Well, He says you'll "receive a hundred times as much...*and* inherit eternal life." While your family may turn on you—Jesus said that was a very real possibility (Matt. 10:21)—but, you know what? You get brothers and sisters in Christ! We really are spiritual family together!

Now, when you talk about spiritual things, how much is "a hundred times as much"? Well, I don't have that algorithm on my calculator, to know how to put "brother, sister, aunt and uncle, and a neighbor" and multiply "times a hundred" to know what that means spiritually; but I do have an idea that God is pretty good and multiplication! Now, how good is "eternal life"? He promises He'll bless you *even* the midst of your lost, *even* in the midst of your sacrifice, *even* in the midst of your persecutions—*and* "in the age to come," you get "eternal life"! Well, "eternal life" is to "know" God (Jn. 17:3); it's to have the life of God Himself. So, "eternal life" is *as good as God is good!* He's saying, "Guys—it's worth it! Will you trust Me?" (cf. Rom. 8:18)

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Now, there's a final zinger in this text. From an earthly perspective, it *looks like* a zealous, religious, rich young spiritual leader has the best chance at the best rewards in heaven. But from an earthly perspective, we don't always see everything right, do we? From an earthly perspective, it *seems like* people in this world who struggle in many ways—well, they kind of get left behind.

But remember what He's just said: Salvation is *impossible* by your own works. Salvation is impossible, except by the grace of God, and so *is* the matter of figuring out how everything is going to pan out in heaven! We don't see it. Earlier that day, probably everybody there had figured—when this rich young ruler ran up to Jesus and started asking these questions—they figured he was a leading candidate for heavenly rewards; and *now*, they know they're wrong.

So, to drive the truth deeper into their hearts, Jesus adds one more sentence; usually quoted partially, and never quoted in context: Mark 10:31—"But many who are first will be last, and the last, first." *What you think* will be the heavenly outcome in any situation, in anybody's life, may be *very far* from the way it will actually turn out. You see, your perceptions—our perceptions, *my* perceptions—are deeply tainted by our earthbound perspectives; we just *can't* see everything in the spiritual realm. It's also bound by our own sinfulness. We have a sense of right and wrong, and fair and unfair—and that's not necessarily how God counts things.

So, what did Jesus mean: "But many who are first will be last, and the last, first"? Well, I'm glad you asked, because Jesus explained—He gave a great explanation. Mark didn't record it, but Matthew did, and so I want you to turn and look at it. I've never been able to study any of the Gospels without studying all four of the Gospels, and making sure we see how things fit. And this is one where the whole situation screams out, "Go to Matthew! Go to Matthew! Go to Matthew!"—we're going to go to Matthew, because I got to decide.

"We left everything," says Peter. "What's in it for us?" So, I want you to come to Matthew Chapter 20, Verses 1 through 16. The kingdom of heaven is like this. Now, this is the start of a new chapter in Matthew, and it's one of those really, really *bad* chapter divisions—it really ought not to be a chapter division. If I were breaking up the Gospel of Matthew into chapters, there'd be about 8, not 28. Notice how this chapter begins: it begins with the word "for." This is the *explanation* of what Jesus meant when He said, "The first shall be last and the last, first"—that's the end of Matthew 19, just as it's Mark 10:31. What Jesus meant is that, when it comes to the judgment of God, when it comes to salvation, when it comes to eternal rewards that He gives to His servants, there will be *many* surprises to us.

Many that we may think are in line for the top positions, the greatest rewards in the future—they may be at the back of the pack, like the rich young ruler. I still like to fancy that he got saved; I'd love to think he was one of those 3,000 on the day of Pentecost, but we don't know. Conversely there are many who appear to be far back in the race, not to have those positions of privilege and opportunity, like—oh, say like, fishermen from Galilee, or tax collectors like Matthew, or disciples who are quietly faithful in Boise, Idaho two millennia later. A lot of them may turn out to come out on top when the race is over.

