

Hard Sayings Of Jesus

Lesson 8

I. This Week's Hard Saying

Matt 19:30 But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first. KJV

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

Mark 10:31 But many that are first shall be last; and the last first. KJV

Luke 13:30 And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last. KJV

II. Why This Is Hard

- a. From the Disciple's point of view (Matt 19:30 & 20:16), this statement would have been an upset in the logical **inference** drawn by those who viewed themselves as "having labored all day" therefore warranting more "pay" for their labor.
- b. It is apparent that the Disciples had an **expectation** that theirs should be a privileged position and therefore they should garner a greater reward than others who would later follow Jesus. Matt 20:20-21 Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. 21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. KJV
- c. From a Jewish perspective (Luke 13:28-30), this was an **insult** for they had assumed that as Jews, having received the oracles of God and the faith of the fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they would be first. Luke 13:28 There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. KJV

III. The Point of This Saying

- a. This saying is not peculiar to the teachings of Jesus, it appears in general folk wisdom writings and **throughout** the Bible the principle is well documented.
 1. The first Adam is overshadowed by the **last Adam** 1 Cor 15:45-47 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. 46 Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. 47 The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. KJV
 2. The first born Esau was **subordinated** to the second son Jacob Rom 9:11-13 11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) 12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. 13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. KJV
 3. The first wife Leah was **less preferred** than the second wife Rachel Gen 29:30 And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, KJV
4. The elder son who stayed at home received no celebration while his younger **prodigal** brother got all the attention. Luke 15:27-30 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. 28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. 29 And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: 30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. KJV
5. The Pharisees were first in the knowledge and practice of the law but the harlots and the tax collectors would enter into the kingdom **before** them. Matt 21:28-32 Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him. KJV

IV. To The Laborers in His Field

- a. Where Jesus appears to have directed His comment to his disciples, He expressly states that those who give up the most and the soonest should **not assume** that their sacrifice should merit the greatest reward. Matt 20:23 And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be

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- baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.KJV
- b. The lack of differential pay/reward would have been considered **counter intuitive** to those who heard the parable of Jesus. Matt 20:11-16 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.KJV
 - c. To the laborers of Jesus' field, including us, this should be taken as a warning or admonition that we should have no greater expectation of reward than is **generally promised**: IE salvation. Ps 84:10-12 For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. 11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. 12 O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee. KJV

V. To The Jewish Hearers

- a. As "first" and "last" relates to the **Jews**, they did in fact have the Gospel extended to them first. Rom 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. KJV Matt 10:5-6 These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: 6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. KJV
- b. Yet, as a nation, the Jews who should have enjoyed a position of primacy found that they had been shut out and the Gentiles, who were **no people** of God, were allowed into the Kingdom. Rom 10:19-21 But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. 20 But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. 21 But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people. KJV

VI. Implications For Us

- a. It is possible for one to erroneously take pride in one's self denial/sacrifice and suppose that it means that one has established a special **claim on God** for recompense or reward.
- b. No amount of exertion, not even self-denial or asceticism can make God obligated to us. Discipleship of the believer is purely a gift of God and it is the measure and degree of **grace received**. 1 Cor 3:9-10 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. KJV
- c. Many modern Christians believe that their service to God is **meritorious** and their deeds warrant rewards, but this must be balanced against the fact that Christ is the judge of true service and what qualifies for reward. 2 Cor 5:9-10 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. KJV
- d. The wood hay and stubble of our lives (**self-generated** good works) shall all be burned up and all that will remain is what the Holy Spirit has done in us and through us. 1 Cor 3:13-15 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. KJV
- e. Any "good works" performed by the believer are manifestations of the **grace of God** working in us and are not manifestations of some self-generated meritorious goodness on our part. Rev 4:10-11 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and

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- ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. KJV
- f. To those who labor in the field of the Lord there is never a time to quit, never a time to retire from His race, never a time to stop attending to the things of God. Rom 11:29 For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. KJV
- g. Believers are admonished to be good stewards over the talents, gifts and abilities they have been given. They are to be faithful and to persevere over their lifetime. 1 Peter 4:10 As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. KJV

Application

- a. We ought to possess a holy fear of ourselves in order to preserve the fidelity of our discipleship. It is a holy fear of ourselves, and not presumptuous confidence that is the best security against apostasy from God, and final rejection by him. (Mathew Henry) 1 Cor 9:27 No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. NIV

Check Yourself:

What is it that God owes you?

How do you know that you are being a faithful laborer in God's field?

What gets in your way of being more faithful or more fruitful?

What will you do about it?

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 - The Pharisees were first in the knowledge and practice of the law but the harlots and the tax collectors would enter into the kingdom _____ them. Matt 21:28-32

IV. To The Laborers in His Field

- Where Jesus appears to have directed His comment to his disciples, He expressly states that those who give up the most and the soonest should _____ that their sacrifice should merit the greatest reward. Matt 20:23
- The lack of differential pay/reward would have been considered _____ to those who heard the parable of Jesus. Matt 20:11-16
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- Yet, as a nation, the Jews who should have enjoyed a position of primacy found that they had been shut out and the Gentiles, who were _____ of God, were allowed into the Kingdom. Rom 10:19-21

VI. Implications For Us

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- Many modern Christians believe that their service to God is _____ and their deeds warrant rewards, but this must be balanced against the fact that Christ is the judge of true service and what qualifies for reward. 2 Cor 5:9-10

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- d. The wood hay and stubble of our lives (_____ good works) shall all be burned up and all that will remain is what the Holy Spirit has done in us and through us. 1 Cor 3:13-15
- e. Any “good works” performed by the believer are manifestations of the _____ working in us and are not manifestations of some self-generated meritorious goodness on our part. Rev 4:10-11
- f. To those who labor in the field of the Lord there is never a time to quit, never a time to retire from His race, never a time to stop _____ to the things of God. Rom 11:29
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