

# The Sacrifice and Reward of Grace

by Michael Durham

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*This sermon delves into the parable of the laborers in the vineyard from Matthew 20, emphasizing the sacrifice and reward of grace. It addresses the legalistic mindset of earning salvation through works, the danger of mixing grace and law, and the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The conclusion highlights that God's goodness surpasses any sacrifice we can offer, and eternal life is a gift of grace. The parable points to Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice and reward of grace, inviting all to embrace Him for salvation and to rest in His grace.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 20:1, Matthew 19:16, Mark 10:17, 2 Corinthians 4:17, Philippians 3:8, Ephesians 2:8, Isaiah 53:5

**Topics:** "Grace vs. Works", "The Ultimate Sacrifice of Christ"

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## Description

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## Transcript

It is a special privilege, a holy one for me to be able to address you today. The text I pray the Lord be pleased to speak to us from is Matthew's gospel, chapter 20, the 20th chapter of Matthew's gospel, verses one through 16. I want to speak today on the theme, the sacrifice and reward of grace, the sacrifice and reward of grace, Matthew chapter 20, beginning with verse one.

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now, when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard and he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace and said to them, you also go into the vineyard and whatever is right I will give you. So they went again.

He went out about the sixth and the ninth hour and did likewise and about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle and said to them, why have you been standing here idle all day? They said to him, because no one hired us. He said to them, you also go into the vineyard and whatever is right you will receive. So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, call the laborers and give them their wages beginning from the last to the first.

And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed they would receive more and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner saying these last men have worked only one hour and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.

But he answered one of them and said, friend I'm doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours, go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you.

Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things or is your eye evil? Because I am good. So the last will be first and the first last. For many are called but few are chosen.

Too many times this passage is reduced to addressing the unconverted religious legalists. The too narrow focus is on the man or the woman who would believe that they merit heaven. But this parable is also for another audience.

It's also for the redeemed. It has much to say to us who, although truly converted, believe that we have built up some credit in heaven's bank. Let me speak plainly so that I'm understood.

Length of service in God's employment or experience in the faith or answers to prayers or victories over temptations all work together to convince and deceive us that our following Christ brings some merit. And therefore the Lord must bring some affliction, some disruption, some kind of reminder that we are as we began the Christian race, needy souls requiring grace. And therefore this parable is for us today.

Now others of us in this room labor under a cloud of condemnation. We pass our sojourn through this world weighed down with the sense of being unacceptable. We're plagued with a nagging notion that we've not done enough, that we are lackluster in our performance and they're lackluster in the eyes of God.

Ever striving and ever failing to quiet the inner voice of disapproval. You long to be holy but it feels like holiness is a moving target and thus God's commendation of you is unattainable. You just don't feel like you measure up.

Well this parable is for you and so let's get to the parable. Today I want to direct your attention first to the parables context and then we will look at the parables characters and finally the parables conclusion. What is the context of this great parable of Matthew 20? Well I can say to you without fear of contradiction that it is the latter half of chapter Matthew, chapter 19 verses 16 through 30.

And I can say that on the basis of two irrefutable pieces of evidence. It's the very first word of this chapter, for. The Bible says for the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

We all know the word for is a connecting word, a bridge to connect what has preceded to what will follow. You could say because. In other words Jesus is continuing the 19th chapter.

Unfortunately the second piece of evidence is we have chapter divisions, verses and chapters that sometimes do not go or there shouldn't be placed where they are. And this is one of those times. This is not a new event.

Often when you see chapter so-and-so you think in your mind automatically a new section of Scripture. But not in this case. No Jesus is addressing the events of the last half of chapter 19.

And what do we see in that last part of that chapter? Well we see first of all a young rich ruler. Isn't it interesting how he's described in the Bible? Young rich ruler. All three words tell us something about him.

Tells us a great deal. He's young and therefore probably quite zealous. He's wealthy.

He's achieved much in his short years. And finally he's a ruler. Perhaps, probably indicating that he has authority in the local Jewish synagogue.

He has appraised unto himself power and authority even at an early age. And this young rich ruler comes to Jesus convinced of a system of merit. That God weighs us on some imaginary scales based upon our performance.

