

## Malcolm's Monday Musings : 15 August 2022

Greetings.

The date today is the anniversary of the birth, on 15 August 1835, of Edward M. Bounds.

Mr Bounds was an American Methodist preacher and the author of some dozen books, most of which were on the subject of prayer. Among the latter were such classics as 'The Essentials of Prayer', 'The Necessity of Prayer', 'Power through Prayer' and 'Purpose in Prayer'.

His book, 'Prayer and Praying Men', focuses on the lives of nine prominent Bible characters (Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Hezekiah, Ezra, Nehemiah, Samuel, Daniel, and Paul) and explores how important prayer was to the spiritual lives of each of these men.

Together with others, each of these books can be downloaded freely at ...

<https://www.embounds.online/books>.

To mark the anniversary of Mr Bounds' birthdate—and to whet your appetite for more of his insights—I quote from my personal selection of his many memorable 'prayer' sayings:

(i) *That man cannot possibly be called a Christian, who does not pray.* [Cf. 'Behold, he prays', Acts 9. 11.]

('The Necessity of Prayer', page 24.)

(ii) *Prayer and sinning cannot keep company with each other. One or the other must of necessity stop. Get men to pray, and they will quit sinning, because prayer creates a distaste for sinning, and so works upon the heart, that evil-doing becomes repugnant, and the entire nature is lifted to a reverent contemplation of high and holy things.*

('The Necessity of Prayer', page 32.)

(iii) *Prayer is humbling work. It abases intellect and pride, crucifies vainglory, and signs our spiritual bankruptcy, and all these are hard for flesh and blood to bear. It is easier not to pray than to bear them ... The little estimate we put on prayer is evidence from the little time we give to it.*

('Power through Prayer', page 13.)

(iv) *God shapes the world by prayer. Prayers are deathless. The lips that uttered them may be closed in death, the heart that felt them may have ceased to beat, but the prayers live before God, and God's heart is set on them and prayers outlive the lives of those who uttered them.*

('Purpose in Prayer', page 2.)

(v) *I think Christians fail so often to get answers to their prayers because they do not wait long enough on God. They just drop down and say a few words, and then jump up and forget it and expect God to answer them. Such praying always reminds me of the small boy ringing his neighbour's door-bell, and then running away as fast as he can go ... Walking with God down the avenues of prayer we acquire something of His likeness, and unconsciously we become witnesses to others of His beauty and His grace.*

('Purpose in Prayer', page 15.)

(vi) *Prayer is the easiest and hardest of all things; the simplest and the sublimest; the weakest and the most powerful; its results lie outside the range of human possibilities*

*—they are limited only by the omnipotence of God ... Prayer is our most formidable weapon, but the one in which we are the least skilled, the most averse to its use.*

(‘Purpose in Prayer’, page 17.)

*(vii) Prayer is not an opiate but a tonic, it does not lull to sleep but arouses anew for action. The lazy man does not, will not, cannot pray, for prayer demands energy. Paul calls it a striving, an agony [Col. 4. 12]. With Jacob it was a wrestling [Gen. 32. 24; Hosea 12. 4].*

(‘Purpose in Prayer’, page 18.)

*(viii) ‘Always’ [Eph. 6. 18] does not mean that we are to neglect the ordinary duties of life; what it means is that the soul which has come into intimate contact with God in the silence of the prayer-chamber is never out of conscious touch with the Father, that the heart is always going out to Him in loving communion, and that the moment the mind is released from the task upon which it is engaged it returns as naturally to God as the bird does to its nest.*

*What a beautiful conception of prayer we get if we regard it in this light, if we view it as a constant fellowship, an unbroken audience with the King. Prayer then loses every vestige of dread which it may once have possessed; we regard it no longer as a duty which must be performed, but rather as a privilege which is to be enjoyed, a rare delight that is always revealing some new beauty.*

(‘Purpose in Prayer’, page 24.)

*(ix) He who is too busy to pray will be too busy to live a holy life. Satan had rather we let the grass grow on the path to our prayer chamber than anything else.*

(‘Purpose in Prayer’, page 38.)

