

# CULTURE

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(PART TWO)

[Continued From The August 2019 Issue]

## The Parable Of The Labourers - Continued

Continuing in Matthew 20:8, *"So when even was come, (the end of the day) the lord of the vineyard (God) saith unto his steward (Christ), Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first."* Those hired in the eleventh hour were paid a penny, the amount promised as deemed right by the householder. It is not recorded, but I would assume that the same amount was paid to those hired in the ninth, sixth and third hour. However, there arose considerable murmuring when those hired in the first hour of the day were paid their penny. 1 Corinthians 10:10, gives a caution against murmuring. *"Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer."*

*"But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more. ... These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day"* (Matthew 20:10 & 12). What was the basis of their supposition? I am sure that everyone can relate

to these poor long-suffering labourers. Where is the fairness? Surely there is more value in twelve hours work than one hour! This can't be right! Shouldn't the relativeness of their effort compared to the others be considered when determining the fair value of the reward?

In reviewing the dictionary meaning of value, we see that the word relative precedes each of the following: relative worth, relative utility, relative usefulness, relative importance. An additional definition states, a fair return or a fair equivalent exchange. This leads to a need to understand the meaning of fair. It is defined as just, honest, appropriate, impartial, and free from both self-interest and favoritism, in accordance with, and conforming to, established rules or standards that provide no unjust advantage.

The labourers' culture had established a set of values that had received acceptance as fair, and this payment distribution decision was contrary to those cultural beliefs. There is little doubt that self-interest was the basis of their stance. What were the labourers really questioning? Fairness? Value? They were

questioning the rightness or righteousness of “*the goodman of the house.*” The response of the householder to the murmuring labourers is to assure them that “*I do thee no wrong.*” Did He not fulfill His promise with the agreed-upon reward? “*Is it not lawful (right/righteous) for me to do what I will with mine own?*” The righteousness of the omnipotent God, the creator of all things, cannot be questioned through the eyes of a culture derived from man’s mind because it (man’s mind) is “evil” and He is “good.”

*“For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God”* (Romans 8:5-8).

When the Children of Israel were delivered from their bondage of Egypt, there was no murmuring from the “senior citizens” that they had experienced hardship and bondage for more years than the younger generation or that they had made more bricks. Would this not be a valid argument considering this parable? Of course, this is nonsense because there is no relativeness to freedom from bondage. You are either free or you are not. Either delivered from Egypt or you are not. Value and fairness are not part of the reward calculation. The reward is freedom from bondage. This parable of the labourers presented by Jesus allowed the hearer to interpret its context either from the point of view of a worldly culture or by the Spirit. He who has ears let him hear. The kingdom of heaven is not relative. You either enter in, obtain eternal life, find His rest, enter into the fullness of His promises, receive the reward, or you refuse and you don’t. When did the labourers get paid? They received their promised reward at the end of the day. They had to labour (minister) in the vineyard to the end of the day. They had to get all the way to the end of the day! You labour in the vineyard until the end of the day and receive the agreed-upon reward or you walk away believing the value of your current condition is greater than the promised reward (eternal life) at the end of the day.

*“Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that HE HATH PROMISED US, EVEN ETERNAL LIFE. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you (the world’s culture). But the anointing which ye have received of him (the Holy Spirit) abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him”* (1 John 2:24-27).

### Jesus Encounters The Rich Man

*“And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder; Thou shalt not commit adultery; Thou shalt not steal; Thou shalt not bear false witness; Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

*The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible”* (Matthew 19:16-26).

A man came to Jesus seeking the ultimate reward, asking, “*what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?*” Jesus responds “*if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*” The man enquires as to which ones. By the 3rd century AD, the Jewish culture recognized 613 laws, commandments and ordinances. 365 were negative in nature (things to refrain from) and 248 were positive in nature (things to do). Jesus lists the following, “*Thou shalt do no murder* (negative), *Thou shalt not commit adultery* (negative), *Thou shalt not steal* (negative), *Thou shalt not bear false witness* (negative), *Honour thy father and thy mother:* (positive) *and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself* (positive)” - God’s culture.

