

In the Nick of Time

Matthew 20:1-16

#0886

Study by W.D. Frazee—October 7, 1975

Let's turn to Matthew the 20th chapter.

God has three great classifications of workers. Now some of these sometimes merge into one another, so this is for study purposes; it's an outline, a diagram.

What's the first group of missionary workers? The tithe-supported ministry—this includes the ministers and their helpers such as Bible workers, and others, who are associated in giving their full time to the work of the church.

Who employs them? The church.

Who pays them? The church.

Where does that money come from? Tithes and offerings. Thus, our world-wide program of missionary endeavors is carried on.

The second group of missionary workers is called the lay members. How are *they* supported? By their *labor*—carpenters, bricklayers, accountants, cooks—all kinds of work, professional, and trades.

How do they do missionary work? They do missionary work in two ways: They're watching for opportunities as they labor, and then of course they have some time like evenings, or on holidays. But they cannot spend their full time in the missionary work because much of their time is taken up making a living.

The third group is self-supporting workers. They are like the first group in that they have heard and answered the call for full-time service in the work of the kingdom—God's cause on earth. But they are like the second group in that they are not supported by the church. If they are supported by the church, they belong to the first group, and if their main program in life is the support of themselves and their families, they belong to the second group.

How can they spend their time in the work of God's kingdom and still not be supported by the church?

Well, this is what we want to study, because this is the type of work that we who are here have been called to, and that we are getting training in. In this line of work, the training never ends. There's always something more to learn about.

God's plan of life has a place for every human being. Not all are called to take the same place, in fact, no two are. There is to be no rivalry, no comparison, no thinking, this person is doing a work that's not as important as the work that *I'm* doing. On the contrary, we should encourage every worker who is working for Jesus, whether as an employee of the church, or as a layman, or in some line of self-supporting missionary endeavor.

Now let's turn to Matthew the 20th chapter, and we will read one of the Savior's parables, drawing attention to some lessons from it.

"The kingdom of heaven..."

Jesus often used that expression "the kingdom of heaven" relating to God's work here on earth. It is of heaven in that it comes *from* heaven, but its work, its operation, is here on earth.

"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" Matthew 20:1-2.

Now those who understand the language and the customs of that time tell us that that penny a day was an ordinary day's wage. So, you may think of it in whatever terms you want to use. It was sufficient to support a man, and care for him and his family.

So, he hired these laborers, and they went on to the 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" *Ibid*, verses 3-5.

What was the third hour? Nine o'clock in the morning.

Sixth hour? Twelve noon.

The ninth hour? Three o'clock.

You mean he was still hiring people at three o'clock in the afternoon? Yes. Why? More grapes to pick; the vineyard wasn't finished.

"And about the eleventh hour...." *Ibid*, verse 6.

What would that be? Five o'clock.

“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” *Ibid*, verses 6-7.

Still hiring laborers just a little bit before sunset. The third stanza of “Work, for the night is coming” often moves me.

Under the sunset skies,
While their bright tints are glowing,
work for daylight flies;
Work till the last beam fadeth,
Fadeth to shine no more;
Work while the night is darkening,
When man’s work is o’er.
(Church Hymnal, 1941 edition, number 446)

Are we going to work up to the last minute of daylight, friends? Yes.

Now notice how these laborers were alike, who were hired at various times during the day, and how they were different.

What were they all doing? Gathering grapes.

Did they all get something at the end of the day? Yes.

Did the men who were hired first know what they were going to get? Yes.

Did those who were hired later know what *they* were going to get? No.

Which group had the more security? The *first* group.

Did the others turn out all right? Yes.

The owner of the vineyard promised the first group what? A penny—that is a day’s wage. What did he promise the last group? Whatever is right, I’ll give you.

So, those who came in for that short time of work at the end were entirely dependent upon the good judgment and the faithfulness of the one that had hired them. Is that right?

