

THE LATTER PARABLES OF JESUS

Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16

INTRO: We have now prepared ourselves to look at the latter parables of Jesus as given in the Gospel of Matthew. We saw that a parable is a figure of speech, and we spent time on how to interpret parables. Then we looked at the meaning of the phrases 'kingdom of heaven' or 'kingdom of God'. I recommended to you that these phrases speak of the same thing. One tells us who the ruler is and the other, the place from which the rule takes place. And as these parables are prophetic in nature, we then looked at the subject of prophecy and I gave a number of kinds of prophecy and some pointers in interpreting prophecy.

In my studies I have found that Jesus made eight recorded trips to Jerusalem. The last one was after His resurrection. After He was resurrected He went to the Galilee area one more time, and then He went back to Jerusalem from where He ascended to heaven. Now on this seventh trip, which was the last trip before He was crucified, He left Jerusalem, and went up to the Galilee area, crossed to the other side of the Jordan, came down to close to Jericho, where He crossed over and stayed night with Zacchaeus. Let me show you that on a slide (Slide of 7th Trip here).

Well, on this seventh journey away from and back to Jerusalem, Jesus gives numerous parables. If you look at the map, and between point A at Jerusalem, and B at Galilee, Luke records close to 20 parables during that part of the journey. I will just make reference to a few of them as we go along as they relate to the subject of the parables that Matthew records. The parables we will be looking at take place between point D, close to Jericho; and A, where Jesus is back at Jerusalem.

Well, by the time we arrive at this morning's parable, everything is building up to some kind of a climax, and the disciples are very sure that Jesus, in the next very short while will put down Roman rule, and He will set up the kingdom I called in the last message, the intended kingdom. That is the long promised kingdom of the OT. What they do not realize is that this is, in my calculations, Tuesday, Nisan 7. On the 14th will be the Passover, and Jesus will die that day. And now a major change will now come that will last some 2,000 years.

Well, Jesus is by now making His way to Jerusalem. He is coming down the Jordan River, on the far side, and is headed for Jericho. From there, in one more day, He will be in Jerusalem. I

have given you an internet site on the map, and would recommend that you watch it before we get into the next message. It is an aerial view of the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. Now the parable we want to look at today is found in Matthew 20:1-16. But I want you to notice what happens immediately after this parable. So look at chapter 20 (read 17-21). So sure are they that the kingdom will very shortly be set up that the mother of the sons of Zebedee is seeking positions for her sons in the kingdom. She is politicking.

In the next little while before Jesus is crucified, and it is by only about a week away, Jesus will tell them in parables what will befall them in the next 2,000 years. It is those parables of the kingdom that we want to look at. And so, we are ready to begin our journey through these parables.

II. THE LATTER PARABLES

A. The Laborers In The Vineyard

1. The Parable (20:1-15)

So, let us go to the parable as it is found in Matthew 20:1-15. It was read for us earlier. It is the parable of a vineyard owner who hired laborers to work in his vineyard. He went out early in the morning and then a number of times throughout the day, even up to the eleventh hour. And in the evening, when it came time to pay the workers, he began with those hired last and then worked his way to those hired first. He paid them all the same, and the last complained that those who had only worked one hour were paid the same as they were. But the vineyard owner said he had paid them all that to which they had agreed.

2. The Setting (19:27-30)

Well, well, that is the earthly story, and our question must be; what is the spiritual truth Jesus wanted to convey? If we had only the parable, we might make a multitude of different interpretations. And so, as I mentioned to you in the introductory matters concerning parables that generally parables have a setting and sometimes an application is made as well. These help us to determine the heavenly meaning, or the spiritual truth intended. So, let us look at the setting.

