

# The Penny Reward!

One of the parables given by Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry was that of a man who called workers into his vineyard and at the end of the day, gave each of them a penny. In the parable, known generally as the parable of “The Workers in the Vineyard”, Jesus Christ stressed the certainty of Jehovah’s promise of everlasting life for His children who maintain the faith until the end and asserted the prerogative of God Almighty to give life to the faithful according to His will.

The account as recorded in St. Matthew’s Gospel chapter 20 verses 1-16, states that the man, identified severally as an householder, the Lord of the vineyard, and the goodman of the house, went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard, (a piece of land where grapevines are grown), and agreed with them for the wage of a penny a day. When the householder went out about the third hour, (around 9.00 a.m.), and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, he immediately invited them to go and work in the vineyard, promising that they would be given “whatsoever is right”, that is, their due reward at the end of the day. The householder engaged more labourers about the sixth hour (12.00 noon) and at the ninth hour (3.00 p.m.). When he went out at the eleventh hour (5.00 p.m.) – which was just one hour before the end of the day – he still found some people standing idle and therefore said to them, “Why stand ye here all the day idle?” and when they replied that it was because no man had hired them, “He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive”. (verses 6, 7)

When it was time for them to be paid however, those who came earlier, murmured as they all got a penny each. Naturally, they expected that they would be paid more than those who came later, especially as payment started with those who came last. They murmured: “These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.” But he answered saying: “Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?” (verse 12) The householder argued that he had the right to do what he chose with his money and that they should even be grateful for his generosity. Jesus Christ then concluded by saying: “So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.” Verse 16.

## Meaning

The word “parable”, is derived from a Greek word, parabole, which means, “to compare things together, to form a parallel or similitude of them with other things”.

Long before our Lord Jesus Christ was born into this sinful world, many prophecies were made about him. One of them was that he would teach the people in parables. David, a king and prophet in Israel, was inspired by God to prophesy concerning Jesus Christ thus: “My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding. I will incline

mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp". (Psalm 49:3, 4) He stated further, "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old". – Psalm 78:2.

In fulfilment of these prophecies, when Jesus Christ came to this world, he delivered a good portion of his homilies by way of parables. The gospels say that "with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them". However, when he was alone with his disciples, "he expounded all things to them". (Mark 4:33, 34. See also Matthew 13:34, 35) Jesus Christ explained his reasons for using parables in response to a question by his disciples on the issue, as it is written: "And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." – Matthew 13:10-13; see also Mark 4:11, 12; Luke 8:9, 10.

The interpretation of the parable of the workers in the vineyard is as follows:

The Householder, (also referred to in the parable as the "Goodman of the house" and "The Lord", as earlier stated): In this parable, the "man that is an householder" is the Almighty God, JEHOVAH, the Creator of the heavens and the earth who will save His people through Jesus Christ. The Bible states that "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." – Psalm 24:1; See also Psalm 33:6-9; 90:2; 93:2; 104:2-4, Jeremiah 10:12; Genesis 1:1-31; etc.

The "Vineyard" stands for the kingdom of God that would be set up in these last days, where His sheep would be called through His servants to work for their own salvation. (Isaiah 5: 7) This kingdom is a place of safety where all the needs of man would be met by God Himself in the same manner the "householder" met the needs of the labourers by paying them their due wages.

The different times in which the labourers were called – in the morning, the third, the sixth, the ninth and the eleventh hours – show the different times people of God are called into His Kingdom, the expansion of the Kingdom being a gradual process. Others would come when they are middle aged, and some in old age – yet, they are all given the opportunity to prove themselves or work out their own salvation. (Philippians 2:12) Some would even have the special grace to pass through from this present world to eternal life in the world to come. Moreover, the different times reflect separate historical periods. Whether one did the work in ancient times or in the time of Christ or in this age of the end of the world, the important thing is what one makes of the call, in that one must labour diligently until the end in order to get salvation by the grace of God.

Grace: Another issue highlighted in the parable is that salvation is a matter of grace. Nobody can of his own accord come into the Kingdom except he is called. It is the Father's good

pleasure to invite all people of goodwill, the meek who want to work, into His service. Jesus Christ himself said: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." He said further, "... Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father". -John 6: 44, 65.

