

GOOD NEWS FOR THE AGED NO. 2602

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S DAY, DECEMBER 25, 1898.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,
ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, DECEMBER 30, 1855.

*“And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle.”
Matthew 20:6.*

WE have come to the end of another year. Better is the end of a year than the beginning thereof. A year is begun with fear and trembling; it closes with joy and thankfulness. In the beginning of the year, we are like the sailor when he leaves port, hoists his sails, and goes out on the broad sea toward a distant country; at the end of the year, we are sometimes like that mariner when he casts his anchor overboard, and lies still in the haven. We have come into harbor now, at the end of the year; and here we rest and gratefully review our voyage.

But, in coming to the end of another year, we have some solemn things to talk about, as well as some on which to congratulate ourselves. This is to be our subject, and may God make it both solemn and profitable for the winding-up of the old year: “And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle.” These words are taken from the parable of the householder, who went out early, and hired laborers into his vineyard; and who went out again at the third hour, and the sixth hour, and the ninth hour, and at last went out at the eleventh hour, and did the same; and when the laborers came to be paid, he gave to those who were hired at the eleventh hour just the same reward as to those whom he had hired at the beginning of the day. We shall note, in our text, first, *the sovereignty of divine grace*; secondly, *the mercy of God*; and afterwards we will endeavor to make a solemn application of the passage to both old and young.

I. First, in our text, we have DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY VERY PROMINENT.

When we say divine sovereignty, we mean that God has the same rights which an absolute monarch has; that, just as a sovereign, under the old Jewish laws, or under the Medes and Persians, had a right to do entirely as he willed with his subjects, and there were none that could stop his hand, or say, “What are you doing?” even so God, only in an infinitely higher and much more righteous sense, is absolute Monarch in this world, and has undoubted right to do with everyone of us just whatever He pleases. The apostle Paul wisely asked, “Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?” That doctrine of divine sovereignty—alas! Too much discarded—must be proclaimed, however men may bite their lips, and however angry they may be, to hear themselves humbled in the dust, and Jehovah God exalted as their Master.

This parable shows the sovereignty of God *with regard to the calling of certain persons*. The householder went out early in the morning, and called so many; he went out at the third hour, and called more; he went out at the sixth, the ninth, and the eleventh hours, and still he found more persons unemployed. Did he find them expecting or seeking work? No; he found them “standing idle in the marketplace.” They were not working, nor doing anything; he found them standing idle; and so, just as he pleased, he said to some of them, “Go and work in my vineyard.” There is such a thing as divine sovereignty with regard to the choice of persons who are to be saved. If one man is saved, and not another, God has made the difference, and God has the right to make the difference. If my brother shall enter heaven, and I shall be sent to hell, God has a right to save my brother; and He would be righteous in my damnation, for I deserve it; and if my brother does not deserve to be saved—as he does not—yet God has a right to give salvation to him, and to withhold it from me, if so it pleases Him. My soul falls down in abject submission at His feet; I have no rights when I come before the Almighty, I have no claims on Him; I have so sinned and so erred that, if He had sent my soul to hell, I should have richly deserved it. God has a right

to do as He wills with His creatures; and He exhibits this right in His choice of those whom He calls to work in His vineyard.

But, again, divine sovereignty is exhibited *in the time when the householder called his people*. Some were called early in the morning; some at the third hour, some at the sixth, some at the ninth, some at the eleventh. The man who was called at the eleventh hour did not grumble and say, “Why did you not call me in the morning?” The man who was called in the morning, though it is said that he afterwards murmured because he did not have more pay than the last who were hired, yet, if he had been in his right mind, would have been thankful to the householder that he had given him the honor of working in his vineyard, and had called him so early into it. It is a mercy to be effectually called by grace at any time; and we must not dictate to God when He shall give us His grace. God exercises His sovereignty in calling and converting sinners when He pleases. We have some in our churches who have been Christians ever since they were four or five years of age; and others who were not converted until they were sixty or seventy. God calls His people out of the world, and from the service of sin and Satan, at all periods of life; and thus He exhibits His divine sovereignty in saving men just when He pleases.