**Lord, teach us to pray!** (Luke 11. 1)

Here is one quotation from Mr Bounds which is not on the subject of prayer but which continues the subject of Satan and his tactics:

*Satan is always at church before the preacher is in the pulpit or a member is in the pew. He comes to hinder the sower, to impoverish the soil, or to corrupt the seed. He uses these tactics only when courage and faith are in the pulpit, and zeal and prayer are in the pew; but if dead ritualism or live liberalism are in the pulpit, he does not attend, because they are no danger to him.*

(‘Guide to Spiritual Warfare’, page 34.)

**Separately**, the following section reproduces (with kind permission) the first of two articles which were printed in the Precious Seed magazine in 2010. (Apart from a few slight ‘cosmetic’ changes and a revision to Note 41, I have made no attempt to update or amend the original content of the article.)

The subject of the two articles is the so-called ‘Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard’, recorded in Matthew 20. 1-16.

Have you ever questioned, I wonder, the justice of an employer who arranges for men who work for twelve hours to be paid the same as men who work for only one—as does the vineyard owner in our Lord’s story?

The exposition provided in the two articles aims to explain the justice of that *seemingly* unjust action and, in doing so, to demonstrate that, through His parable, our Lord ‘raises with you and me the issue of our motives for serving Him’.

God willing, the second and concluding article will be reproduced in next Monday’s Musings.

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

---

## The Parable of the Workers in Vineyard. Matthew 20. 1-16. Part 1.

### SCRIPTURE

Jesus said to them, ‘... But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

‘For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard.

‘Now when he had agreed with the labourers for a denarius 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 to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you”. So, they went.

‘Again, he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise.

‘And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, “Why have you been standing here idle all day?” They said to him, “Because no one hired us”. He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive”.

‘So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, “Call the labourers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first”.

‘And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius.

‘And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, “These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day”.

‘But he answered one of them and said, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?”

‘So, the last will be first, and the first last’.

Matthew 19. 30 – Matthew 20. 16 (*The New King James Version*)

### INTRODUCTION

As I understand it, by means of the Parable of the Workers in Vineyard, the Lord raises with you and me the issue of our motives for serving Him.

At the outset, we need to consider the structure of the passage.

### STRUCTURE

**1.** The first, and all-important, point to note is that the parable is wedged between two similar versions of the same saying: on the one hand, ‘many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first’,<sup>1</sup> and on the other hand, in reverse order, ‘the last shall be first, and the first last’.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly these two sayings are meant to function as the bookends of the parable.

2. The second point to note is that the parable opens with the word 'For',<sup>3</sup> and is immediately followed by the word 'so'.<sup>4</sup> These verbal links tell us plainly that the purpose of parable is to explain, to illustrate, and to amplify the saying.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, any satisfactory interpretation of the parable must harmonise with the saying, and any satisfactory interpretation of the saying must harmonise with the parable. All suggested interpretations of either the parable or the saying which fail this test must be rejected.

3. The third point to note is that the first saying ('many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first') itself begins the word, 'But'.<sup>6</sup> That is, in some way the saying of verse 30 must stand in contrast to what is said previously; namely in verses 28-29.

Reading back further, we discover that the whole section from verse 28 onwards is anchored in Peter's statement and question of verse 27, 'we have left all and followed you. Therefore, what shall we have?'

We conclude, therefore, (i) that verses 28-29 form one answer to Peter's question and (ii) that the passage from chapter 19 verse 30 down to chapter 20 verse 16 forms another—a contrasting—answer.

But, reading back still further, we find that Peter's question itself arises out of a previous incident, recorded in verses 16 to 26 of chapter 19.

## CONTEXT

That incident concerns an exemplary rich young man who had approached Jesus with a question about obtaining eternal life. This exceptional young man knew in his heart that more was required than mere outward conformity to the law; hence his question, 'what do I still lack?'<sup>7</sup>

The Lord knew the young man's heart, that riches held the supreme place there. And so, He put His finger on the dominant love and idol<sup>8</sup> in the young man's life.<sup>9</sup>

He told the rich ruler<sup>10</sup> to forsake his wealth: 'go, sell what you have and give to the poor ... and come, follow me'.<sup>11</sup>

But, faced with this two-fold demand (in effect, to '*forsake*' and to '*follow*'), the young man's brow clouded over<sup>12</sup> and 'he went away sorrowful'.<sup>13</sup> The price was too high for him.