Let me ask you another question. Was there anything wrong with either arrangement? No. Now don’t *forget* that. Some people get their eyes on a certain method of doing the Lord’s work, and they get all wrapped up in that, and they think anything that’s *different* from that, there must be something *wrong* with it. But all you have to do is look around in nature and observe that God is a God of variety.

So, God lets some people *know* what they're going to get; and other people, He arranges it so they *don't* know what *they're* going to get. Now, if you can't live with that sort of life, if it gives you ulcers, you either need to be converted, or else you need to be in some other situation. Convert, you know, means to turn, to be changed. So if I am restless and dissatisfied and insecure unless I know what to count on, I repeat, I either need to have my mind changed, or else I need to have my body changed to some other location.

Are there situations in the world today where a man can get a job and *know* what he's going to receive? Yes. We won't discuss inflation, but that's another subject. In fact, most of the business in this country is carried on on that basis, isn't it? We have become security conscious more than any generation perhaps that's ever lived. Not only security conscious, but old-age retirement conscious. Actually, people that haven't a single gray hair are laying their plans to be sure that their financial situation and their wage, their employment situation, is taking care of what they're going to be doing 20, 30, 40 years from now.

Well, I have no criticism of that for those that want to go that way. What I'm trying to get at is this: There is at least a little place left in this world, in God's program in this world, that doesn't *deal* with that sort of thing. This says, Very well, if John Doe and Mary Roe want to work in such a way that they know what they're going to get every day, every week, every month, and also know what they're going to get in retirement benefits, very well. That's all right; no criticism. But I've heard a call of God in my soul. The Master of the vineyard has put His hand on my shoulder, and said, Go pick grapes, and don't worry about what you're going to get, either here or hereafter; whatever is right, I'll give you. And to those that have the call, and mind you, notice I say to those who have the *call*, that's a happy life. I know.

Oh, to see God answer prayer and work miracles, to see the Red Sea open, to see the manna come from heaven, to see water come out of a rock, to see one interposition of providence after the other. But it has to be those who have heard the call, and who know that God has called them to that, and who are willing to take the consequences.

Do you remember the experience of Elijah? The ordinary method of taking care of God's program on the earth was pretty well broken down in Elijah's day due to the Baal apostasy. When Elijah brought God's message to Ahab, He had to go into hiding. But God didn't say, "Because there is a drought, and the tithe is down, Elijah, I won't be able to use you." What did He do? He sent what? Ravens. To what? Feed him.

But by and by, the brook went dry. Now will you picture yourself in that situation? It's all right to read about it after it's over, but try to get it in the present tense. There you are; you're living a hand-to-mouth existence. It's a *beak-to-mouth* in *this* case. Meanwhile, what's happening to that stream? It's getting lower every day. If you were there with Elijah, what do you know is going to happen? In the ordinary course of events, that's going to run dry.

Does God give Elijah a vision six months in advance and say, "I've got that all taken care of, and here is the plan"? Not a bit of it.

When the water runs dry, *then* God says to Elijah, “I’ve got a new plan for you now. I want you to go clear across the country to Zarephath and Zidon, and there’s a widow woman over there.” When Elijah gets over there, he finds this poor woman out doing what? Gathering some sticks. To do what? Cook her last meal. Isn’t it interesting that God arranged it at that particular time?

May I throw this in parenthetically? People get all excited about fictitious tales when things happen just in the nick of time, or watching movies when things happen just in the nick of time. It’s all *phoney*; it *sounds* phoney and *looks* phoney. It is! But in the drama which is the real unfolding of God’s purpose, things, over and over again, happen in the nick of time. This is particularly true in the type of labor and mission that we’re studying about, where one is entirely dependent upon the providence of God.

That’s the position that Elijah was in at that time. You remember, he got his meal all right, and the widow got hers; but, there again, they were dependent upon a day-by-day miracle. Every day when the widow, for her son and herself and Elijah, made the meal, she took what? She took the last. But when she went there the next time, there was always something more.