The man claims, somewhat presumptuously, that “*all these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?*” Obedience to negative “laws” are presumably measurable. You either refrained or you didn’t. However, at what point have you honoured your father and mother enough or loved your neighbour enough? The culture that this young man lived in must have determined some level deemed “acceptable” for him to claim his self-righteousness and stand believing that he had attained compliance. Jesus responds by saying “*If thou wilt be perfect* (wanting of nothing necessary to completeness), *go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor;* (self-righteousness vs ministry) *and thou shalt have treasure in heaven:* (promise and reward) *and come and follow me.*” I would like to note that even if this man was to act in obedience and give away all that he had to the poor, there was still a further requirement and that was to follow Jesus. There was a walk for him to walk in. It was not over. He would have those things necessary to become complete (a type of our gifts) but he was not yet perfect. He had to follow Jesus (a type of our walk in our gifts and ministry by the Spirit). Having great wealth and possessions, this man walked away believing the security of his current life was greater than the promised eternal life he had sought. He viewed the costs as too great. After the man’s departure, Jesus turned to His disciples for a teaching moment. He taught them that earthly wealth could be a significant, almost impossible, barrier to entering the kingdom of heaven. Upon hearing this the disciples knew that their entire culture was based on the obtaining of wealth and riches and looked at this seemingly impossible juxtaposition (earthly wealth vs the kingdom of God) and asked, “*Who then can be saved?*” To which Jesus said, “*With men* (man’s culture) *this is impossible; but with God* (God’s culture) *all things are possible.*”

### What Do We Really Seek?

This rich man with his lips was seeking eternal life but in the end, his culture was his abiding place, his sanctuary. I believe we sometimes act the same as this rich man. We come seeking God for Him to agree with, even give endorsement to, what we want to do rather than us turning our lives over to what He wants to teach us to do. I would like to give another account from the Scriptures along this same line.

John 6:15-27, speaks of the aftermath of Jesus' miracle of feeding the multitude. After the feeding of the multitude, Jesus had departed into the mountain because he *"perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king."* Having been the recipient of His loving miracle, the crowd responded according to their culture and wanted Jesus to be their king. However, this was not the plan of God. He did not want Jesus to be set as a King over Israel as like other nations (Deuteronomy 17:14-16, 1 Samuel 8:1-5). God's plan was to set Jesus as an eternal King, King over all, King of kings. After pursuing Jesus all the way to Capernaum, the multitude caught up to Jesus and questioned His fleeing. *"Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled."* Their seeking wasn't after the reality of life through Jesus as manifested through the power of God, but rather their seeking was for their natural needs and desires to be satisfied. They sought Him for another free lunch. Jesus then teaches, *"Labour not for the meat which perisheth (that which feeds the natural body), but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life (that which nurtures the spiritual), which the Son of man shall give unto you: (He is the source) for him hath God the Father sealed."*

### Even Peter, Jesus' Disciples Began To Wonder, "What's In It For Me?"

*"Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first"* (Matthew 19:27-30).

After seeing the reaction of the rich man and listening to the teaching of Jesus on that experience, Peter still has some personal decisions to make in his walk of following Jesus. He still had to fight the culture in which he had been immersed. Peter asks, *"we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?"* He was evaluating his cost-versus-reward equation. It was hard for Peter, in his mind, to weight the value of the things he had forsaken in the natural against the promises that Jesus had promised were his in the spiritual realm. Jesus again lays out His promises. *"Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration (restoration) when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*

This promise is to all who follow Jesus until He is restored to His rightful place of kingship, sitting on the throne of His glory. Christendom separates the promises spoken to the disciples/apostles in Jesus' time from this current time. This scripture speaks to all which follow Him until the full restoration of His kingdom. Jesus continues, *"every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, (those who have chosen to follow Him) shall receive an hundredfold (this gives some magnitude to His promises), and shall inherit everlasting life."* What a promise! What an inheritance! Praise the Lord!

I would like to conclude with an example from the Scriptures which illustrates how we can succumb to the fear of our culture when being directed by the Spirit to fulfill our ministry.