As I see it, the entire portion related to our parable is from 19:16-20:16. We need to begin by reading 19:16-26 (read). Let me ask you, if this rich young man came to a Christian today with this same question, how would he be answered? Did you notice that Jesus did not give that standard answer? You see, in salvation, there is one major issue to be taken care of. It is sin. Jesus said, "Why do you call me good? There is none good but one." Sin is the problem. What is Jesus' message to the rich young man? You, like all other men, are not a good man. You, like all men, have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

I have heard and read many times among Christians this saying: The only sin that will keep you out of heaven is unbelief. That is not true. Here is what is true; any sin will keep you out of heaven. Unbelief will keep you locked in lost-ness. Sin is the problem. If Jesus had told this young man that all he had to do was believe and he would be saved, he might have gone home thinking he was saved when he had not yet come to deal with his sin. You see, salvation is repentance and faith, not just faith.

So, when Jesus wanted the young man to discover that he was a sinner and that sin was his problem He said, "If you want to enter eternal life, keep the commandments." Who would have answered like that today? Well, maybe Ray Comfort. Jesus wanted this young man to discover what was keeping him from eternal life.

So the young man said, "Which commandments do I need to keep?" So Jesus briefly gave him the two main tables of the ten commandments and the young man said, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" Well, Jesus knew that not all men's problems are the same, and He knew what this young man's problem was. So He said, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow Me."

It is apparent that what kept this young man from dealing with his sin was his love of riches. It is not riches that are the problem, it is the love of riches. Paul said it is the love of money that is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). This young man loved riches.

Well, Jesus had discovered to this seeker his problem. And what is sad about this story is that the rich young man 'went away' sadly. The one thing that had been holding him all along was still holding him. And notice that Jesus did not beg him to reconsider. He let him go. You cannot get anyone to acknowledge truth by begging for it.

Well, Jesus then lectured the disciples on riches in verses 23-26. And Jesus had said to this seeker, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." And that then leads to Peter's question, which will lead to the parable. Look now at verses 27-30 (read).

Now, I think Peter's question is generated by what Jesus said to the rich young man that he should sell everything that he had and give it to the poor, and he would have treasure in heaven. And here is Peter's question, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore, what 'treasure' shall we have?" And here is my question: Is it OK to wonder what we, as Christians will have in the future for the things we sacrifice in this life? And the answer is: It is OK. Jesus did not say, "Listen Peter, that is kind of selfish thinking. Just follow Me and it will all turn out OK. Just be glad you are saved." Jesus answered his question.

So, in verses 28-30 Peter has drawn the Lord's attention to the future with his question, and the Lord takes opportunity to teach them some things regarding the future. He spoke of what it would be like for them in the regeneration. That speaks of the millennium, when this earth is regenerated, and the wolf lies down with the lamb and a child plays by a cobra's den.

And in this regeneration, the intended kingdom of God, Jesus Christ, in fulfillment to many OT prophecies, will sit on the throne of David and rule the world. And what would the disciples have for leaving all? They would, each of them, sit on a throne judging the 12 tribes of Israel!! You have to ponder that. That is a phenomenal reward to receive! It is so easy to read that and not catch how huge that prophecy is!

Have any of you left anything for the Lord? Do you wonder what you shall have? It's OK to wonder. Have you not left anything for the sake of the Lord? Maybe you should ponder this question too. The answer for me and for you is found in verse 29 (read).

Now look at the prophecy that all this leads to in verse 30 (read). May I ask you, what does that mean? You see, it all started off with the question of a rich young ruler, which led to Peter's question which led to this profound statement! And we cannot help but wonder, what does this mean? Well, Jesus gave this parable to answer that question. He is making use of a teachable moment.

Notice now the little preposition that starts verse 1 in chapter 20. It is the word, 'For'. And when there is a 'for' you have to ask, what is the 'for' there for? And I believe it is there to say, "Many that are first will be last, and the last first. For..." And now He gives the reason in the parable. The parable has been read for us. This is the earthly story. And now we ask, what is the spiritual truth that this parable is laid alongside of? What does it mean that the last shall be first, and the first last? And to answer that question, Jesus gives this parable.

