

## THE REWARD OF THE KINGDOM

*Scripture Reading: Matt. 19:13-15, 16-30; 20:1-16*

In this chapter we will cover Matthew 19:13 through 20:16. Although this is a long portion of the Word, it is nevertheless quite simple. The parable found in Matthew 20:1-16 is a definition of the Lord's words at the close of chapter 19. This passage begins with little children being brought to the Lord Jesus. When the disciples tried to prevent the children from receiving the Lord's blessing, the Lord rebuked them, and laying His hands on the children, He blessed them. This reminds us once again that **the kingdom people must be like little children**. Whether we are old or young, we all need to be like little children. **Children are very simple**. They are poor in spirit and, in a sense, pure in heart, fulfilling the requirements of Matthew chapter 5. **For the sake of the kingdom we need to be poor in spirit and pure in heart**. Because children are not rich, it is quite easy for them to be like this. **Grownups, on the contrary, are rich**. Some are rich physically, others are rich psychologically, and still others are rich in their dreams. They dream of being rich. Little children are poor in every sense of the word. We must rid ourselves of such dreams and become like little children. If we fail to become like little children, we will be like a rich man coming to the Lord.

### A RICH MAN

Following the incident with the children, we are told of a rich man who came to the Lord Jesus seeking eternal life (19:16-26). He was seeking the zoe life. He already had the bios, the physical life, and the psyche, the soulish life. Now he was seeking after the zoe life, the divine and eternal life, which he thought he could inherit by doing good. Addressing the Lord as "Teacher," he asked, "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (v. 16). The Lord Jesus was very wise, and His answer revealed something very significant. The Lord responded, "Why do you ask Me concerning what is good? There is only One who is good" (v. 17). What does this reveal? It tells us that if we call the Lord good, we must recognize that He is God, for no one is good except God. **The Lord was saying that if you call Me good, you must recognize that I am God.**

We should not think of ourselves as good, because we are not God. Only God is good. This indicates that we are unable to do anything good because we ourselves are not good. How can a man who is not good do something good? It is impossible. Can an evil tree bring forth good fruit? (7:18). We are not good. We must be convinced that we cannot do anything good. **If we consider ourselves to be good, this is blasphemy against God. We all must realize that we are not good because we are not God. Only God is good.**

The Lord Jesus told this rich young man that if he wanted to enter into life he had to keep the commandments. When the young man asked which commandments, the Lord enumerated six: not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to bear false witness, to honor his parents, and to love his neighbor as himself. The young man replied, "All these things I have kept. What do I still lack?" (v. 20). Although this was not his real condition, the Lord Jesus did not argue with him. The Lord Jesus simply said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in the heavens; and come, follow Me" (v. 21). The Lord's words were a real test of his genuine love for his neighbor. The Lord Jesus did not rebuke him; He simply placed the facts before him. As a result, the young man was exposed and went away sorrowing.

Then the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, Only with difficulty will a rich man enter into the kingdom of the heavens...It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (vv. 23-24). This saying is an expression showing impossibility. It is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. When the disciples heard this, they were disappointed. Because they did not understand, they asked, "Who then can be saved?" (v. 25). He answered, **"With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"** (v. 26). For a rich man to be saved is like a camel trying to go through the eye of a needle. It is impossible with man. But God is able to enlarge the eye of the needle, and He can also reduce the size of the camel. You are unable to do it, but God can. **Therefore, do not be concerned—be at peace.**

Once again, we see that Peter appeared. Thank the Lord for Peter! Without such a good brother, many things would not have been exposed. When the Lord Jesus told the rich man to sell all that he had, Peter certainly heard. When he heard, he compared it to what he and his brother had done in leaving the fishing wharf and following the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus had said to Peter and Andrew, "Come after Me," and immediately they had given up everything and followed Him (4:19-20). To a certain extent, Peter was boasting: "This rich man could not give up everything, but we did. Lord, when You called us, we came. You asked us to follow You, and we did. We have forsaken everything. Now, Lord, what are You going to give us?" The Lord Jesus' answer shows that He is good and that He is God. He told Peter that he would receive exactly what he should receive. "You who have followed Me, in the restoration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (19:28). The Lord further promised that everyone who forsakes mother and father, brothers and sisters, and all that they have for His name's sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. He went on to tell Peter that "many first will be last, and many last first" (vv. 29-30). Why did He tell Peter "many first will be last, and many last first"? It was because Peter thought that he was able to pay the price of buying the

kingdom, but the Lord was indicating to him that **the kingdom is priceless and that he could never purchase it**. The kingdom is of peerless worth, and its price is too high. He could never afford to buy it. What He had asked Peter to give up was not the price of gaining the kingdom. He had simply asked Peter to give up the frustrations. The kingdom is not a recompense; it is a reward. Peter needed to realize that the kingdom was not something he could buy at any price. He would never have sufficient means to buy the kingdom. **The Lord had only asked him to forsake every entanglement and frustration. Then he would receive the kingdom as a reward, not as a recompense.** The Lord did not act according to the **commercial principle** which says that the more you pay, the more you receive. Peter's concept was too commercial. The Lord was washing away that commercial concept by saying, "Many first will be last, and many last first." **How wise is the Lord Jesus!**

