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‘GO YE ALSO INTO THE VINEYARD’

—MATTHEW 20:1-16.—

Golden Text:—‘Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.’—Matt. 19:30.



GRAPE CULTURE was one of the main industries of the days of the Great Teacher. The stony hillsides of Palestine were once terraced and extensively used as vineyards. On our recent visit we noted with particular interest the revival of this custom, as one of the evidences of the beginning of restitution in the Holy Land.—Acts 3:19-21.

The grapevine was honoured of the Master, in that he used it in a parable to symbolise himself and the Church, saying, ‘I am the Vine, ye are the branches’; ‘My Father is the husbandman’; ‘Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit’; ‘Every branch in me which beareth fruit he pruneth it that it may bring forth more fruit’; ‘Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away’.

Our present study, The Parable of the Labourers, is in full accord with the foregoing, but shows the matter from a different standpoint. It shows how each one of the Lord’s consecrated Church, each heir of the Messianic Kingdom shortly to be established, is privileged to be a co-labourer with his Lord and Master, and with the Heavenly Father in the vineyard work—tending the vine, looking out for the injurious pests, keeping the soil in good condition, assisting every way in the production of ‘much fruit’ and of fine quality. Evidently many Christian people do not appreciate the privilege of being labourers in the Church of Christ—‘building one another up in the most holy faith’ until we all come to the full stature of a man in the Anointed One.

St. Paul appreciated this privilege greatly, saying, God hath made us qualified servants of the New Covenant. So then we, as ambassadors for God, beseech men, be ye reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:20.) Whoever is negligent of his opportunities to serve others who manifest a hearing ear, a humble heart and a teachable spirit shows his own lack of appreciation of God’s message.

He thus indicates that he has not fully come to a knowledge of God nor to a knowledge of the Truth [R4666: page 265] respecting the Divine Plan. And, indeed, the Scriptures declare that a deep knowledge of God, his Word and his purposes, is attained only as a gift of God, bestowed only upon those who are in a humble, faithful, zealous attitude of mind—‘To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.’

The things pertaining to God’s Kingdom, in its future operation toward the world for a thousand years, will be openly manifested to every creature, shortly. But now it is appropriate, and is the Divine will, that these things should be known only to the Church, the consecrated, the spirit-begotten sons of God. Likewise there are important truths pertaining to the Kingdom class, the Church, which is being prepared to be the Bride of Christ and his joint-heir in the Kingdom. And these things are likewise intended to be comparatively secret—to be clearly and fully understood only by such as have made a covenant with the Lord by sacrifice. (Psalm 50:5.) ‘The Secret of the Lord is with them that reverence him, and he will show them his Covenant.’ (Psalm

25:14.) All such in close sympathy with the Divine purposes will be anxious to serve the Lord, the Truth and the brethren. And such from time to time will be specially sent into the Vineyard, and will be specially used of the Lord for the assistance of his consecrated people in various ways.

AGREED FOR A PENNY A DAY

The word ‘penny’ here is from the Greek *denarius*, a silver coin of about 17 cents value [worth over \$3.00 in 2022]. But the value of money has so changed in recent years that today a labourer’s wage in proportion to other things would be considerably more. The *denarius* was the Roman standard of that time, as the *lira* is the Italian standard, the *mark* the German standard, the *franc* the French standard, the shilling the English standard, and the dollar the American standard.* It is worthy of note that in one of the fine old English cathedrals the records show that its excellent chisel work, superior to anything of today, cost ‘a penny a day and a bag of meal for each labourer’. The parable of our lesson is evidently intended to teach that God will give all that he has agreed to all who labour—that he in generosity gives more than he has stipulated.

At the close of the day we read that those first hired murmured against their lord. We cannot suppose that any who would be counted worthy of a share in the Kingdom would murmur against the Giver of all Good. The rewarding is to be expected at the close of the harvest day and the murmuring may be expected there also.† The ‘penny’ or reward would thus seem to be something of the joys, blessings, honours and privileges of God’s people in the present life, at the close of this age.‡ Those who murmur that

they do not receive a sufficiency of honour and distinction and of Divine acknowledgment will be thereby proving themselves unfit for the future service ‘beyond the veil’, as members of the Church in glory. This would seem to point a warning to those of God’s people who have been long in the Truth, and who have had great privileges of service, that if they murmur against the blessings and rewards coming to them, it will mean that they were labouring for the reward merely and not appreciating the privilege of being labourers with Christ and with the Father; it would imply that they had failed to enter into the spirit of the wonderful privileges granted them of serving the Lord, the Truth and the brethren. The right spirit, the proper interest in the Father’s work and in the brethren should prompt all to rejoice with every new labourer and to be glad that all such should receive of the Lord’s favours, blessings and enlightenment as fully, as freely, as themselves. Surely any who have not this spirit have not the Spirit of Christ on this subject at least.¶

The general lesson is that God is so just, so generous, so bountiful, in his dealings that all those who appreciate matters from his standpoint will rejoice in the blessings which overflow upon others. A failure to appreciate the Lord’s generosity was one cause of stumbling to the Jews eighteen centuries ago—they were offended that the Gospel message should go out beyond them to the Gentiles.

doing a final work...doing a *smiting* work...Therefore, while each of the laborers in the parable was given a penny, that penny represents the privilege of doing another work—a *work that is a little different from the vineyard work* [The vineyard work being a public work to find the Lord’s jewels, and giving them assistance, etc.].—p. 7.