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So immediately, Jesus speaks this parable which elaborates on Mark 10:31, which is also the end of Matthew 19. It's a parable for those of us who are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. It is to let us know that, under the rule of our King, things are not necessarily as they now appear to us. The parable illustrates the nature of the King; it tells us how His character is manifest in His judgments. He is just—He does things right. He is sovereign in judgment, because He *is* the Judge. He is generous and He's merciful, because He is just as loving as He is righteous. He knows *motives* as well as performances (1 Cor. 4:5; cf. Prov. 16:2). He understands hearts as well as He understands résumés (Prov. 15:11; cf. 1 Sam. 16:7b). He knew what was in the rich young ruler's heart—that's why He answered so differently from what people expected.

So, Matthew Chapter 20, Verse 1: "For"—in other words, "To explain to you what I meant by 'Many who are first shall be last, and the last, first' "—"For the kingdom of heaven is like..." Now, here's the beginning of a "parable," a story made up to tell a spiritual principle. "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard." "The kingdom of heaven is like" tells you that this is an explanation of how the kingdom of heaven is appropriately described by that saying, "Many who are first will be last, and the last, first." The "landowner" in this parable is a wealthy man; he owns a large vineyard. Now, the rich young ruler owned a lot of stuff, too, but this is a good guy who owns a big vineyard. And this is a great illustration because vineyards were common in Israel—people knew exactly what Jesus was talking about.

Now, I've never been a grower of grapes; I've never successfully grown *anything* except weeds and a little bit of grass to go along with them. But it's crucial to get the grapes off the vine at just the right time. So just like in our world, there are migrant farm workers who move around from place to place, from harvester harvest; they get hired by the day—especially at harvest-time. Many could find a lot of extra work during the grape harvest. The "vineyard" here represents the kingdom of heaven in this era. The kingdom of heaven—which, by the way, is the same as the kingdom of God (see Matt. 19:23-24)—in this era is the Church.

Now, we look for the Millennial kingdom, when Jesus comes and reigns on Earth (see Matt. 19:28; Rev. 20:4-6), but this is the form of the kingdom that was a "mystery"—it was never revealed before, until Jesus taught about it (see Matt. 16:18; cf. Col. 1:26). Matthew has done a lot in developing this; Matthew Chapter 13 is a whole series of kingdom parables about how the nature of the kingdom in this age will be different than anything they had known—revealing the "mysteries" never before made known (see Eph. 3:3-6). We saw some of those in Mark Chapter 4.

So here's the picture: This guy owns a great big vineyard, and he goes out to hire workers. He "went out early in the morning"—that would be around 6:00 AM. The workaday, during the harvest, was sunup to sundown. Laborers who were looking for work would gather in the marketplace of the nearest village or town, and men like the landowner could come and find them, negotiate a price for a day's work, and send them off to work in the vineyard. Verse 2—"When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard." A "denarius" is an amount of money; it was a standard pay for a day for a Roman soldier, so there were coins that were "denarii."

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Day laborers, for something like harvesting grapes, would have considered that a good amount of pay for one day. A whole denarius—that's what a skilled soldier would get paid. A whole denarius is more than a farm worker probably would have expected, but this landowner is a fair man, a good man, a kind man, a generous man. He expects a good day's work, but he's willing to pay a generous wage to get it; so he's going to treat his workers well. And would you notice, it says: "When he had *agreed* with the laborers...he sent them into his vineyard"—that's going to become very significant.

Now, Jesus said all of this in response to Peter's question: "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" (Matt. 19:27). This parable addresses, at least in part, the issue of asking, "What's in it for us? What's in it for me?" That's not maybe the best question to be asking. I understand it. But you're going to see that there's a different perspective, a better perspective.

By the way, this parable is a complete refutation of the concepts that are driven by the perversions of the gospel going on these days; like, for example, one of the best-selling Christian books of the last couple of years: "Your Best Life Now"—that's not possible, unless you're going to hell (see 1 Cor. 15:19). Now you need to be concentrating on working faithfully for "the landowner," if you will, in the kingdom of heaven.

Well, let's look what this tells us here. Matthew 20, Verses 3 and 4—"And he went out about the third hour"—"he" the "landowner"—"and saw others standing idle in the market place; and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And so they went." Now, the "first hour"—sunup—was 6:00 AM; the "third hour" of the workday is about 9:00 AM. There was, obviously, still more work to be done than could be accomplished by this landowner's regular employees and his family and those that were hired first thing in the morning; so he went back to the market, found more laborers, and sent them to work. This time, there's no bargaining; there's no contract with them. The word of the landowner was sufficient—he must have had a good enough reputation; nobody was worried about what would be happening. And so they were satisfied with, "Whatever is right, I will give you."