What we do and what we don't do. He believed rule-keeping would inherit him eternal life. Notice his question in Matthew 19 verse 16.

Now behold one came and said to him good teacher what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? Here his question reveals his heart. He's a man that checks off the boxes and for whatever reason there's a disturbance in his heart. He thinks there perhaps is one box unchecked.

Something overlooked. What was it? What stirred up this young man to come to Christ? Well the text doesn't say. But would you allow me to venture somewhat of I think an educated guess.

I think he had been observing Jesus. And that was enough to unsettle him. He was there.

He had watched how Jesus dealt with the children whom the disciples had tried to keep from coming to Christ. He saw them and he heard him say unless you become converted like this little child you shall no wise enter the kingdom of heaven. Something had been disturbed in him.

He had watched this young man from Nazareth. He had seen his demeanor. He had listened to his teaching and it shook him.

He saw himself in the light of Christ. Oh there it is. That's what all of us need to do this morning.

Look away from ourselves and look to him. Look upon him today in all of his glories, beauty, his moral excellence and perfection. Have you ever had that moment when as you felt you were in the presence of Christ himself and something began to be shaken on the inside? A disturbance began.

An awakening if we please. I tell you unless you've had that experience you're not a Christian. There comes a moment to all who have believed who are the children of God.

That awakening. That moment of crisis. It may not seem earth-shattering as it begins, but oh my friend it is earth-shattering.

It turns the world upside down. You see yourself in the light of who God really is and you don't measure up. Has it happened? Oh I pray this morning it happens to several in this room that you're confronted with this same Jesus that this young rich ruler was and so in the disturbance of his heart he comes to Christ.

What must I do? I think I've done everything but perhaps there's something left undone and Jesus answers curiously doesn't he? He gives him six commands. Tells him not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to lie, not to steal, to honor his father and his mother and to love his neighbor as himself and notice what the young man says in verse 20. All these things I have kept from my youth.

What do I still lack? There are some of you here this morning that are no different than this young rich ruler. You've been reared in this church. Your mom and dad have been faithful and diligent to teach you the Word of God, the commands and the precepts of Scripture and there is an there is with you some some form of adaptation, conformity, obedience.

You do as you're told because you know you must. You've got to check off the box. You've got to do what's right.

You've got to avoid what's wrong if you're going to be acceptable to God. That's the system this young man was under and believed and I tell you that if that's your system, if you believe that somehow your goodness, your obedience, your conformity to what is right is the standard by which God will grant you eternal life, you are sadly wrongly mistaken. You are on a path to one place only, hell, destruction, eternal destruction.

This was the path this young man was on and here was one of the finest young men of the hour, the day, and he knows something's not right. Do you know it? Are you experiencing the trouble of your own soul, that conviction, that that shaking that tells you not all is right? Well, this is the young man and then in chapter 19 we have the disciples. They've watched and listened to this amazing conversation between quiet Christ and the young rich ruler and they're actually stunned by it.

The text even says that. They were greatly astonished. The young man goes away because Jesus said what? You lack one thing.

Go sell what you have, give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me. They heard that and then they heard Jesus say even something more radical and amazing. It's hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Now that statement was a surprise to them because you've got to remember in the days of the Apostles their theology wasn't a lot of different from a lot of people today. God blesses those who serve him, who obey him. He gives them wealth and health and prosperity.

Believe it or not, what's going around today isn't all that new. It was very much in the Jewish framework and religion. And so they thought as they looked upon this man, the Apostles thought if anybody's going to heaven, this man.

And now Christ says this man, it's so hard it'd be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for him or a rich man to enter the kingdom. And so their astonishment they ask the amazing question, don't they? What's the question they ask? Who then can be saved? In other words, if this guy is not making it, who is? And then Peter opens his mouth. Look at what he says.

Matthew 19 27, and then Peter answered and said to him, see we've left all and followed you, therefore what shall we have? The question betrays Peter's heart. It tells you really what's going on even amongst the other men standing there with him. Peter and the disciples believed making great sacrifice for Christ would earn them a great reward.

