

THE HEAVENLY VINEYARD

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning October 27th, 1867

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AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

Volume 9 Number 468

“He sent them into his vineyard.” Matthew 20:2

THIS parable is intended to set forth that test to which the Lord is pleased to put people, by which he demonstrates who are his true servants, and who are not, and by which he brings to light their respective characters. If they keep the vineyard in a good state, that will imply that they themselves are in a good state; but if in a bad state, that will imply that they themselves are in a bad state. If they are contented, and thankful to the Master, that is one proof that they are true servants: if, on the other hand, as some did, they murmur and are discontented, that is a proof that they are not true servants. I shall therefore in the first place describe, as near as I can, *what it is to be a laborer in this vineyard*, and then, secondly, *the distinction that comes out at the last between them that served him acceptably and them that served him not*.

First, then, *what it is to be a laborer in this vineyard*. Now all the persons here sent into the vineyard were standing idle. And this is a part of the subject that we must take particular notice of, that the people were standing idle, having nothing to do; and as the Master went along, as they professedly wanted work, he sent them into his vineyard. Now we have to ascertain what is the kind of character that is here represented, which the Lord commands to come into his vineyard. They were out of work, to speak plainly. Now this represents a sinner that has left off working in the service of Satan; he is tired of that, and he desires to be a servant of God. He knows not how to go to work; he knows not how to pray, and he does not understand anything; but he has a desire for heavenly work, he has a desire for that that pertains to God; he has a desire to be a servant of God; he has a desire to be a Christian. Now on the ground of this profession (for we may call it a profession) which they make they are thus commanded to go into the vineyard. Let me first point out what this vineyard is, and then take another vineyard in order to illustrate this all-important matter. If we take Isaiah's account of this vineyard, we shall see what kind of a vineyard it is that the people of God are brought into. It is that state of things wherein a victory is wrought; and there must be an understanding of that victory, how that victory was wrought, and who wrought that victory, and why that victory was wrought; and when there is an understanding of this, those that understand the same are they that generally prove to be true servants; though a man, as we shall have to show presently, may go a long way in profession, and yet be at the last nothing but a mere professor. “In

that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea." I think the sea there means mystically this world, and that the dragon means Satan, and that the Lord Jesus Christ, by putting away sin, and swallowing up death in victory, has thereby destroyed him that had the power of death. And the man that desires to be a servant of God sees that he cannot come effectually out of the service of Satan only by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and by the victory which the Savior wrought. That man sees and knows his need of this victory which Christ has wrought; he, as it were, lays hold of that, and he says, Here it is that sin is ended, here it is that righteousness is brought in, and here it is by faith I can serve the Lord, because here it is by faith I can have access to God. "In that day", when you are brought thus far, "sing you unto her, a vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it." And such, in his heart and secret soul, will say, yes, Lord, that is the vineyard where I desire to be, where you do keep it. Lord, keep me as the apple of your eyes; keep me under the shadow of your wings; bring me and keep me in your love; bring me and keep me in your choice; bring me and keep me in your fear. And then, while he will water it every moment, the question is asked, "Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle?" That is anticipating the enmity of the natural mind against the completeness of the Savior's work, and against the certainty of divine and eternal interposition. And then, if the sinner not yet knowing the truth thinks that these testimonies are dangerous, and fights against them, by and by he is brought to feel his need of the very truths; like Saul of Tarsus, brought to feel his need of the very Savior that he had fought against. Then the Lord says, "Or let him" if he is tired of fighting against me, "take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me." Of course the strength there means the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you are favored to lay hold of Jesus Christ, and set the strength of his atonement against your sin, and set the strength of his righteousness against all the condemnations and accusations of conscience; and set the strength of his power, and the strength of his lovingkindness, and also, and especially, the strength of the exceeding great and precious promises of his word, over against all that is against you, what a blessed state is this! Ah, our proud, our legal, our wicked hearts seek about for something of our own to set over against our sins, and that we may have some strength and goodness of our own. But where the Lord is the teacher, he makes us feel that we have no strength, or goodness, or righteousness of our own, and that will make us desire to lay hold of God's strength. Christ is God's strength, for Christ is the power of God; and says the apostle, when looking at the power of God in the gospel by Jesus Christ, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes." Those that are thus brought into the Vineyard will not do as the people did whom you read in the 5th of Isaiah. We will just trace that out and see that they did what a real child of God cannot do. Now the lord had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. That fruitful hill refers literally to the land of Canaan, that yielded the people everything they needed for this life. And Canaan is thus a type of the Lord Jesus Christ; he yields us ever thing we can need in an infinitely better sense than the produce of the land of Canaan. Jesus is that fruitful hill, he is that field which the Lord has blessed, that yields us all we need while we live, and all we need when we come to die, and all we need when we shall rise from the dead, and all we need to eternity. Oh! while religion is an infinite mystery, yet all its essentials are made to those taught of God so plain that the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. Now the Lord hedged this vineyard in and gathered out the stones. This vineyard has a typical meaning, though this typical vineyard was brought to naught by the apostasy of the people. Now the Lord gathered out the stones, the impediments. I should think that means, but you must judge for yourselves, for I am a poor creature in these things as well as in everything else, and therefore I would not have you