### LABORERS IN THE KINGDOM

The Lord Jesus next spoke a parable to further illustrate the impossibility of earning the kingdom or of paying a certain price for it. He told of a householder who had a vineyard and who went out early in the morning, as the ancient custom was, to hire workmen (20:1-16). At six o'clock the householder hired workmen and agreed to pay them a denarius for the day's labor. Later, at nine o'clock, noon, three o'clock and five o'clock in the afternoon—the owner went to the marketplace again, found more idle people, and hired them to work for a suitable wage.

At six o'clock in the evening the householder paid the workmen. What happened was quite unusual. **He started to pay from the last, not from the first.** Altogether, there were five groups: the six-o'clock-in-the-morning group, the nine-o'clock group, the twelve-o'clock group, the three-o'clock group, and the five-o'clock group. The master of the vineyard paid the last group first and concluded with the first group. The agreement between the master and the workmen in the first group was for one denarius for twelve hours' work. They worked from six in the morning until six in the evening. Starting with the last group, the master gave each man a denarius. The master eventually paid the same amount to those in the first group. Those who had worked from the early morning were angry with their master, saying, "These last ones worked one hour, and you have made them equal to us who bore the burden of the day and the scorching heat" (v. 12). Then the householder asked them, **"Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is mine?"** (v. 15). The Lord seemed to be speaking to Peter, "Didn't I make an agreement with you, Peter? You gave up everything to follow Me, and I agreed to give you a denarius. I have given you what I promised. I told you that the first will be last and that the last will be first." This same expression is found both in Matthew 19:30 and Matthew 20:16, proving that the parable is a definition of the Lord's words to Peter in Matthew 19:27-30.

**This parable signifies the whole age of grace.** The time early in the morning denotes the time when the Lord Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to enter into the kingdom. He called them and hired them, and they gave up everything for the kingdom. This parable is very meaningful in the eyes of the Lord. **It indicates that unless you forsake everything for the kingdom, you are an idle person.** You may be a doctor or a professor, but if you do not give up everything for the kingdom, the Lord considers you an idle person. **In the entire universe God has only one work and one purpose—to establish His kingdom. If you are not in this work, you are idle.** If we sacrifice all that we are and have for God's kingdom, it means that we have been hired by God to work for Him. We are no longer idle and jobless; we have the proper job. If we do anything else on earth, in the eyes of God we are idle.

In the first century, the Lord Jesus came and saw some idle fishermen. These He hired to work in His vineyard. Throughout the following centuries the Lord has been calling people to labor in His vineyard. Probably the present time is five o'clock in the afternoon of the age of grace. The United States is large and wealthy, but in the eyes of the Lord few are working. Most are idle. The Lord has called us and hired us at five o'clock. We will be working for the kingdom for a short time, and then we may be the first ones to receive the reward. How marvelous! We may be rewarded before Peter, John, and James. I laughed at Peter when I read this parable. He was called much earlier than we, but we may receive the reward first. I am sure that the Lord Jesus will not pay him more than He pays us.

**This parable reveals that the kingdom is not a matter of commerce.** The Lord Jesus is not selling the kingdom, regardless of the price we are willing to pay. Do not have a commercialized mentality. **The reward of the kingdom is altogether a matter of the Lord's gracious doing according to His will.**

We must realize that none of us are good. Therefore, we must be poor in spirit. We need to be like little children. As far as we are concerned, there is no hope. But what is impossible with us is possible with Him. We simply need to give up the entanglements, frustrations, and distractions. We must forsake all these things. However, we should never think that what we give up constitutes the price we pay to purchase the reward of the kingdom. Whatever we do or give constitutes nothing and amounts to nothing. Never think that you can buy the reward of the kingdom. We do need to give up all frustrations and entanglements, but the Lord will not give us the kingdom as a commercial transaction. The kingdom comes to us from the Lord's gracious giving according to His own will. In order to prove that the kingdom is not a matter of commerce but of the Lord's gracious giving, He will reward the last first and the first last.