Oh, we did that. They heard what Jesus said, go sell what you had, give it to the poor, you'll have treasure in heaven and come follow me. And they think, well we did that, so what do we get? They literally had very much the same kind of heart that the young rich ruler had, although they're regenerate, yes they're saved, but friend, please listen carefully.

You may have been delivered from bondage, but the Christian can go back into bondage. You can be delivered into the liberty of grace, but you can go back under the bondage of the law. Here were these 12 followers of Christ, and they're wanting to know, okay, we've done it, we checked off that box, we did what he wasn't willing to do, what's in it for us? Do you hear the spirit of legalism? Do you hear the spirit of merit deserving? I've done something, I've achieved something, what do I get? That's the context here.

And whether you agree with me or not, I believe that Jesus' parable is not for the young rich ruler. He's already gone. It's for the apostles.

It's for you and me today. It's for those of us who are his children, who have left to follow him. It's for us.

So let's look at the characters in the parable. First we have the landowner, chapter 20 verse 1. For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. The landowner represents the kingdom of heaven.

That's what Jesus says. For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner. Which means the landowner represents the king of heaven, because you can't have a kingdom without a king.

And so here we have God represented in the parable as a landowner who is going to hire men for his vineyard. He has a vineyard at the time of year is the time of harvest. And as any, as the day, the custom of employment then, you didn't go to the unemployment office and fill out an application or go online.

No, you went to the village square or the town square at the appropriate place and you gathered at sunrise and you waited for people to come and hire you. And that's exactly what he does. He goes to that place where people gather to hire men to go out into his vineyard and harvest the grapes.

And then you have secondly in the parable, the first employees. The first employees. Verse 2. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

It's about six o'clock in the morning. This is the first hirees. These are his first employees.

But notice something very important here. It's important for you to know that the laborers must have negotiated, negotiated with the landowner for their wage. Notice what the text says.

Now when he had agreed with the laborers, somebody said, well we'll work for you but we'll work for the going wage today. A denarius. And that was the common wage of a day laborer.

A denarius. And so they negotiated. Before they would say yes, before they would go into the vineyard, they wanted to make sure they had him on the dotted line.

They had his commitment. And he agrees. And they go and work for the agreed wages.

And then we have the secondary employees. Verses 3 and 4 and following. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace and said to them, you also go into the vineyard.

Whatever is right, I will give you. So they went. He does this two more times at noon and three o'clock.

So please make sure you understand. At nine o'clock, three hours later, he goes and sees he needs more employees. He goes back, hires at nine, then at noon.

Now three o'clock in the afternoon, he's done the same. But notice there's something different about these employees and the first ones. What is the difference? There's no negotiation.

There's a no agreed-upon price. He simply says, whatever is right, I'll give you. I'll do what is right.

And then lastly in the parable, we have one more set of characters and that's the last employees. Verses 6 and 7. And about the eleventh hour, about five o'clock in the hour, about another hour left of sunlight, he went out and found others standing idle and said to them, why have you been standing here idle all day? And they said to him, because no one hired us. He said to them, you also go into the vineyard and whatever is right, you will receive.

Now let's call these characters undesirable employees. Now why would I call them undesirable employees? Well because of what they said, because no one hired us. Now maybe a painful memory, I hope I don't send you into a tailspin, but don't you remember when he's a little kid on the playground during recess and we would divide up into teams, whether we're playing baseball or kickball or soccer, whatever.

Do you remember how that went? And who were the first ones chosen? The better athletes. Everybody competed to get them on the team. And who was left there standing? Well, the ones who were not so athletic.

And if that was you, I'm so sorry. I apologize if I overlooked you in some way or those like you, but that's the way it was. And here we had employees who for whatever reason didn't quite make the standard.

Maybe they were infirmed, crippled, handicapped in some way, or maybe their reputation just had gotten out and around, but they weren't the best employees. You had to prod them. They like to take too many water breaks.

I don't know, but whatever reason, they were undesirable employees. And it says that he hired them at the last hour, but I have to remind you, they didn't even work one full hour. How do I know that? Well, simply because in that day, nobody lived on the farm.

