

KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES

Our society is saturated with materialism. People are obsessed with obtaining all the "stuff" that they can get. The apostle Paul instructed young Timothy concerning material things. He said, "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (I Tim. 6:6-8). Though there is nothing inherently wrong with having material possessions, the almost uncontrolled desire and drive to acquire more and more material possessions is dangerous to say the least. Paul said, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (I Tim. 6:9-10). The key word in that passage is the word "will". It is that drive to be rich that is such a danger.

One of the greatest motivators of materialism is the desire to be like everyone else. Every parent has to deal with this issue when their children always want the same name brand or style of shoes, shirts and such as the other children at school have. However, this seemingly innocent tempter does not leave us as we come to adult age. The houses and the cars possessed by the neighbors have caused many to misplace their priorities for the sake of "keeping up with the Joneses".

God chose Abraham and promised to make of him a great nation. That promise passed on to Isaac and then to Jacob who was given the name Israel. The children of Israel were God's chosen people. It was His desire that they serve Him and no other. Yet, "all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (I Sam. 8:4-5). God told Samuel that the people had not rejected him, "but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (I Sam. 8:7).

Those who misplace their priorities, placing "keeping up with the Joneses" ahead of righteousness have done nothing less than did the children of Israel when they rejected God for the sake of being like all the other nations. Jesus said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). What the Joneses have is really not that great. *Tilis*

THE ELEVENTH HOUR MAN (Matt. 20:1-16)

Often people have read this parable, coming away with some confusion on how to justify paying the one who works all day the same amount as the one who worked only one hour. The answer is, the parable is not teaching anything about paying anyone for working for any length of time! The parable is teaching that no matter when one becomes a child of God, that person will receive his or her inheritance!

The vineyard represents the church (kingdom of heaven) and the householder represents God. No one outside of that institution can nor will receive any reward from the Father. Just as those who do not work at a particular work place will not receive a check from the company on pay day, those who are not in the Lord's church **shall not** receive eternal life.

The laborers represent Christians. Though we have already noted the necessity of each person being in the church in order to have salvation, note that while in the church, they are to be laborers. We often state that Christianity is not a spectator sport that one can sit on the bleachers or before their television at home and watch it played by others. "For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building" (I Cor. 3:9).

The penny represents eternal life. Our reward can be no greater than that. No matter how early or late in life we become a child of God, the eternal reward is life eternal in heaven with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and with all the saved from creation until the end of time. The apostles may well have been first to follow the Saviour, but their heaven will be the same as ours. The Jews may well have been first to be offered entrance into the kingdom, but if saved, their heaven will be the same as ours. The one who obeys the gospel at age twelve and is faithful for eighty years will enter the same heaven as the ninety-two year old who finally submits to the will of God.

Let's close with a warning. Do not put off obedience to the gospel of Christ thinking that at the last minute you will obey and have your home in heaven. One never knows when that last minute will be. The rich man was told, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee..." (Lk. 12:20). How about you? Are you working in the vineyard?

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