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A0643 – October 22, 2006 – Rev 21:7-8 – The Overcomers & The Defeated - Part 2

Q: How does the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard relate to inheriting in the kingdom or is it speaking of something else?

It is correct that the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard is related to inheriting the kingdom. It is also related to rewards in general. Several things have to be remembered in order to understand the parable.

1. The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard explains the prior proverb, “Many who are first will be last; and last, first” (see 20:1 begins with “For” (Gk = *gar* which signals an explanation of this phrase).
2. The prior context concerns the rich young ruler who is contrasted with the twelve disciples.
3. The rich young ruler corresponds to the first (among men) but if he was a believer he would be last (among God in the Kingdom) because he did not forsake all and follow Christ.
4. The disciples correspond to the last (among men) and they would be first (among God in the Kingdom) since they did forsake all and follow Christ.
5. Thus, “Many (not all) who are first (among men - the Rich Young Ruler) will be last (in the kingdom); and last (among men - the disciples), first (in the kingdom)”.
6. Jesus promised them they would co-rule with Him on twelve thrones in the Kingdom (Matt 19:28).
7. The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard explains how the first (among men) can be last (among God in the kingdom) and vice-versa.
8. The landlord corresponds to God
9. Five groups of workers are hired at different times during the day
10. The point of this is to show that amount of time at work does not necessarily determine amount of pay at the end of the day.
11. In the end those who worked 1 hour received as much as those who worked 12 hours.

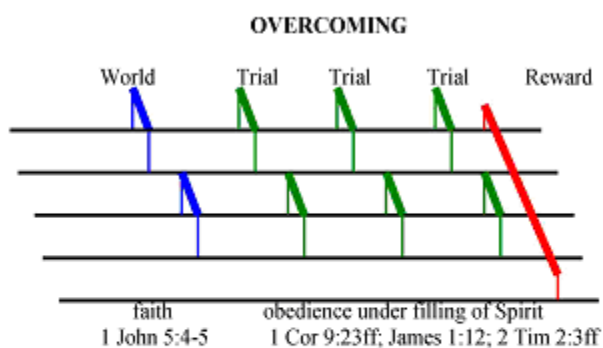
12. This led to grumbling and an evil jealousy by those who worked 12 hours.
13. The landlord reminds them that he was just because he paid them what he promised.
14. The landlord also reminded them that he was generous because he paid those who worked less time the same amount.
15. The point is that rewards are issued on the basis of God's justice and generosity and not His justice alone.
16. God will never give less than what He promised but He may generously give more.
17. For those who forsake houses and brothers and father and mother or children for Christ's name sake will be given many times more in return.
18. The parable also shows that a person who becomes a believer late in life may receive more rewards than one who became a believer early in life.
19. The issue is not how long one is a believer but what one does during that time.
20. The parable also shows that it is never too late to start earning rewards.
21. For example, believers in the Tribulation will have a very short period of time for earning rewards yet those who are martyred for Christ will receive great reward.
22. The bottom line is that rewards are not issued on the basis of God's justice alone but also according to His grace.
23. The passage does not teach that all believers will be equally rewarded. Other passages such as Matt 25:14-30 teach they will not.

Thus, it is correct that the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matt 20:1-16) is related to inheriting the kingdom. It is also related to rewards in general. The twelve disciples were certainly not considered first among men. They were often mocked as mere fishermen, uneducated and untrained in theology (Acts 4:13), but though they were last among men they would be first among God in the kingdom, even co-ruling with Christ because they forsook all and followed Christ (Matt 19:28). Such is true for all believers who forsake all. While it is possible for one who is first among men to co-rule with Christ it is generally more common that those who are last among men will be first among God in the kingdom. Thank you for the good question. Keep it up. Keep asking questions. We need that. I need that.

Let's have some basic review on the Doctrine of Salvation. There are three phases to Salvation.