That's right. Not even the landowner would have lived on his property. He would have lived within the parameter of the village or the city walls for safety and protection.

And every day he'd go out to his inheritance or his farm. And so by the time they're hired, the time they get to the vineyard, the time they get the explanations of what they are expected to do, well, not even a full hour is left. And there are the characters of our parable.

Well, let's now look at the conclusion in the book of our time. There are three major conclusions I want to draw from this parable. I think this is the reason Jesus tells this parable to the disciples.

The first is to the legalist, the self-righteous. Those hired the first hour believed to qualify, you had to do a certain amount of work. They believed God worked by merit, by deserving.

This is the way they viewed God. If you kept his commandments, you kept your nose clean, you averted evil, then God accepted you. You were approved by him.

The story teaches us that those like the young rich ruler who believed eternal life is earned by rule-keeping, that eternal life is not so earned. It's given by grace and it's given to those who've never measured up. It's given to you who never qualify, to me who's never once ever performed enough for God's approval.

Today, if you view God on this same basis, you are viewing God unscripturally. You are not addressing the true God, the living God. God doesn't work by the basis of performance.

There's only one time he has done so, and we'll get to that in just a few moments. He doesn't judge us this way. Oh thank God he doesn't.

I'm thankful. I'm standing here with great joy in my soul. Whether I preach good or I preach poorly this morning, it has no effect on me.

You want to know why? Because I'm accepted in the beloved, that's why. I've got God's approval, and that's better than anybody else's approval. I'm delighted that God does not judge me by this message, or how I treat my family, or how I treat you, or anyone else.

I'm glad today. God doesn't judge me by the thoughts and the imaginations of my heart, because if he did, I'm sunk. How about you? Oh friend, especially you who are laboring under this same idea that you're not good enough, but if you can just do more, then God will finally love you and receive you.

Oh you are chasing a pipe dream, a rope of smoke. It cannot and will not sustain you when you stand finally before God. Do you hear me? You're deceived.

You've believed the lie, and the lie will not save you. Look at Matthew chapter 20, verse 13. These first employees, they come to get their wages, and they've watched, they've observed.

Jesus has the landowner giving the last ones he employed their payment first, and they received a denarius, a full day's wage, even though they did less than an hour of work. And he gave a denarius to those whom he'd hired at three o'clock in the afternoon, as well as those noon and nine that morning. Well by the time they get ready to receive their paycheck, their wages, they are just all consumed with joy and excitement that they're going to get more because, well, they worked more, but they didn't.

They got exactly what they negotiated. Friend, if you stand before God and you try to negotiate his favor, you'll get exactly what you have asked for. You will be judged based upon your performance, and none of us in this room wants that.

You don't want God to judge you by your goodness or your merit. Your goodness is as filthy rags. It cannot stand the hot searing glaze of his perfect and pure eyes.

Who are you to think that you can measure up to the righteousness of God, that you are as perfect as Christ? Because that is the standard. That's it. There's no less.

He can do no less and still be God and holy. And so we see in verse 13, but he answered one of them and he said, friend, I'm doing you no wrong. They complained.

They complained. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you.

Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? And then Jesus, he exposes the young rich ruler and the disciples as hearts. Or is your eye evil because I'm good? In other words, because I'm gracious to these with my own things, is your heart so evil, so self-centered, so selfish that you would condemn God for his grace and mercy to those who are not as quote holy as you or as righteous or you or as obedient and conforming as you are? Oh, dear friend, this is a problem in Christianity today. It always has been, always will be.

There are some who cannot imagine that God would bestow upon them the same heaven they're going to. I remember years ago watching a documentary and it was on one of those serial killers who had been supposedly converted in prison and they went and interviewed one of the fathers of the victims that he had slain and cannibalized and said, what do you think that God has forgiven this man that he will get to go to heaven? He said, I will refuse to believe in a God that would do that. I refuse.

I don't want to be in heaven with that man. I don't believe that's the way God works. If it is, he does.

I don't want any part of him. And there are some who do, who claim to be Christians and yet they look down their self-righteousness noses and they peer and they scorn those whom they don't think are as good as they are. And they would have complained against God if God was as merciful to them, those who are undeserving in their eyes, if he was to do that for them what they, what he's supposedly doing for them.

