

1-31-71. The Basis of God's Rewards.

Continue study of parables, orgn into lessons according to subj-matter. Dr Davis has talked about the meaning of the word and its place in teachings of J, and also about the parables of the Kgdm. Subj for today is the question of rewards for services rendered in and for the Kgdm.

And again we have a story that points up in dramatic fashion the essential contrast between man's way of judging and God's way. Here again is a glimpse into the nature of the infinite and its fundamental difference with the finite. Nowhere is this clearer than in the whole idea of rewards. Last time we raised the question, what is God like? Today we consider how God thinks and measures, and we raise the question, again an ancient one, What is in it for me? What do I get out of religion? Why should I keep the faith and struggle against my animal nature and primitive urges unless I get something out of it that will set me above my fellows? We may want to be good, but we want to be good for something, not good for nothing. We want to be paid off, the jack-pot, and we want more than the next guy whose faith was not so deep nor his commitment so demanding. We want to be religious because from our stand-point God keeps books on us, and records the minutes we spent in prayer and Bible reading and the hours we spend visiting the sick, and all those good thoughts we had. Surely God thinks as we think and will reward us; there will be more stars in our crowns and we will be nearer his throne. He will even reward us openly for our secret devotions and acts of charity. All this is reasoning at the human level, and J would say that God does not think this way at all. How does God think about rewards for our actions and thoughts?

Matt 19: 23-30. How difficult it is for a rich man, for ANY man, to enter; J assures his folwrs that salvation is possible only thru the love and grace of God, and this is always available to men. Anyone who lost anything will be repaid manifold, and inherit eternal life. But many who appear to be first will be last, and many who appear to be last will be first. Note the question of the disc: Peter: we left everything, what then shall we have? In the story, this folws acct of rich young ruler, to whom things were more important than spirit. Same probl confronted by Peter and the others, what is in it for us? What is in the balance, if we decide to put selves on it? Here is the temptat, to look for rewards rather than places to serve. So J tells another parable. Matt 20: 1- 16.

We shld be grateful to Matt for preserving story (unique) as to Lk for Prodigal Son, its twin companion and the best commentary on this parable. In both stories it is grace and loving kindness of God to those who enter Kgdm that are described--tho in ProdSon we can share in understanding the response of father to lost son, while it is more diffic to understand the Hsehlc who pays his wages in this manner. Story has much to say about econ condits of the time--D is about 20¢, but is a working wage. Working day was from 6 to 6, div into 4 equal parts. 11th hr is incl to emphasiz the apparent injustice. Also note unempl present at the time--depression then too. Some worked 22 hrs, some 9, some 6, some 3, some only 1 hr--only the first were promised an amount, ~~others~~, whatever is right. And at the accounting, last came first and recd D, others thot they should get more--that is the human reasoning; but each got the same, and they grumbled. V 15 is key--Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what b'longs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? Does my friendliness produce in you the unfriendly feelings of an unhappy man? V 16 is diffic--does every distinction vanish in Kgdm of God? Or, as some suggest is it mispalced or did Matt not underst meaning of story? For the first, instory, who have worked all thru the heat of the day, are not disparaged. It is not the reversal of positions that is the point, but the equalizing of privileges, and fact that as we are all God's he may do as he likes. Equal pay for unequal work means that whether I come to God thru grace at a very early age, on on deathbed, I am as much in the kgdm. The first were not put last, but were put equal; they were paid last, but that is just part of the story.

Parable directed vs prevailing relig theory about the basis of Heaven's rewards--obey all comdts, tithe smallest items, and get rich rewards. But God does not keep his books that way.

Several lessons: 1) J does not condemn human desire for rewards so much as define them, channel them into path of real greatness. God offers greatest reward of them all--new spiritual relationship w/him, like father, restqres lost relat of Eden. Heaven's richest reward is this --the capacity to see God wherever he reveals himself. More than this no may can ask, and no man receive. Whether it comes after long service or short, this is the payment, and it is equal, a privilege open equally to all, who are humble, who are willing to give rather than to get, who are willing to put God first over all else--pleasure, comfort, independence in life, material wealth, pride, anything. World is in need of people who live by the impulse of the ages rather than the thrills of the minutes.

2* Contin problem of what do I get out of relig, and here is essential contrast, in this story. God's love is so great that he cannot distinguish between old-young, last come or first, in--it is the attitude of humility he is after. People willing to minister, to serve, to suffer in order that others may see the truth.

But man--he wants to be seen of men, to be first, to enjoy. Wants to be holier than anyone else. Take a look at it from the perspective of God, using the spectacles of J Cr. The J

idea of God is of a spirit who wants reverence and service and those who give it are equals. The wages of serving God are the Kgdms of Heaven. It is saving and it will save, it is elevating and humbling. More than this no man can ask.