Turning to His disciples, the Lord informed them how difficult it is for those who are rich to enter God's kingdom.<sup>14</sup> He then illustrated His point by reference to the natural impossibility of (to them) the largest familiar animal (the 'camel') entering through the smallest familiar hole ('the eye of a needle'). 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle', He said, 'than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God'.<sup>15</sup>

The disciples were astounded. Were not riches, they may well have questioned in their minds, themselves evidence of God's blessing and favour?<sup>16</sup>

'Who then can be saved?' they wanted to know.<sup>17</sup> Looking searchingly at them, Jesus declared, 'With men this is impossible ('This *cannot* be'), but with God all things are possible ('all things *can* be')'.<sup>18</sup>

It was at this point that Peter spoke up, to claim that they (the twelve) had complied both the conditions which the Lord had laid down for the young ruler: 'Then Peter answered and said to Him, Behold, we have left all and followed you'.<sup>19</sup>

We note: (i) it is said that Peter 'answered', possibly indicating that he was replying to what Jesus had just said, and (ii) that the 'we' is emphatic in each of the synoptic Gospels.<sup>20</sup>

'We', the apostle was saying, 'have done precisely what that young man was not prepared to do'.

And then came the tell-tale question; literally, 'What then shall we (emphatic) have?'

What, we ask, was in the minds of the disciples?

Clearly, we need to relate Peter's question both (i) to the popular understanding of 'Messiahship' and (ii) to the disciples' own expectation of the manifested kingdom of God. Alas, at this point, their eyes were closed to all else except the imminent advent of a physical, temporal and earthly kingdom.

Only a moment or so before, the Lord had promised that those who 'forsook' all and who 'followed' Him would 'have treasure in heaven'!<sup>21</sup>

I think we can take it that the disciples' eyes had lit up at those words. Their appetite had been well and truly whetted. For, beyond any dispute, they had certainly fulfilled all the conditions. And they were now eager to obtain more details of their reward. In effect, they wanted the Lord to put some flesh on the bones of His promise!

As we have noted above, and as often, Peter was simply the spokesman of the apostolic band. Hence the repeated 'we' of verse 27, together with the way in which the Lord addressed 'them' as 'you' (plural) in verse 28.

And we must grant that the sacrifices which these men had made were far from negligible. We are told, for instance, that the author of this gospel had risen up from his custom-booth and left behind him his spacious house—a house large enough to accommodate 'many' tax-collectors and outcasts for a farewell meal.<sup>22</sup> For their part, Peter and Andrew had left their fishing nets,<sup>23</sup> and James and John had left their boat, their father and the hired servants.<sup>24</sup> And, of each, it is said that they had then 'followed' Jesus.

It is lovely to observe that our Lord first answered the disciples in the spirit in which they had asked, giving a straight answer of the very sort for which they had hoped.<sup>25</sup> Reversing the order expressed by Peter in verse 27, the Saviour spoke, first, in verse 28, of those who had 'followed', and, second, in verse 29, of those who had 'left'. (i) The twelve would each have a throne<sup>26</sup> and (ii) 'everyone' who left anything for His sake would receive a hundredfold recompense.<sup>27</sup>

(i) Speaking of the apostles themselves, Jesus said they would be allocated special places of authority and responsibility ('*thrones ... judging*') in the Messianic kingdom at the time of Israel's and the earth's 'regeneration'.<sup>28</sup>

(ii) Speaking of '*everyone who has left*', He focused, not on recompense to be received in the coming kingdom, but on recompense to be received in the present life.<sup>29</sup>

The Lord listed in pairs the order in which His followers would be willing to leave their families: 'brothers or sisters, or father or mother, or wife<sup>30</sup> or children'. And all these He enclosed between 'houses' and 'lands', in all probability because '*great possessions*' had proved the key issue for the young man.<sup>31</sup>

God would, the Lord taught, compensate all such sacrifices by increased spiritual relationships and possessions in what we now know to be a world-wide circle of fellowship. And so, what men might reckon to be a sacrifice was in reality an investment. God would not be their debtor!<sup>32</sup>

And they would, Jesus concluded, 'inherit *eternal life*'. And, with these words, the section has come full circle. For they clearly link back to the rich young ruler's question, 'what good thing shall I do that I may have *eternal life*?'<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, **Luke** closes his account of the incident at this point,<sup>34</sup> as a story complete in itself: wholehearted commitment to Christ brings eternal life.