Is your eye evil because I'm good? Is there something in your heart that finds fault with God this morning? That God is a gracious God and a merciful God that he gives to the lowliest and the most undeserving in his favor. Second, the parable points to the only law keeper I am indebted to, Dane Ortlund in his book, Surprised by Jesus, for showing how this parable, or how the cross fulfills this parable, the death of Christ. He said, Jesus suffered eternal judgment even though he was the only one qualified to go to heaven since he was the only one who had kept all of the commandments from his youth up.

Isn't that true? The young rich ruler comes to Jesus and said, I've kept all of these things from my youth and he's standing before the only one who ever did keep all of the commandments and didn't violate even the spirit of them. He's the only one who has earned God's favor. He's the only one who's performed to the level that God would say, well done.

The second conclusion is to the disciples. The story teaches those who, like the disciples, believe, like some of us, that service and sacrifice in nearness to Jesus entitles them to reward. That there is no sacrifice greater than God's goodness.

That's what this lesson teaches us, this parable teaches. Some of us, as I said in the introduction, have come to the place because of longevity in our walk with God. We've walked with him for many years now and we have a track record of service and obedience and faithfulness.

And if you're not careful, that track record will begin to mess with you in an unconscious way. God answers your prayers. You have victory over temptations that you struggled with years ago and you think you've arrived, you've got some kind of credibility with God.

Oh my friend, that's what the disciples thought. They had credibility because they had left their families, their businesses, their possessions, and they had followed Christ. What do we get? And the story is saying to them, listen, no sacrifice that you can make for God is greater than God's goodness to you.

That's what he's saying here. Let me show you this. Go back to verse 8 and 9 of our text, Matthew 20.

So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last of the first. And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they received a denarius. They got more than what they deserved.

They got God's goodness, the landowner's goodness. They got mercy. They got grace.

They got not what they performed or deserved in their labors. They got much more. And that's the way God wants to work with you and me.

That's the basis upon which he wants to deal with you and me. Not on how well you do, but on how good he is. And we see this again back in Matthew 19.

Look at verse 28. Now some of you are wrestling with this. This sounds so counterproductive to what you feel in your heart.

And I tell you, the reason is because grace is so misunderstood. Grace works counter to the nature of our flesh, our own person, our own human being. Grace is what makes Christianity so different from any other religion of the world.

There's no one like it. Every religion in the world bases eternal life on performance, on what you do and don't do. But not Christianity.

No. It's based upon the merit of another. And it's grace to you and me.

He says in Matthew 19 verse 28, Assuredly I say to you that in the regeneration, when God makes the world new, when the son of man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my namesake shall receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life. Jesus does not ignore what you've done for him.

But listen carefully. When he rewards you for what you've done, you will not get what you deserve. You will get more.

Much more. God always gives much more so that the sacrifice and the service you render to him seems so little in comparison. This is what the Apostle Paul states in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 17.

In the second epistle to the Corinthians you hear Paul talking about his struggles in a very open, frank and transparent way. Despairing almost even of life he says. The burden of the church, shipwrecked, beaten, persecuted.

This man lived a very difficult life in that, listen to what he says in the fourth chapter verse 17. For our light affliction which is but for a moment is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal way of glory. When you put what you do for Christ in proper perspective of what he will do for you, you when you stand before him, you will say, oh why did I not give more? Why did I not pray more? Why did I not labor more? My

friends, you will never outdo God's goodness.

That's what this parable is teaching. And not only that, but all the things you and I esteem as good in our life, the things we hold on to, why God is worthy in his beauty and his glory to turn loose of every one of those things. Listen to the same apostle.

What things were gained to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, dung, that I may gain Christ. Oh I ask you this one, think with me.

Probe into your own heart for a few moments. Is it true for you that Jesus means more to you than anything in this world? Can you say that Christ is the love of your soul so much so that everything dear is like rubbish to you? Something to be disposed of not to keep or to think or to give much attention to. Oh that's the heart of the child of God.