1. Past—Justification—Faith alone in Christ alone—Position—Saved from Penalty of Sin
2. Present—Sanctification—Obedience under Filling of the Spirit—Experience—Saved from Power of Sin
3. Future—Glorification—Faith alone in Christ alone—Position—Saved from Presence of Sin

Now, returning to Rev 21:7, we are studying the Greek word “overcome”, *nikao*. This word refers to a victor who has conquered an obstacle. It can refer to either phase 1 or phase 2 or phase 3. In 1 John 5:4-5 the overcomer is the one who overcomes the world by means of faith that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. So, the obstacle is the world, the means of overcoming the obstacle is faith that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. So, in one sense all who believe are overcomers (1 John 2:13-14). This aspect of overcoming refers to Phase 1 of Salvation: Justification by faith alone in Christ alone at which point we are saved from the penalty of sin which is spiritual death in the lake of fire.



*The reward is for persevering to the end in obedience to God under the filling of the Spirit.

However, in Revelation 2-3 there are other obstacles which must be overcome by those who have already believed. These passages have reference to Phase 2 of Salvation: sanctification by obedience under the filling of the Spirit. If the believer operates this way and overcomes these obstacles then reward(s) are earned. If not reward(s) are forfeited. Rev 21:7 reveals two rewards that will be given to those believers who overcame during Phase 2 of Salvation. In Phase 3 they will be rewarded with a dwelling place in the new Jerusalem

(also see John 14:1-3) and an intimate Father-son relationship (also see Matt 5:9; Rom 8:14, 19).

Rev 21:7, **the one overcoming**, an articular present active participle functions as a noun (whereas the non-articular participle would function as a verb). So, we have a category of believers in Revelation known as “the overcomers”. Many NT authors look at the Christian life in terms of a soldier in battle or an athlete in a competition (2 Tim 2:3-6). In such battles or competitions there are the victors and the defeated. The same thing is true in the Christian life. There are victors and there are the defeated. There are those who start the race but do not finish. The Book of Revelation is encouraging Church saints and Tribulation saints to be victorious by overcoming obstacles and finishing the race (Paul desired to do the same thing; Acts 20:24 and apparently he did 2 Tim 4:7). In Revelation the emphasis is on the fact that there is no time to waste because Christ can return at-any-moment and when He returns His reward is with Him to give to each according to his deeds (Rev 22:12). The obstacles for Church saints and the means of overcoming them and the reward for doing so are outlined in Rev 2-3.

	Obstacle	Means of Overcoming	Discipline	Reward
Ephesus	Left first love	Remember, repent, do first deeds	Removal of church	Tree of life
Smyrna	Persecution in prison and execution	Be faithful until death		Crown of life, highly rewarded
Pergamum	Compromise with false doctrine	Repent	Temporal judgment	Hidden manna, a white stone, a new name
Thyatira	Tolerate false teachers	Repent, hold fast	physical sickness, great trouble	Co-reign with Christ, the morning star
Sardis	Complacent, lack good deeds	Remember, repent	Temporal judgment	Clothed in white garments, verbal confession of name before Father and angels
Philadelphia		Hold fast to what you have		Pillar in the temple of God, the name of God, the name of the city of God, the new Jerusalem, and the new name of Christ
Laodicea	Lukewarm	Be zealous, repent, do good deeds	Severe reproof and discipline	Co-reign with Christ

I think these basic obstacles are the same obstacles we face today as individuals and as local church bodies all over the world. Some churches/believers have good doctrine but need to put them into practice and obey the commandments. Some churches/believers face imprisonment and execution. These believers need to be faithful until death. Some churches/believers compromise sound doctrine for the sake of a perceived unity. These believers need to repent. Some churches/believers tolerate false

teachers in their midst. These believers need to repent. Some churches/believers have a reputation that they are alive but they have become complacent in their wealth and are dead in the department of good deeds. They do not see their need for daily reliance on Christ. These believers need to wake up and repent. Some churches/believers have everything going for them. They are excelling in doctrine and good deeds. They need to hold fast what they have and not let anyone take their crown. Lastly, some churches/believers are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold for Christ. They need to realize their spiritual poverty, become hot for Christ, repent and do good deeds. If the individual believer will take these things seriously and follow Christ's commands then he will be an overcomer, richly rewarded in the new heaven and new earth.

