

Qualifying For Stewardship

by Gary Carpenter

Matthew 20:1-16 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that is* an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. (2) And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. (3) And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, (4) And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. (5) Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. (6) And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? (7) They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, *that* shall ye receive. (8) So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them *their* hire, beginning from the last unto the first. (9) And when they came that *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. (10) But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. (11) And when they had received *it*, they murmured against the goodman of the house, (12) Saying, 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. (13) But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? (14) Take *that* thine *is*, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. (15) Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? (16) So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

Because we have not understood the distinction between Provision and Stewardship, we have not correctly interpreted this parable. The key to understanding it is to remember its context. The event just prior to Jesus teaching this parable was the "Rich Young Ruler" who could not bring Himself to follow the "qualifying instructions" he received from the Lord in order to "follow Jesus."

By this parable in Matthew 20, Jesus is showing us what is in the heart of most people (including the Rich Young Ruler), that disqualifies them from becoming effective Stewards of Finances in the Kingdom of God. What did Jesus have in mind as being the "highest and best" for the Rich Young Ruler? Jesus desired for the Rich Young Ruler to become a permanent disciple, fit for service [Stewardship] in the kingdom of God. The invitation was to "... come and follow Me." Jesus gave him a "qualifying instruction" to expose the true motive of his heart. That underlying motive disqualified the Rich Young Ruler and it will disqualify all who desire to become Stewards for the Master, especially regarding Kingdom Finances.

The parable in Matthew 20 further describes for us the "qualifying process." It will help to understand this parable if you keep in mind that the Householder is also desiring permanent disciples whom he can trust with Stewardship [in light of the context regarding the Rich Young Ruler].

Desiring permanent, full time Stewards, the Householder first hires these men for a single day's service to watch their performance. Apparently, all of them did what they were told to do, from the ones who worked all day all the way down to the ones who only worked one hour. The Householder made no complaint as to the quality nor the quantity of their work. All of these men were qualified in the sense of their ability and their desire to complete the Householder's work.

Therefore, it was neither their abilities nor their diligence that determined their qualification to become permanent stewards of the Householder. No, the Householder was looking for something else ... the motivation of their hearts in serving Him. The qualifying question that must be answered is this: Why were they serving Him?

When it came time that evening for the servants to be paid their wages, we find out what the motivating force was in the hearts of the servants all along. We find out why they were serving the Householder in the first place. When those who had labored all day saw that those who only labored one hour were paid the same, they murmured against the Householder;

Mat 20:11-12 And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, (12) Saying, 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.

THEY WERE WORKING FOR THE WAGES. THEY WERE "SERVANTS FOR PERSONAL PROFIT." THEY WERE HIRELINGS, NOT BOND SLAVES WHO WERE SERVING FOR "LOVE'S SAKE" ALONE. "PERSONAL PROFIT" WAS THE MOTIVATING, DRIVING FORCE FOR THEIR SERVICE TO THE HOUSEHOLDER.

They were disqualified from becoming "full time Stewards" in the kingdom of God for the same reason that disqualified the man who would not trade the "pound" that had been entrusted to him by the Master (Luke 19:20-21). He would not spend his life "stewarding the pound" because He feared that the Master would come and "take up" the profits which the man considered to be his own. If there is no "personal profit" in it for him, he will not serve! [See the lesson - "Stewarding The Pound"]. We find the same disqualifying factor in the heart of these servants in Matthew 20. They do not have the heart of "bond slaves," they have the heart of "employees."

Jesus is looking for those He can promote to great Stewardship of Kingdom Finances in these last days. Later on in this same chapter, Jesus gives us the required progression that qualifies any person for promotion in the Kingdom of God when He says,

To be promoted to the highest level of Stewardship in the Kingdom of God (to be chief), a man must be a "servant." These two words are very important. In the Greek language they are;

Matthew 20:25-27 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. (26) But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; (27) And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

CHIEF = "FIRST"

4413. protos, pro'-tos; contr. superl. of G4253; foremost (in time, place, order or importance):--before, beginning, best, chief (-est), first (of all), former.