Verse 5—"Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing." He came back to the marketplace again at noon, again at three in the afternoon, and hired everybody that was there. Then, an even greater surprise: Verses 6 and 7—"And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day long?' They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' " Maybe these guys had come late. Maybe they had been in a different place, and nobody had come there to hire them. Maybe they'd even done a smaller job earlier, and they were there now. But he says, "I've been hiring people all day! Where have you guys been? Okay—go into the vineyard!"

Now, this landowner pictures one who is not only serious about getting the work done, but he also seems motivated to be generous and compassionate to those who need work. He's obviously an illustration of God—"The kingdom of heaven is like...", and here's an illustration of what the King is like.

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Well, now comes the end of the day. Some hired at 6:00 AM, some at 9:00 AM, some at noon, some at 3:00 PM, some at about 5:00, and now the sun is going down. Day laborers were paid daily—that, by the way, is a requirement from Deuteronomy 24:14 and 15. And this landowner—he was a good man, he was a just man—and so, he takes care of his obligations properly (see Lev. 19:13).

Now remember: this parable is to elaborate on what Jesus meant by: "But many who are first will be last, and the last, first," so hence, look at Verse 8 of Matthew 20—"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.'" So the owner gives instructions to his bossman to pay everybody in the reverse order of hiring. So this is going to be an illustration of "the last being first," and it also becomes a challenge to the motives of the ones who were hired first.

Look what happens—and I have a feeling you know about this: Verses 9 and 10—"When those hired about the eleventh hour came"—they'd worked *one hour*—"each one received a denarius. When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius." Now, that pictures something earlier; that's probably a picture of salvation.

I heard somebody say the main purpose of this parable is: "Well, if the last are first, and the first are last, everybody's in a tie! Everybody gets into heaven the same way." Well, I think that's true—there's only one salvation; you have two choices about it: take it or leave it, get it or don't, heaven or hell, lake of fire or new heavens and new earth. There's only one kind of salvation, and everybody gets the same; and it's impossible to get that salvation, except by the grace of God (see Eph. 2:8-9). But two surprises came to those who were hired first, and I think there's *more* here than just saying, "There's only one basis of salvation."

The first surprise was: they got paid last, even though they went to work first. And the second surprise: they did not receive more than those who were hired later. In other words, they got *exactly* what was promised to them; they got *exactly* what they agreed to. So, Verse 11: What do you do when you get exactly what you agreed to? "When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner." "Grumbled" there—that's one of my all-time favorite New Testament words. The verb for "grumbling" is *gonguzō*; I just love that word, just sounds so good. It's "onomatopoetic"—it describes muttering under your breath. Now I like, even better, the noun form. *Gonguzō* is the verb; I love the noun form: the one who grumbles is called a *gongusmos*. I love to think of Rikki-Tikki-Tavi, the mongoose; you know, running around and causing trouble and doing all kinds of things.

"They grumbled." Now, the tense of the verb here tells us that the grumbling was not just blurted out all at once. The problem started the moment the first one who worked all day received his denarius. Now, look how they present their case to the landowner: Verse 12—"They grumbled at the landowner, saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.'" (cf. Ezek. 18:29)

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Now, let me take a small side-trip here. This is recorded only by Matthew; not Mark, not Luke, and none of the incident is recorded by John. There's a very significant dispensational aspect to this, because Matthew is the Gospel for the Jews, and this is also picturing—not only, there's only one kind of salvation; not only do we not necessarily understand how God's judgments will be—but, there could be those who would say, "Hey, we've endured all of this so long, all of a sudden, these Johnny-come-lately Gentiles come swooping in, and they get the same thing we do! That's not fair!" There's a teaching here about that, as well, and that's not what *we're* looking at. But just notice: it's there, and well worth your following through.

Now, the case they make to justify their grumbling was not a matter of justice. Nothing unjust was done to the men who worked all day long. As a matter of fact, they had been hired by a landowner who probably paid more than most others would have paid them for that day's work! What was wrong is that they had become dissatisfied with their pay—which they were very happy about before they went to work—they had become envious, and they had become enamored with their own accomplishments, and how special they were.

