

THE ELEVENTH HOUR

“Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’” —LUKE 23:42-43

In Matthew, Chapter 20, Jesus tells the parable of the ‘Workers in the Vineyard’. When a landowner needed workers, he went out early in the morning and hired men for one denarius a day. Three hours later, he went out again and hired more workers for one denarius a day. At the sixth hour, ninth hour and eleventh hour, he brought more workers to his vineyard for one denarius a day. At the end of the day, he paid them all the one denarius he had promised, but the workers who were first on the field grumbled against the landowner, because they had been paid the same wages for a full day’s work as the men who had come in at the eleventh hour. Was this fair?

In the ‘Prodigal Son’, the older son who stayed home and dutifully served his father was in the fields, and when he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. They were celebrating because his brother had come home, and this greatly angered the older brother. He said to his father, “Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered

your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!” (Luke 15:29-30) Would we think this to be fair?

It is not fair, but Jesus says this is what the kingdom of heaven is like. It is not built on being fair. Deeply ingrained in many of us is this sense that we need to be deserving of God’s grace, and that is a problem. There are also those who believe they are deserving of God’s grace, and this is also a problem. To believe either way is not a correct understanding. The kingdom of heaven has nothing to do with what we deserve or do not deserve.

All the issues of the Gospel are about a restored relationship with God. Acknowledging our sin and receiving forgiveness is necessary, but is a means to an end in that we come to know Christ. Jesus said, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Everyone enters the kingdom of heaven on the same terms, whether at the first hour or eleventh hour. And this is so passionately revealed in the words of Jesus to the man on the cross beside Him, “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

PRAYER: Thank You, Lord, for your gift of grace, not only in forgiveness and salvation, but in coming to know You.

TO REFLECT UPON: Do I sometimes feel I have to earn God’s grace?