SERVANT = "SLAVE"

1401. doulos, doo'-los; from G1210; a slave (lit. or fig., invol. or vol.; frequently therefore in a qualified sense of subjection or subverviency):--bond (-man), servant.

It is the "bond slave," the one who does not serve for wages, the one who does not serve with the motive of "personal profit," the one who serves "for love's sake alone" that Jesus promotes to the highest levels of STEWARDSHIP in His Father's kingdom! This statement in verse Mat 20:27 agrees completely with Jesus' concluding statement at the end of the parable of the Householder and the servants;

Mat 20:16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

The word "first" is the same Greek word translated "chief" in Mat 20:27. The word "last," from Strong's dictionary is,

LAST = LOWEST

2078. eschatos, es'-khat-os; a superl. prob. from G2192 (in the sense of contiguity); farthest, final (of place or time):--ends of, last, latter end, lowest, uttermost.

The "lowest" position in any society is that of a SLAVE! A slave does not serve for wages. A slave is "owned" by His Master. In particular, a "bond slave" is owned by His Master by the slave's own choice ... for love's sake alone. So what is the "wage," the "reward" for a bond slave?

HIS SERVICE IS HIS REWARD!

This is the "first class servant" [Greek = Doulos = Slave] that Jesus spoke of in Luke 17:7-10. The bond slave who is not serving for personal profit, but rather only because he loves his Master. For the bond slave, his "meat" is to do the will of his Master ... Period! Personal profit for the first-class servant does not even enter into the equation.

Now notice how precisely all of this agrees with Jesus' answer to Peter's question after he saw the incident regarding the Rich Young Ruler. Peter asked,

Mat 19:27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

Notice especially the first part of Jesus' answer to the question:

Mat 19:28 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.

What is to be the reward of these "first class servants" who have "left all to follow Jesus?"

**THEY ARE REWARDED WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE EVEN MORE!
FAITHFUL STEWARDS ARE PROMOTED TO GREATER LEVELS OF SERVICE!**

By proving themselves to be faithful stewards for Jesus in this life, they will be promoted to even higher levels of stewardship in the next life. They will then be "stewarding" whole "tribes" of people for Him. This is the eternal principle for promotion in Stewardship;

Luke 16:10 He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

Getting back to the original parable of the Householder and the servants, a person might jump to the conclusion that those who did not murmur were now qualified to be promoted in their stewardship. No, such is not the case. Those who worked only one hour yet received the same penny as those who bore the heat of the day, felt they were "well paid" by comparison.

The only way to find out what is in their heart is to put them in the position of the first. Perhaps the following day the Householder would repeat this whole scenario, but this time, hire "first" those who had only worked one hour the previous day. If they also complained at the end of the day when they saw those who worked one hour being "paid" the same as themselves who labored more ... THEN the Householder would know they had the hearts of hirelings, not bond slaves. They too would be disqualified for promotion to higher levels of Stewardship.

Relating all of this to the Rich Young Ruler, it is not that Jesus was angry with this man. In fact, in Mark's account of this incident we are told that Jesus, "beholding him loved him." Jesus was exposing the answer to the question, "Why have you observed all of these things from your youth?"

Why did the Jews attempt to keep the Law in the first place? Was it because they loved God so much? No! In fact, the Law was given because they would not obey God for love's sake alone. Paul tells us,

Gal 3:19a Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions ...

What transgressions? When the Lord delivered Israel out of Egypt, ten times they provoked Him in the wilderness. Ten times they proved to the Lord that they would not obey Him for love's sake alone. Knowing they would be destroyed by their enemies unless they learned to obey Him, God gave them the Law. The Law had blessing and cursing, reward and punishment. If they obeyed, they were blessed. If they disobeyed, they suffered the curse.

**THE UNSAVED JEW OBEYED THE LAW BECAUSE HE LOVED "HIMSELF,"
NOT BECAUSE HE LOVED GOD!**

For the sake of this teaching, and to understand the "motive" problem of the Rich Young Ruler, I will say it this way: The unsaved Jew, including the Rich Young Ruler, kept "all these things from their youth" because it was "personally profitable" for them to do so.

