

The True Discipleship Broadcast-1983-11 True Discipleship

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald explores the parable of the workers in the vineyard to illustrate the principles of grace, justice, and true discipleship in the Christian life.

Duration: 26:43

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 19:16 - 20:15, Luke 18:9-14, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5

Topics: "True Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the parable of the workers in the vineyard from Matthew chapter 20. The parable tells the story of a landowner who hires workers at different times throughout the day, but pays them all the same wage. The preacher emphasizes the lesson of not bargaining with God and highlights the envious and greedy nature of the human heart. He also emphasizes the importance of God's grace and how it is better than justice. The sermon concludes by highlighting the caring nature of the employer in the parable and suggesting that Christians should strive to run their businesses with the same compassion.

Transcript

Okay, today we want to look at another embarrassing portion of the Word. It starts out to be embarrassing, but it isn't really, of course. Matthew, chapter 20, Matthew, chapter 20, verse 1. A man goes out into his vineyard at, let's say, six o'clock in the morning, and you can just picture the situation there.

Every day there are probably men lined up at his gate looking for employment. Times are really hard. And so these men agree to work for him for a denarius a day.

Don't be alarmed about that. It says a penny a day in the King James original, and that sounds terrible, a penny a day, but actually that was the going wage at that time, a denarius a day. It was okay.

Don't worry about that part of it. So, they start working at six o'clock. At nine o'clock he hires some more.

At twelve he hires some more. At three he hires some more, and at five in the afternoon he hires some more. Then at six o'clock at night he calls his foreman, and he says, Now, I want you to pay the men, beginning with those who were hired at five.

Give them each a denarius. Go back to those that were hired at three. Give them all a denarius, twelve noon, nine in the morning, and then last of all give those that were hired at six a.m. a denarius.

So, no matter how long they worked that day, they received a denarius. And, of course, the six a.m.ers exploded when they saw what was happening. What kind of a deal is that? We work all day long, and some of these people work an hour, and we all get the same wages.

We're going to complain to the labor board. And a lot of people have difficulty understanding this passage of Scripture. It's really quite wonderful.

To understand it, you have to go back to the previous chapter. You've often heard how unfortunate the chapter breaks are in the Bible. Well, they're good.

They're really good, but some of them are a bit unfortunate. This one is. Go back to verse 16 of chapter 19.

Now, behold, one came and said to him, Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? He said to him, Why do you call me good? He said, No one is good but one, that is God. Jesus wasn't denying that he was God. He was just giving an opportunity to this man to confess it.

The man should have said, I know. That's why I called you good, because you are God. That's what he should have said.

Then Jesus said, But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandment. Jesus used the commandment to produce conviction of sin. He wasn't saying that salvation was by the commandment, but he was going to probe and see whether the man stood and whether he was truly repentant.

If you want to enter into life, keep the commandment. He said, Which one? Jesus said, No murder, no adultery, no stealing, no false witness. Honor your father and your mother.

Love your neighbor as yourself. He said, Well, I've done all these things for my youth up. And Jesus said, Oh, really? You've loved your neighbor from your youth up? Go sell all that you have and give to the poor.

Now, that's not a new gospel. It's not a new way of salvation that the Lord Jesus is enunciating here. He's showing him that he didn't love his neighbor as himself.

If he did, he'd go and sell all that he had and give to the poor. If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you'll have treasure in heaven, and come follow me. I'd just like to pause there and say that if the Lord Jesus had stopped in the middle of that sentence, it would have been ridiculous.

It would be ridiculous to tell a person to go sell all that he has and give to the poor. Period. But when he said, Come follow me, that took care of everything that he'd ever need.

Involved in those words, Come follow me, are a guarantee of everything a person could ever need in this Christian life. The young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions, proving what? Proving he didn't love his neighbor as himself. But it proved he wasn't willing to help his neighbor.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, verse 23, Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I say to you, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? Remember, these disciples were Jewish disciples.