In his gospel, **Mark** concludes his account of the young man's encounter with Jesus and our Lord's subsequent teaching to His disciples with His words, 'But many who are first will be last; and the last first'.<sup>35</sup> And there the saying hangs, so to speak, in mid-air—with no parable recorded to help explain its proper significance to the readers of Mark's gospel.

We are indebted to **Matthew** alone (under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of course) for recording our Lord's explanation of the meaning of the saying.

And so, to the parable itself.

## EXPOSITION

It hardly needs to be said that the main point and purpose of the parable is tied up with the manner in which the wages of the vineyard workers wages were paid at the end of the day.

'When evening had come', reads verse 8, 'the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, "Call the labourers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first". Here the words 'last' and 'first' become all-important, and 'the first' quite literally becomes 'the last' and 'the last' quite literally becomes 'the first'.

The procedure followed in verse 8 therefore provides the key to the meaning of our Lord's enigmatic saying. But for us to grasp that meaning we need first to listen to the Saviour as He tells the whole of His parable.

**Verse 1.** Vineyards were plentiful in Judea and, during the time of the grape harvest in particular, workers were in great demand. 'The vintage and the pressing had to be finished before the onset of the rainy season'.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, to be certain of securing his requisite workforce, the 'landowner'<sup>37</sup> of the story felt obliged to get down to the market-place<sup>38</sup> early—which market-place served among of things as the local Unemployment Office (now titled Jobcentre Plus).<sup>39</sup>

'Early in the morning': presumably, that is, when the Jewish day started at 6 a.m.

**Verse 2.** Here we meet one of the key words of the parable, 'agreed', which will play a most important part in verse 13.

This word 'agreed' translates the Greek word from which we derive the English word 'symphony'. We might say, therefore, that the owner of the vineyard (so-to-speak) 'harmonised' and 'was in accord' with the first group of labourers. He and they entered into a binding agreement, everything being conducted in the most business-like manner. There was a contract with very clear terms, specifying both a stipulated sum and a stipulated period; 'a denarius a day'.

It is important to note that 'a denarius' was a most decent (even a generous) wage for a vineyard worker.<sup>40</sup> This vineyard owner was certainly not out to short-change or to exploit the men who worked for the whole day.

**Verses 3-5a.** Reckoning from the commencement of the day at 6 a.m., 'the third hour' brings us to 9 a.m. It was 'about' that time that the vineyard owner returned to the market-place, where he observed 'others standing idle', the word 'idle'<sup>41</sup> indicating only that they were inactive and, as yet, unemployed.

It is important to note that the arrangement which the owner made with these men is very different to that he had made with the first group of labourers.

On this occasion, there is no precise contract. In this case we read only of the vineyard owner's undertaking to give these men what was deemed to be 'right' ('equitable', that is).

Such an arrangement demanded from the workers no small measure of trust in the man's fair dealing and honesty. But for these workers his rather vague undertaking was sufficient and, on the strength of it, 'they went'.

**Verse 5b.** The actions of 9 a.m. were repeated at 12 noon and at 3 p.m. It is likely that each of the workers who were employed on all three occasions understood the vineyard owner's 'whatever is right I will give you' to mean that, in due course, they should receive the appropriate proportion of a full day's wage. But we note that, strictly speaking, none of these men had any legitimate cause for complaint (still less, any legal redress or comeback) if, in the event, he chose to pay them much less.<sup>42</sup>

**Verses 6-7.** At about 5 p.m. the vineyard owner returned to the market-place. 'Are there not', Jesus once asked, 'twelve hours in the day?'<sup>43</sup> And indeed, a full working day, including breaks, consisted of twelve hours. So, by 'the eleventh hour', the day was coming to its close. Hence the owner's question in verse 6 (literally), 'Why do you stand here all the day idle?'

That the men had remained in the market-place for almost the entire day showed just how desperately they wanted work. But, as they explained, 'no one hired us'.

This time, the owner's response differs significantly even from what he had said to those employed at 9 a.m., at 12 noon, and at 3 p.m. On this occasion, all he said was, 'You also go into the vineyard'.<sup>44</sup> This time, there was no mention made of any wage or reward.

