

As many of you know, I get a magazine called WORLD Magazine. It is a news magazine – coming out every two weeks and on the order of TIME or Newsweek, but from a Reformed, Evangelical Christian perspective. They give, as Paul Harvey would say, the rest of the news, applying a Christian perspective on the news. I would encourage you all to read it, and if you want info on it, let me know. For those of us in the 21st century, it is also available online.

Now, I don't always get to the issues as they come out, so some of the news might be a bit late – but it still interesting. For example, only last week I finished the issue that came out after the election – I'm not even near the inauguration. That is where I got the article that I copied for you last week.

The issue I am reading now has a very interesting interview with a man named Joe Eszterhas. It is a name that you might or might not be familiar with. He is a Hollywood Screen writer with such movies as Basic Instinct, Jagged Edge and Show Girls to his credit. I have not seen any of them, but I am told that they are filled with graphic sex, violence and foul language.

However, something happened to Joe Eszterhas 7 years ago. He was drinking heavily and smoking 4 packs of cigarettes a day when he was diagnosed with throat cancer. Despite his movie credits he was a devoted family man with a wife and four kids and he wanted to be around for them. So he quit drinking and smoking.

As he was going through withdrawal, he found himself praying – a remnant from his childhood and he soon accepted Christ as his Savior and Lord at 57 years of age! He is now an outspoken Christian in Hollywood – something, that to put it mildly, is not acceptable. He has now become pro-life and vocal about his faith.

57 years old. It's never too late. I am reminded of a man name Joe. He was in his early 80's and came from a Roman Catholic background, but was not a practicing Roman Catholic. He had owned a chain of Liquor stores. He came to an evangelistic video program that we had at the old church and he accepted Christ as his Savior and Lord. He began to study the Bible and attend church regularly. He died a short while ago, and his funeral was a testimony to his faith. It's never too late.

That is exactly what we see in our Gospel lesson for today from Matthew 20. Please turn with me there. It is one of many parables of our Savior that he used to teach some foundational Biblical truths. And I believe that there are more than one in this particular parable. Let's look it together.

As we see from the first verse our Savior tells us what the parable is all about – it is about the Kingdom of Heaven. Keep that in mind as we consider what Jesus has to say.

There was a landowner who had a vineyard, and as was the custom in those days he went out in the early morning to get laborers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the days work – which was a days wages back then.

All day long up, including an hour before quitting time, he went to where the laborers were hanging out and kept hiring men. Quitting time came and those who were hired last were paid first and even though some had only worked an hour, they each received a denarius – the same amount that had been agreed for those who started at 6:00 AM.

When those who had labored all day saw that those hired last were getting a denarius, they assumed that they would get more. And when they didn't, they complained. The landowner, correctly pointed out that they had received what they agreed to and that the landowner had the right to pay the laborers what he wished.

Jesus concludes the parable with the words: *“So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”*

So what does this parable mean for us as 21st century Christians? I think that there are a few things that we can learn from this parable. The first is that which I used in my introduction – about someone coming to faith in Christ late in life.

Some of us have been Christians as long as we can remember. We were raised in the church, we have been going to church all our lives. Except for a couple of rebellious teenage years, I have been going to church regularly since I was 3 years old. That may also be true for some of you.

However, some have come to Christ late in life. Does that mean those of us who have been faithful all our lives will get more reward in heaven than those who become Christians late in life?

According to our parable, that is not the case. In fact what we see clearly here in our parable is the grace of God in our salvation. It is God who calls us to Himself and in His time. Again, remember the concluding words of Jesus – *“So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”*

As our memory verse for today makes clear – Ephesians 2:8-9: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”* It is God who does the choosing. It is God who moves the Holy Spirit in us that allows us to come to faith, in His time.

Titus 3:4-7 says: *“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”*

I am also reminded of the clearest example of this with the thief on the cross, who was crucified along with our Savior. As we read in Luke 23:39-43: *“Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, ‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us. But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong. Then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom. And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’”*

Interesting that one was saved and one was not. Again, it is God's choosing.

This is the equivalent to a deathbed profession of faith in Christ. It does not make his salvation any less valid than those who love and serve Christ for many, many years. What this means for us is a couple of things. First, we should not be jealous of those who come to Christ late in life – we should rejoice with them. Remember, God is not under any obligation to save anyone, but in His grace He chooses to save some – again, *“For many are called, but few chosen.”*

Secondly, as I said. It is never too late. Think of those you love who do not know Christ as Savior and Lord.

They may even be hostile to the gospel. Pray that the Lord would be gracious to them, as He has been to you. As the Lord gives you opportunities, tell them that Christ died for the sins of those who believe in him as Savior and Lord.

I think of two other things, from a practical point of view need to be pointed out. First, human nature – or should I say our sinful human nature tends to look at what another has and say how come they have so much and I have so little. We must remember that God has promised to provide all our needs and that we are not to be envious of the good gifts that God has given to someone else.

I believe that this also applies to us as a church. I know that I struggle with it. I pass churches and see their parking lots full and I see some pretty nice buildings. And I think, why not us? Why couldn't we keep the building we had? Why don't we have more people? Why can't we even find a rented space for us to meet in? And, as I said, it is a struggle for me. I don't know if it is for you also.

But then I have to remember that the church is the people of God and not a building. I have to remember that the church is two or three gathered in God's name and we know that He is present. And I have to be thankful for that.

So, there is a lot that we can learn from the parables of our Savior. Let us remember these truths. And if we know Christ as Savior and Lord, let us be thankful – *“For many are called, but few chosen.”*