

Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16.

Theme: Wages from God.

Text: Matthew 20:8 -- "...pay them their wages..."

Proposition: God pays wages, and gives rewards and gifts, to people because of his love and generosity, and not just because of the service rendered him. He extends this unearned love and generosity to people who need it and will accept it.

Dates written: February 8-9, 1963.

Dates and places used:

- Feb. 10, 1963 - Montrose, Colo.
- May 1, 1966 - Alamosa + Blanca
- June 15, 1969 - Alamosa, Colo. (Presbyterian + Methodist churches)
- June 8, 1969 - 1st Bn, 49 Arty, West ARMC
- July 10, 1969 - Ft. Gordon, Ga.
- SEPT 2, 1984 - D.D. EISENHOWER ARMY MEDICAL CENTER, FT. GORDON, GA.

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Date and place read:

Feb. 10, 1963 - Madison, Wis.

St. Paul's Episcopal Church

Madison, Wis.

Read by Rev. [Name]

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Introduction:

1. Some years ago in a certain large city I had a job to do which required more muscles than I have. In fact, I needed the help of at least two men, and I didn't know how to get them. Someone advised me to go in the morning to a certain street corner in an older part of the city, and that I would find there at least several men hanging around, just waiting for someone to hire them for the day. I went there, as suggested, and, sure enough, there were several men in work clothing leaning against building walls, sitting on the curb, visiting among themselves, and just waiting. One of the more alert of the men nodded at me, and said "good morning"; so I told him my problem. He said he would be glad to help, and then recommended a friend of his, from the now-silent and listening group of men. I agreed with them on an hourly wage, and off we drove to do the day's heavy work. It is still possible to find "pick-up" day laborers like this in some areas, though it is becoming more and more difficult to do so, especially if hard physical work is involved.

Introduction:

I. Some years ago in a certain large city I had a job to do which required more muscles than I have. I needed the help of at least two men, and I didn't know how to get them. Someone advised me to go in the morning to a certain street corner in an older part of the city, and that I would find there at least several men hanging around, just waiting for someone to hire them for the day. I went there, as suggested, and sure enough, there were several men in work clothes leaning against buildings, sitting on the curb, visiting among themselves, and just waiting. One of the more alert of the men noticed me, and said "good morning," and I told him my problem. He said he would be glad to help, and then recommended a friend of his, from the neighborhood and living across town. I agreed with them on an hourly wage, and off we drove to do the day's heavy work. It is still possible to find "pick-up" day laborers like this in some areas, though it is becoming more and more difficult to do so, especially if hard physical work is involved.

2. The Scripture that we read today is a parable by Jesus, the story of which depends on the same method of finding laborers. In most lands an age-old custom of folks who need a job is to congregate at some place where they may be easily found by those who are seeking help. In Jesus' parable, the employer was the owner of a vineyard. He found some workers in the market place early in the morning and hired them, for an agreed-on price, which by today's standards would be about 20¢ a day. Three more times during the day he realized that more help was needed, and so made three more trips to the market place to hire additional help each time. These new laborers, hired at the sixth, ninth and eleventh hours of the twelve-hour day, were simply promised that they would be paid "whatever is right." At the end of the day all were paid ~~th~~ then and there~~x~~ for their work. Those who had worked the full, long, hot twelve-hour day were paid the denarius or 20¢, that they had been promised. These men were upset, however, when the farmer paid exactly the same amount to each of the other workers, regardless of whether they had worked six, three, or one hours. The reply that

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the vineyard operator gave to them carries the message of the story, and was the reason for its telling.

3. The whole story and its message were told by Jesus to illustrate everyday and eternal truth about God, about God's Kingdom, and about God's relationship to people. ~~It is, of course, this truth in which here we are interested. The first point of truth here seems to be that~~

I. A response to the master, a willingness to work, is the first qualification of him who receives wages from God.

1. One woman asked another, "Is your husband a good provider?" "He is that," came the reply. "He's going to get some new furniture providin' he gets the money; he's going to get the money providin' he gets work; he's going to get work providin' the job just suits him. I never saw such a providin' man in all my life." (No. 286 in "400 More Snappy Stories That Preachers Tell," by Paul E. Holdcraft, Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1948).

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2. There are people who will take a job only if it suits them. Some people feel that they are too good for this job or that one. In this day of unemployment insurance there are many folks who prefer to draw their \$40 to \$50 a week for not being employed in their special line of work than to ~~earn~~ earn a few dollars more a week, or even than to earn quite a bit more, by working hard at something they do not like. If our unemployment rate is high it doesn't necessarily mean that jobs aren't available. It often simply means that ^{some of} the unemployed are choosy about that at which they'll work. After all, welfare, unemployment insurance, and other programs won't let us suffer. "Providin' we get a job such as we want, we'll work!" seems to be wording which expresses much of our modern day attitude.

