

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

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Do You Grumble Against God or Rely on His Gracious Favor?

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“Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’” (Matthew 20:10–12, ESV)

According to St. Matthew, just prior to Jesus telling His apostles the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard, He had spoken to them regarding the dangers of wealth. In doing so He upended their world once again, teaching them that wealth can be an impediment to faith, that with wealth also comes spiritual danger. Danger to the point of becoming an impediment to faith, possibly depriving the wealthy of salvation. Wealth usually makes man look at it as being a product of his work, which has the danger of leading the wealthy to ignore the truth that salvation is solely the work of God. So Christ tells His apostles just how difficult it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven, saying it is more difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle (Matt. 20:23-24). Not surprisingly, the apostles are alarmed by this news and question what Jesus has to say.

In their astonishment, they ask, *“Who then can be saved?” (Matthew 19:25, ESV)* St. Peter, speaking for the twelve, says, *“See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” (Matthew 19:27, ESV)* This makes us ask, “Is St. Peter saying that they all followed Jesus because they expected a reward, that they expected to become wealthy as they sat in seats of honor after Jesus had assumed the throne of David?” Some, certainly think this was St. Peter’s intention, which causes them to cringe at his words. Scripture does show us that St. Peter’s track record wasn’t all that stellar. Being impetuous, speaking for our Lord’s band of apostles, his comments have been known to miss the point.

Now one might think that Jesus would rebuke St. Peter for his impetuosity, but rather than rebuke him, Jesus receives his words and responds, *“Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, 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 children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (Matthew 19:28–30, ESV)* Yes, Peter, you will sit on a seat of honor at my side, but not after I have assumed the earthly throne of David, but after I have ascended to my heavenly throne. At that time you and the others will each be given a throne to sit on, a throne by which you shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel. *“Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”* To explain His words, Jesus tells them the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.

St. Peter’s response focuses on himself and his fellow apostles, *“we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?”* We have left our businesses, our families, what we hoped would lead to sound futures, to follow You, but you seem to be saying, our following You will not lead to riches. Is this true? Jesus answers, yes Peter, it will not lead to earthly riches, but it will lead to a throne in heaven. This is a truth every pastor needs to know. If you are a true under-shepherd of Jesus, following Him will not lead to earthly wealth. However, the same can

be said of every follower of Jesus Christ. You do not follow Him to receive earthly wealth, but wealth that exceeds all the wealth of the earth combined. You follow Him to receive heavenly wealth, life eternal with Jesus in His heavenly home.

Indeed, Jesus tells Peter and His apostles when the **“new world”** comes (Matt. 19:28), their following Him will lead to their active participation on Judgement Day. When Jesus sits on His glorious throne, to Judge all, the twelve apostles will be with Him to take part in the judgement of the people of God who are gathered at the throne of the Son of Man. It is most interesting that the Greek word used to describe the **“new world”** παλιγγενεσία (palengenisia) is also the Greek word interpreted as **“regeneration or renewal”** in Titus 3:5. That word describes what happened to you at your baptism. In those blessed waters you were regenerated, renewed, cleansed of your sin, robed in the very righteousness of Christ so that on the Last Day, the beginning of the **“new world,”** you will be among those judged innocent, pardoned and acquitted of all sin, to be resurrected to immortal, glorified bodies, becoming permanent residents in Christ’ **“new world.”** So do not worry about earthly wealth in this life, Jesus says, the wealth that I promise you far exceeds any wealth you might accrue on this earth.

To the words of St. Peter, Jesus seems to be offering an important warning to him and the others. Jesus does so by telling them the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard. Yes, their future wealth will be greater than any wealth found on earth, but our Lord warns them against any prideful comparisons that may be lurking in their hearts.

Without question the apostles have heard His call and followed Jesus. And yes, Jesus promises they will ascend to the unique office to which they have been called, to sit on one of twelve thrones in heaven. However, many others have also heard the call of Jesus and have become disciples of His. They, too, have suffered various kinds of loss, leaving behind their relationships with family and possessions all for the sake of the name of Jesus. So it really doesn’t matter who the disciple is or how much they have lost, all disciples on the Last Day will be abundantly recompensed and blessed, as they all receive eternal life. At that time there will be no distinction between believers. Thus, no prideful comparisons in their hearts and minds. Even now, as they follow Jesus, waiting for the regeneration to come, they are the same. So, when Jesus says, **“Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first,”** He makes it clear, faith in Him begets a leveling effect for all believers.

Jesus levels the playing field. There are no proud and powerful or weak and poor people among His disciples, they are all the same. Salvation is the equalizer. It is given to the earthly rich and to the earthly poor solely as a gracious gift from God, the gift of faith to believe in the atoning sacrifice of God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

It is not just to St. Peter and the twelve to whom our Lord affirms unique status, but also to all who have **“left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, [they] will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.”** (Matthew 19:29, **ESV**) All who follow Jesus Christ suffer some loss, this is the cost of following Jesus, this is way of discipleship living in a broken and rebellious world. But we must take note that in His words, Jesus excludes all unbelievers. Non-believers are no longer in view, therefore, there is no comparison. All who believe will, by grace alone, inherit the same eternal life. None will be greater or lesser than the other. Heaven is not to be likened to this world. Life in heaven is operated on the principle of life for Christ’s sake. This looks utterly foolish to sinful mankind, and to this foolishness, Jesus gives us the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.