* The *Euro* is now the standard currency for Italy, Germany and France. The *pound* is the standard for England. The dollar remains the American standard.

† Bro. Frank Shallieu’s *New Testament Studies* (Parable of the Penny—April 2001, Discourse, p. 4) states, in part: ‘... the first laborers showed a wrong spirit by murmuring, thinking they should have received more; that is, they murmured because those who worked only one hour got wages equal to their wages. Not only will the murmuring take place just before the Gospel Age ends, but it will take place down here, not up in heaven, for murmuring would not be tolerated in heaven, as even the Pastor admitted in subsequent articles. Therefore, the wage, or penny, must be given *on this side of the veil*.’

‡ Bro. Frank Shallieu’s ‘Parable of the Penny’ discourse continues: “In the Parable of the Penny, the ‘penny’ reward given to each of the laborers is the *privilege* of

¶ Bro. Frank Bro. Frank Shallieu’s *New Testament Studies* [Matt. 20:16] states, in part: ‘Although all of the workers got the penny, not all were in the right heart attitude, the lesson being that it is one thing to *get* the penny but another thing to *use* it. At the end of the age, the feet members will be rebuking Jezebel. The Elijah class will (1) espouse unpopular truths and (2) expose popular errors. ... Receiving the “penny” will be the *right* to do this last smiting work. However, one will not enter the work (and thus use the penny) unless he has the heart and zeal to do it. ... All will get the penny, but not all will participate in smiting the Jordan, that is, giving a *strong*, concentrated message against nominal Christendom. ... Many will see the smiting activity taking place but will hold back. They will have the “penny”—the right or privilege to participate—and will see others giving the strong message, but they will hold back and “murmur” until it is too late.’—www.revelation-research.org

Similarly today some Christian people are stumbling over the fact that the Word of God shows that, whereas Divine blessings are now confined to the Church, 'the elect', the servants and hand-maidens of the Gospel Age, yet the time is near at hand when 'God will pour out his spirit upon all flesh,' and when all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

All who have the privilege of bearing the labour and heat of the day in the Lord's service must be glad of the privilege, in order to be worthy of participation in the Kingdom. Thus some who seem

to be first in their promptness to respond to the Lord's call for labourers may be amongst the last to receive special blessings of grace and Truth, and this may serve as a special test upon them—as respects their loyalty, and the motives which actuated them in engaging in the Vineyard work. 'Let us take heed, lest a promise having been left us any should seem to come short'.

—THE WATCH TOWER, AUGUST 15, 1910.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

Question. *Who will give the penny?*

Answer. I don't know.

—What Pastor Russell Said, [Q530 (1), 1916.]—

Question. In Matthew 20, the Parable of the Penny, we read, verse 2, 'And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.' What does the penny represent? Again, in verse 6, (Mat. 20:6), we read, 'And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle'. Do we understand the eleventh hour is past? Again, in the 11th verse, (Mat. 20:11) 'And when they had received it they murmured against the good man of the house'. What does the murmuring represent, or signify?

Answer. We have dealt with this question several times in the Watch Tower, but I will briefly outline the matter again. Perhaps others also may have forgotten what was written. The parable is one that is difficult to understand with all its peculiar features; as for instance, this giving of the penny seems to be on this side of the veil, because, when it was paid there were some there who murmured, and surely no one would murmur on the other side. If they had been disposed to murmur they would not have been on the other side. The giving of this penny seems surely to mean something that will occur in this present life, before our change, and at the end of this age. Then, it is to be given by the Steward, and given to those who have been labouring in the harvest. I do not know definitely how this will turn out. You are aware that most of the things of God's Word that are prophetic are difficult to understand in detail until they have been, or, are in the process of fulfilment; and I think this parable is about to be fulfilled. I can

give only a suggestion. This great work of Smiting Jordan which, I think, is the thing before us, and is to be done within the next few years, is somehow to be connected with this matter. Just how, I do not know. I am looking, and so are you. We will see in due time. It is a parable and will be made clear and will then meet our expectations fully. So then, let us avoid any spirit of murmuring and let us be thankful for all our privileges given to us, and let us not think for a moment that, if the sisters be given an opportunity to serve we should murmur against them for having such opportunity!

—What Pastor Russell Said, [Q530 (2), 1916.]—