Brought up in the Old Testament Scriptures, which taught that when you were faithful to the Lord and obedient to the Lord, he would bless you materially. It was true, a Jew in the Old Testament, if he lived a righteous life, his barns would bulge, his silos would overflow, his wine vats would be filled and overflowing with wine. Riches were a sign of God's favor in the Old Testament.

A sign of his blessing in the Old Testament. And so, here's a rich man, and Jesus says it's impossible for him to enter the kingdom of God. And the disciples say, well, that's the case.

If a man who's righteous and enjoys the blessing of God can't enter the kingdom of God, who can? Who then can be saved? Jesus said with men it's impossible, but with God all things are possible. Why is it impossible? Well, it's practically impossible to have riches and not trust in them. That's why.

The Lord Jesus is there pointing out the impossibility of having riches and not trusting in them. It's really true, money is power in a very real way, and the more money you have, the more you can do with money. You can bribe people to do things, you can pay people to do things.

If you don't have money, it's a great blessing in the things of God, because then you're limited to what God wants to be done. Like, if I had \$100,000 today, I could do an awful lot in Christian work, but it might not necessarily be the will of God. You know, it might not necessarily be the work of God.

I could just conjure up a great empire and build an empire centered around myself. When I don't have that, I'm really cast upon the Lord, and I depend on him to provide for what he wants. Okay, then we come to the crux of it.

27. Peter answered and said to him, See, we have left all, and therefore what shall we have? Now, Peter used the occasion of the rich man going away, walking away from Jesus, unwilling to forsake all. And Peter stuck out his chest and put his fingers under his lapel and said, We've left all and follow you.

What's in it for us? That's really what he was saying. In other words, Peter adopted a bargaining attitude, and you must see this. You must see this, that Peter adopted a bargaining attitude with the Lord.

Now, the next words by the Lord Jesus are answering that bargaining attitude. Assuredly, I say to you that in the regeneration, the regeneration is the millennium. 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 an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many who are first will be last. The last first.

The Lord Jesus is saying, You'll get rewarded, Peter, for forsaking all to follow me. You'll get rewarded in this life, and you'll get rewarded in the world to come. The interest rate you'll get in this life will be ten thousand percent, which is better than Wells Fargo's pay.

Inherit eternal life. You say, Is this the way you get eternal life? This is eternal life in its future aspect. You get eternal life by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, but this is the fullness of eternal life.

This is eternal life with the rewards that go along with it. This is the heavenly aspect of eternal life. So, Jesus is saying, Peter, you're not going to be the loser because you forsook all to follow me.

You'll be rewarded in this life, and you'll be rewarded in the next life. But watch out for that bargaining attitude, because many who are first in this dispensation, and you, Peter, are one of the first, one of the first to answer my call. Many of the first will be lost when it comes to rewards.

And maybe somebody living in 1982 in San Leandro, who serves the Lord without any bargaining spirit, can be first when it comes to rewards. In other words, just because you're one of the twelve doesn't set you apart as far as rewards are concerned. Many that are first shall be lost, and the lost first.

Now, the parable of the workers in the vineyard is given on the heels of that to illustrate how the lost will be first as the first lost. Because that's the way it ends. You remember in verse 16 it says, so the lost will be first as the first lost.

In other words, verses 1 through 15 of chapter 20 are an illustration and an explanation of verse 30 of chapter 19. Okay, Jesus at the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. It doesn't say when he went out.

Let's say 6 a.m. Just so you'll get a mental picture of the day's operation. He went out at 6 a.m. And notice, when he had agreed with the laborers. This is very important.

Those are crucial words. Those laborers bargained with him. They said, we will work for you for a denarius a day.

It's what you might call a labor management contract. They did. They entered into a definite contract.

The 6 a.m.ers. When they had agreed with him for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. He said, okay. And the day lasted until 6 at night.

12 hour day. He went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace. Now, don't be deceived by that expression, standing idle.

It means they were unemployed. It doesn't mean they were lazy. It doesn't mean they didn't want to work.

