

GLAD TIDINGS

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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“The last shall be first, and the first last.”

By: Jerry Fite

Jesus’ parable of the householder rewarding the laborers in his vineyard is introduced with, “*But many shall be last that are first; and first that are last*” (Matthew 19:30). The parable apparently illustrates the introductory remarks for Jesus says, “*So the last shall be first, and the first last*” (Matthew 20:16).

The householder calls people to service in his vineyard at various time through the twelve hour work day. He hires laborers early in the morning, and then at the third, sixth, ninth and eleventh hours. Those called early in the morning go to work agreeing to the wage of “a shilling a day” (Matthew 20:2). The householder calls various workers to service saying that they would be paid according to “whatsoever is right” (Matthew 20:4). At the close of the day the householder commands his steward to call the laborers and pay them their hire, “*beginning from the last to the first*” (Matthew 20:8). The laborers he had called first suppose they will be given more, but are given what was agreed upon—a shilling a day (Matthew 20:10). The householder reminds the mur-

muring workers who were called first, “Friend, I did thee no wrong; didst not thou agree with me for a shilling? Take up that which is thine, and go thy way; *it is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee*” (Matthew 20:13-14).

Who were these last that were paid first? They were workers who were idle. When asked by the householder why stand ye idle they reply, “Because no man hath hired us” (Matthew 20:7). When called, they went into the vineyard to work just like those who went in the early morning. Herein lies the point of the parable: faithfulness to opportunity.

Those called first were paid last and those who were called last were paid first. All however were rewarded the same. Those called early in the morning were faithful to their calling. While they worked throughout the heat of the day, they needed to understand that those called the eleventh hour, like the early morning workers, were faithful to the first opportunity they had to enter into service. While man might do things differently, paying more to those who worked longer, God rewards on the basis of faithfulness.

People will be weeping with gnashing of teeth when the door of opportunity is forever shut. They will be seeing others from the east to the west, and north to the south sitting down in the Kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets. But they will be left outside. Jesus reminds them, “*And behold, there are last who shall be first, and there are first who shall be last*” (Luke 13:30). Justifying themselves, the sorrowful had pleaded, “We did eat and drink in thy presence, and thou didst teach in our streets” (Luke 13:26). Being faithful to the opportunity of God’s call demands obeying the call, not just being exposed to it. They were workers of iniquity for they disobeyed the teachings of the Lord.

We may have all the privileges in being exposed to the Lord’s teachings. We may proudly think of ourselves as “the first”, and therefore should be rewarded according to our privileges. But the Lord reminds us that He does not reward us upon being exposed to the Lord, but rewards us according to our faithfulness in obeying the Lord, even if we are the last called.