How often have I heard legal preachers assert that, if a man is not saved before he is thirty, it is not likely that he will be saved at all; and that, if a man has attended the house of God for thirty years, and is not saved, there is just a possibility, but hardly a probability, that He ever will be saved. That is all nonsense or something worse; because God is God, He saves whom He will, and He saves them when He wills. Our Lord said to Nicodemus, “The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell from where it comes, and to where it goes: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.” God is just as able to convert a man with grey hairs on his head as He is to convert a man of thirty; there is no difference. We all stand before Him as sinners; and if He pleases to save a grey-headed man, He can do so. Men talk in the way I mentioned just now in order to stir up the young to seek Christ; but they little know that, while such language has little or no effect upon the young, on the other hand it often depresses the spirits of the old, and makes them think, “Surely, then, our hour of mercy is passed, and we cannot be saved.” And yet these same preachers quote Dr. Watts and say—

*“Life is the time to serve the Lord,
The time to insure the great reward;
And while the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return.
Life is the hour that God has given
To escape from hell, and fly to heaven;
The day of grace and mortals may
Secure the blessings of the day.”*

Yes, beloved, as long as a man is living in this world, and I also am living, I will preach the gospel to him; and if I could find “the wandering Jew”—if such a being ever existed—and he were nearly two thousand years of age, I would still preach the gospel even to him, and if he trusted Christ as his Savior, he would find mercy and salvation.

So, divine sovereignty shows itself, first, in the calling of certain persons; and, next, in the time when those persons are called.

And, once again, there will be divine sovereignty *in the ultimate reward of those who are called*. The householder gave to every man a penny. The one who was hired at the eleventh hour came in fresh to his work, and did just a little hoeing, or digging, or pruning, or something of that sort, and there was a penny for him. In comes another man, who wipes the sweat from his brow, and says, “Ah! I have been hard at work these twelve hours;” and there was a penny for him; neither more nor less for one or the other, a penny for each one who came to work in the vineyard. Thus God shows His sovereignty in His distribution of rewards. When some of the laborers murmured against the good man of the house, he answered one of them, and said, “Friend, I do you no wrong; did not you agree with me for a penny? Take what is yours, and go your way: I will give unto this last, even as unto you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Is your eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many are called, but few chosen.” Those who came last received just as much as those who came first.

I am not quite sure whether that doctrine is true, which is called the doctrine of degrees of glory. I have heard it preached very frequently; but I never yet saw any Scripture warrant to back it up. The text that the advocates of this doctrine usually bring forward is the passage, “One star differs from another star in glory.” But anyone who can read English, and who turns to that passage, will see that the apostle

is not speaking of degrees of glory in heaven, but of different kinds of glories in the *sidereal* heavens; and besides, stars may differ without varying in degree of glory, for one may be red, another green, a third yellow, and yet all may be alike bright; even so, though all the saints will differ in some respects, I do not see why there should necessarily be degrees of glory. There may be degrees of glory; but, so far as I can judge by reading the Scripture, I cannot see the slightest evidence to prove the doctrine to be true.

What is the glory of a saint? Is it not Christ's righteousness? And shall I, the least of all saints, have less of Christ's righteousness than the greatest? Is not the glory of the saint the love of his Master? And will my Master love a poor old woman, who lived up three pairs of stairs, and died without ever having been heard of, less than He loves the most popular minister? Ah! Beloved, there are degrees of grace here; but we know not that there will be any degrees of glory. Why should a poor creature, lying on a sick bed, which for years has trusted in her Savior, have less glory than another, who has been allowed to toil in His service? Why, it is an honor for us to be busy in good works here; and we do not want to be honored for honor, and because God has given us a little more honor here, to have an eternal difference made between us and others of His people. No, beloved, every man who worked in the vineyard had a penny, and every saint will, in God's own time, be in heaven; he will be with Christ, and like Christ. How can he be more one with Christ than another is? All believers are blood-washed, all are equally justified, all shall be equally sanctified; and as their persons shall be all pure, so do we believe that their heaven will be equal; or, if not, Scripture certainly gives no countenance to the idea of degrees of glory.

In this matter of eternal rewards, God will display His sovereignty. There shall be some old man, who has lived to be ninety, and who was saved only in the last year of his life; and when he enters heaven, he will sit as much beside Christ as one like Timothy, who was called in his early youth, preached the gospel during a long course of usefulness, and died with honors on his head. There shall be a poor wretched sinner, like the thief who was saved when he hung upon the cross; and he will sing as sweet, and as loud, and as strong as the apostle Paul, or the apostle Peter, "for there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek"—between one man and another—"for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him." Thus He displays His sovereignty in choosing the persons who shall be saved, in selecting the time when they shall be saved, and in their ultimate reward.