The 5 o'clock labourers therefore set about their work in simple reliance on the vineyard-owner's good nature. They were content to depend entirely on his character. Lacking any promise of recompense, they had no legal comeback, even if, in the event, the man chose to pay them nothing at all.

**Verse 8.** The time of recompense brought two great surprises. First, there was the **order** of the payments, and, second, there was the **size** of the payments.

'When evening had come'. The owner of the vineyard acted strictly in accord with God's law: 'The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning'.<sup>45</sup> The rationale for the command was later explained: 'You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy ... each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you'.<sup>46</sup>

'His steward' was the man who administered his affairs for him; the senior servant responsible for running the household and supervising the other servants.

The first surprise came with the specified order of payments; 'beginning with the last to the first'. This, then, was very much a case of 'last come, first served'!

And here lies a desperately important part of story. For here are created the two categories which control all that follows, and which serve to explain our Lord's words at the close, 'so the last will be first, and the first last'. Note (i) the later identification of the early morning team as 'the first',<sup>47</sup> (ii) the identification of the 5 o'clock team as 'these last'<sup>48</sup> and (iii) the description of one of the 5 o'clock team as 'this last'.<sup>49</sup>

We are left in no doubt, therefore, about the identity of the two key groups. Indeed, it is clear that the meaning of the parable focuses entirely on just these two groups; those who commenced work at 9 a.m., 12 noon and 3 p.m. are simply scenery in the story.

As far as our Lord's story went, presumably, the vineyard owner wanted those who had been hired first to see how generous he was to those he had hired later.

But this very detail was critically important to the lesson our Lord wanted to teach His disciples. For, had ‘the first’ been paid first, they would doubtless each have taken his denarius and disappeared out of the story. And even if ‘the first’ had stayed around to witness the payment of those who began their work later, they (the first) could have murmured then only that the other workers had been paid too much. In either case, the whole purpose and moral of the parable would have been lost.

**Verses 9-10.** It is at this point that the Lord introduces the second—and even bigger—surprise in store for His disciples. For ‘the last’ (‘those ... who were hired about the eleventh hour’) received a whole denarius.

Why, the Lord’s disciples may well have wondered, didn’t those who had worked for only one twelfth of the day receive a ‘*pondion*’, a coin with a value exactly one-twelfth of a denarius.<sup>50</sup>

Quite understandably, ‘the first’ (the workers who had begun at six o’clock in the morning) ‘supposed that they would receive more’.

We can almost see them while they stood waiting in the queue, rubbing their hands together, tapping their noses and whispering among themselves, ‘Therefore what shall we have?’ This was, of course, the very question which Peter had recently voiced on behalf of the twelve.<sup>51</sup> That is, the early morning team were thinking hard about what they were going to get for their service. Their minds were wholly occupied with the detail of their reward.

‘But’, someone might say, ‘fair’s fair! Surely it was only reasonable for them to expect some productivity bonus. For, after all, they had done much more work, and had done most of this through the hardest time of the day’. On any score, it seemed that justice was very much on their side. And yet, when their turn came to be paid, they (to their dismay and disgust) received only a denarius.

**Verse 11.** Although, according to verse 8, it had been the ‘steward’ who actually handed out the wages, the vineyard owner himself had clearly remained in earshot. And it was against him personally that the men ‘murmured’ (‘grumbled’)—the tense<sup>52</sup> indicating that their complaint was continued and prolonged. They were certainly not amused! Any more, I guess, than many of us would have been.

**Verse 12.** ‘Us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day’. The word ‘burden’ describes oppressive, burdensome and wearisome toil.<sup>53</sup> These men had been exposed to the ‘heat’ (i) of the sun, and, likely as not, (ii) of *the sirocco*—a scorching hot and dry wind which blew in from the desert at sunrise, referred to in scripture as ‘a vehement east wind’, and as the wind which comes ‘up from the wilderness’.<sup>54</sup> We may well recall the words of Jacob to Laban, ‘in the day the drought consumed me’.<sup>55</sup>

By way of contrast, the first to be paid had had to contend with neither the sirocco nor the sun. Their work not only had extended for a much shorter period (namely, one-twelfth of the time), but had been far less strenuous and demanding. For they had benefited from the cool of the evening.

And there we leave our study, with the early morning team feeling pretty peeved about the treatment they had received. God willing, we shall consider the vineyard owner’s response and its significance, together with the sequel to our Lord’s parable, in Part 2 of our study.