Not a whole deep freeze full, not a walk-in stocked—and there’s nothing wrong with that—but my point is: This kind of *faith* and this kind of *call* and *answering* this kind of call makes it possible for a man or a woman to keep on working for God right down to the last of the supply, whether it’s money, or meal, or oil, or whatever. Do you see?

Now, I will tell you why this is so important, and why I am drilling away at it, and why God has brought you and me to this campus to learn these principles and how it works.

We are in the 11th hour! We’re in the closing moments!

Listen to this from *Selected Messages*, Book 2. This was written in 1913, one of the last things in the life of Sister White.

“In the future, our work is to be carried forward in self-denial and self-sacrifice even beyond that which we have seen in past years” *Selected Messages* Book 2, page 206.

Did the one who penned those words know anything about self-denial and self-sacrifice? Read the experience of James and Ellen White there in Volume 1 or *Life Sketches*. Read how they combined hard manual labor with prayer and trust in God, and sacrifice. But she says:

“In the future, our work is to be carried forward in self-denial and self-sacrifice even beyond that which we have seen in past years. ... Brethren, let us ... put before our associates an example of self-sacrifice. If we do our part

in faith, God will open ways before us now undreamed of”
Ibid.

What a wonderful thing.

Now, it’s interesting that this is the particular approach that Jesus used during the three and a half years that He was training His disciples. Now, He didn’t use this method during the 30 years. If you had gone and visited Nazareth when Christ was 12 years old, or 18, or 25, or 28, you would have found Him doing what? Working. As a what? A carpenter. Part-time or full-time? *Full-time*. His studies were on the side, and His missionary work was on the side. Jesus was giving an example to every lay member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church down here today. Yes He was. Every lay member today can do, and should be doing, what Jesus did as a layman.

Was He a layman? Yes. He had no credentials. He had no position. He was fulfilling His divine mission by working with His hands. But there came a time when He heard the divine summons to lay down His tools and go to Jordan and be baptized and enter upon His mission. And He spent His time then as a medical missionary worker and got richer than He ever was as a carpenter.

What? Didn’t He?

Was He busy? Which did He spend more time in, healing or preaching? Healing.

Well, isn’t that very rewarding financially?

It is to some people. Incidentally, there are people who make money preaching. Sure. There are people who have gotten *rich* off of preaching. Not many, I agree; but there are *some*. I am not talking about Seventh-day Adventists. But out in the popular churches there are men who make merchandise of the Gospel. Aren’t there? Sure. And they get rich at it.

God help us, my friends, there are people who do the same thing with *medical* ministry. Let the Lord deliver us from all that concept.

What was one of the ways that Luke, the beloved physician that labored with Paul, was supported? By Paul’s tent making. Interesting isn’t it?

Don’t misunderstand me. I think Luke probably got some donations from his patients. He must have been helping a lot of poor people. What I am trying to get at is this, friends: God has not called the ordained ministers who are supported by the tithe to get rich at that. Neither has He called self-supporting missionaries to get rich. But there’s nothing wrong with lay members of the church that are called to some remunerative form of employment getting rich if they get their wealth honestly and use it in the cause of God. God has given to some people the ability.

I think of the dear man that finally gave his business, the Harris Pine Mills, to the General Conference. That man and his wife labored for years. While I didn’t

know them personally, all I've ever heard of them was good. They built up a great business for God and then turned it over to the church. That's a wonderful spirit, isn't it? Yes.

But, while God has called ministers to put their full-time in the work of the church, and has told the church to support them with a proper amount, and has given lay members the ability to labor with their hands or their brains and earn a living and get a measure of security, He has also called some people to throw their lives into the closing work of God without the assurance of the church that they're to be supported, and without putting themselves into a type of labor which ties up all their time in simply making a living.

Now let me read a few references on this so you will see where we get these ideas. And it is this third type of worker that the Spirit of Prophecy particularly speaks of when the word is used "self-supporting." In a sense, everybody is self-supporting. The minister that raises up churches and the tithe comes in, that's self-supporting in a sense. The carpenter who works with his hands, or the barber, and makes a living, and gives Bible studies on the side, he's self-supporting. But as used in the Spirit of Prophecy, it's especially dealing with this third type of worker.

