

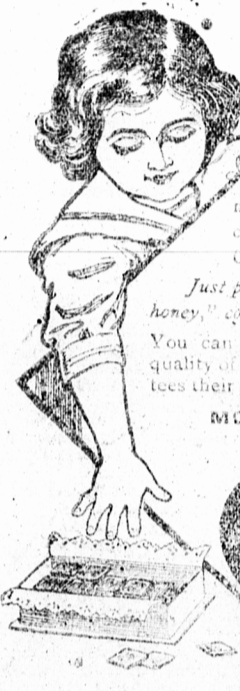
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THE GUARDIAN'S WEEK END SERMON

Sermon preached by Rev. J. W. Aitkens.

The Parable of the Laborers. Matt 20-1-16.

There are certain difficulties that appear on the surface of this parable. To begin with it seems eccentric. A householder engaged certain laborers in the morning and others toward evening, yet he gave them all the same wages. That seems odd, but it is not written—"My ways are not your ways, nor My thoughts your thoughts." There has never been a truly great soul in this world who was not been misunderstood. Christ himself was said by some of his contemporaries to be insane.

A more serious difficulty is that it seems unfair. At the first glance we feel like sympathizing with the numerous and saying, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" But must always face the problem of "judging before men the justice of His actions, but we must remember that 'man looketh on the outward appearance, but God judgeth the heart.'" Hence His justice may be based on facts that are unknown to us.

A third difficulty has been imported into the parable by dividing the laborers into persons saved and unsaved, and by teaching that the coming of the Son of Man may be saved at the close of his life and Heaven be the same to him as if he had come to God in youth.

It is a fact that a man may be saved when he is old, but it is not thought in this parable. The division is not between saved and unsaved, for they all were laborers. The difficulty is made between different kinds of service. This can be readily seen if we look at the first word in the parable. "For" links the story to the preceding chapter. There we read that a certain rich man failed to measure up to the test imposed by Christ and went sorrowfully away, then Peter said—"Behold we have forsaken all and followed Thee. What shall we have therefore?" It was the speech of a worldly minded man and the parable was spoken in order to rebuke this bargaining spirit.

The first laborers "agreed" with the householder, they were not willing to trust themselves to his justice, but compelled him to make a bargain, and this spirit still manifests itself with the Lord. There are people who follow Christ, not because they see the miracles but because they eat of the loaves and fishes. A colored man came to the pastor of a prominent church in Nova Scotia and said, "I have seen how you gain your church." The pastor replied—"You must rest for your sins and accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, then your name will be proposed in His name and if you approved, you will be admitted as a member." The man then said—"Well, pastor, I think I'll join, I want to be on the list." "I ought to be on the list," said the pastor. "So long as Christianity costs money and costs comfortable living and popularity, there are many professed followers of Christ, but it means the despoiling of our property, the loss of popularity, a public whipping, such as Paul and Silas received, what then? We should remember that it is given us as our reward, Christ not only rewards us in His life but in suffering for His sake and the suffering reveals the Christian and weeds out the hypocrite. Whenever a moral crisis arises in a community then people are weighed in balance. The crises of life do not make character they reveal it. Inconsistently, men step upon the scales of public opinion and are weighed in their true light. Two boys made a wager about which of them weighed the most. One boy stepped on the scales and began to expand his cheeks as if to increase his weight, but the other boy said—"You need not expand your cheeks that way or you only weigh what you are. When a good stuff light is on, then men weigh just what they are and they register their weight so that he who thus may read."

The bargaining spirit is revealed at the last day. "They murmured against the good man of the house, saying these last have wrought more than we and thou hast made them equal unto us which have borne the burden and heat of the day." Had they been men of the proper spirit, they would have rejoiced, inasmuch as the last laborers came at the first call that they received. Has not this parable a wider application? Are there not nations that are not abiding for Christ simply because they have not been called, and if at the close of the day, when they are called and labor only for one hour, shall we who have enjoyed the blessing of Christianity murmur? We should rather rejoice.

It is worth noting that although their spirit was not of the best yet they were allowed to labor. Some reach Christ of contention, others I strive but nevertheless we should be thankful for an imperfect presentation of Christ is better than none.

The last laborers came at their first call. There is no comfort here or those who are postponing the day of decision for Christ for the first opportunity was embraced. Prof. Drummond tells of a student who was seriously ill was urged to accept Christ. The student replied, "Don't you think it is a pretty meaning for a fellow to accept Christ as his Saviour simply because he is driven into a corner and almost compelled to do it?" "That may be so," said the Professor "but if after your years of indifference Jesus Christ draws near to you with offers of mercy, it would be infinitely meaner not to accept Him."

The last workers made no bargain. The householder said "Go ye also into the vineyard and whatsoever is right that I shall give ye," and they trusted him and went to work. How much more do we know about the rewards of the future than is here indicated? Shall the heathen be saved? Whatsoever is right shall they receive. Shall moral men be saved? Whatsoever is right shall they receive. Shall the wicked be

punished forever? Whatsoever is right shall they receive.

These men served in the spirit of love and there is no question which tests the foundations of character as much as Christ's question to Peter—"Lovest thou Me?" How many questions are solved by self-sacrificing love? It solves the problem of decision, for Jesus said they who loved father or mother or sister or brother or lands more than they loved Him were not worthy of Him. If people do not serve Christ, it is because some person or thing keeps them back and sometimes the object of their love is not wrong in itself, but has simply claimed the first place in the affections. Love solves the problem of service. Jesus served seven years for Hachid and they were not as a few days to him for the love he had for him. There is nothing that is distasteful in Christian work and it will become unendurable if we do not love Christ. Christ, who is a great musician said that the work of practicing was a great drudgery to him until the love of music took possession of him, then he rose early and toiled late and found great delight in it.

Disinterested love solves the problem of pain and suffering. Paul said he was "ready not only to be bound, but to die for the name of the Lord Jesus." What made him ready? Was it because he desired a martyr's death?

He took every means for preserving his life that was consistent with Christian principle. He loved Jesus and that was his equipment. Some time ago the sad news of the mission of a missionary in China reached this country, but the tidings came scarcely before before applications came pouring in from those who were ready to take his place even at the risk of life.

Love solves the problem of reward. In Matthew 25 we read that those who were rewarded were people whose good deeds were done so unconsciously that they asked—"Lord when saw we Thee sick, or in prison and ministered unto Thee?" Some think that they will be rewarded for the length of their service but that is not fair, for some have never had the opportunity for long service. James and Stephen were both slain at the beginning of their lives of service. Is it fair that they shall receive less than others? The rewards of heaven are based on the motive, spirit, and whole purpose of life and whole purpose is the reward in given, even though the length of service is not long. The fact that his Father is a merciful Father.

Notice some other lessons. The bargaining spirit receives its reward. "Friend, I do thee no wrong, slide thou not a piece with me for a penny." Take that thought to heart, why? Write the forward God, saying, "I'll sell forward." If we do our work in a haphazard way we shall receive the hireling's reward. God sees not his man's work. We judge that so many hours work with only so much pay, but God does not work things out according to our laws of Arithmetic. The Lord weighs the reins and the heart. How carefully should we examine the motives of our life and throw wide the heart's door that the refining Spirit of God may purify us.

Many are called but few are chosen. Gideon's army numbered 32,000, but there were only 200 choice ones whom many who are best in this world will be best in the next. If a man purges himself he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, meet for the Master's use and ready for every good work.

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