

The labourers in the vineyard

(*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. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. 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? 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. 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. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, 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. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.”

This is a kindly parable, for in it Jesus is encouraging every state

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and stage of mentality and all approaches, provided a man agrees with Principle, the owner of the vineyard, to come into that vineyard, or the realm of Science, and work. Each man who agrees to become a labourer in this vineyard — that is, consecrated to the teachings of Christian Science as demonstrated by Jesus — will get his penny, or just reward, the full payment of fruition. That is certain. Time wasted in deviating from Christian Science by endeavouring to find other means of realizing Truth which are outside that vineyard will never receive the reward of working *in* the vineyard; as long as we are in the vineyard, we can all rest assured that Principle will not discriminate in giving the full reward.

Those who agree to work in the vineyard are found in the market-place. The market-place is where values are sorted out, so although the men are standing idle, they are looking for something with value to which to agree to give their time. The opportunity to work in the vineyard is always there, but the choice of time to accept that opportunity is made by the different groups of labourers as and when they feel response to what is offered. When men are touched by Principle, they respond at once, because they feel the true value of the work they can do.

Those who come in at the first hour, the third hour, the sixth hour, the ninth hour, and the eleventh hour are symbolic of different degrees in the resurrection of thought from the belief that man was made to till the soil and that toil and sweat are needed in order to have the full reward of fruitage. "Three" and its multiples are used throughout the Bible to represent the resurrecting or uplifting of thought.

Those who come into the vineyard of Science at the first hour represent the state of thought which believes that a great deal of time and effort is needed in order to arrive at the reward of fruitage. This may be true of all of us on occasions when we feel that we have to toil at our study for hour after hour and thus make heavy going of it. There are other states of thought progressively less burdened by the belief of toil, progressively resurrected from it, and they are symbolized by those who come into the vineyard at the third, sixth, and ninth hours.

Those who come into the vineyard of Science at the first hour are

those who recognize that Science is the only thing for them, but consider that there is so much in their character and understanding obstructing its full recognition (symbolized by the penny) that they set a path of consecration and study equal to their admission of the obstacles. Those who approach Science at the third hour are those who find that it resurrects their thought from beliefs and character-expressions which may have presented insurmountable problems to them before they came into the vineyard. Those who come in at the sixth hour are those who find that Science so stimulates their sense of manhood (the sixth day of the Genesis story depicts the full character of man and his purpose) that they rejoice in working in Science and in the joy of the health in expression and experience which it gives them.

Those who come in at the ninth hour are those who find that Science gives them more than resurrection from some human claim which had weighed them down, for it leads to a higher (3 x 3) resurrection, even to a realm of realization beyond and above the apparent human need, and confers on them the wonderful joy of altitudes of inspiration unattainable through conventional human methods of acquiring spiritual understanding. When we read of Jesus and his disciples, "His resurrection was also their resurrection" (S&H 34: 20-21), we gain some insight into the two levels of resurrection indicated first by the third hour (that is, the resurrection of the disciples from ignorance) and secondly by the ninth hour (that is, the resurrection which Jesus himself experienced, a resurrection multiplied by resurrection, as it were).

All those who come in at these different hours in the story receive the full value of reward, according to the need they feel at the level where they set it. Those who come in at the eleventh hour are those who lose all sense of self in their realization that the only Self is God. Their answer to the question "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" is this: "Because no man hath hired us;" in other words, "No man-made values of reward have any appeal to us." Their one desire is to be in the vineyard of Science, dwelling in a complete devotion and consecration of thought to the one necessity of man — namely, to know

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God and feel His onliness and allness. This all-in-all adoration of the "adorable One" (S&H 16:29) gives them the same reward (the penny) as the others, but in an effortless manner which by human criteria appears sometimes inexplicable and yet which because it does happen for those with that attitude of mind must set a standard of which we should each take note.

We can see that the parable covers all the processes adopted by men in their admission that Science is indeed the only vineyard and from that first admission come right into it, expecting and therefore receiving the benefits of so coming, according to the need which they consider special to them. The life and teachings of Jesus meet every phase and standard of thought and approach illustrated in this parable.

Those who come in at the eleventh hour represent the acme. They do just the work for which this one hour stands. It is the crucial "hour," the only "hour" for which we need work, the heart of the whole matter, represented by the first question and answer in "Recapitulation" in "Science and Health." That is the chapter which has twenty-four questions and answers in all and which in itself recapitulates what is embodied in the previous chapters. The first question is "What is God?" and the answer is "God is incorporeal, divine, supreme, infinite Mind, Spirit, Soul, Principle, Life, Truth, Love" (S&H 465:8-10). This is the one "hour" of paramount importance, the pure essence of all the rest.