"Self-supporting missionaries are often very successful"
Testimonies for the Church, Vol 7, page 23.

The next word is not "financially."

"Self-supporting missionaries are often very successful. Beginning in a small, humble way, their work enlarges as they move forward under the guidance of the Spirit of God. Let two or more start out together in evangelistic work" *Ibid*.

What kind of work? *Evangelistic* work.

"They may not receive any particular encouragement from those at the head of the work that they will be given financial support; nevertheless let them go forward, praying, singing, teaching, living the truth" *Ibid*.

Now notice. They have heard the call of God to what? To evangelistic work. This might mean holding meetings; it might mean something that didn't involve holding meetings, as we shall see.

Evangelistic work means "soul-winning."

"Let two or more start out together in evangelistic work. They may not receive any particular encouragement from those at the head of the work that they will be given financial support" *Ibid*.

Have they been hired? No, not by men, not by the church. There is nobody that assumes an obligation to support these people.

“They may take up the work of canvassing, and in this way introduce the truth into many families” *Ibid.*

Now let me read a parallel reference here from *Ministry of Healing*. This is very parallel to the one in Volume 7, but it introduces some other points. Speaking of Paul, it says:

“Many today, if imbued with the same spirit of self-sacrifice, could do a good work in a similar way. Let two or more start out together in evangelistic work. Let them visit the people, praying, singing, teaching, explaining the Scriptures, and ministering to the sick. Some can sustain themselves as canvassers; others, like the apostle, can labor at some handicraft or in other lines of effort. As they move forward in their work, realizing their helplessness, but humbly depending upon God, they gain a blessed experience. The Lord Jesus goes before them, and among the wealthy and the poor they find favor and help” *Ministry of Healing*, page 154.

Now let me go back to Volume 7.

“As they move forward in their work they gain a blessed experience. They are humbled by a sense of their helplessness, ...” *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol 7, page 23.

Does that sound like security? No. They’re what? They’re *humbled*. By a sense of what? Their helplessness. That’s very hard to do if you’ve got a lot of money in the bank, and/or you know that you’ve got a check coming at the end of every month.

Don’t misunderstand me. There’s nothing wrong with having money in the bank. Thank the Lord, some people have it. There’s nothing wrong with getting a regular check every month. Thank the Lord, some people have that. And if that looks attractive to you, by all the rules of the Bible I tell you, it’s perfectly honest and proper to go get it; it’s there for the seeking, nothing wrong with it.

But here, I’m reading about something else.

“They are humbled by a sense of their helplessness, ...”
Ibid.

These self-supporting missionaries who have launched out without assurance of support, and are going from home to home visiting the people, singing, praying, teaching the truth, helping the sick, introducing our literature:

“They are humbled by a sense of their helplessness, but the Lord goes before them, and among the wealthy and the poor they find favor and help” *Ibid.*

Now comes this wonderful sentence.

“Even the poverty of these devoted missionaries is a means of finding access to the people” *Ibid.*

Now you can chew on that one a long time.

Too many of our dear people have the idea that anything remotely like that means that something is wrong. Somebody hasn't thought it through. Somebody is being inefficient, or improvident, or poor managers. Some people think that it's a crime today to allow anybody to work without assuring them of a salary and sustentation or sick benefits. Sure. They think that all has to be underwritten.

But this says:

“Even the poverty of these devoted missionaries is a means of finding access to the people” *Ibid.*

You mean there are some people that can be reached by poor, self-supporting, medical missionaries, that can't be reached any other way? Precisely, that's the point. But it takes a special breed to *take* that. It takes a special training to *appreciate* it. God has brought you here, my dear friend, for one of two reasons: He has brought you here either to train you in how to *do* this work this way, or else to find out that it's not for you.

You know who will decide which one of those two classes you're in? You will. You should.