3. The Interpretation

And so let us now seek to make an interpretation from this. Note first in 20 verse 1 that it is a parable about the kingdom of heaven. Peter had asked Jesus, what the disciples, who had left all to follow Him would have for that. And Jesus said, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration..." That is in the intended kingdom of heaven they would rule, each one from a throne over one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Then He said, "But many who are first will be last, and the last first." And then He said, "For the kingdom of heaven..." And then He explained by way of this parable how it would be that the first would be last, and the last first.

We saw in the parable that the vineyard owner went out throughout the day and hired laborers, even to the eleventh hour. And when the landowner paid them at the

end of the day, he began with the last and paid them first. But the first he paid last.

We go now to verse 1 (read). It says the landowner went out early in the morning. This is 6:00 a.m. Now, you and I will ask, "Who in the world is standing around at 6:00 a.m. waiting to be hired?" In the rules for interpreting parables we said that it is important to understand the culture in which the parable is given. Let me set that cultural picture for you. I got some idea of this many years ago when I did the series of messages on wine and the Bible. Israel was a land of many vineyards. In many vineyards friends and relatives were invited to the harvest time. The grape harvest came in the fall. And when it was time to harvest, it was a very exciting time in Israel. I expect that sleeping places would be arranged for many of the helpers if the vineyard was some distance from town and they would spend many joyful evenings and meals together. It was a highly festive time.

I expect that in some of the larger operations, most if not all of the laborers were hired. And so we must try to get an understanding of how they hired and paid workers for their vineyards. It is from that, that the point of this parable is made. The "Bible Manners and Customs" book says, "The place for trading was often at the gates of walled cities... Here, also, laborers went to seek employment, and employers went to seek laborers. Sometimes, in oriental cities, a large public square is used for similar purposes. Morier says: 'The most conspicuous building in Hamadan is the Mesjid Jumah, a large mosque now falling into decay, and before it a maidan or square, which serves as a market-place. Here we observed every morning, before the sun rose, that a numerous body of peasants were collected with spades in their hands, waiting, as they informed us, to be hired for the day to work in the surrounding fields'" (pg. 357). The PNT commentary says, "Unemployed laborers gather in the market place of the villages, waiting for an employer." So, we are beginning to get the cultural picture.

So, come with me now to the hills of Israel where the vineyards were plentiful. Harvest time for grapes has come, and 6:00 a.m. eager, expectant workers are

already gathered for some vineyard owner to come along and hire them.

Now, let us say that workers are getting scarce and the crops are very ripe and the weather is questionable, and the vineyard owner goes from time to time to see if any more laborers have gathered. John MacArthur says the grape harvest was a hectic and demanding time. Possibly some could not make it early in the morning, and some could not make it until much later. And in his eagerness to get his grapes harvested, the land owner checks every hour for more workers. And even in the eleventh hour he finds some.

Well, let me give you the spiritual truth alongside which this story is placed, as I interpret the parable. The landowner represents God. The hours from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. represents the history of the Jewish nation. In Christ's time, they were in the eleventh hour, the end of their time for the next 2,000 plus years. The laborers are those of the Jewish nation who had responded to the call of God to salvation in history past. The landowner goes out to hire throughout the day, even to the eleventh hour. Throughout Israel's history God called for workers in His kingdom. The eleventh hour represents the time in which those who are called who lived during the time of Christ, which was also the end of the Jewish age until the 70th week of Daniel. And it was the apostles who responded to the call to work in the kingdom in the 11th hour. And these apostles were the last of the Jewish age, but the first of the Church age.

And then, in our parable we come to the end of the day in verses 8-15 (read). The workers were paid at the end of the day. Maybe those who were hired last were closer in and pay began with the last, and proceeded from there to the first. But, there was a problem, not for the last, but for the first. The last, who had worked only one hour, were paid a denarius; a day's wages, just like the first, who had worked all day. And they complained about it. The first argue that the landowner has made the last 'equal' to the first by paying them the same (11-12). But the householder argued this way: "I am doing you no wrong, because did you not agree to work a day for a denarius?" There is only one answer,

of course (13). Now look at what the landowner says in verses 14-15 (read).