### The Account Of Jonah

With the assumption that the Jonah mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 is the Jonah of this book, scholars place the account documented in the book of Jonah during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC) whose reign ended approximately 20-30 years prior to the Assyrians ultimately conquering Israel (722 BC). Assyria was a feared and hated enemy of Israel during Jonah's lifetime, therefore, so would the inhabitants of Nineveh, its capital. This background information is forwarded to merely give context to this account which centers on Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. The dissecting of these historical facts falls within the classification of nonessential to the point of this account.

Jonah 1:1-3, *"Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry (proclaim) against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD."* At this early stage of the account, we see that God called Jonah to perform his ministry, but Jonah was determined to flee *"from the presence of the LORD."* The question that intrigued me was why? With the minimal information, we are given up to this third verse, we can presume a multitude of reasons: rebellion against God or fear of the Assyrians. Jonah was certainly walking in disobedience to the calling of God.

Let's encapsulate the key events in Jonah's journey to Nineveh. Jonah catches a boat to Tarshish. During the voyage, a great storm blows up, and all the occupants of the boat fear for their lives. Jonah, by lot, is identified as the person bringing this grave danger to the boat. Jonah confesses that he is fleeing from God and volunteers to be thrown overboard. Jonah saw death as inevitable, so why not now? However, God has some unfinished business for Jonah to accomplish, so God sends a "great fish" that saves Jonah from death by swallowing him. Jonah now goes through three days of *"submission training and attitude adjustments"* in the belly of the great fish, and he is vomited upon dry land.

*"And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time,*

saying (God doesn't give up on those He has called. We are all familiar with this account of Jonah's experiences, and I am glad that God never gave up on Jonah. I am beginning to realize how much I am blessed that God doesn't give up on me when I walk in disobedience and walk in my own way), *Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, YET FORTY DAYS, AND NINEVEH SHALL BE OVERTHROWN*" (Jonah 3:1).

The ministry to which Jonah was called was to speak these eight words of prophecy, the only prophetic utterance in the entire book of Jonah. I can almost see in my mind's eye Jonah saying, "There, I did what you asked. Are you happy now?"- begrudging the fulfillment of his ministry. How the people of Nineveh responded to Jonah's prophecy and God's reaction to the people of Nineveh's response is the crux of this account. *"So the people of Nineveh believed (abandoned their culture) God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes"* (Jonah 3:5-6). All the people of Nineveh including the king genuinely repented of their wickedness and turned from their wicked ways. *"And God saw their works (undertakings), that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not"* (Jonah 3:10). The people of Nineveh repented, and then God repented of His intended action against them. Now Jonah had a real problem with all this. He wasn't rejoicing that more than 120,000 people in Nineveh were saved from God's wrath and destruction. Jonah 4:1, *"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil."* Jonah argues before God that this exact series of events is what he and God talked about before any of these adventures began. Jonah knew that the Lord God was *"merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil."* Then why was Jonah angry? What was Jonah's problem? Jonah was so despondent that he pleaded, *"Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live"* (Jonah 4:3). Why would Jonah desire to die? You might think that Jonah did not have the capacity to love his enemy, the people of Nineveh.

However, the real issue Jonah had with God's actions is rooted in his Israeli culture derived from Deuteronomy 18:20-22, *"But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him."*

The Mosaic laws, over time, were but the shredded fabric used to patch together a powerful social culture in the kingdom of Israel developed by evil kings and a false priesthood and corrupt judges beginning with Jeroboam I (1 Kings 11 & 12). Jonah now saw himself shamed by his culture. He was sent by God to prophesy destruction unto Nineveh but his prophecy did not come true. He would now be viewed by his people as a false prophet to be, at a minimum, ridiculed and outcast by his kinsman, or worst case, put to death according to their culture. Jonah throughout this whole account was more afraid of the consequences of being judged by his own peoples' culture than to minister God's mercy to the inhabitants of Nineveh. Jonah's culture might condemn him but his obedience to God's calling will receive its reward. I pray Lord that we have eyes to see and ears to hear. Glory be to God! ✚

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