Finally, not only Church saints have obstacles to overcome. The Tribulation saints will also have obstacles and that is why the Tribulation is given so much attention in the Book of Revelation. The obstacles for the Tribulation saints are the Global Economic and Political System of the Antichrist and the False Prophet as well as the Religious System of Babylon. The price will be high for Tribulation saints who stand against the Antichrist and for Israel. To overcome these obstacles the Tribulation saints must accept whatever destiny God has for them, persevering to the end (Rev 13:10). For the 144,000 and many others this will mean martyrdom. They will be greatly rewarded if they do not shrink back from confessing Christ.

I hope you can see that whether you are a Church or Tribulation saint rewards are given for overcoming the specific obstacles in the believer's life. This is done by a faithful persevering obedience to God. The most important element in all of these exhortations is persevering to the end, remaining faithful in time of trial. James stressed this point when he said,

James 1:12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

We will, in time, talk of these future rewards and I will isolate each one and explain just what they are.

Let me explain one more time how this works in terms of inheritance. Having an inheritance is a reward. The overcomers in Rev 21:7 are promised

that they will inherit these things, that is, the new Jerusalem. The word “inherit” is *kleronomeo* and means “share” “possession” “ownership”. Thus, the overcomers will inherit a dwelling place within the new Jerusalem close to the Lamb. Last week we talked some about inheritance in the OT and how this parallels inheritance in the NT. In the OT we learned that when a father’s firstborn son was born he was allotted an inheritance. If the father had other sons they would also receive an inheritance but the firstborn was allotted a double portion by virtue of the birthright.



The believer has all these spiritual assets and if we don’t really understand all we’ve been given and why Christ gave it to us then we are really going to struggle with being properly motivated to overcome. Much of this list is composed of positional truths. Paul spends a tremendous amount of time in the doctrinal portions of his books on these positional truths (e.g. Eph 1-3; Rom 1-12). Apparently, once we understand our position then our thankfulness will overflow in faithful service to our King. Other assets on the list are experiential truth (e.g. Filled with Spirit, Recovery Mechanism). These things are available for the Christian to tap into to enjoy the power of God at work in their lives. When we truly grasp our position in Christ and all He has given us to be victorious in our experience then there is only one proper response; to love Him. “If you love Me you will keep My commandments” (John 13:34). Out of thankfulness we will obey Him under the filling of the Spirit. If we do so He will disclose Himself further to us through His word. So, we really need to understand our spiritual assets because when we do we use them to earn the inheritance God allotted for us. Maybe we will, maybe we won’t, that is conditioned on our response to God’s grace. If we don’t understand all we have we probably won’t use it and we may be in danger of three things; 1) temporal divine discipline, 2) sin unto

death and 3) disinheritance. The believers in Rev 21:8 are being disinherited; *their part is cast in the lake of fire*. God allotted this inheritance for them at the time of their spiritual birth but they never understood their spiritual assets or that they were given to him in order to be able to earn his allotted inheritance. Because of this they are not believers who overcome but believers who were defeated. They spurned all that Christ gave them. Now, let's deal with the details of verse 8. What kind of believers will be disinherited?

Revelation 21:8 But the cowardly and unfaithful [not unbelieving] and abominable (PerfMPart) and murderers and fornicators and sorcerers and idolaters and all the liars, their part [is] in the lake, the burning (PPPart) fire and brimstone, this is (3SPA) the second death.”

First, it begins with the word **But**, and the Greek word *de* is used. This is not the strongest Greek word for a contrast, *allo*. So, the contrast does not seem to be between believers and unbelievers but between believers who overcome and believers who were defeated. The list here is one descriptive of their character. They persevered in one or more of these character traits throughout their Christian life. This is not simply descriptive of an act or behavior that was committed a few times. All believers have lied, been unfaithful to someone at some time, been a coward, been involved in idolatry. That's not what this is talking about. We have all seen the fruit of the flesh in our lives as Christians (Gal 5:19-21). What's different about this list is that these Christians not only produce this fruit, their whole Christian lives are characterized by one or more of these sins. They have consistently lived according to the flesh which is really not living but an experience of death (Rom 6:23; James 1:15). So, their lives are characterized this way. They had all the spiritual assets other believers had but they never tapped into these resources which would have enabled them to escape these sinful patterns and earn their inheritance. Therefore, they will be disinherited at the judgment seat of Christ because they did not overcome. Let's look at these eight characteristics. First, some believers are characterized as **cowardly**, *deilois*. The cowardly believer is the one who shrinks back from confessing Christ when given the opportunity to do so. Peter did this three times when he denied Christ. This did not mean he was not a believer. It simply meant that he was at that time a cowardly believer. After Pentecost he became a bold