What is the meaning of this? The apostles, and those who became believers among them after Jesus came, are represented by those who responded in the 11th hour. And when the Lord reckons with His people, He will begin with the last. This includes the apostles and those of the Church age. You see, they will be raptured and go to glory and enter the kingdom before the Jews who responded to God's call first.

We do not have time to look at Luke 13:24-30. But Jesus closed that parable off like this: "They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."

4. The application

We come then to the application, which in this case is given in the text in verse 16. You see, in 19:30, Jesus said to the disciples who were wondering what they would have for leaving everything and following Him, "But many who are first will be last, and the last first." Then He gives the parable to explain that. And now in verse 16, we have the application (read).

We have, in this application, two major points. The first is in the words, "So, the last will be first, and the first last." Peter has asked what they would have for leaving all and following Christ. He has told them that they, the apostles, would rule in the millennium, with each of them on a throne ruling the twelve tribes of Israel. And then He said, "But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first." Then Jesus explained that by way of this parable, where the landowner, throughout the day hired workers, and when He paid them, he paid the last first, and the first he paid last.

I believe Jesus is speaking here of Jewish history. For many years already, many of them had been called to enter the kingdom, and many had. And now the time of the Jewish kingdom is about to come to an end. And the Apostles, and those of their time who responded to the

call of God, who had entered last, that is in the eleventh hour, would become first in the kingdom of God. And those of the past, who had responded to the call of God first, would be last. Peter had asked, "Lord, what will we have for leaving everything and following You?" And Jesus said, "You will be first in the kingdom, and you will be rulers of the kingdom."

There is a second major point made in verse 16. First Jesus said, "So the last will be first and the first last." Now He adds to that, this statement, "For many are called but few are chosen." We have here a very difficult statement. Let me just make a note here that most, if not all modern versions do not include this statement in the text. But, if it is allowed to stand as part of the text here, as I do; the great question regarding this statement is most aptly asked by the Jamieson, Faucett and Brown commentary. They say this, "But what, it may be asked, has this to do with the subject of our parable?" And that is the great question.

Well, what we have before us in that prophetic statement are two biblical doctrines. There is the doctrine of God's call. It says that many are called but few are chosen. In the whole process of salvation, the doctrine of God's call is very important. Without it, no one gets saved. Everyone who is saved has been called to salvation somewhere in life. In the parable, the calling is pictured by those who are hired to work in the vineyard. We will not spend time on that, as the second topic is the one most important to the subject. The second doctrine here is the doctrine of election. It says *few are chosen*. The doctrine of election has to do with choosing. How does God choose some to salvation and others not? How does one become one of the elect, which means he has become one of God's chosen ones? If you have further interest in the subject of election, we have a message on sermonaudio that deals with the subject of election.

With regard to election, there are two major views. Let me briefly give you those. According to Calvinism, in eternity past, before God even created man, He chose some to salvation and most to damnation, although the Calvinist might not be pleased with the wording I used, that is precisely what they believe. This choosing,

according to them, has nothing to do with what anyone wants or does not want of his own free will. God elected a few to salvation, and most He rejected to damnation, and there is nothing you or I or anyone can do about that. Since He only chose a few, therefore only few were can be saved.

On the other hand are those who hold to the view I also hold to, and that is that God, before He made man, chose that each person would have to choose Him of their own free will. In other words, He chose such as would choose Him (see 1 Pet. 1:1-2). So, to be one of the elect, one of the chosen ones, you have to choose Him of your own free will. When you choose Him, you become one of His chosen ones.

Now, as I see it, the parable answers how some are chosen. Those who chose to go to the place of hiring are the ones who were chosen to go to work in the vineyard. Those who did not go to the place of hiring were not chosen by the vineyard owner. Why not? Because they did not choose to go to the place of hiring.

