

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The Kingdom of Heaven is not like the kingdoms of men. So we base what we believe about the Kingdom of Heaven on the kingdoms of men. The problem, of course, is that we are men, and our reason and logic, our morals and mores, our ethics and our sensibilities are influenced by, distorted by, and even based on, sinful human wisdom.

Consider our civic leaders. We fully expect them to promise things which they will never deliver. We elect those we think will best profit us, be they honest or not, be they models of righteousness or not, even when our profit means loss for others. And when they break their promises, we are not surprised. We kind of expect it. We don't expect that they will do what they said. Thanks be to God that the Kingdom of Heaven is not like the kingdoms of men.

But it is not just politicians. We hold up professional athletes as role models, but look the other way when their greed and lust and conceit is exposed. So too the stars of Hollywood and of Nashville and of Wall Street and of Washington. None are without sin, all are fallen and flawed, many are simply evil. More than a few end up in prison. But we continue to hold them up as examples, to allow them and even support them in continuing in places of influence in our society. Thanks be to God that the Kingdom of Heaven is not like the kingdoms of men.

The kingdoms of men are fallen. They are sin-filled, because they are filled with sinners. They are lorded over by men with fleshly motivations and aspirations. They approve what best satisfies their twisted desires. They normalize perversion and legalize hallucination.

To use the language of Holy Scripture, their god is their stomach. For the Apostle writes "... many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame-- who set their mind on earthly things."

How is it that we allow such men to be made role models? How is it that we look to them, and not to the Holy Word of God, to establish what is right, for examples of how to live, for guidance on how to structure our finances, on how to teach our children?

How is it that we look to men who strive to line their pockets for our understanding of the worth and value and measure of a man, giving them place over the Word of God? Or is your eye evil because God is good? Repent. Look not to fallen men, but to God. He alone is holy. Look to the Holy Scriptures. Look to Christ. He is the only worthy Model of faith and life.

For soon, on the Last Day all earthly mammon will be stripped away by fire, and men will be seen as they truly are. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD."

So it is in mercy, in love, in love for you, that the Lord speaks the Parable of the workers in the vineyard. He uses an earthly example to explain a heavenly truth. But it is an example that confounds earthly logic. It is an example that offends fallen men.

In the parable, the men who believe that they, by their works, have earned more, are disappointed. They complain against God, and even find Him to be evil for showing grace to others. They are sent away with the just reward for their labors. They are paid what they have earned. So will it be on the Last Day for those who trust in their works. And contrary to what they think is right, what all fallen men have earned is condemnation and eternal separation from God.

But there are a few, a remnant, those who enter through the narrow gate, who simply believe what God promises - although it be impossible for men. These receive the superabundant grace of God in thanksgiving, in faith; more than they could ever earn, more than they could ever merit. They receive the gracious reward even though it is contrary to the world's understanding, even though it is contrary to the fallen world's wisdom. They receive the true reward, the lasting reward, the reward that cannot be taken away.

And that reward you cannot earn. It is beyond your means. But God, in His great mercy, earns it for you. For it is He who created the Vineyard entered His own Vineyard as a lowly laborer. He knew what He would receive. Still, He took on the Flesh of the Virgin to do the work that you could not do. He did not stand idle. His obedience was perfect, both His active and passive obedience.

His Day the ancients called the Day of the Lord. And His labor was perfect, His faithfulness without flaw. He vested Himself as a servant and washed the feet of His disciples. He did not shy away from persecution and slander and false arrest and sham trial. Then at the third hour they crucified Him. And from the sixth hour till the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.

And at the ninth hour He cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" For that was the just reward for the work He rendered. The burden He bore was your sins. And the heat of the day He suffered was the searing heat of your punishment. He went into the vineyard of Golgotha covered in the transgressions of the world, and whatever was right He received.

The Kingdom of Heaven is not like the kingdoms of men. In the Kingdom of Heaven, the King labors on behalf of His subjects, and the fruits of His labor He freely gives to you. He takes your sin away, and He gives you His righteousness. He takes your unbelief and doubt away, and gives you faith. He takes your death away by dying it for you, and in exchange He gives you the life He won for you in His defeat of death, in His glorious resurrection.

In mercy, in love, He gives you the denarius of salvation, for what is His He freely makes yours. So according to His Gospel Promise, "Whatever is right you will receive", for it is meet, right and salutary, in the Kingdom of Heaven, that you receive Christ's reward. And so, in joy, in thanksgiving, the Apostle writes "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."

Christ has labored for your salvation. He has won forgiveness and life for all men. But not all men receive it. The Lord teaches that many are called, but few chosen. That you receive the reward of His labors, that you receive the fruits of His cross and empty tomb, He chose you from eternity. He makes you a citizen of His Kingdom through Holy Baptism. There, by the power of His Word and the work of the Holy Spirit, you are washed into forgiveness, and eternal life. It is there that He promises you, you who are called so late in the day, the denarius of salvation.

Israel was baptized into Moses. You are baptized into Christ. They drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But to you He gives His Body as Food, and His Blood as drink. You eat and drink Christ, and with you God is pleased. So in Christ you run the race not with uncertainty, but in faith. And so you obtain the prize, the imperishable crown, the denarius of everlasting life. And you who are last will be first in the Kingdom of Heaven.

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