*To be continued*



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 19. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 20. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 20. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 20. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Technically, the 'for' is a conjunction and the 'so' is an adverb. But, though different forms of speech, both words serve equally to tie the parable to the saying.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 19. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. 19. 20.

<sup>8</sup> The young ruler claimed to have kept those commandments which were 'man-ward', Matt. 19. 18-20 (cf. Exod. 20. 13-16; Lev. 19. 18). But, in effect, the Lord Jesus took him back to the very first commandment—which was 'God-ward'; namely, 'You shall have no other gods before me', Exod. 20. 3.

<sup>9</sup> The Lord's demands were motivated by love for the young man, Mark 10. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Luke 18. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Matt. 19. 21.

<sup>12</sup> 'His countenance fell at the saying', Mark 10. 22 RV.

<sup>13</sup> Matt. 19. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Matt. 19. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Matt. 19. 24.

When commenting on Matthew 19. 23-26, THOMAS AQUINAS (1225-1274) in his '*Catena Aurea - Gospel of Matthew*' attributes the following gloss to ANSELM OF CANTERBURY (1033-1109): 'It is explained...that at Jerusalem there was a certain gate, called, "The needle's eye", through which a camel could not pass, but on its bended knees, and after its burden had been taken off; and so the rich should not be able to pass along the narrow way that leads to life, till he had put off the burden of sin, and of riches, that is, ceasing to love them'; see <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/catena1.ii.xix.html>, page 671.

Although this 'explanation' has appealed to many since, it has no sound basis. 'The idea that it ("The Needle's Eye") was simply a name for a small gate in Jerusalem is based on a gate from the medieval period and sheds no light on Jesus' teaching', CRAIG KEENOR, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, on Matthew 19. 23-26. 'The gate in Jerusalem known as "The Needle's Eye" was built during the Middle Ages and was not in existence in Jesus' day. Jesus was speaking rhetorically to point out that apart from God's intervention, salvation is impossible', the footnote to Mark 10. 25 in *The NET Bible*.

The Jewish Babylonian Talmud speaks, in similar vein to our Lord, of an elephant passing through the eye of a needle to describe something which is impossible: 'Perhaps you are from Pumbeditha, he retorted, where they draw an elephant through the eye of a needle' (*Baba Mezi'a, 38b*), and 'a man is never shown in a dream a date palm of gold, or an elephant going through the eye of a needle' (*Berakoth, 55b*).

But, although the Rabbis in Babylon would have been familiar with elephants, the same would not have been true of the people in Israel in our Lord's day. Our Lord therefore spoke in terms which they would have recognised; namely, that of a 'camel'.

<sup>16</sup> Certainly, at the outset of Israel's history the Lord had promised that national prosperity and blessing would follow obedience; see, for example, Deuteronomy chapters 26-28.

<sup>17</sup> Matt. 19. 25.

<sup>18</sup> Matt. 19. 26.