believer and was characterized that way the rest of his life. A believer can be a coward his whole life. If he is he will forfeit reward. Second, some believers are characterized as **unbelieving**, *apistois*, but in the context this should be translated **unfaithful**. An **unfaithful** believer would be like a believer in Smyrna who was imprisoned. Jesus told them to be faithful unto death and he would reward them with the crown of life (Rev 2:10). If a believer's life is characterized by unfaithfulness they will lose their reward. Third, some believers are characterized as **abominable**, *ebdelugmenois*. These are believers who permitted themselves (Perfect Passive Participle) to be polluted by the world system. The believer has been called out of the world system and is not to be polluted by the world system. These believers have failed in this respect and will lose their reward. Fourth, some believers are characterized as **murderers**, *phoneusin*. Believers commit murder by hating another believer as well as by actually murdering someone. The word of God gives examples of believers who murdered others (e.g. Moses, David, Cain). When you get to heaven you will meet believers who murdered others. Those characterized by inner hatred or physical murder will not be rewarded (1 John 3:10-15). Fifth, some believers are characterized as **fornicators**, *pornois*. This word refers to a broad range of sexual immorality. Clearly, and unfortunately, believers are often engaged in sexual immorality. The believers at Thyatira (Rev 2:20-22) and Pergamum (Rev 2:14) were warned against being involved in sexual immorality. The divorce rate among believers in America is apparently higher than that of the unbelieving world. Those characterized this way will lose their reward. Sixth, some believers are characterized as **sorcerers**, *pharmakon*. From the Greek *pharmakon* we get "pharmacy". The word may refer to "drug use" which is often associated with occultic practices such as sorcery. Unfortunately again, believers are all too occasionally engaged in drug use and sorcery. If they are characterized this way they will lose their reward. Seventh, some believers are characterized as **idolaters**, *eidololatriais*. There are many examples of believers who were involved in idolatry in the Bible. In 1 John 5:21 believers are warned to "guard themselves from idols". Obviously they will not have reward. Lastly, some believers are characterized as **liars**, *pseudos*. Obviously believers can and are often characterized as **liars**. For example, Ananias and Sapphira lied to God the Spirit (Acts 5:1-10) Some believers seem to never be able to get rid of these old carnal ways of walking. Since believers can choose to walk by the flesh (Gal 5:19-21) or by the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) what we have here is a description of believers who chose to spend their Christian lives walking by

the flesh. A similar list is recorded in Gal 5:19-21 and 1 Cor 6:9-10 where believers are warned that if they walk this way then they will not “inheriting the kingdom”. Again, inheriting the kingdom does not mean entering but having ownership and rule in the kingdom. Believers who continually walk in the flesh will enter the kingdom but they will not inherit it. In addition, believers who are characterized as cowardly, unfaithful, sorcerers, etc...will have their part/their inheritance cast in the lake of fire. That is, they forfeited their inheritance. God graciously allotted them an inheritance at the moment of their spiritual birth but their disobedience resulted in forfeiting it. They are like Esau who forfeited his inheritance. Like Esau they were so earthly-minded that their lives were overrun by disobedience. They will be disinherited. Like the prodigal son who ran off and squandered his inheritance. When he returned home he was received into the family. There was even a great celebration. However, there was no more inheritance for him, he had already spent it. In a similar way to Esau and the prodigal son, these believers will not have an inheritance in the new heaven and new earth.

Nevertheless, this is not to say they will not have joy in the new heavens and new earth. We have already found that there will be no more tears, or mourning or crying. In the new heavens and new earth everyone will have a full cup of joy. The only difference is there will be some who have a larger cup! This idea of different degrees of joy is already something you and I have experienced in our daily lives. For example, if you won \$1000 you would be joyful. However, if you won \$5,000,000 you would experience greater joy. Everyone will have a full cup of joy in the new heavens and new earth. The only difference will be the degree of joy experienced.

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