It means they couldn't get work. He said to them, you go into the vineyard and whatever is right I will give you. And they went, but there was no agreement.

Get it? He didn't make any bargain, but he said, look, I'll just give you what's right. And they went into the vineyard trusting his goodness. Trusting his grace.

They didn't say, we'll go if you give us a denarius a day. They didn't know what they were going to get. Maybe they'd only get a half a denarius.

They didn't care. They went and worked. They wanted work.

They wanted to serve. Okay. Again, he went out about the 6th hour and the 9th hour.

That's noon and 3 o'clock in the afternoon he went out. There's always plenty of unemployed in almost any society. You never get 100% employment.

And those men at noon and at 3 o'clock, they went to work in the vineyard and there was no labor management contract. None whatever. They went under the same terms as the 9A emirates.

You go into the vineyard and work and I'll give you what's right. About the 11th hour he went out and found others standing. Here we're up at 5 o'clock at night.

He went out and found them standing idle and he said to them, Why have you been standing here idle all day? He's testing them. He wondered if he detected a slight allergy to work on their part. Were they allergic to work? They said, No, that's not the reason.

The reason we stood here idle all day is no one would hire us. Nobody hired us. We want to work after all.

We have wives. We have children at home. We want to have money to provide for them, but we haven't been able to get employment.

He said, You also go into the vineyard and what is right you will receive? What is right you will receive? And they went on that basis. So get the picture. 6A emirates made a definite contract with the employer for a denarius a day.

9, 12, 3 and 5, they just went out trusting the employer that he would do right by them. But no contract at all. And they had no idea up until 6 o'clock at night what they were going to get for a day's work.

So when evening came, owner of the vineyard said to his steward, Call the laborers and give them their wages beginning with the last to the first. Very important. This is illustrating verse 30 of chapter 19.

Many who are first will be last. He says begin with the last. Begin with the 5T emirates and pay back so that the 6A emirates are the last to get paid.

When those came who were hired about the 11th hour, they each received a denarius. They worked one hour and received the same pay that those who worked 12 hours got. When the first came, they supposed that they would receive more.

They likewise received a denarius. You can imagine how they felt. Maybe some of you are bristling at this moment.

Maybe some of you feel the whole thing is most unfair. When they had received it, they murmured 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 heat of the day. Quite an expression, isn't it? Borne the burden and heat of the day.

We slaved out there in the vineyard, the heat, the dirt, the hard work. We worked 12 hours and you gave us a denarius and these people only worked an hour. They hardly got their hands dirty and you gave them a denarius.

They're mad. You say, what about it? Was it fair? Well, there are some wonderful lessons that we learn in here. The basic lesson is don't bargain with God.

That's the basic lesson. If you miss that, you miss the whole thing. Peter bargained with God.

The Lord Jesus warned him against it by this parable. The 6 AMers bargained. If you bargain with God, you may be first chronologically, but last in compensation.

That's what it's really saying. If you bargain with God, you may be first chronologically, but last as far as compensation is concerned. That is the basic lesson.

Say, do people bargain with God? Of course. Christian service all the time. What's in it for me? What am I going to get out of it? Sad business.

Second lesson is this. The 6 AMers got what they bargained for. They got justice.

The rest got grace. Grace is better than justice. We tell that to the unsaved, at least we used to.

I hope we still do. We say to the unsaved, don't ask God to give you what you deserve. If he gives you what you deserve, you'll go to hell.

Cast yourself on the love, mercy, and grace of God, and you'll do much better. We tell it. It's true in Christian service, too.

It's true in Christian service. Grace is better than justice. One of the most precious lessons in the passage to me is that God goes by need and not by greed.

Those 6 AMers were greedy and resentful, but God goes by need and not by greed. They say, what do you mean by that? Well, this employer really had a heart for his men, for those who worked, unlike most modern employers. He really cared more about his men than he did about his profit and loss statements.

You can tell he did. He knew that all the other workers needed money to buy food for their family, and he was determined to save heaven. Boy, wouldn't it be nice to see Christians running a business like this today? Very hard.