They exposed their sin in three ways: They had a mercenary spirit from the beginning; they were selfish. Their attitude was—well, you might have phrased it this way: "What's in it for me?" They had no basis to feel that they were wronged. Secondly, they failed to acknowledge the right of the landowner to be generous! They were asking questions that were not theirs to ask! It wasn't their business what somebody else got paid. And thirdly, they were envious; they wanted something that didn't belong to them.

Those three sins—their mercenary spirit, their asking the wrong questions, and their envy—they were met head-on by three questions that the landowner asked. Read on to Verses 13 and 14—"But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you.' " To that selfish, mercenary spirit, the landowner says, "I didn't do anything wrong. Didn't we have an agreement? Didn't *you* agree that a denarius was a good amount for the day's work?"

Do you understand: it's *none of your business* how God deals with someone else? What *is your business* is: making sure *you* are faithful to what God has called *you* to do (cf. Jn. 21:22)! It's not your job to fix anybody else! It's not your job to figure out what somebody else should do, should have done, could have done, might have done, or what they deserve (see Rom. 14:4). It's *your* job to be faithful: "God, what have You asked *me* to do? Have I been faithful?" *That's* what you can ask.

To their complaining about not getting more, the question of the landowner is at the beginning of Verse 15—"Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?" Now, you can be wronged in the world—I get that; it'll happen. But you have a legitimate complaint *only* if someone defrauds you, if someone deals with you contrary to a contract, if someone deals with you unrighteously in some way, if someone harms you physically or financially or whenever. But, that's the *only* time you have a complaint.

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Listen to what God says to you when you start complaining about how He deals with anybody else. There's a great parallel to this over in Romans Chapter 9; this one has to do with the issue of the Jews and the Gentiles, and, Has God broken His promises to Israel?—that's the context there. Let me read to you Romans 9:14 through 16, and then down to Romans 9:20. Paul writes this: "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." And go down to Romans 9:20—"On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?" Who are we to judge God? I hope many of you have committed to memory the "Two Spiritual Laws." A lot of people double up on it; they say there are four. I prefer two. Number 1 Spiritual Law: God is God. Number 2: You're not! That's another way to summarize this parable.

Now, to their envious spirit, the question comes in the last half of Matthew 20, Verse 15. He says: "Or is your eye envious because I am generous?" Now, in this case, I like the most literal translation; it's very picturesque. I think the King James even translated this way: "Is your eye evil because I am good?" (NKJV). The "evil eye" was a Jewish idiom for jealousy—looking with an evil eye: "I see that, and I want—I want it *for me!* I deserve it more than you." To be envious because God blesses someone else is *blatant* sin, because *God is good*, and He's good *all the time*, and He's good *to you* all the time (see Ps. 119:68)! And if you're His child, He will cause every single thing "to work together for good" because you "love" Him, you are "called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28; cf. Deut. 8:16b).

Now, think about it: You might be going through a hard time. Maybe somebody in your family is breaking your heart with how they're dealing with spiritual things, how they're responding to you. Hey, listen: Does God need to give you every blessing that He ever chooses to give someone else, in order for you to trust Him? Don't you think He's at work in your life, even in the rough time? (see 2 Cor. 4:17) Do you really think God is evil if *you* don't get your every wish, or if somebody else gets something better than what you get?

So, after this story—after this parable—Jesus goes back and says *why* He spoke the parable: it's to illustrate what He meant in Matthew 19, Verse 30—which is the same as Mark Chapter 10, Verse 31. Matthew 20:16—"Thus"—in this way, as I just explained to you, as I just illustrated—"Thus, the last shall be first, and the first, last." Or, as Mark puts it: "Many who are first will be last, and the last, first."

So, Peter asks: "What's in it for me? What's in it for us? We left everything!" We saw what the kingdom of heaven is like from the parable. And now, thirdly—I call it: "So you should..." Let's make some applications. Now, the main principle revealed here in this parable is that, many who seem to us to be headed for prominent positions in the kingdom of heaven, are not actually going to come out on top. Some might even *not get in*, like the rich young ruler. And conversely, there are many who don't look like front-runners to us, and they're going to be rewarded greatly.