It represents that complete consecration to Principle and its seven-fold nature for which Jesus asked his disciples when he found them sleeping and said to Peter, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" (Matthew 26:40) He knew that if they watched the "one hour" of full individual realization of the Mind, the Spirit, the Soul, the Principle, the Life, the Truth, and the Love of all that he had taught and demonstrated, they would not be asleep in heaviness of thinking, but in the ratio of their aliveness to the joy and presence of Principle would be alive to what he was about to do. If they had watched with Jesus in this way, they would have supported their great Master, who was making himself submit to the exclusive truths radiating from that question and answer, truths which led him through

the human ordeals ahead. *He* was watching that "one hour," his whole being consecrated to the essence of Being, and it was the "eleventh hour" of his earthly career. The whole focus of his attention was on all that *we* know as framed in the answer to the question "What is God?" He was aware of the presence of that which *caused* that definition of God to be revealed to Mary Baker Eddy. What finally matters to each of us is that one "hour" of the direct realization of what God is, and in this parable Jesus appears to show that it is the only necessity for man.

The whole of "Science and Health" and all individual applications of its meanings bear witness finally to the completeness of that single question and answer. "If God, the All-in-all, be the creator of the spiritual universe, including man, then everything entitled to a classification as truth, or Science, must be comprised in a knowledge or understanding of God, for there can be nothing beyond illimitable divinity" (S&H 127:4-8). Within the scope of that question and answer in "Recapitulation" anyone can, through intelligent and adoring attention, find everything that was said by Jesus or written by Mrs Eddy. Therefore all the joy of working in the realm of Science only enhances the reality of what that definition crystallizes.

The introductory adjectives of this definition of God — "incorporeal, divine, supreme, infinite" — act as four fundamental directives to thought to ensure that the approach to the understanding of what the synonymous terms for God mean will be kept safely on a correct path leading to realization. They also answer any question as to whether dwelling with this definition of God implies ignoring the belief in evil or matter. If we take the first synonymous term — Mind — as an instance, we see the necessity of realizing that it is "incorporeal" — nothing to do with corporeality, with body or brain; it is "divine" — it is not the human mind magnified; it is "supreme," supreme over every belief of minds many; and it is "infinite," in no degree finite or limited. So devotion to that one question and answer does not imply devotion only to the positive, but indicates the necessity of seeing that every claim of opposing realities is untrue and powerless. As Mrs Eddy says, "*by knowing the unreality of disease,*

sin, and death, you demonstrate the allness of God" (Un.9:28-1) — the exclusiveness of God, encompassed in that definition.

It does not matter whether we go in at the first, third, sixth, ninth, or eleventh hour — we shall always gain the reward of complete fruitage, symbolized by the penny, the full payment. Everyone is entitled to all the blessings available through working in Science, but the value of that "eleventh hour" stands forever as the one essential need for man. Moreover, it is worthy of note that whatever the hour in which any man started work, he still came in due course to that same eleventh hour. Jesus himself continually referred to and demonstrated the "eleventh hour" approach, summed up in his words, "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." Instantaneity in the realization of God's presence and power must be the ideal for the student, and the key to its attainment is the first question and answer in "Recapitulation."

When we enhance our understanding of God through the symbols given in this question and answer, we are enhancing our own being as the expression of God. In other words, we cannot enlarge our understanding of God without in exact proportion to that understanding enlarging our expression of individuality. *How* we understand this momentous and most important question and answer — whatever the method we adopt for its realization — is our choice, and it is our privilege to make that choice. We shall receive our penny and we can be satisfied that in itself it gives us full payment and we could not ask for more. Principle could not give us a greater realization of itself and of our own being (and therefore the being of all mankind and the universe) than is to be found in the acceptance of ideas radiating from that question and answer. We interpret the answer in our own individual way, and since our consciousness is us, we are already there in that interpretation. This is confirmed by that saying of John the beloved disciple: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear [become clearer through our understanding of this question and answer], we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."

Sometimes we have the experience illustrated by those with the approach symbolized here by the eleventh hour who received the full reward. We find thought so consecrated to the spiritual, so inspired and free, so released to the divine, that we go right to the heart of the matter in hand, everything comes clearly and easily, realization comes spontaneously, and healing takes place quickly. At other times we may need long and consistent application of thought to the spiritual idea. The ideal must always be what the "eleventh hour" symbolizes, but if we do not continually attain to that, let us be glad about whatever necessity we temporarily accept in order to arrive at realization and fruitage.

We all have the experience of a sudden breakthrough of inspiration, which comes without perceptible effort. Sometimes an apparently simple thought based on Principle comes to us and heals or transforms in what seems an amazing way. If we analyze such experiences, we find that a consistent devotion to the ideal of the allness of God and the nothingness of matter has been going on in our thought and we may also have put in hours of study. But it is still not the hours that have produced the heights of inspiration — they merely removed the ignorance which hid the perpetual presence of all that God is. The years that Mrs Eddy gave to the study of homeopathy etc did not bring her the sudden realization of Life in and of Spirit: Principle brought that. But what they did do was to contribute to the pulling back of the veil which had hidden that truth from her.