When you're running a business, you're always thinking of the bottom line, as they call it. The bottom line is the last line on a profit and loss statement. It shows you what you're doing.

But here was a man, this landowner was really interested in his employees. He really cared for them. Wouldn't it like to work for an employer like that? Another lesson you get from this passage, and one that I think is very important, is God is sovereign.

Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? No. That's good. I'm glad that this landowner said that.

If I want to give these men enough additional money to buy groceries for the day, don't I have the right to do that? God is sovereign. When we say that God is sovereign, we mean that he can do as he pleases. And when he pleases, it's always right and just and fair.

And it is. The sovereignty of God, I think, is one of the greatest studies that can occupy the human mind. The hymn says, God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform.

He plants his footsteps on the sea and rides upon the storm. God is not affected by circumstances. God harnesses circumstances to perform his will.

But another lesson you learn in this passage of Scripture is that the human heart is envious and greedy. I tell you, this really showed up those 6 AMers. It shows what's in the human heart.

The master said, are you envious because I'm generous? The answer is yes. That's right. The greed of the human heart.

The 6 AMers didn't want the 5 PMers to have enough money to buy groceries. They wanted to have it. They didn't want anybody else to have it.

This is interesting. Man doesn't want to be the recipient of God's grace. He doesn't want to see God showing grace to anybody else either.

When you deal with people, they would like to think that they can earn their way to heaven or merit their way to heaven. Either by good works or by their character. But they don't like the idea of salvation by grace.

Why is that? Does it rob them of any glory? Man in his natural condition doesn't want God to show him grace, and he doesn't want to see God showing grace to anyone else either. It's like the old story of the dog in the manger. The dog is there in the manger.

The dog is hungry. It can't eat hay. Well, it's not going to let the cow eat hay either.

The story is told of a young fellow named Ernest. Ernest was very, very good at playing marbles. The other boys in the neighborhood didn't particularly like it, and they consequently shunned his company.

One day, this boy met a Christian worker and unburdened his mind to him. Told him how unhappy he was that he was skunking all the kids in marbles, and they didn't want to play with him. The Christian worker says, My, you do seem to win an awful lot of marbles.

He saw the bag full of marbles that Ernest had. He said, Yes, sir, I do. He said, Ernest, I wonder if you ever ask the Lord Jesus about your marble playing.

And Ernest said, Oh, yes, sir, I pray about it. He said, What do you ask him? He said, I ask him that I might win. He said, Do you ever ask him that any of the other boys might win? He said, Oh, no, sir.

He said, Why not? He said, Why? Why not? He said, Because I want to win. I want to get all the marbles I can. This Christian worker says, It seems like some of the other boys might like to win the marbles sometimes.

Are you trying to show God to them? Oh, yes, sir. He said, I am. He said, Do you ever talk to them about God? And he said, Oh, yes, I do.

But they don't seem to love God. The Christian worker said, You know, I don't wonder too much about that. The God they see is your God.

The God they see wants you to win all the marbles. And he doesn't want them to win any marbles. You're not showing them the God who laid down his life.

What do you mean, sir? The man said, Giving up the thing that we want is the very heart of religion. Christ laid down his life for us. And we are to lay down our lives for others.

If we lose our life, that is our will, our way, our pleasure, our advantage. For Christ's sake, we shall find a real life which he only can give. Try it, Ernest.

Lose your life among the boys and see if they won't think better of your God. Too many of us are very much like the boy. As long as we succeed, it's well, but let us fail and it's ill.

If we're living and laboring for Christ's sake, we must remember that the very first principle is the denial of self. You say, what about those 6 AMers? They did work all day. They did work 12 hours and they only got a denarius for it.

My answer is this. They should have worked for such an employer who thought more of his personnel than he did of his profit. They should have been happy with serving such a one.

And that's true of us too. The Lord Jesus is the best and his service is great. And every one of us should count it the greatest privilege of life to be able to serve such a one.

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