trust me, but simply understand and judge for yourselves. I should think the stones, which are impediments, are an allusion to the Canaanites, and the Lord cast the Canaanites out, to give the people possession of the land; and I should think these Canaanites, or these stones may allude to our sins. And if it alludes to our sins, to my mind it is very beautiful. Our sins were the hindrance, and the Lord himself gathered out the stones. It is a nice expression. Only think of God your Father from eternity, in his mind and counsels, gathering up our sins; knowing their number, and where and how to find them, gathering them up and laying them to the account of his dear Son. Only think of Jesus Christ spending his life to gather up your sins out of the way, and then to die that atoning death that should put an eternal end to them. Only think of the Holy Spirit's goodness in awakening your soul up to see that the impediments lying between you and God are your sins. And then only think of the Lord coming in and enabling you to say with Hezekiah, while he thought that everything was wrong with him, by and by comes the lovely turn, "You have in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for you have cast all my sins behind your back. Therefore, we will sing my songs all the days of our life in the house of the Lord." In olden times criminals were stoned to death, but here there is not a stone, not a sin left to be thrown at the true laborer in the vineyard of the Lord of hosts. And the Lord planted this vineyard with the choicest vine. What a choice vine is Jesus Christ! "Abide in me," says he, "continue you in my love," for severed from me you can do nothing. You cannot pray to God severed from me, because you have no plea before God that he will hear or answer. You cannot have access to God severed from me; you cannot have any real love to God severed from me; you cannot have any life severed from me; you cannot do anything pleasing to God severed from me. Therefore "continue you in my love." Here is the choicest vine. Oh, then, if my prayers come from my oneness with Jesus, they will savor of Jesus; and if my love to God comes, like the woman you read of, that washed his feet with her tears, if my love to God comes from my oneness to Jesus, and that mercy that is by him, then it is a love that will savor of Jesus, it is the love of Christ; and if I run in the way of the Lord's commandments from my oneness with Jesus, then it is an obedience, it is a practice, it is a service that savors of Jesus, and acceptable to God, for "without faith it is impossible to please God." So, then, here is a vineyard, and the impediments removed, and the choicest vine planted. And the Lord built a tower for safety, and "the name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runs into it and is safe." But for the tower the laborer might say, I am not safe here, here is no place of safety; here is the enemy round about. But here is a tower of safety. And so, the name of the Lord is our safety; the presence of God is our safety; the love of God is our safety.

"We're safe in our Redeemer's hands,
Even when he hides his face."

It is a service by the victory of Christ, by the impediments being removed, and by his being the choicest vine, and by our being safe. And the Lord made a winepress, that they may drink the pure blood of the grape and be cheerful. Now the Lord says, "Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, it brought it forth wild grapes?" My answer to that is this, that it brought forth wild grapes by their bringing in other gods, in other words, by their bringing in strange doctrines. And when they brought in strange doctrines what was the consequence? There was deadly enmity to the people of God. "Which of the prophets," said Stephen to these same spirited people, these apostates that brought forth wild grapes, "have not your fathers persecuted?" Now these wild grapes may seem a very simple matter in the first place, but whatever it may be, however much lauded or followed, whatever doctrine has a tendency in the least degree whatever to sour our