II. This brings us to consider THE GREAT MERCY OF GOD EXHIBITED IN HIS SOVEREIGNTY.

This householder went out to hire men for his vineyard, because he needed them; did he not? Yes; but God does not go to hire men, and bring them into His vineyard because He needs them. There is not a man in this world that God could not do without. "Oh!" you hear persons say sometimes, "suppose Mr. So-and-So was to die, what would the church do?" Why! Do as it did before—live on its God; for—

*"When all created streams are dry,
His fullness is the same."*

And when He calls any of His servants away, He can work out His eternal purposes quite as well without us as He does with us. The householder in the parable needed men, but God is altogether independent of them; and herein is the mercy of God manifested, that He goes out to find men to come into His vineyard when He positively can do without them. Does He need any of us? What! He who guides the stars, and keeps them revolving in their orbits by the motions of His fingers, does He need an insignificant atom like one of ourselves to serve Him? What! He whom all the hosts of angels do worship, and before whose throne the cherubim do veil their faces with their wings, does He need a tiny creature like man to give Him homage and reverence? If He did need men, He could soon create as many mighty kings and princes as He pleased to wait upon Him, and He could have crowned heads to bow before His footstool, and emperors to conduct Him through the world in triumph. But He needs not men; He can do without them if He pleases. O you stars! You are bright; but you are not the lamps which light the way of God; He needs you not. O sun! You are bright; but your heat warms not Jehovah. O earth! You are beautiful; but your beauty is not needed to gladden His heart; God is glad enough without you. O you lightning! Though you write His name in fire upon the midnight darkness, He needs not your brightness. And you, wild ocean! You are mighty; but though you hymn His deep praise in your solemn chorus, your storms do not add to His glory. You winds! Though you attend the march of God across the pathless ocean;—you thunders! Though you utter God's voice in terrible majesty, and track the onward progress of the God of armies, He needs you not. He is great without you, great beyond you, great above you; and, as He needs you not, He needs *us* not.

Then look at the mercy of God, *to come after any of us*; to come after me, to come after you, my sister, my brother. Admire His grace. Look at the householder in this parable; He comes early in the morning; He comes late in the evening; and he comes many times between. In like manner, God is untiring in His mercy. The householder rose up early to go out and find some men to work in his vineyard; so does God. How early He goes to some! Blessed be His dear name, there were some of us who were lit to our slumbers, while we were young, by the lamps of the sanctuary. We can recollect when, in our midnight watches, like young Samuel of old, the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and we answered, "Here am I, Lord." Oh! We can remember when our grandmother Lois, and our mother Eunice, taught us out of the Scriptures; when we were dandled on the lap of piety, when the breath of sacred song was breathed by us, and an atmosphere laden with the perfume of heaven was always around us; we inhaled it even from our infancy. Ah! Hear this, you sons of grace, God came to some of you very early; but, beloved, He does not get tired. He came for some early in the morning, and they would not go; He came after them in the preaching of the gospel, and they spurned all that the minister said; but when God is determined to save, He does not tire, but continues seeking even to the eleventh hour.

And now, O you grey-headed men, God has come after some of you! All your coming to God's sanctuary from your earliest days have been of little or no avail up to now; yet now, I beseech you, consider that He comes to you even at this eleventh hour, for the Lord's mercy is untiring, His grace is immutable. Having set His heart upon a man, if He does not come at the first hour, He shall come, some time or other; divine mercy will sweetly dispose Him to come. Blessed be the name of our God, there have been some who have come into our churches who would not have been taken into any army in the whole world, for they were made, by old age, too feeble to fight. Their eyes had begun to be dim, Father Time had written his name on their brows, their hair had become blanched and whitened, and they came leaning on their staff to tell us what they knew of the Lord's redeeming love. Some of the sweetest tales I have ever heard have been told me by grey-headed sinners, saved in their last days, just when they were trembling on the borders of the grave. Do you think you see such a scene? The poor old sinner is tottering along; another minute he will be in hell. Hear the voice of God, "Gabriel, stop that man! One more step, and he will be in the pit!" Down flies Gabriel, catches him in his arms, and stops him for a moment, while the Holy Spirit whispers to him, "Flee from the wrath to come!" And, starting backward, he looks at the pit wherein he had almost fallen, and he hears hollow time sinking down into eternity; yet he is saved.