The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that the Father has committed the work of gathering people to His dear Son, Jesus Christ the righteous, hence Christ said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6) This work of gathering the people took a greater dimension after Christ's resurrection when the saints were anointed and the gospel started spreading beyond the confines of the Jewish nation, thus fulfilling the statement of Jesus Christ who said: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." – John 12: 32.

A striking example of how God calls His people is given in the book of Acts chapter 16 verse 14, which states that when Paul and Barnabas arrived Macedonia, and preached to those who were at the beach, one of those who heard them was "a certain woman named Lydia, which worshipped God, whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul".

Even: The next point is the meaning of "even" in the parable. This is an old way of saying "evening", which is the end of a day, representing this age of the end of the world when God will judge the world in righteousness and render to every man according to his works. Apostle Paul addressing the Roman Christians stated that God "will render to every man according to his deeds". (Romans 2:6, 7; see also Romans 14:12; Matthew 16:27; Revelation 22:12) As the householder entered into a contract with the workers and fulfilled his promise to them so God Almighty will keep His promise to His children in due course by His grace. Saint Paul, exhorting true Christians on this said: "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." – Hebrews 6:10-12.

Penny: The "penny" was the reward the 'goodman of the house' gave to each person. It was the day's wage for workmen in the time of Christ. The penny stands for everlasting life, salvation or eternal life. Apostle John wrote: "And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life." (1 John 2:25; 5:11) This promise is sure. We should not doubt it. Hence Saint Paul spoke of the "hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18) Salvation, which is complete deliverance from sin and its consequences including death, is the prerogative of the LORD which He gives to His faithful worshippers as a matter of grace. (Ephesians 2:8, 9) The Psalmist stated: "Salvation belongeth unto the LORD..." (Psalm 3:8) Again, he went on to say that, "He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto GOD the Lord belong the issues from death." – Psalm 68:20.

God will give eternal life to all His faithful worshippers regardless of age, gender, position or status, no matter how long they served, whether it is for the duration of their lives or shortly before God destroys the world. That is why St. Jude spoke of “the common salvation” (Jude 8) while St. Paul asserted that as far as this important promise of God was concerned, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female”, adding “for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”. – Galatians 3:28.

To labour until the evening or the end of one’s life requires faith, patience, understanding and, above all, the grace of God. (2 Peter 1:5-11) Jesus Christ stated: “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” (Matthew 24:12, 13) Moreover, St. Paul exhorted Christians thus: “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise...Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.” Hebrews 10:35,36,38,39.

St. Peter expounded on the fate of those who backslide in the following words: “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.” – 2 Peter 2:20-22.

The Steward: The “steward” in the parable stands for the immediate disciples of Christ, his cabinet members, known as the apostles or saints, whose number is a hundred and forty and four thousand. They are the ones vested with the authority to call, gather or fish out the children of God, known in the parable as “labourers” into the Lord’s kingdom fold. In Jeremiah 16:16 they are called “hunters” and “fishers”. It would be recalled that Jesus Christ told his immediate disciples he would make them “fishers of men”. – Matthew 4:18-22.

The remaining ones among the apostles or saints, known as the remnant will be chosen in this age to continue the gathering work. Jesus Christ made this clear in Matthew 24:31, where he stated: “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” Aside from the apostles, their helpers or children in the Lord who share in their grace, would also be used by Him to call His children into His Kingdom.

## Conclusion

It is evident from the parable that it is not the volume of work one does or the length of time spent in the service of God that matters but the quality of the work in the sight of God. It is for this

reason that Apostle Paul warned Christians to be careful in what they do in the service of God to ensure that they obtain a full reward, by His grace. He declared: "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." – 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. See also 2 John verse 8.

The statement of St. Paul that some people's work "shall be burned", though they will still get salvation means that such people will get salvation without other accompanying rewards because of their poor heart condition which was reflected in the quality of their work in the service of God. This again emphasizes the importance of serving God with a clean heart always, hence David the prophet declared: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart". He also prayed thus: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." – Psalm 73:1; 51:10; see also Psalm 125:4; Jeremiah 17:7,8; Romans 2:6, 7; etc.

There is no doubt that by the parable of The Workers in the Vineyard, Jesus Christ impressed on all Christians this very important truth: that the matter of reward is under Jehovah's sovereign control. Certainly, the Judge of all the earth, will do justly always, by giving "what is right" to whomsoever will do His will until the end. – Genesis 18:25.