

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

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St. Matthews Consecrates New Church

By MISS ANNIE B. HERBIN

Last Sunday's chilling rains had no apparent effect on the opening services at the new ultramodern St. Matthews United Methodist Church, the corner of Asheboro and Florida Streets, as a massive integrated crowd congregated to consecrate the recently constructed edifice. The sanctuary over filled its capacity of 350 while hundreds of other people stood patiently in the circular hall throughout an unusually lengthy service to worship with members, visiting friends and dignitaries.

The church's three choirs combined in singing "The Anthem of Praise," with Miss Juanita G. Wells, Director of Music, at the organ, accompanied by Mrs. Carrye B. Shipp, Director of the Youth Choir, at the piano. The Church's Gospel Choir was part of the group. Dr. Julian A. Lindsey, District Superintendent of Greensboro Methodist Conference, led "The Canticle of Praise."

The Pastor, Reverend Joseph Bethea presided over the services, and was assisted by Dr. James C. Peters, former Pastor of St. Matthews, and the Reverend G. M. Phelps, retired Minister in the district.

The Consecration Sermon was delivered by the Right Reverend Earl G. Hunt, Jr., Presiding Bishop of the Charlotte Area of The United Methodist Church.

In his sermon, Bishop Hunt brought the congregation to reflect on past experiences and strengths of Christianity. In tracing the work of the Methodist Church, and Christianity, itself, he spoke of the changing times we experience today, diminishing influences of the church as contrasted with periods of church history wherein such men as Jonathan Edwards of the Revolutionary Period caused men to tremble in their seats, from his stirring sermons; men like Billy Sunday, Billy Graham, Dr. Martin Luther King, among others, who in our times, have kept Christianity alive.

Bishop Hunt further emphasized the importance of Christ now, in our changing world amidst this period of confusion on every hand. He reiterated the fact that God's House must continue to serve the purpose for which it was established, that of saving men from their sins. His unique title, "Gentlemen! The King!" appealed to those who know Christ to be sincerely able to present Him to others, and to the world in the sense of dignity and loyalty as His representatives. His closing remarks were a tribute to the building of this structure, and the adjointment of St. Matthews Church to stand out in the community as a tower, instrumental in drawing others to Christ. Said the Bishop, "I salute the pastor and people of St. Matthews United Methodist Church upon the completion of their beautiful new edifice."

Following the singing in unison of the hymn, "The Church's One Foundation," the Act of Consecrating the new edifice by the Bishop, the Presiding Pastor and accompanying ministers, the morning worship services were concluded.

The afternoon services which the Reverend Cecil Bishop and his choirs of the neighboring A.M.E. Zion Church conducted, witnessed another record crowd that came to join in the laying of The Corner Stone, at The St. Matthews new church.

THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

THE BASIS OF GOD'S REWARDS

Beginning Where You Are

"What kind of rewards can I expect?" The question is not just that of Peter and the disciples but of every one of us. We are a practical, pragmatic people, taught from earliest infancy that results are what count in this life. The commencement speaker may say, "It matters not whether you win or lose. It's how you play the game." But coaches and bosses are well aware that "good guys finish last" and "winners take all."

How does God reward the good man? This is one of the most persistent questions in the Bible. Are there real rewards and punishments in this life administered with even-handed justice by a good God? Or do the swindler, the shyster, and the fixer get all the gravy?

The psalmists were deeply troubled by this problem as they looked about and saw the wicked flourishing like the green bay tree. They had to face the galling fact that righteousness did not always pay off in houses and land, and that grafters and chisellers seemed somehow to rake in most of the winnings.

In Fiddler on the Roof, Tevye is a hard-pressed Jewish dairy farmer with a big family of daughters. He complains to God, "It's no shame to be poor. But it's no great honor either." If only he were a rich man! He goes on to dream of what that would be like. It would even give him more time to read the Scriptures and to say his prayers.

"What's in it for me?" is the question, spoken or unspoken, men have asked throughout all history. If God does indeed reward the good man, is it only in spiritual coin? Or does he pay off in more tangible ways, in currency that can pay the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, the mortgage company, and even the funeral director?

But some rewards cannot be reckoned in such material terms.

In an old cartoon a father, speaking to a prospective son-in-law, says, "Whoever gets my daughter will get a prize."

The young suitor replies, "Sir, do you mind if I see the prize?"

Even so, each of us is tempted to press God about the terms of this life. If the reward is not in cash but in more personal terms, we need to be shown. We need to rethink our notions of work and reward, of our deserving, and of God's giving.

Most of all, we need to look at what Jesus is saying in the Gospels about the nature of God himself and how life at its best is organized. Are the real and enduring rewards given out on payday? Are there genuine re-

wards that are less visible though nonetheless real? All this is suggested whenever we ask, "What's in it for me?"

Searching The Scriptures

The Scripture for this lesson is Matthew 19:23 through 20:16. Selected verses are printed below.

Matthew 20:1-16

1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place. 4 and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. 5 Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. 6 And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' 7 They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' 8 And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages beginning with the last; up to the first.' 9 And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. 10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. 11 And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder, 12 saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' 13 But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. 15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' 16 So the last will be first, and the first last."

Memory Section:

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

—Psalms 103:8

Exploring The Questions

When the rich young ruler turned sorrowfully away from Jesus, Jesus said to his disciples, "It will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19:23) The disciples reacted with shocked surprise, for they had thought wealth was a sign of God's favor. According to Matthew, Jesus then told the puzzling parable we are studying in this lesson. It raises many questions.

1. What is really the basis for God's dealings with his children? This is the first and basic question in this lesson. If our good or evil actions in this life bring real rewards or punishments, how are these governed by a just God? Is God's reign one in which we reap exactly what we sow, or is his rule a different kind in which love has the last answer?

Is God both a God of law and a God of grace? If so, how are the two related?

2. How has man's idea of reward changed from earlier, more primitive times? Are we still tempted to think in terms of God's serving man's immediate interests — winning his battles, granting him good crops and long life, as a reward for obedient service?

How did Jesus criticize the ideas of reward current in his time? How did he say God's love and justice operate both now and in the age to come? Was Jesus a revolutionary in suggesting that the last shall be first, that God's ways are not our ways? How did he feel God rewards the faithful in his kingdom?

3. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard suggests that the attitude of men toward their reward is all-important. Jesus was pointing once again to an inner dimension of life that is easily lost to sight in any simple legal formula of reward and punishment. As elsewhere in the Gospels, he is focusing on man's inner motives. Why do we obey God and seek to do right by our neighbor? Is it only for what we may get? Is real love seen only when it is stripped of rewards, poured out without regard to the other person's response, simply because love is God's way?

4. If we truly love and trust God, what does this attitude suggest as to specific ways we can respond to God? How can it revolutionize our relationships with friends and family? How does this attitude lead to a life of new freedom and joy? Can we measure our actions solely by how others respond to us, whether happily or violently? Or must we keep the faith even when rebuff and division ensue?

Finding Help

With Your Questions

With this parable, as with others, we must first examine the situation in which Jesus told it. Then we will be better able to understand what he meant to say and what he did not mean. This procedure is particularly important in interpreting the parable in this lesson.

God's Overflowing Grace
 The parable of the laborers

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