Surely, there will not be any man in heaven who will bless God more than the grey-headed man who is called at the eleventh hour. Blessed be the name of God that such sinners are brought in, poor decrepit old creatures, past labor, and good for nothing; yet they are saved. Yes, even those who have worn themselves out in the service of Satan, God is willing to receive; the devil's hacks Christ will not cast away; they who have nothing left that is of any use in the world, Jesus Christ graciously receives at the eleventh hour. He says to them, as the householder said to the men in the marketplace, "Why stand you here all the day idle?"

Do you not, beloved, admire the stupendous, amazing, astonishing grace of God, which thus reclaims men at the eleventh hour? There is a young man in a very poor position in life; you come to him, and say, "Come to my house, and be my son; I will wash you clean, I will give you warm clothes, I will make you rich." But he turns away, and does despite to your invitations; he insults you to your face, mocks at your friends, breaks your holy days, and thoroughly despises you. When you look at him, again, he is beginning to enter middle age. You go to him, and say, "Will you come to me now, and be my son?" "No," he says, "I will not." Do you not think that, by the time he was forty or fifty years old, you would be quite tired of him? And suppose it possible that, when he was seventy or eighty years of age, he should come and knock at your door, and ask to be adopted as your son, would you not go to him, and say, "What! You have the impudence to come now, while these forty, fifty, sixty years you have refused to accept my invitation! You vile ingrate, I will have nothing to do with you now; do you think I am going to have you now, when there is nothing left of you that is worth having? Go back to where you have been all these years; those you served when you were young, you may serve now that you are old! You had the pleasures of sin when you were young, go and have them now! It is a fine thing to make an almshouse of your religion; coming to me to take care of you when you are so old that you cannot take care of yourself; be off with you!" You and I might act like that, but the Lord does not. He not only does not turn a grey-headed old sinner away, but He goes after him Himself, or else he would not come. Though He has sent His servants, and the man has rejected them time after time, He

says, "He will not come unless I go after him Myself." So He goes to the poor palsied man, who can be of no service to Him, and says, "Come unto Me! Even you have I loved with an everlasting love, and I will save even you! You shall be delivered from going down to the pit; your eyes shall be saved from tears, and your feet from falling." There is divine sovereignty! There is unparalleled mercy!

III. Now may God help us while we ENDEAVOR TO MAKE A SOLEMN APPLICATION OF THIS SUBJECT, first, TO THE OLD!

It would be presumption in a young man to speak to the aged if he spoke to them simply as a young man; but, as a preacher, I am God's ambassador; and if God has sent me, no man may despise my youth, nor is it to be considered in the least degree, nor do I consider it myself. I speak with the same authority that the most aged minister can command, for I have the same commission that he has, and he has no better message than mine. Old man, come here, and let me give you a solemn address, to warn you of the wrath to come.

Grey-headed man, I beseech you, first of all, *remember how many years you have wasted*. Look back upon your misspent life, and count your years over and over again. What do you say of your sixty, seventy, perhaps eighty years? Your harvest is past, your summer is ended, and you are not saved. In your youth, oh, how much you might have done then! In your middle age, oh, how your vigor might have been spent in doing good to your fellows! Even some of your old age, how has it been misspent and misused! Weep, I beseech you, weep bitterly; let your cheeks, furrowed with the ravages of time, feel for a moment the solemn scalding tears of regret, because you have wasted all those years.

Remember, also, that *you can never get them back again*. Long as you may live, you can never get one of them back; they have winged their way behind you, they are with the years beyond the flood; and though you toil now, you can never recover the time you have lost, it is gone beyond the hope of rescue. Could you count out at once the price of a kingly ransom, you could not have back again even an hour. Consider then, my aged friend, how much of your time has already run to waste, and how many years have rolled away, and you are still unsaved.