3. This type of attitude isn't indicated at all on the part of the laborers in the story that Jesus told. The vineyard owner ~~evidently~~ had no trouble finding people who wanted to work. I'm not familiar with grape growing on a large scale, so don't know just how hard or tedious the work might be. This story, like all the

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rest of the parables of Jesus, reflects accurately the conditions of his times. The people who worked all day are quoted as saying that they "have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat," so probably ~~the~~ such jobs were not particularly easy. The laborers had to be willing to do such hard work, and had to work at it, before they received wages from the employers.

4. From all this, it seems fair, then, to find in this part of this parable about God and his kingdom the message that he who would receive wages, or rewards, from God must be willing to do the work that God wants him to do. No arguments, no questions are indicated. Simple, prompt and willing obedience are ^{called for} the things that count. (The rest of the story is such that through it Jesus seems to have said that this spirit of willingness and obedience is the most important thing about working for God.)

5. We should not let such a point go by without turning the searchlight on our inner selves, each in his own way. Questions which this part of the parable might cause each to ask

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HIMSELF are: "Am I willing to do the things that I honestly think God wants me to do, no matter how hard or distasteful they are to me?" "Do I show evidence of such willingness by sincere courtesy to and concern for all other people, regardless of race or nationality? each of whom is ~~as~~ important to God as I am?" "Do I give sacrificially of both my time and money to help my church win people to ~~Christ~~ Christ, and to serve them in many ways for God, since the church is the only really-effective way I have of joining with others so that our efforts for God are the most effective?"

6. Willingness to do God's work is so important that in the parable Jesus next made the point that

II. God's reward, or wages, for workers are not based on the ability nor the service they perform.

1. In the parable the farmer paid all the workers of the day the same amount. Not unnaturally, those who had worked all day grumbled about it. It just didn't seem fair that those who had worked only 1/2, 1/4 or 1/12

himself are: "Am I willing to do the things that I honestly think God wants me to do, no matter how hard or disagreeable they are to me?" "Do I show evidence of such willingness by being courteous to and concerned for all other people, regardless of race or nationality, each of whom is as important to God as I am?" "Do I give sacrificially of both my time and money to help my church win souls to Christ, and to serve them in many ways for God, since the church is the only really-effective way I have of joining with others so that our efforts for God are the most effective?"

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II. God's reward, or wages, for workers are not based on the ability nor the service they perform.

1. In the parable the farmer paid all the workers of the day the same amount. Not uncharacteristically, those who had worked all day grumbled about it. It just didn't seem fair that those who had worked only 1/2, 1/4 or 1/12

of the day should be given the same amount as those who had worked all day. I suspect that if any of you business men paid in such an unusual manner today you'd have considerable grumbling among your employees too. Probably the next time you hired, you would find that most of the workers were waiting for that last hour before they started to work! Don't worry, though, for this parable imposes no christian duty or example to ^{use} such a pay system. All the commentators and scholars agree that this Scriptural story was not told to give a new system of employer-employee relationships. It was told to point out that in things spiritual and eternal, in things of God and His kingdom, the standards are a bit different from everyday business standards.

2. If God followed the normal business practices of paying wages according to the time you've worked, or the ability you have, or the amount of work you do, the message of God's impartial love and justice would be meaningless. There would be little hope for the future except on the part of the most gifted persons, and of those who very early in life turned to

of the day should be given the same amount as those who had worked all day. I suggest that if any of you business men could in such a unusual manner today you'd have considerable sympathy among your employees too. Probably the next time you hired, you would find that most of the workers were waiting for that last hour before they started to work! Don't worry, though, for this terrible imposes no christian duty or example to me such a pay system. All the commentators and scholars agree that this biblical story was not told to give a new system of employer-employee relationships. It was told to point out that in this spiritual and eternal, in things of God and His kingdom, the standards are a bit different from everyday business standards.

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God through Christ. Suppose God paid wages in terms of eternal life, according to what folks did for him. The biggest contributors to the churches, and to other good works, would ~~really be correct with~~ ^{is - they assumed} attitudes of superiority, and ~~condescension~~ toward others. So many years in heaven for so much money, might be the standard. Of course, such a thought knocks out the idea of everlastingness about heaven! Or suppose that the person with a lot of special ability received special wages from God. This might mean that people with good vocal or instrumental musical talent, or those with excellent artistic taste, or the golden-throated and persuasive sermon orator, or the person who is especially good at getting along with almost everybody, or the person with unusual energy who is always and everywhere doing good, would receive special rewards from God. If this were so, those of us who are more ordinary and less gifted and less spectacular could not have much hope for the future. Any idea of equality before God would become impossible.

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parable. God does not pay spiritual and eternal wages by such standards. Rather,

III. God's rewards, or wages, are based on the generosity of the Master, who recognizes, respects and ministers to the needs of each.