Don't misunderstand me. I mean nothing disrespectful about either class. God has not called everybody to any one of these three lines of work. But He's called *somebody*.

Now let me read on about it, because this is a tremendous page.

“As they pass on their way they are helped in many ways by those to whom they bring spiritual food” *Ibid.*

They are what? Helped in many ways. Why sure, they give treatments and some people can't pay anything, but others that get help, they say, “Here. I want to help you do this work.” They pass out literature, and some people appreciate the literature, and either pay for it or give them an offering, and that helps; but others, they pass out the literature and they don't get anything. And so it is with all the other phases of medical missionary work. This is talking particularly about house-to-house work.

“Many will be brought to a knowledge of the truth who, but for these humble teachers, would never have been won to Christ. God calls for workers to enter the whitening harvest field. Shall we wait because the treasury is exhausted, because there is scarcely sufficient to sustain the workers now in the field? Go forth in faith, and God will be with you. The promise is: ‘He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.’ Psalm 126:6. Nothing is so successful as success. Let this be secured by persevering effort, and the work will move forward. New fields will be opened. Many souls will be brought to a knowledge of the truth. What is needed is increased faith in God” *Ibid*, page 23-24.

You know, for years, I was in conference, pastoral, and evangelistic work. And reading some of these statements, and many others that I might share with you, I was led to invite certain selected people to join my company on a self-supporting, faith basis. During the years I was in conference work, I had anywhere from three or four, to as many as 25 people eating around my table, and sharing in soul-winning.

But do you know what happened? By the time I had read the promises, and taught these principles for years to those people, they made such an impression on me that when the providence of God called me here to Wildwood to accept the same faith basis for myself that I had taught to those people all the years, there was only one thing I could do, that was do it. That was how I got involved in this, just reading some of these references.

Well I've never been sorry. But you know, we have an institution here now; but we didn't when we started. Oh, we called it a sanitarium. Do you know what it was? Well, it's this little evangelist house up here, smaller than it is now; it's been added to. That was the Wildwood Sanitarium. That was also the medical missionary institute. That's where we had our morning worships, and our business meetings, and our classroom, and had our patients in there, kitchen, and everything. And we've seen it grow. Thank God.

But it's been these principles of inviting people to connect with this program on a volunteer basis, asking them to find out if God wants them to come in at the 11th hour and help gather grapes before the sun goes down, while it's going down—and do it on the basis of “whatever is right, I will give you.”

I hadn't intended to say what I am going to say, but I feel impressed to say it. I've been here for a third of a century, and I haven't a scratch of a pen from this organization that guarantees me anything—not a thing. It doesn't worry me. I'm not working for this organization; I'm working for my Lord. He sent me into the vineyard and says, “Go and gather grapes, and whatever is right, I will give you.” And He's done it. He did it when I was in conference work; He did it when I was in self-supporting work.

Suppose somebody would say, “But Brother Frazee, suppose you break your leg tomorrow, suppose you break your back tomorrow, or something else?” Yes, suppose. I can think of a lot of things that could happen. Look at Philippians 4:19. This is my traveler’s check that I carry in my pocket. And again, so I won’t be misunderstood, let me repeat: There’s nothing wrong with people finding and securing security, nothing wrong with it at all. But some people, God leads a different road. Some people know they’re going to get their day’s wage, and some all they know is that the Master of the vineyard has said, “Whatever is right, it’s going to come.”

All right.

“But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” Philippians 4:19.

Some of you put an “s” in there that isn’t there at all, on the word need. Need. That’s all-inclusive.

You say, “Well, doesn’t it mean needs?” Ok. But it says “need” that means everything, anything, that you might need.

Let me tell you, there is no program of security in this world that can guarantee *that* to you. Why, I just was noticing not long ago in a news dispatch, do you know how much the dear Medicare patients are going to have to pay for the first little while they’re in the hospital? It’s a lot of money after all the Medicare benefits.

There is no way to get a program of government security or any other kind of security, that’ll take care of every need. But here is a promise for those that meet the conditions.

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