Now, as to our text, and the question as to what part the last sentence plays in the whole picture, I view the answer to be this: The text says, "So the last will be first and the first last, FOR, many are called, but few are chosen." Here is the question being answered by the last statement: Why will the last be first and the first last? Why will all those Jews who chose the Lord first in time, be last, and the last that chose Him be first? Why? And the answer is, "For many are called but few are chosen."

Let me explain. If the majority of the Jews, as God's chosen people had chosen to be faithful to God, they would have been first. They would have called the Gentiles to salvation, as God had planned, and the Jews would be first. But now, because of several thousand years of opportunity so few had responded to the call, they would be last. And those last few who responded to the call when Christ came, would enter the new work of the Church and ultimately become first to enter the millennial kingdom and be first in position; that is rulers, in the kingdom.

You see, if we should study Romans 9-11, that great interjection into the book of Romans, we would find that Israel was rejected because of their unbelief. It was not because God did not choose most of them. It was because most of them did not choose God. And now, the first would be last, and the last first because the majority of the Jews failed to respond to God's call. So our text says, "So, the last will be first, and the first last, because many are called but few are chosen."

You see, when Christ came to earth, the call to the vineyard was extended to the Jews once more as it had been many times in the past. Only now Christ was personally there. But John tells us that He came to His own and His own received Him not. There were very few from among the Jewish nation who responded to the call. And because few chose to respond positively, God would reject the majority, the nation; and He would use those chosen last, to turn to the Gentiles and bring them to salvation. So why would the first become last? Because so few chose Him, or in other words; because the majority, including the leaders, rejected Him. And because that was the Jewish response to the coming of the Messiah, the first will be last to enter the kingdom, and the last will be first. Why? For many were called, but few were chosen. The majority of the nation rejected Christ at that time. And because of that, a new work would soon be begun. And those who entered this new work, though they were last, they would become the first to enter the kingdom of heaven. According to further prophecy, that is exactly what will happen.

Let me give the application in brief as I see it. The general truth Jesus sought to convey by this parable. Peter had asked what they would have for leaving everything and following Him. And Jesus said, you will sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel. And, **"The Jewish people who responded to the call of God before the eleventh hour of their history, will be last, because many were called but few were chosen; and the Jewish people of the eleventh hour will be first. So the last will be first and the first last. The last will be first in the kingdom and first in position."**

CONCL: So, we conclude on this first parable. This parable is the beginning of prophetic revelations given by Jesus in the

final week before His crucifixion. And Jesus has shown that Israel is in its 11th hour, and not only that, but because so few responded to God's call from among them, they will be last in the kingdom. Those who responded to Him when He came to earth, while the others all rejected Him, will be first. This would have been an unbelievable revelation to the religious leaders of the day. Had they heard and understood this parable, they might have well crucified Him sooner.

Now, there is one more question one might have. What does the parable mean by all of them being paid the same amount? Well, I think it is this: The rewards for each Christian will depend entirely on what each believer has done for Christ or forsaken for Him, but salvation is the same for all. It does not matter how much one has done, how much time one has served, or what length of life has been spent for God, when we get saved, we all get the same salvation.

Though the rewards for how one serves in the vineyard will differ according to each workers faithfulness, the one thing all who respond to the call of God get in equal amount is salvation. John MacArthur says, "In no area is God's impartiality more significant and wonderful than in regard to salvation. No matter what men's circumstances might be when they come to Christ, and no matter how well or poorly they may serve Him after coming, they receive the same glorious salvation."

All those from history past, and all those who have and will yet respond to God's call, the one thing they will all get in equal share is salvation. I heard of a woman who was bitter against her dad. And when someone said that toward the end of his life he had changed his ways, she said, "You can't tell me that you can live a life like that and then repent in the end and be saved!" I can assure you that no matter how late in life one truly repents and receives Christ, one will get the same salvation as all the rest! But, one might lament like the song writer who said, "Must I go, and empty handed; must I meet my Savior so?" That is a word for us.