1. In the parable, the employer pointed out to the grumblers that he was doing them no wrong. He was paying them the amount which had been agreed. Then, speaking of his equal payment to those who had worked only fractional parts of the day, he said: "I choose to give to **these** last 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?"

2. In the day of Jesus the average minimum daily wage of a working man was about that which Jesus represented the landowner of the parable as paying. A man could hardly support a family on less. This much was needed if he were to care for his wife and children. The vineyard farmer was aware of this, since it was common knowledge. In paying to those who worked the shorter hours the minimal

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wages, he recognized this need.

3. Such is the way of God in his dealings with people, Jesus is saying God knows the needs of each, and is willing and anxious to help these ~~new~~ needs be met. God does not force his will and way on folks as they deal ~~with~~ with their needs and problems. They must be willing to accept his help, willing to approach things with the right spirit, willing to alter their ways to conform as best they can with what they understand to ~~be~~ his will.

4. God is not capricious in paying wages, in giving rewards, ~~how-~~ever. He is not moved by extreme generosity one moment to one person, only later to show a greater or lesser generosity to another equally-deserving person. His choices, rather is to be equally generous and gracious to all. To ~~the~~ person of faith goes the same eternal happiness, wages, or reward as to any other such person, regardless of differences in ability, length of service in God's work, or other factors.

5. If this is true, then there is no way to earn God's favor, to

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merit his wages, to get a reward from him. ~~The only thing is simply to~~ accept his gifts in faith, gratitude, and love.

6. Recently I received another booklet in a series which is sent out to ministers around the country by a pro-segregation southern group. One such book was sent with the compliments of Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia. This indicated ~~the~~ determination and wealth behind efforts to preserve a society based on discrimination along racial lines. The most recent book from this source sought to prove from biological research that the average negro is inferior in mental ability to the average white man. Because this is so, it concludes, the superior race, the white man, must do everything he can to prevent mixing of the races, ~~mix~~ by which his superiority would be reduced.

7. This sort of reasoning sounds strangely like that of Hitler's theorists about the superior Aryan race, and the inferior Jewish race that must be exterminated, doesn't it? In retreat and withdrawal and retal-

merit his wages, to get a reward for his. The ~~the~~ ~~time~~ is simply to accept his gifts in faith, gratitude, and love.

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7. This sort of reasoning sounds strangely like that of Hitler's tirades about the superior Aryan race, and the inferior Jewish race that must be exterminated, doesn't it? In retreat and withdrawal and racial-

iation at such white man's arrogance some negroes have gone into the sect known as The Black Muslims, described recently in a Saturday Evening Post article. This group uses the same type of thought and tactics as the white supremacist, except that they claim that the white race is the inferior one. For them, the white man is a devil, and the black man is favored of God!

8. Whether one race or group or nationality is superior or inferior is immaterial from the christian viewpoint. Christ taught, and Christians must believe, that God ~~love~~ loves all individuals equally, and has in store for all the same wages and rewards. ~~As~~ As christians, we have no right to be concerned with how mingling with another race or group might degrade or upgrade us. As christians, we should be concerned only with how we can best help others, regardless of race or creed, because from our love of God we want to serve him through others. As God treats people fairly and generously regardless of race, wealth or status, so should his worshippers.

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9. This doctrine that God treats each according to his need is Christ-taught, ~~let us remember~~. This doctrine gives hope for eventual justice to the ^{UNFORTUNATE AND} mistreated. It removed the fear of death. It eliminates overbearing pride by ^{PEOPLE} the capable and undue humility by ^{US} the less able people. It helps ^{US} people recognize the ultimate value of each individual, whatever his place and circumstance in life. ^{IT GIVES SELF VALUE!}

Conclusion: Common sense and the nobler impulses of our spirits should make us glad that all this is so. It is good to realize, as the parable of the workers in the vineyard so well points out, that God pays wages and gives rewards and gifts to people not because of service they render him, but because of his love and generosity for all people alike. God extends this unearned love and generosity to all people who need it and will accept it.

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 it.

Father, help us never to be deceived into thinking that we can work or buy our way into ~~thy~~ Thy favor. We are thankful for this beautiful parable of the workers in the vineyard, by which Jesus made clear this point. We are pleased that thy generosity is extended unhesitatingly and without strings to each according to his~~x~~ need, if he will only accept.

We accept thy love. We would show our gratitude by copying the pattern that Jesus showed us in non-discriminatory and sacrificial service to our neighbors, of all colors, races and needs.

Use us in thy service, we pray.
Amen.

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Opening Sentence (Funeral)

The eternal God is thy refuge,
and underneath are the everlasting
arms.

Journal of the [illegible]

The [illegible] of [illegible] is [illegible]
and [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible]

[illegible]