minds against God's yea and amen and eternal truth, that doctrine is deadly to the man that receives it, and it is an insult to God, and destruction must follow where such lies are received. Now upon this subject of the wild grapes hear one of the most solemn scriptures in the Bible, in the 32nd of Deuteronomy. It there says, "Their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter," that is expressive of their bitter enmity against the free grace, pure truth of the blessed God; "Their wine is the poison of dragons;" dragons signifying tyrants, persons that would tyrannize over the people of God, and rob them of the blessedness they have in Christ; "and the cruel venom of asps." Ah, we see in these people that brought forth these wild grapes, these bitter clusters, that drunk in this false doctrine, we see in them the cruel venom of asps. How shall I express it? how shall I set it forth? I often wish the Lord would help some one of his servants to preach a great, a mighty sermon upon this point, namely, that the dear Savior lived you all know he did, an innocent life, wronged no one, defrauded no one. You know that he fed the thousands. went about doing good and healing all manner of diseases: that if all he had done, all the good things he had done, and all the good things he had said, had been written, the world could not have contained the books. Why, you would have required an antediluvian life to have gone through the details of what the Savior did. Is it possible, is the thing possible, that a person so holy, so harmless, so undefiled, so liberal, so merciful, so benevolent, so good, so loving, that he listened to every cry of human nature, is it possible that men were so satanized, were so cruel, were so bitter, as to deal with him as they did? to blaspheme and to mock him, and to study and contrive in what possible way they could put him death with the greatest degradation, to put him between two malefactors; and the worst thing they could say and the worst thing they could do seemed to them to be too good for him. There is a murderer; we have more respect to that murderer than we have to this man that has gone about all his lifetime doing good. "Not this man, but Barabbas." Here is the wild grape, here is the bitter cluster, here is the vine of Sodom, here is the poison of asps. And why did these men thus do? Because they had drunk into the spirit of Satan. And how did they drink into the spirit of Satan? Why, by false doctrine, therefore, beware of false doctrine, and remember that Satan is transformed as an angel of light, and his ministers as ministers of righteousness. Wherever there are these wild grapes, this poison of dragons, wherever that is received, desolation must follow. If you drink in anything hostile to God's truth, he will take the hedge away from you; no longer a hedge round about you; he will break down your strongest stone walls of protection; he will lay you waste, and everything belonging to you, and you shall be trodden down by sin, and death, and hell, and nothing but thorns and briers shall be your lot. Such is the way in which the Lord will deal with such. "I looked," he says, "for judgment, but behold oppression." I have never been blamed yet for oppressing the people of God; that is what I could not do, because the Lord does not oppress me; but I have been mightily blamed for going what some people will too far. And if such people should live many years, and they are the people of God, they will be glad to see the time when they would rejoice to hear a man that dare go so far as I have. Now the Lord looked for judgment. You rulers ought to have protected my people; you ought to have maintained them in their inheritance and in their right; but instead of this you have robbed them, brought them into bondage, deprived them of their inheritance, hidden their genealogy from them, and you have every way injured them. "I looked for judgment, but behold oppression;" and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? "I looked for righteousness but behold a cry." I have given the people an inheritance, and the righteousness I looked for was for you to abide by me and advocate them in the possession of that inheritance; but instead of that you have cast their right aside, and put your own authority into the place thereof, and all sorts of traditions, just to aggrandize the priesthood. slay the souls of men

and bring them thus into bondage. And there is plenty of that also in the day in which we live. God the Father blessed his people with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus before the world begun; and when the world shall end, it will prove that the Savior has not withheld from the people one of those blessings. "My mercy," says the Lord concerning him in the 89th Psalm, "shall be with him." The 2nd of the Hebrews explains that: "That he might be a merciful and faithful high priest." Has Jesus withheld the blessing? Did he in the counsels of eternity receive a blessing for the thief on the cross, and did he say, Father, this character is so notoriously bad, I must withhold the blessing here? No, no; know you not, brethren, what is said of the Savior? that "he who sanctifies, and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause", let them have been what devils they may in themselves, "he is not ashamed to call them brethren." He has not withheld a blessing. What does he himself say about it in the Psalms? "I have not hidden your righteousness within my heart; I have not concealed your loving-kindness and your truth from the great congregation." And all shall bear testimony eternally to this, that he has carried out every blessing, every promise, and every mercy. What an infinite difference, then, between the spirit that crucifies the Savior, that hates the truth, and the spirit that loves the truth and abides by it! Now if you are a true laborer, then, you will not bring forth wild grapes, bitterness against God's truth; you will not be of that spirit of cruelty against his truth or against his people knowingly or willingly.