Consider, next, *suppose you are saved now, what a very little you can do for God!* At the most, you can have but a few short years in which to serve the Lord. Death is at your gates; those gates are tottering beneath the battering-ram of age. Death is already besieging you; the walls of your town of Mansoul are shaking beneath the devastating engines of decay. In all probability, you have not more than a few years to live, and perhaps not more than a few months, or weeks, or even days; and then you must be gone the way of all flesh.

Consider, too, O aged man, if you are put into the vineyard at this eleventh hour, *how little you can do for others!* You cannot preach the gospel now; your eyes are, perhaps, too dim even to read God's Word to others; your voice has lost melody; the windows out of which lust once looked have become darkened, and you cannot hope that the fire of life shall light them up again. Consider how little you can do, even if you are saved now; how much less if your salvation is still postponed, and you are not delivered from sin for years to come! Consider what is gone, you hoary heads, and turn unto the Lord even now.

O aged sinner, *consider how much trouble has been lost upon you!* The vinedresser said of the barren fig tree, "I will dig about it, and fertilize it." How have you been dug about and fed! Another hundred and four sermons you have heard during the past year, and yet you are unsaved. For fifty years, for sixty years you have attended the sanctuary every Sabbath; yet, as oil from a slab of marble, the Word has run off you. Thousands of sermons have left you as dead as ever; and myriads of warnings have all sunk, as it were, into the sea, like a pebble hurled into it, which is lost and gone. In all your Sabbaths, you have secured no merchandise for heaven. You have toiled hard enough for this world; and now where is all that you have gained? You have put your treasures into a bag full of holes. You have "sown the wind," and you shall "reap the whirlwind," unless you speedily repent, and seek the Lord.

Consider once more, old man, *how long and how much you have provoked your God*. Call to remembrance the sins of your youth. How often has that hand of yours, which now is quivering with death's touch, grasped the wineglass of the drunk in your youth! Look back upon your manhood; has it not been devoted to Satan, and blackened with enormities of guilt? And now, up to this time, you have still provoked your God to smite you. His long-suffering arm has not crushed you, and His mercy has kept back the sword of justice; but can you expect such gracious treatment as that much longer? Will God be merciful forever? Will He be kind throughout eternity? And if His mercy should fail, will not His justice make short work with your soul?

And yet, if that thought does not stir you up to repentance, consider, once more, *if you should be unsaved, how horrible is the place appointed for you!* How fearful must be the doom which you shall receive! You are not a young sinner—he would be damned. You are an old sinner—how increasingly awful must be your doom. You are not one who has sinned because of mere youthful passion; but you have sinned when passion has died away, and when prudence has taken possession of your soul; you have sinned when the heat and passion of youth have died; you have sinned, therefore, worse than a young man can have done. O old man, may a child warn you? I am sure I love you with all my heart, and even now my young eyes weep for you. Have you never seen an old man led by a little child when he was blind? It may be that, though you are blind, a little child shall lead you to the Savior; it is a child who now speaks to you. O grey-headed man, would it not be to you an eternal source of misery if I, a youth, were saved, and you, who are aged, wert lost? Oh! When you see a young Christian, does not the tear run down your cheeks? When you see a child in grace, does the penitential sigh never start from your bosom? I think if I were old like you, and saw some young child saved, I would wring my hands in misery, and say, “O Lord, is such a child a Christian, and yet I am unsaved, I am unforgiven, I am still unpardoned?” Quake, quake, quake, O aged sinner! Be afraid, be afraid, be afraid, O unregenerate old man! Let your knees knock together, let your blood curdle in your veins, let your heart quiver, let your flesh be ready to creep at the thought that you will be lost; and that, as the Lord God lives, there is but a step between you and death—between you and hell!

But there are THE YOUNG; and they are, perhaps, smiling, and saying, “Ah! All that is good advice for old age; it is quite right that old people should be religious, but why should we think about such things yet? We have not come to our eleventh hour yet.” What did you say, young man? “I said I had not come to my eleventh hour yet.” What did you say? *Will you repeat that sentence?* No; you dare not, for you do not know when your eleventh hour may be. Does any man know which will be his eleventh hour? Does any one of you know how many more days you may have to live? I do not; and nor do you. Does any one of my friends conceive that the time of his death is a long way off? No, beloved, there is such a thing as death in the chapel pew! The angel of death may be this moment coming in at that door, and flapping his black wings across this place, to find someone who is marked for destruction; and before you shall have entered your house, your soul may have departed, and you may have gone from this stage of existence.