That's a true Christian's heartbeat. Christ in Christ alone, he's the lover, he's the pursuit, he's the one we truly enjoy more than anything else. Because his goodness is better than life.

Thy loving kindness is better than life. Have you found that to be so? If not then my friend, you are still not yet a Christian. All the people of God in this room can stand and say yes indeed, his loving kindness to me, his care, his grace, his love is better than life itself.

Anything I've ever tasted of this world cannot compare to the joy in Christ. Oh are you experiencing that? Or have you left the Father's table and you've begun to feed on the husks that the swine would eat? Have you left the true living waters of life and now drinking from broken cisterns? Oh come back to the table. Come, your heart wants it, your heart pants for it, follow it and it will bring you to Christ because you see, he is the greatest reward himself.

I want you to remember Peter's question back in the 19th chapter. In verse 27, then Peter answered and said to him, see we have left all and followed you, therefore what shall we have? Oh how that question must have stabbed and wounded the heart of our Lord. Peter's question as I said about the young rich ruler's question, it too betrays his heart.

It tells you what's in his heart. For if he had really realized the value of he who stood before him, if he really knew the beauty and the glory of the Christ he was following, he would have never asked that question because he would have discovered, he would have known nothing of heaven will be ever, ever better than Christ himself. Nothing in glory will outshine the glory of heaven.

Christ is that glory. He's the light thereof. And that's what the heart of the child of God paints.

He's the greatest reward, Christ himself. And the cross declares to us that there's no sacrifice we as Christians can make that's greater than his. Oh friend, you who love him and want to give your lives in his service, thank God for that.

That's a grace, that's God working in you. But remember all of your sacrifices will never measure the great sacrifice of our King of Kings and Lord of Lords as he hung there on Calvary's cross for us. No sacrifice can compare to this.

How shameful it would be that we would want to bring our service in the light of comparison to his. But there's a third conclusion. And it's for the poor and the lowly.

It's for those who have no righteousness of their own nor great sacrifice to bring. It's a message for those who others would reject and ignore. It's the last employees.

Verse 6 again and 7. Why have you been standing here idle all day? Because no one would hire us. No one wanted them. They weren't worthy.

They weren't good enough. They didn't measure us. Anybody here like that today? Feel that in your heart? You just feel like you just never ever can please God.

You can never satisfy his holy demands. The commandments seem beyond your grip. Oh friend, this parables for you this morning.

God is speaking to you right now. And the conclusion of the matter is this. You have no sacrifice to bring him.

But you can have both eternal life and great reward. You can freely be given eternal life and the reward of heaven to come because Jesus on the cross gave the ultimate sacrifice so that you can have the ultimate reward. That's what this parable is all about.

The story teaches us that those who have not borne the burden and the heat of the day may have eternal life because Jesus bore the burden and received the white hot wrath of eternal justice. And he was denied the wages he deserved. Think of it.

None, none could dare say and be honest, I've kept these things from my youth up but Christ. And there he's the one on the cross forsaken by God. Why? When he deserved the wages of God's favor.

Why does God cut him off? Why does God curse him and forsake him? Because he took the wages of your sin. He took the wages of your penalty. Even before you were a Christian in this sin, even since you've been a Christian, all of our sin has merited one thing and Jesus received those wages.

Oh glory be to his name. He was the stone that the builders rejected. He came into his own and his own received his not.

And as Isaiah said, when we saw him there was no beauty that we should desire him. He's despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief as we hid as it were our faces from him. He was despised and we did not esteem him.

Surely he has borne our griefs. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was smitten by God and afflicted for us.

That's what this parable reminds me. And perhaps there's one here this morning whom you're a little bit of each three. You're like the rightarian, that young rich ruler, but you know you're not right.

You're like the disciples thinking if you could just sacrifice more work, work more, pray more, you'll get more. But you're also like the undesirable employees because you know in your own heart of hearts, you never even measure up to your own dreams and aspirations. Oh, the parables message is good news.

God doesn't measure you by any of these things, but by one thing. Christ. Jesus alone.