An illustration of the breakthrough of the light is given by Mrs Eddy in "Unity of God": "When I have most clearly seen and most sensibly felt that the infinite recognizes no disease, this has not separated me from God, but has so bound me to Him as to enable me instantaneously to heal a cancer which had eaten its way to the jugular vein ... an acknowledgment of the perfection of the infinite Unseen confers a power nothing else can. An incontestable point in divine Science is, that because God is All, a realization of this fact dispels even the sense or consciousness of sin, and brings us nearer to God, bringing out the highest phenomena of the All-Mind" (Un.7: 8-12, 20-26). But until she could attain to these heights and to that

quality of inspiration which flowed to her, Mrs Eddy was glad to make such statements as "Be of good cheer; the warfare with one's self is grand; it gives one plenty of employment, and the divine Principle worketh with you, — and obedience crowns persistent effort with everlasting victory" (Mis.118:24-28).

"Jesus required neither cycles of time nor thought in order to mature fitness for perfection and its possibilities" (Un.11:24-26), and he taught us to hold that high goal always before us, but he did not expect others to be exactly like him at once.

So the lesson appears to be that it is we who set our standard to earn our reward, therefore we should not grumble if our standard has involved a great deal more work and study than someone else's, because in any case we have our reward. We have the full penny.

In human life men tend to erect a standard of judging people by the amount they do, but there is nothing wrong either in working all day or in being wakened from sloth to an all-in-all devotion to that one "hour". Whichever we choose, we have our reward, but that reward is according to how *we* outline its method of attainment.

Sometimes the one who studies continuously feels critical of him who comes along unburdened by self and spontaneously adores the infinite One. But the point is that the man who feels that long hours of study are essential could not have come in at the last hour to earn the penny: his conscience would have belaboured him. Jesus is saying to this state of thought, "That is all right. Do it your own way in all honesty. You are a labourer in the vineyard, and you will have your reward, but do not get disturbed because someone else can do it another way. Do not indulge in malpractice by feeling that he is not doing what he should be doing. Do what you find is best for you and look not over your shoulder at those who find other ways and yet receive the same reward. Principle is always your friend."

No man can legislate for another, but as long as each individual keeps to the law that there is one Being and one only, anything that supports this for him is right in his particular case at any particular stage, whether it is pure revelation without explanation or the ordered, intelligent flow of reason. Some individuals need the continual

application of this flow of spiritual reasoning to their daily thinking to lift them to the realization of the onliness of divinity; others can without effort acquiesce in that onliness and reach it through revelation alone — “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise. ”

Mrs Eddy wrote, “Individuals are consistent who, watching and praying, can ‘run, and not be weary; ... walk, and not faint,’ who gain good rapidly and hold their position, or attain slowly and yield not to discouragement” (S&H 254:2-6). She recognized different types of mentality in the approach to Science. The main thing is not to have either pride or discouragement about our own path or any criticism of another’s path. If we take the course we feel is right for us, the course which brings us enlightenment, joy, and progress, and do happily whatever we feel necessary, the reward is there, until we see and take a higher way.

If we start criticizing someone else or questioning Principle’s way of dealing with things, we merely devalue our own penny, because we think it ought to be more. We devalue our own happiness by getting miserable about someone else getting happiness more light-heartedly than we do. So it is wise not to do that. Criticism does devalue the fruitage which is ours. Jesus has no condemnation for those who take a long time to arrive at fruitage. The only thing he condemns is their losing the value of what they have by criticizing others for not having done so much work or put in so much consecration to study. “Leave the distinctions of individual character and the discriminations and guidance thereof to the Father, whose wisdom is unerring and whose love is universal” (No.7:25-2).

The lesson is not to grumble or assess that we should have greater reward because of the greater amount of strenuous study and devotion we have given than he who appears to be so spiritually endowed that inspiration and realization come to him in a flash. The point that Jesus is bringing out is that there always is a reward as long as we are “with Him,” in line with the Scriptural statement, “His reward is with Him.” We must enter all spiritual activity not looking for the reward, but for the joy of being *in* that activity. Then if the time is

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long before we arrive at the realization of present perfection, it will not seem long to us; and if the time is short, it will be wonderful to have the breakthrough of spiritual inspiration.

Jesus underlines the error of measuring the reward we expect according to the work we do. Such a thing is impossible in Science.