Consider then, I say, for you are all, if you are uncalled by grace, like the man in the eleventh hour, standing idle in the marketplace. Consider, if you are ever so young, have you not already given too much time to Satan and the world already? I do not like the devil well enough to think that he ought to have the first twenty years of a man’s life. Consider, young man; has not Satan had more than enough service from you? Will not the time past of your life suffice you to have worked the will of the Gentiles in serving divers lusts and passions? Do you think it will give you any comfort, on your deathbed, to reflect that you were for many years living in sin, and not saved early? And do you not know that religion is so sweet that we might well seek it, even for its sweetness, if it were not necessary for our soul’s security? Ah! You men of the eleventh hour, for such you all are, may our Master come to you even at this moment; and if He finds you idle, may He say, “Go you, also, and work in My vineyard”!

I will conclude with just a few words of encouragement to the eldest man and the oldest woman among us. Think not that you are beyond the pale of hope because you are aged. Do not believe Satan when he says to you, “Oh! You are too old a sinner to be saved.” Tell him that he is a liar, and that he does not know anything about it; for there are none too old to be saved. God will have mercy on all those that come to Him. He takes no objection to youth; He takes no objection to old age. Hear this, you aged sinners! If you are now under a sense of sin, if you are desirous of being saved, there is mercy in the Lord Jesus even for you. And O beloved friends, one and all of you, are you this night crying out for mercy? Are you desirous of pardon? Do you feel that life is short, and death is sure? Do you know that, in a few short days, or months, or years, a few narrow boards shall hold your body and your soul shall have gone from it into eternity? Do you wish for a Guide across the trackless desert which leads to heaven or to hell? Do you want a Conductor to lead you into Paradise? Do you desire angelic wings to lift you up to the Celestial City? Do you seek for Christ’s blood to cleanse you, for God’s grace to sanctify you? Then there is mercy for you; there is mercy for all who feel their need of it, and ask the Lord for it. The viler the wretch, the more welcome here; the worse the character, the more reason he should go to the Lord Jesus. It is free grace that we preach; and the vilest, most guilty, oldest, youngest sinner—anybody who feels his need of a Savior, is welcome to that Savior now. The Lord give you grace to seek

Him! Remember that the least prayer will be heard; the weakest desire, the feeblest groan will be acknowledged in heaven; and little as you may think that you ever shall find mercy, you most assuredly shall, if you seek it through Christ.

Farewell! Adieu, old man! I know not who you are; but it was laid on my heart to seek you, and I have sought you. O poor old man, you are like one who once lost himself in a pine forest! The snow fell thickly around him; it was dark, damp, cold. The howling of the wolf could be heard by him in the distance, and he feared that, during the darkness of the night, he would be consumed. There remained but one protection for him, and that was that he should light a fire, by which he might warm himself, and frighten away the wild beasts. He gathered together the pinewood and the dry, sere leaves, wherever he could find them; and he took out his matchbox. He tried to strike one match, but it was good for nothing. He tried another, and another, and another; and once he thought he had a light, and carefully held it in his fingers, seeking to bring it to the little kindling he had laid beneath his pile of wood; but it died out, to his bitter disappointment. For some time, he kept on striking his matches; he did so carelessly at first, but, as the number diminished, he struck each one more carefully, till he came to the last two. He struck the first of the two; he put it under his pinewood; it flamed a moment, and then a gust of wind blew it out, and now he came to his last match. The wolf was howling, the wild wind was whistling, the snow was falling, the night was darkening; he feared that he must be there all night without a fire! Already his stiff joints began to freeze; his fingers were well-nigh numb. You may guess how that man cowered on the earth, to strike, within the circle his frame might make, his last match. You may imagine how earnestly he put up his prayer to God that he might succeed the last time. "O Lord, let this last match succeed," he cried. And anxiously did he look at it time after time, lest it, too, might fail. He strikes that match. On it his life depends; it is his all; yet he strikes it. Ah, glorious! The flame has caught. It blazes! He sits down, and cheers himself. He is saved! He is saved! Or else the fire dies out, and the wolf devours him. So, there is the gray-headed old man; he has his last match in the box. He has struck sixty-nine of them all to no effect, and now he has got to the seventieth. O God, if You do not strike the seventieth for him, he is lost forever! If You do not give him the light from heaven, fire from above, he must perish forever! God grant that that last match may succeed with you, O old man!