Have you embraced him? Have you taken him as your substitute? Have you clung to him and said, here's my hope and stay? Here's where my dependency starts and ends. It's with Christ. How many of you can say with all assurity, I know God's favor.

I know God's acceptance. I know God's love. And that is my treasure, my true treasure.

But there are some of you who are Christians who can say that, but today there's bondage. Today there's a darkness in your soul. You know why? Because you're trying to mix grace and law and they don't mix.

They don't go together. They will never go together. How do I know that? Well, I will let you determine it for yourself.

Let me ask you one question. Does the idea of death bother you any? Does it cause any trembling, any fear, any concerns, any agitation at all? I'm speaking to believers now. I can tell you that for many years I struggled with the day of judgment.

I'll tell you why. My fear was that I would get the draw and have to be judged right after the judgment. I mean, I never have done any of those things.

I've not planted all those churches. I haven't suffered like Him. Or how would you like to be judged by God after one of the great martyrs? You never really had to suffer physically for Christ.

I mean, that kind of bothered me. I don't want to go to the Lord with just a few things and be judged alongside the man who's got many things to bring, you know, the many talents, the many gifts. I mean, until I understood this parable, until I really understood it, you say, but Brother Michael, the Bible teaches rewards.

Jesus taught that very parable of the talents, one given five, one given two, one given one. He taught the parable. He taught us that there are rewards in heaven.

Yes, He did. But here's what you must remember, Remember that no one who makes it to heaven by the grace of God will be rewarded on their performance. It won't be done.

The Bible doesn't say it will be done. The Bible says it will be based upon grace, which means you will get more than you earned. That's what this parable tells me.

On the Day of Judgment, when we're marched before the Lord, God is going to lavish His goodness upon us then, just as He does now, and you will get everything you get, not because you earned it or deserved it or by merit, but because of His loving kindness, by grace. You'll get more than you deserve, much more. Another reason that's true, every good thing you've ever done in the name of Jesus Christ, you did by the power of the Holy Spirit, and if you did it by the power of the Holy Spirit, that's the grace of God at work in you.

It was God's activity in the first place that created the good work, not you alone. So, here in this parable, we find both the sacrifice and the reward of grace. Christ is the sacrifice of grace, and He is the reward of grace.

Oh, I pray. I pray that your heart's been made to look at Him this morning and see what you ought to see that you don't measure up, that you don't deserve to be in His presence, and you certainly don't deserve His approval, but He's given it to you anyway based upon Jesus Christ, the great sacrifice of grace. God is gracious to us because of what Jesus has accomplished for us, and that goodness of our dear Savior has been granted to us as a grace, as a gift, but now we are seen in the eyes of God, acceptable in the Beloved.

And the reward that we have awaiting us, oh yes, it's wonderful beyond even understanding or our imaginations, but everything about those rewards and that heaven is going to point us to the beauty of the sacrifice and reward of grace to Christ Himself. I truly believe that the rewards that we will have are nothing more but God's means of helping us to enjoy Christ all the more, because God's system, His relationship with you is not based upon merit of your own, but upon the merit of Christ. Rest on that.

Depend upon that. Do not forsake that. Don't run back to bondage again.

No, drive your stake home upon Christ and Christ alone. He is your hope and consolation. Let us pray.

Our Father and our God, we are delighted that Christ is our standard bearer. He represents us before you and all that you've done, will ever do, is through Him and it's good. Lord, we find no fault in your mercy and your grace.

We delight in it. We rejoice. We desire to understand and to consume more of it, to be a people of grace, to live by grace through faith, not just to be saved by it, but to live by it.

Oh, Father, I pray for the child, the adult, the person who's struggling today. They want to be saved, but they just don't know what's hindering them. Like the young rich ruler, they're trying to figure out what they must do.

Oh, Father, please, please destroy such logic and foolishness and show them the truth that's in Christ, the good news, that if they would believe and turn from themselves and their goodness and turn and rest and rely upon the goodness of Christ, they could be saved even right now. Help my brothers and sisters, Lord, who've gone away from liberty back into bondage, trying to merit or thinking they have merited some kind of favor from you by their performance. Oh, God, deliver us.

We pray in Jesus' name.

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