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You see, blessings in the kingdom of heaven are the result of the sovereign acts of an all-knowing God. He's not only all-knowing, He's always just; He is always fair—maybe not by *our* definition, but ours is sin-cursed. God always knows more than you and I know, and He knows the motives—not only the actual actions. He knows "the intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12) like He knew the heart of the rich young ruler (see Matt. 9:4; Jn. 2:25). Your King is righteous, He is sovereign, He is all-powerful, He is all-knowing, and His rewards might be quite different from what you and I might anticipate, based upon our sin-saturated, finite, earthly vantage-point (see 1 Sam. 16:7b).

So let's make a few applications, if you will. First one—this is pretty obvious: God's judgments are not always what you think (see Is. 55:8-9). Mark 10:31—"But *many* who are first will be last, and the last, first." "Many" is the word that helps me not just say, "The point of this is, everybody ties, and we all get into heaven on the same basis." Yes, we do, but there's more than that. In many cases, we would judge wrongly. And if you think of this in the context of Jesus's life and what was going on in the world of Judaism, remember: many Jews are going to be surprised at what happens with the Gentiles. And when Jesus returns, and there are going to be people from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" in the kingdom (Rev. 5:9, cf. Lk. 13:29), a lot of Jews are going to be surprised by that. They wouldn't have thought so (see Acts 11:1-18).

Here's another application: Be careful not to judge, what is truly successful. Our society is *really bad* at deciding what's good, what successful, what ought to be rewarded (Lk. 16:15b). We love worshipping superstars and personalities in every arena of endeavor. We have to have the greatest of this and the hall of fame of that and the All-Conference, All-League, All-World, All-Whatever. And a bunch of sappy, doctrinally-starved, feelings-driven Christians are all over television and radio and the so-called "Christian entertainment" industry—falling right into step with our world (see Eph. 4:14). "Christian entertainment industry"—is that not an oxymoron? Christianity is not about *entertainment!* What is "Christian entertainment"? Don't we "delight...in the *Lord*"? (Ps. 37:4) Do we need to be *entertained* into the kingdom? Do we need to be *wooned* by the right kind of *music* to get in the right *mood* to feel the right way to come to the Savior? I don't think so. Judge what is spiritually successful by what the Scriptures say is spiritually successful (e.g. 1 Cor. 2:4-5).

Now, I stand up here and, week after week, my voice falls on a lot of ears. You might think, "Well, that's what it means to be spiritual." Trust me: it's not! It might give you a heart attack to do what I do in front of church; I know how much most people *love* public speaking. It's just that, I survived the heart attack the first time. Well, it wasn't a true heart attack. But, you know what? You may carry on a ministry that I never see, and you may do it more faithfully than I ever could, if I was in your shoes. Okay, maybe you won't spend the next 20 years in a jungle, winning cannibals to Christ like some missionaries do. But *they're* never going to be the ones that are going lead *your* kids to Christ. They're never going to be the ones that will reach *your* neighbors. They're not the ones who will teach *your* class. They're not the ones who can do the service that God has designed for you. Remember Ephesians 2:10—those good works which He "prepared beforehand" for you to "walk in them"? They're not the ones who are going to be able to give sacrificially from the abundance that God has given people in our

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society. Just be faithful to whatever tasks you have, and let God be the judge of the rewards (see Rev. 22:12; cf. 1 Cor. 4:5). Listen: What matters is what you do with what you have (see 2 Cor. 8:12), and how you do it. If your desire is to glorify God, you can trust Him (see Heb. 6:10). The rewards will be great.

Another application—and I think this is also pretty obvious: Many people are far more faithful than you can see. Now, how does our world go about making decisions? We love to compare, and we love to compete. Those thoughts are *antithetical* to the constitution of the kingdom of heaven. Be thankful for the opportunity to know God and to serve Him. Those who entered the vineyard at the eleventh hour—they were just as precious to the landowner as those who worked all day (see Lk. 23:40-43). Let God deal with the other person's heart. Ask yourself—instead of, "What's in it for me?"—ask if your motive is, making sure that people notice what you do (see Matt. 6:5), or is your motive just to be faithful to God so that He gets the glory? (see Ps. 115:1)