“The last shall be first, and the first last.” Sometimes the “wise and prudent” who have done years of study in Christian Science and believe that it is not right or normal to have full inspiration without toil, sweat, and suffering (and so do not allow it in their experience) are critical and distrustful of the “babes” in Science who often have quick healings and outstanding and immediate fruitage. So although they came in at the “first hour,” they put themselves in the “last” position at the bottom of the class, as it were, through their critical attitude. On the other hand the “last” become “first” because they are unweighted by egotism and buoyed up by a genuine humility and a true appreciation of the divine. They do not set up one milestone after another as necessary to attain given stages of understanding. This explains why a child can have the experience of instantaneous healing. Those who have demanded of themselves a long process with a succession of milestones can be disturbed by envy and even anger or disappointment when they see the demonstration of Science in the lives of those who have accepted (either naturally or through alertness to reason and revelation) the logic of a perfect Principle and its perfect expression. They should not be disturbed, but should realize that the path they themselves are taking is revealing wonderful pictures to them, filled with healing and encouragement. Each one of all the labourers came to the eleventh hour through the process he chose, and therefore all the processes are fully approved by Jesus in this parable. There is not the slightest hint of criticism, but rather the granting of absolute freedom to the individual worker in the vineyard, with the penny of full reward unconditionally guaranteed. The choice of procedure is ours and whatever the choice we make, that way is lovely for us.

“Many be called, but few chosen.” Many are called to Science, but few allow themselves to be chosen by the unlaboured joy of Science

which could be theirs. They temporarily prefer their egotistical methods, which run parallel to the curse put on man that he should till the soil by the sweat of his brow. The "chosen" are those who, whatever hour they come in, find joy and satisfaction in what they are doing and have neither time nor inclination to do anything but praise others for where they are and what they are expressing. They are the chosen ones of Principle, because they have spontaneously chosen the way of Principle.

What the parable brings out is this: we should approach Principle in any manner we wish, and impose what period of time or study we wish before we will allow the enlightenment which leads us to where *we* can honestly expect the reward of our efforts. But we must keep our eye on the important objective of it all — that "one hour" to which Jesus referred in the garden of Gethsemane and to which at that time he was devoting his whole thought, with a depth of consecration which should be our example. How good and satisfying it is to accept what we feel to be right for ourselves and then, through giving full attention to the one essential objective, to have no time for criticism of the methods which others employ or of the fact that without any apparent effort they arrive at the same wonderful goal. Surely the Scripture can apply to us all, however we choose to work: "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace."

The Master deals in his parables a great deal with the time factor, a constituent of mortal thought. We have to recognize that, as Mrs Eddy says, "Time is a mortal thought" (S&H 598:30), and she defines "time" in her "Glossary" in part as follows: "Mortal measurements; limits, in which are summed up all human acts, thoughts, beliefs, opinions, knowledge; matter; error" (S&H 595:17-19). Any form of belief in time will spoil the possibility of instant reward. Those who come in at the eleventh hour do not have a sense of time to mar that possibility. Very often someone comes into Christian Science and has no measurement in his thought and so experiences instantaneous healing and revelation. He sees some idea in its beauty and wonder and he accepts it, where others may think, "Am I morally fit for this? Do I deserve it?" That is a belief in time.

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Possibly Jesus discerned among his students and others that a man can be brought right down by the feeling that he really has to toil to get anywhere; his own egotism bars him from allowing a quick reward through the simple process of accepting truth, instead of the more laborious process of a big preliminary building up of that truth until he can permit himself to accept it.

If only we would accept Truth! "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." There is no time, no requirement to mature fitness for perfection. Generally we say to ourselves, in effect, "I must try to get to the point of understanding all this about there being no time," thereby laying out a path whereby we can bring ourselves to accept it, and thus we impose on ourselves the element of time. If instead of this we would accept that there is no time, and that man is the idea or expression of Truth, as Jesus did, and work from that basis, we would experience its manifestation in such things as the quicker apprehension of Truth. It is a good thing to develop the habit of accepting a truth quickly because it is true and not play with it on the basis of "our" understanding. That is the way to receive the "penny" with a decreasing amount of toil and have the joy of increasing immediacy of understanding and fruitage.

One of the most vital lessons to be learned from the story of creation at the beginning of Genesis is that all truths which are there unfolded have always existed, but from the individual's point of view the word "Let" (which appears at the beginning of each of the six days and is to be found at the beginning of important statements within those days) gives the key to his experiencing those truths and leads to the wonderful rest and certainty defined in the seventh day, where all the previous "letting" culminates in that supreme reward. All the work of the student — and in fact all the work of man through all his experience — is the removing of that which would obstruct this pure letting of Truth, so that the truth possesses him wholly. It matters not how long we take or what standards we set before we arrive at that position. The one requirement of Principle to the student is that at first or at last he does that letting, which means a complete acqui-

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escing in Principle and its only possible expression, namely, perfection. For that reason the immediate admitting of Truth just for its own sake must always be right and will contribute to the speed with which the absolute conviction of it takes possession of our consciousness through whatever method we choose to employ to support our understanding.