Before the possibility of the new birth at the cross, this was perfectly acceptable to God. That's why He gave them the Law in the first place, knowing that they loved their own "selves" more than God. It was the best way God could deal with people who had the nature of death in their spirit.

Jesus is ushering in a new kingdom, based on the new birth. He is teaching and preaching the "Kingdom of God," not the old covenant. In this kingdom, the motivations of the heart supersede all acts of obedience done from a heart motivated by "personal benefit."

Notice that prior to the new birth, the question still loomed in the heart of Jesus' disciples, "What shall WE have, therefore?" Without being yet born again and receiving the nature of Christ, this attitude of "personal profit" was still within them. Yet, when Jesus had called the twelve, all of them were willing to "forsake all to follow Him."

The Rich Young Ruler was not! If following Jesus meant forsaking everything he had already personally gained through obedience to the Law, then he chose not to follow Jesus! It is the same attitude of heart that we see in the servants who murmured against the Householder and the wicked servant who refused to spend his life stewarding the pound: "I AM SERVING BECAUSE OF WHAT I WILL GAIN IN PERSONAL PROFIT! IF THERE IS NO PERSONAL PROFIT IN IT FOR ME ... I WILL NOT SERVE YOU!"

THAT attitude of heart must be put to death before any man will ever be qualified for promotion to great Stewardship in the Kingdom of God.

This lesson would not be complete without discussing the "penny." What does the penny represent in the context of the Steward Of Kingdom Finances? First of all, from Vines Dictionary Of New Testament Words, I find that the penny is a relatively small amount, only sufficient to meet the needs of a single day. I cannot help but be reminded of these words from the Lord's prayer;

Mat 6:11 Give us this day our daily bread.

The whole message Jesus delivered in Matthew Six concerning serving God and not Mammon teaches us to come to the place of trusting God to provide our daily needs (like the birds and lilies) in order that we can devote our entire lives to accomplishing our call in the body of Christ.

Again, I see the analogy of the ambassador sent from a wealthy nation to steward funds in order to benefit the impoverished people of a poor nation. The wealthy nation would provide both a house and a salary to meet the daily needs of the ambassador. This would be his "penny." His "penny" is not affected by his punching a daily time clock, so to speak. No, some days may require longer hours than others, but he can depend on his "penny," the fact that his daily needs will be met.

It is the same in the analogy of my grandfather's farm. The serving sons could devote all of their time to harvesting in the fields because they trusted in their "penny," the fact that their own needs would be met at the dinner table each evening. If it rained extremely hard on any given day to the point they couldn't even work at all in the fields ... they still received their "penny." They still ate to the full at the dinner table that night. They trusted that their "daily" needs would be met.

I will share with the reader a teaching vision that the Holy Spirit gave me in December of 1997 when I was first learning of the "grandfather's farm" analogy. I had been meditating on the parable of the Householder and the servants, wondering what the "penny" represented. In my spirit, I "saw" each servant holding his penny in his hand. As I watched, the penny changed into an admission ticket, much like the ticket you receive to enter a movie theater. On the ticket was written these words, "Admit one to the family dinner table tonight." Amen!

In summary, all of this only reinforces the necessity of making a clear distinction between our PROVISION and our STEWARDSHIP. Every man received a penny ... his daily bread. His provision was not based on his Stewardship. His provision was not based on His performance. No amount of performance, great or small, changed the penny he received. OUR PROVISION IS NOT BASED ON OUR PERFORMANCE!

However, exaltation as a Steward in the Kingdom of God is based, 100%, on our performance. The motivation for a Steward Of Kingdom Finances must never be for the purpose of increasing our own "personal profit," our own "provision." We must NEVER confuse the two issues: PROVISION VS. STEWARDSHIP! They are mutually exclusive!

To become "qualified" for promotion to greater levels of Kingdom Financial Stewardship, the number one requirement is a heart that serves "for love's sake alone," and not for personal profit. Jesus does not "hire" Kingdom Financial Stewards. He "owns" them!

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