- <sup>19</sup> Matt. 19. 27 literally.
- <sup>20</sup> Matt. 19. 27; Mark 10. 28; Luke 18. 28.
- <sup>21</sup> Matt. 19. 21.
- <sup>22</sup> Matt. 9. 9-10.
- <sup>23</sup> Matt. 4. 20.
- <sup>24</sup> Matt. 4. 22; Mark 1. 20.
- <sup>25</sup> Matt. 19. 28-29.
- <sup>26</sup> Matt. 19. 28.
- <sup>27</sup> Matt. 19. 29. Some Greek manuscripts read 'manifold' (as in Luke 18. 30) rather than 'hundredfold' (as in Mark 10. 30). But the sense is unaffected.
- <sup>28</sup> Matt. 19. 28.
- <sup>29</sup> Matt. 19. 29. Mark's parallel account reports the Lord's words as 'there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold *now in this time*—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, *with persecutions*—and in the age to come, eternal life', Mark 10. 29-30.
- <sup>30</sup> Although several of the oldest Greek manuscripts omit 'wife' from the list here in Matthew 19 (as they do in Mark 10. 29), the inclusion of 'wife' is undisputed in Luke 18. 29.
- <sup>31</sup> Matt. 19. 22.
- <sup>32</sup> I have traced back the saying 'God is no one's debtor' as far as THOMAS AQUINAS (1225-1274). The saying is found in his *Summa Theologica*, First Part of the Second Part, under Question 114.
- <sup>33</sup> Matt. 19. 16.
- <sup>34</sup> Luke 18. 29.
- <sup>35</sup> Mark 10. 31.
- <sup>36</sup> JOACHIM JEREMIAS, *Rediscovering the Parables*, page 136.
- <sup>37</sup> Literally, 'housemaster'. He is one and the same, of course, as 'the owner (literally 'lord') of the vineyard' of verse 8.
- <sup>38</sup> Verse 3 makes it clear that it was to 'the market-place' that he went.
- <sup>39</sup> 'The market-place was the equivalent of the labour exchange. A man came there first thing in the morning, carrying his tools, and waited until someone hired him', WILLIAM BARCLAY, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew*, volume 2, page 223.
- <sup>40</sup> See the comments on page 5 of the exposition of the Parable of the Good Samaritan which was attached to the Monday Musings dated 4 April 2022. Note, additionally, that a denarius was the equivalent of the Greek 'drachma', which, according to the Jewish apocalyptic book of Tobit 5. 14, was paid as a daily wage. Note also: 'One of Caesar's scribes [a skilled workman] received one denarius per day', ARTHUR RUPPRECHT, *Christianity and the Slavery Question*, accessed at [https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bets/vol06/6-2\\_rupprecht.pdf](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bets/vol06/6-2_rupprecht.pdf). 'One denar per day was considered a good wage. The great Hillel did manual labour for half that sum', T. W. MANSON, *The Sayings of Jesus*, page 219.

<sup>41</sup> 'Ἄργος (a and ἔργον), not idle in habit, but unemployed and looking for work', A. B. BRUCE, *The Synoptic Gospels: The Expositor's Greek Testament*, page 253.

'Ἄργος (cf. 12. 36) probably means 'idle' (not 'useless' or 'lazy'; cf. bāṭēl)', W. D. DAVIES and D. C. ALLISON, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, Volume 3, page 42.

'The word ἄργος 'literally means without work. These men are not deliberately avoiding labour (cf. v. 7). With their families they may well go hungry that evening if they do not find work', CRAIG L. BLOMBERG, *Matthew: The New American Commentary*, page 302.)

'The owner goes back into the marketplace in his village and finds other day labourers standing around doing nothing. It must have been difficult and in some cases humiliating to stand around ... hoping to be hired, and not being able to leave the marketplace for fear of missing an opportunity to work that day', B. WITHERINGTON III, *Matthew: Smyth and Helwyn Commentary*, page 373.)

<sup>42</sup> It would have been no problem for the vineyard owner to have made payment of a *much* smaller sum than a whole denarius. One denarius was worth four sesterces, one sestertius was worth four asses, one assarion was worth four quadrans and one quadrans was worth two lepta (the two 'mites of Mark 12. 42 and Luke 21. 2). That is, one denarius was worth 128 lepta.

<sup>43</sup> John 11. 9.

<sup>44</sup> The earliest manuscripts omit the clause 'and whatever is right you will receive'. The insertion of these words by some later copyist (as in the text underlying the KJV and NKJV) goes no small way to destroying the meaning of the parable. 'These words ('you go too') said this time with marked emphasis ... The clause about payment ... is obviously out of place in this case', A. B. BRUCE, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, on Matthew 20 verse 7.

<sup>45</sup> Lev. 19. 13b.

<sup>46</sup> Deut. 24. 14-15.

<sup>47</sup> Matt. 20. 10.

<sup>48</sup> Matt. 20. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Matt. 20. 14.

<sup>50</sup> 'There is such a thing as a twelfth part of a denar. It was called a *pondion*', T. W. MANSON, *ibid.*, page 220. Similarly, in his commentary on Mark 12. 41, MATTHEW POOLE quotes from chapter 19 of JOHN LIGHTFOOT, *Temple Service*: 'each *denarius* made six *meahs* ... the *meah* made two *pondions*'.

<sup>51</sup> Matt. 19. 27.

<sup>52</sup> Imperfect tense.

<sup>53</sup> 'Burdensome, grievous, oppressive', *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*, under *barov*.

<sup>54</sup> Jonah 4. 8 and Hos. 13. 15 respectively

<sup>55</sup> Gen. 31. 40.