Jesus now begins to explain why there are many first ones who will be last and last ones who will be first. Our Lord crafts this parable to open the minds of His apostles that all His disciples are equal in the present and the future reign of God in Christ.

Our Lord tells us about a homeowner who goes into the community five times during the day to hire laborers to work in his vineyard. He goes out early in the morning, again at the third hour, again at the sixth hour, again at the ninth hour, and finally at the eleventh hour (Matt: 20:1-8). At the end of the day he tells his foreman to pay the laborers their wage. This is where the parable makes its point. The foreman pays each laborer what they had agreed to, a denarius. Now those who had worked longer hours, bearing the heat of the day, were really upset when they got the same wage as a laborer who, being hired at the eleventh hour, worked only for one hour. They thought their wages should have been more. So they complained to the homeowner. Here the parable closes with Jesus making the point: God treats all those who work in His vineyard, those who are workers in the reign of heaven the same. God's grace is poured out upon all who believe in His Son Jesus, equally. There is no distinction of the Last Day.

Grace is God's most remarkable attribute. It is the source which drives Christians to proclaim God's love and forgiveness to fellow sinners; teaching that God would have no one be lost, but that all would come to faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, grace is the very heart of the Gospel: the great all-embracing, never-failing love of God which God dispenses equally. You, who claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ, *Do You Grumble Against God or Do You Rely on His Gracious Favor?*

In the beginning God created all things harmoniously. Man was given dominion over all the earth, but in this gift of dominion there was no indication of superiority or inferiority, there was only harmony. However, this blissful harmony was lost in a heartbeat when Adam sinned against God.

When sin entered the world with the fall of Adam, everything changed, chaos and disorder entered creation. No longer did man live in harmony with God, with other men, or with creation. Sin brought disharmony into the world of men and to this day man struggles with equality. Thus, man created unequal classes because of his desire to be first with the most.

But God loves all that He made. Therefore, He looks at every man equally. There are no qualifications of class, race, or gender. No qualifiers of wealth, breeding, or physical strength. He simply pours out His love upon every man equally. He willingly forgives our sins because He, ***“desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4, ESV)***

Just as the owner in the Gospel Reading for today called laborers to work in his vineyard, giving them the same wage, God calls laborers into His Church by grace, offering them the same yet unimaginable wage, eternal life. But this was a lesson our Lord's apostle had not yet learned.

Do we not see in these complaining laborers ourselves? Instead of rejoicing over the goodness of God, we grumble and murmur, “God, I'm worth more than this other fellow.” Although we don't want to admit it, our self-righteousness springs forth: we have labored longer; we have suffered more; we have contributed more; we have been members of the Church since infancy; we have shouldered the duties and responsibilities of supporting the Church, we have taught Sunday school, held congregational offices, all of which required much in time and effort. So, we justify our superiority by asking, “Haven't we labored harder and longer than those who have just become members or those who were brought to repentance on their deathbed? How can God

treat them exactly as us?” If this is the way you think, then you need to ask yourself, “Do I know what grace is?” If this is your thinking, I would urge you to repent and give thanks for the radical egalitarian spirit of God.

We may have labored long and hard in the vineyard of God’s Kingdom of grace, but who are we to quibble with the Master over our wage? Who are we to say, “Your offer is not good enough!” Who are we to challenge God for our reward when we consider what it cost Him to offer us a reward of which we are so underserving? To show us His love for us, God poured out His grace upon us through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He sent His Son into this world to undo the consequence of our sinful pride, our desire to be superior. Our Lord Jesus Christ humbled Himself, becoming one of us, teaching us how-to live-in peace with one another and with God. To complete that peace, He gave His life upon the Altar of the Cross thereby paying the penalty for our sinful pride. If you think God owes you more than the reward He promises, undoubtedly, you will hear Him say; ***“Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?”*** (Matthew 20:10–12, ESV) I shudder to think what lies in store for the soul who would challenge God’s generosity on the Last Day.

Regardless of how long you toil in God’s Church, at the end of your days you will be summoned, and you shall receive a reward. You shall stand before the steward of the vineyard, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and He will execute the will of His heavenly Father, giving you your just recompense. At that moment, you will receive God’s incomparable goodness, His never-ending grace given to all who have been reborn in the waters of Baptism, robed in the righteousness of Christ, and made children of His. At that time, you will hear Him say, ***“Well done, good and faithful servant . . . Enter into the joy of your master.”*** (Matthew 25:21, ESV)

On the Last Day, the reign of God in Jesus will come in all its fullness, and all who have been called to faith, called to be workers in His vineyard — all who are disciples of Jesus, without distinction — will receive from their Master what He deems just, in accordance with His pledge to them when they were first called; they will receive *God’s Grace Dispensed Equally*; that is, life eternal for all who believe. All are equal in His sight and thus receive His grace, equally. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.