Another one: Be faithful to God without demanding your pay (see Is. 58:3a; Mal. 3:14). "What's in it for me, Lord?" Hey... "Lord, how can I serve You?" That's what we need to ask. I like what Paul wrote to the everyday man and woman, about how to do your job every day. He wrote one version of it to the Ephesians; he wrote another version of it to the Colossians. And in that culture, he was addressing people who worked, essentially, as domestic slaves. Surely, it applies to you, and to what you do every day. Want to know God's will for your life? Well, when you wake up tomorrow morning, you have a job to do: Colossians 3:23 and 24— "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve." And look, if you're one of those who worked all day long, and you saw some guy who worked for only *an hour* get paid *the same as you did*—hey, realize: it's that same landowner that's going to reward *you* in eternity! Now, you read something like Colossians 3:23-24, about how to do your job, and you say, "Oh, wow, am I glad I'm retired!" No, no, no! When you get up tomorrow, you have something to do. "Whatever you do," do it "heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men."

This parable matches everything else said of God in the Bible: He is fair. He is trustworthy. He is generous. Don't go trying to make deals with God: "Well, I'll serve You, *if* You give me what I want!" No, trust Him. One of the perversions of the gospel these days is: "Well, if you do your part, God will do His part, and that's how you get healthy and wealthy!"—and that's *absolutely upside down!* That's saying, your result depends upon your works! No, they don't—you have no good works to offer to God! (see Jn. 3:21; cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:13) Everything you do is like "filthy rags" (Is. 64:6, NKJV)—the *best* of what you do! It's "*He did His part* to make you his child. Will you accept the free gift?"

Finally, last application: Keep your mind on your own business. Don't worry about what God does in other people's lives. Does it seem like somebody else is getting a better deal from God? "Well, I've been faithful, and...ahhhh, it's just like I've lost everything! I just can't get ahead, there are all these debts, there's all these *burdens*, there's all these things! And that guy down the street—he's just got everything, and I see him go by with his \$60,000 pickup,

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pulling his \$90,000 boat to head off to the lake, and I've got to do all this stuff and take care of Grandma, and...Oh, Lord!" Hey...are you being faithful? Keep your mind on your own business. Keep your eyes on your own Lord. Don't worry about that. You know, God has not yet made a mistake—and He never will. Those men who were hired early—if only those other ones hadn't come into the field, they would have probably come *bouncing* in the door at the end of that day and said, "Hey, Honey—I found a guy who paid me a *whole denarius* today! Last week, I had to work for half a denarius for that yahoo down the street. This guy paid me a whole denarius!" If only they had minded their own business, they would not become *gongusmoses*!

Do you get the point? Don't ask questions that aren't yours to ask! Don't *try* to manage God's affairs for Him—He's got it under control. Don't *try* to figure out what's right for somebody else, or how it compares to what you have. The fact is: God has been *way more than fair* with us! We all deserve *nothing*—except, of course, eternal judgment! (see Rom. 3:23; 6:23; cf. Rev. 20:13-14) So why worry about what might appear to be an inequity? Or, as Jesus said, "Is your eye evil because God is good?"

I thought of a hymn that, if we were going to have a closing hymn, I thought it would be perfect for today—but I didn't think of it in time to get the music to Dirk and the worship team. Maybe we could sing it from memory: "Don't Worry, Be Happy!" You probably never thought of that as theological, did you? And now I've got the stupid thing stuck in my head until the next time I hear something!

Don't worry! Find your happiness in what your Lord has given you! (see Col. 4:17) Have you lost a lot? He said you would! Have you suffered? He said you would. Has somebody in your family broken your heart? He said they would. But, are you willing to be faithful, and let Him take care of what eternity will make right in every way possible? And, yeah—from our perspective, "Many who are first will be last, and the last, first."

*Father, how we thank You for letting us know You are sovereign, You are good, and You are trustworthy. And so, our Lord, as we think about these things before us, please keep our eyes on You. Help us to ask only those questions that are appropriate to ask—not, "What's in it for me?" but, "How may I serve You, Lord? What is right? What is good?" And Father, put the message of salvation upon our lips. Send us out into the world to speak the truth about Christ, in love, to those who so desperately need a Savior. And Father, if there is an "evil eye" within us, deal with it, we pray. You know each of our hearts. And anything that might keep us from serving You less effectively than we should—sweep it away, we pray; and have Your way, that You might get the glory. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.*