

Dear Friend,

I recently received a question from a man in South America concerning a difficult verse in the gospel of Matthew. He said it seems to imply that if we do not work for the kingdom, we will go to hell. The particular verse he mentioned was:

Mat 25:30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

A casual reading of the whole parable sure makes it seem like the man is being cast into outer darkness because he wasn't willing to work for the kingdom. But there is a much deeper problem revealed in the parable than that. I suggest you read the entire parable which includes Mat 25:14-30. (If I copied the whole thing here it would take up almost half of this letter.) Notice that the unprofitable servant said he "knew" the Lord. Read carefully what the servant said;

Mat 25:24-25 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: (25) And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, *there* thou hast *that is thine*.

This man said he knew the Lord, but in fact, he did not know the Lord. The description he gives of the Lord is not like Jesus at all. He says Jesus is a "hard man, reaping where he had not sown, etc." He is basically accusing the Lord of being a dishonest tyrant who forces people into slavery against their will. Anybody who truly "knows the Lord" is aware ... Jesus is not like that at all. He never forces anybody to do anything against their will. Even when it comes to salvation, He holds out the offer to everybody but He still leaves it up to each individual whether they choose to believe the gospel or not. He never forces anybody against their will.

The man in the parable is like many people today. They only want "fire insurance" against going to Hell. They want a "Savior" but not a "Lord." They say they know the Lord, but in all honesty, they do not want to obey Him or His teachings. Here is the problem ... anybody who says they know the Lord but they do not want to obey His commandments ... they don't actually know Him. Here is proof positive of that statement:

1Jn 2:4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

Anybody who knows Jesus will automatically strive to keep His commandments. Not because He is a hard, tyrannical, demanding taskmaster. Just the opposite. It is the "goodness" of God that brings men to repentance. Anybody who has met Jesus by being born again will be so grateful they have been spared from eternal damnation they will automatically want to give their whole lives to Him. According to 1st John 2:4, if there is not that desire to obey Him within them, the only conclusion is ... they have never met Him ... they do not know Him. Don't get me wrong. Even after the desire is birthed within us to serve the Lord, the flesh will war against that desire to have its own way. Every child of God continues to war against the flesh daily. We must all "take up our cross daily" and follow Him.

The unprofitable servant thought he knew Jesus. He did not. There is no substitute for knowing Him. Christianity is a family, not a religion. We must have a genuine, living relationship with the Lord. Jesus had warned earlier in the gospel of Matthew that religious duty and mere lip service calling Him "Lord, Lord" was not enough.

Mat 7:22-23 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? (23) And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Why were they cast away from Jesus? Was it because of their works, or their lack of works? No ... it was because they did not know Him. They had no living relationship with Him. Let me go one step farther and say, they were never born again into the family of God. Let us never focus on our works for the kingdom. We must always keep our focus on Jesus HIMSELF! Jesus gave us the pure definition of eternal life when He said,

John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

Sue and I love you and appreciate you. We thank God for your generous and giving heart. God bless you!

Your friend and co-laborer,

Gary