The description in Hebrew's 6th, is of the mere professor, if he shall fall away. I have a New Testament by me which some friend kindly sent me from the New York Bible Union Translation Society, and this scripture is in that version rendered thus: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God and the power of the world to come *and have fallen away.*" And I think if the best Greek scholars were to meet and consider this subject, that the majority would come to the conclusion that this was the right construction of the original sentence, "and have fallen away." What kind of a fall is it? Why, they have been drinking the poison of dragons, they have been drinking a little of the golden cup full of abominations, and thus their minds have become poisoned against God's truth; they fall into a spirit of enmity to that truth, and thus crucify to themselves afresh the Lord Jesus Christ. Away with your high doctrine, say they, of eternal redemption, away with your doctrine of certain salvation, away with your blood of the everlasting covenant; away with your doctrine of Christ dying for some, and the others are not to be exhorted, and invited, and coaxed, and wooed. So, they crucify to themselves the true Christ, adopt a false Christ or no religion at all, and the world adores the change. If a man is converted to the name of Christ, and if it is not the true Christ; if a man is converted to a creed, and that creed is not gathered from the gospel, and the man does not know it experimentally; if a man is converted to God professionally, and remains ignorant of the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure, I say that man's conversion, if God's word be true, is only a false conversion. He is enlightened, and that is all; there he lives, and there peradventure he dies; so that he does not fall from where he is, for the devil has got him fast where he is; so, he goes on all his days crucifying Christ, ignorantly, I grant. The Lord, then, deliver us from such a spirit, that we may not taste a drop of the wine of Sodom, for our minds thereby would be embittered against the truth of the blessed God. Hence such are said to bear thorns and briers, expressive of their enmity against God's truth.

Now there were some of whom the apostle was "persuaded better things, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which you have showed towards his name, in that you have ministered to the saints,

and do minister.” Just look at that. “And we desire,” he says, “that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that you be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” There are the people practically. Now, after looking at them practically, let us see them spiritually and doctrinally, and let us see if we answer to it. “When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.” It is the foundation of my hope; God knows I have no hope anywhere but in that. If there be anything on the part of the creature, I am lost, lost, lost; but if it be all of God, and his promise be yea and amen, and never was forfeited yet, then for a sinner like me there is hope. “For,” adds the apostle, “men verily swear by the greater;” as though he should say, If there had been a greater than God, he would have sworn by him, to show the stability of his counsel on our behalf: “and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife,” and God has put an end to all strife, and brought about eternal peace. “Wherein God, willing”, that is, determining, “more abundantly to show”, to those to whom it is acceptable, how sweet the thought! “unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel.” Do you like that? Yes, say you, I do; I cannot do without it. As sure as you are sitting here this morning, if that is our feeling, you will sit down on the heavenly hills of eternity with all the saved of the Lord; for if the Lord meant to destroy you, he would not have revealed to you and endeared to you the immutability of his counsel. “To show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things”, his counsel and his oath, “in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation”, now comes the spiritual character, “who have fled for refuge”, so they are a people that know their need of a hiding-place, of a refuge, “to lay hold upon the hope set before us”, they are a people that are taught what ground what ground is a safe anchorage: “which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entered into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” These are the people that the apostle was persuaded better things of. Now “things that accompany salvation.” I will tell you two things that are sure to accompany salvation; and one is the truth, new covenant truth; and the other is the love of it. Well, say you, I have both of those. Very well, then you will go to heaven. True laborers never murmur at the truth; they are brought into the vineyard and will never be sent out.

But now we must go on to the murmurers. There were three things at which they murmured. One was that the others were called before them, attended to before them. The second was because the others had been a very short time there. “We” great “we”, “have borne the burden and heat of the day.” And the third was, “You have made them equal unto us.” Now these became discontented with the service of the Lord. And the master “answered one of them and said, Friend, I do you no wrong;” you agreed to be contented with my service. “Well, we should have been if the others had not been used so well. So, the older brother; I would have gone quite contented to my father’s house; but since that prodigal is received, I will not go in. Well, says the Pharisee, we would have received Jesus Christ; but then these abominable publicans and harlots are received: if we should not have been mixed with such bad characters, we would have received him. And they murmured because he received sinners and did eat with them. Enmity and prejudice are never at a loss for excuses. Well, the acceptable ones were contented with the service of God, and the Lord was good to them. They rejoiced in his sovereignty. “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?” Yes, Lord, it is I will stand to that if no one else will. “Are your eyes evil because I am good?” No, Lord, my eyes are good because you are good. “Blessed is he that is not offended in me,” says the