God bless you, dear Friends! A happy new year to every one of you! Many of them to those of you who are bound for heaven; and a new year in heaven to those whom God may take away before another year comes round! Adieu!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
MATTHEW 20:1-7.

(This Exposition is reprinted from Mr. Spurgeon's last literary work, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. The Sermon and Exposition combined show the harmony between almost his earliest and his very latest proclamation of the gospel).

Verses 1, 2. *For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

The kingdom of heaven is all of grace, and so is the service connected with it. Let this be remembered in the exposition of this parable. The call to work, the ability, and the reward, are all on the principle of grace, and not upon that of merit. This was no common man that is a householder, and his going out to hire laborers into his vineyard was not after the usual manner of men, for they will have a full day's work for a full day's wage. This householder considered the laborers rather than himself. He was up before the dew was gone from the grass, and found laborers, and sent them into the vineyard. It was a choice privilege to be allowed to begin holy service so early in the morning. They agreed with the householder, and went to work on his terms. They might well be content, since they were promised a full day's hire, and were sure to get it; a penny a day represented the usual and accepted wage. The householder and the laborers agreed upon the amount; and this is the point which has to be noted further on. Young believers have a blessed prospect; they may well be happy to do good work, in a good place, for a good Master, and on good terms.

3, 4. *And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said unto them; Go you also into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you. And they went their way.*

Hating indolence, and grieving that he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, he hired more workers about the third hour. They would work only three-quarters of a day; but it was for their good to cease from loafing at the street corner. These are like persons whose childhood is past, but who are not yet old. They are favored to have a good part of their day of life available for hallowed service. To these the good householder said, "Go you also into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you." He pointed to those already in the field, and said, "Go you, also;" and he promised them not a definite sum, as he did those whom he first hired, but he said, "Whatever is right I will give you." They went their way to their labor, for they did not wish to remain idlers; and, as right-minded men, they could not quarrel with the householder's agreement to give them whatsoever was right. Oh, that those around us, who are in their rising manhood, would at once take up their tools, and begin to serve the great Lord!

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

Had it been altogether and alone a business transaction, the householder would have waited to begin a new day, and would not have given a whole day's wage for a fraction of a day's work. The entire matter was alone of grace; and, therefore, when half the day was gone, about the sixth hour, he called in laborers. Men of forty and fifty are bidden to enter the vineyard. Yes, and about the ninth hour, men were engaged. At sixty, the Lord calls a number by His grace! It is wrong to assert that men are not saved after forty; we know to the contrary, and could mention instances.

God, in the greatness of His love calls into His service men from whom the exuberance of useful vigor has departed; He accepts the waning hours of their day. He has work for the weak as well as for the strong. He allows none to labor for Him without the reward of grace, even though they have spent their best days in sin. This is no encouragement to procrastination; but it should induce old sinners to seek the Lord at once.

6, 7. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and said unto them, Why stand you here all the day idle? They said unto him, Because no man has hired us. He said unto them, Go you also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall you receive.

The day was nearly over; only a single hour remained; yet about the eleventh hour he went out. The generous householder was willing to take on more workmen, and give them hire, though the sun was going down. He found a group lingering at the loafers' corner—standing idle. He wished to clear the whole town of sluggards, so he said to them, "Why stand you here all the day idle?" His question to them may be read by making each word in its turn emphatic, and then it yields a fullness of meaning. *Why* are you idle? What is the good of it? *Why* stand you *here* idle where all are busy? *Why all the day* idle? Will not a shorter space suffice? *Why* are *you* idle? You have need to work, you are able to do it, and you should set about it at once. *Why* is any one of *us* remaining idle towards God? Has nothing yet had power to engage us in sacred service? Can we dare to say, "No man has hired us"? Nearly seventy years of age, and yet unsaved! Let us bestir ourselves. It is time that we went, without delay, to kill the weeds, and prune the vines, and do something for our Lord in His vineyard. What but rich grace could lead Him to take on the eleven o'clock lingerers? Yet He invites them as earnestly as those who came in the morning, and He will as surely give them their reward.

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