Savior. Laboring in this vineyard includes all the parts of the service of God; we have served the Lord, and we must go on serving him. But to come back again to my sermon upon "These all died in faith." There are people that kick at that sermon; and they are like some I have met with, steeped to the very lips in the love of the world, in covetousness. Their whole life is to grasp and get together all they possibly can. By and by he or she dies, the same spirit is left among the survivors. Ah, he died worth so-and-so, so many thousands. I say he did not die worth his salt. He was a great deal of worth to himself; but what worth was he to the cause of God, to the people of God, to the ministers of God? Ah, a dear good man, sir, a very consistent man, sir; no doubt he is gone to heaven, sir; no fault about him, sir; ah, he was an excellent man, sir. And the minister is expected to further all this. I gave great offence once when I made the remark about someone, I would not mention his name, that he died a great thief and a great robber. Oh! oh! oh! do you really mean it? I will not mention his name, but I believe he died a great thief and a great robber; I believe he was steeped to his lips in thieving; I think he was a great robber, died a great robber, and yet I hope he is gone to heaven, too. Well, say you, what do you mean by that? 3rd chapter of Malachi: "You have robbed me, even this whole nation." I have given you all you have; have you given me a tenth? have you felt for my cause? have you been concerned for the spread of the gospel? have you laid out a little of what you have in doing good to my people? "You have robbed me, even this whole nation." And so, these men, by withholding from the cause of God what they ought to give, they live and die infamous robbers; and if ever I preach the funeral sermon of such a man, as sure as I live my text shall be, "The beggar died;" and my sermon shall accord with the text. If any man by adversity, God forbid I should say a word in favor of dishonesty, but a great many good people are subjected to adversity, and we are apt sometimes to judge before we have heard both sides, but if any man die, and by adversity owe another a few pounds, his character is blasted. It does not matter how much a man robs God, how much he has withheld from God's cause; but if he owes fellow creature only a few pounds, dishonest man, sir; bad man, sir; you are not going to bury that bad character, sir, are you? That is about it. Now let us look at it. 18th of Matthew: there is a servant that had robbed his lord to such an extent that he owed ten thousand talents; that is, two million. Well, his lord said, I will have compassion upon you, and he let him go. By and by that servant meets with a fellow-servant that owes him a hundred pence; that is, in round numbers, three pounds. This fellow-servant says, "Do forgive me, have patience with me, and I will pay you all." But instead of this he took him by the throat and cast him into prison. So, his fellow-servants came and told their lord what he had done; and the lord steps in: "O then wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you desired me; should not you also have had compassion on your fellow-servant, even as I had pity on you?" Torment shall be your portion. Now, I say, there are many that die steeped to the lips in this world, most covetous, and not worth their salt to the cause of God, and yet pass for consistent people, pass for honest people, pass for good people, pass for true servants. To me they are thieves and robbers of the worst kind. "You have robbed me, even this this whole nation." And if you as a body were of that stamp, this should be my last sermon this morning; I would not even come this evening to speak to you. But I bless the Lord that I am, by long experience of your liberality and kindness, I mean your liberality and kindness not merely to me, but to the cause of God, persuaded better things of you.

Well, now, there is a cause in Australia, they built a chapel there, holding four or five hundred people, and our good brother, Mister Bunyan McCure, has done all he could, and the people have done all they could, and other churches there as well, and with it all they are likely to lose their chapel. Mister McCure has come over to England to see what the churches here will do. We hope

tomorrow night week to have a good meeting here, when the case will be laid before you, and if you are enabled to begin, and set a good example, I hope and trust that other churches will follow. The Lord looks upon them that favor his righteous cause, and remember, not a cup of cold water that is given shall lose its reward. He that shows these practical sympathies towards the truth and towards the cause of God shall never be the worse for it. So, I hope we shall not be tired of the service of God. Mind, if some of you say, "I shall not entertain the case; I shall not attend to others," very well, I am not going to condemn you for that; you must all act voluntarily; but nevertheless, I shall still indulge the hope of seeing a good meeting tomorrow night week, November 4th, when Mister Bunyan McCure will be here to state his own case.

So, then, the Lord forbid that we should ever cease to be zealous in his cause, that we should ever grow weary in well-doing; for remember, "the blessing of the Lord makes rich, and adds no sorrow." There are many scriptures upon this; let us then never forget the words of the Lord of the vineyard, that "He that receives you receives me, and he that receives me receives him that sent me; he that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward; and whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no also lose his reward."