

Pile On the Overtime!

‘Fred and Harry met each other on the street one day. Fred looked unhappy, almost on the verge of tears. Harry turned to him and said, “What has the world done to you, my old friend?” Fred said, “Let me tell you: three weeks ago, my uncle died and left me forty thousand dollars”. “Amazing. That’s a lot of money”. “But you see, two weeks ago, a cousin I never even knew died, and left me eighty-five thousand dollars, free and clear”. “Sounds to me that you’ve been very blessed”. “You don’t understand!” Fred interrupted. “Last week my great-aunt passed away. I inherited almost a quarter of a million from her”. Now Harry was really bewildered. “Thy, why do you look so glum?” “This week ... nothing!”

It seems that Fred’s understanding of reality changed over the last few weeks. For him, suddenly he was receiving inheritances every week, like clockwork. This was just the new way of the world. Why, he’d never have to work another day in his life. The money, the bequests, just kept coming. Once a week. Every week. And not only did they just keep on coming, each time they increased, hugely, in absolute dollars. The world and life for Fred was truly a “bowl of cherries”, as the saying goes. Until it wasn’t. Fred’s whole world came crashing down when the fourth week came and went, and nobody died and left him anything! What

happened!? The apocalypse had suddenly, and without warning arrived. The sky had literally fallen. At least for Fred.

We may laugh at Fred's experience and ignorance. But in many ways, we are all "Fred's". Some call it the "normalcy bias". Whatever we've become accustomed to, we just assume that it's going to continue on like it "always" has been, for forever, or at least for a very long time. And when it doesn't, why, then we're disappointed, if not shocked and crestfallen. For those of us who've lived several decades, we've gotten enough life experience under our belts to be less shocked when things suddenly change and we have to make major adjustments. Young people who're just starting out in life simply haven't experienced life long enough to expect that things might not continue on in the manner they've always known. Which is a major reason why young Millennials and Generation Z-ers who've taken a shine to rioting in the streets virtue signaling to all their peers that they're "with it", and doing their part to make society ever better, advocating for things they literally know nothing truthful about, which, once they're 20-30 years older, most will realize were pipe dreams, and evil pipe dreams at that.

The manual laborers in our Lord's parable recorded in Matthew 20 provide an explicit case in point. Now according to Marxist/Communist dogma, these laborers are all subjugated, exploited members of the oppressed lower class. And thus it is their duty to rise up, en masse, and overthrow those oppressing them,

in this case, the landowners, and take over the vineyard for themselves. Then they can truly reap the “fruits” of their labors. And they will each get paid for the amount of work they put in. Or would they? The workers who had put in some 10 hours of work that day were paid what they had agreed on, and what was normal and fair for a day’s work. It was a “living wage”. But the ones who had worked fewer hours, even those who’d remained unemployed for nearly the whole day, all received the same pay of a full day’s wage. This was most generous on the part of the landowner. They, of course, were surprised, delighted, and I assume, very grateful. The ones that’d worked longer, especially the whole day, thought they deserved more than those who’d worked less. And when they didn’t get more, they felt short-changed. Some were upset, actually coveting more because they thought they deserved more. But in reality, they were all treated fairly.

We know that the parable is a metaphor for the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who are called and respond at the Savior’s first call, and spend their whole lives working for the Kingdom, receive at the end of The Day, the salvation of their souls with eternal life. Others who responded to His call later, and worked fewer years for the Lord, at the end of The Day, also receive the salvation of their souls and eternal life. So all people who come to the Lord, those very young, and those who don’t discover the Savior’s love for them until they’re aged and near death, each receive the same “wage” of eternal life. Isn’t that truly wonderful! They’re all the

same. In a warped kind of way, it sounds almost communistic.

But it's not. The last will be first and the first will be last. And in that sense, all will equally receive salvation and eternal life in Heaven. But there's a great difference between people in the in-between time from salvation to death, during the length of time when we become true servants of the Lord to the time we're called up to Heaven. Those who are "late" to join the ranks of the Lord's earthly armies, have comparatively few years to contribute and render their service to the Lord. While those who spend many decades as dutiful soldiers experience much different lives. They were originally first, and spent much more time of their earthly lives enjoying the blessings of being in God's service, of living in obedience to the will of God, and receiving the Lord's promises, as King David expressed in Psalm 27. While so much time of the others' lives was wasted, pursuing the things, and sins, of earth. At the time they had no idea what they were missing. It's a common response when older people are born again that they regret having come to faith in the Lord so late in life. So grateful they are, they desperately wish they had more time to gratefully serve Him while still living on this earth.

The apostle Paul touched on this dilemma in his letter to the Philippians. When he sent it, he was likely in his mid-to-late 50s. Which, in those days, was fairly old. And Paul had been a pioneer missionary for around 15 years. During which time, he'd been arrested and thrown in prison multiple times, beaten, tor-

tured and flogged several times, shipwrecked, snake-bitten, and on it went. Suffice it to say that not many modern-day missionaries have life nearly as tough! It was perfectly understandable for Paul to dream of a nice, cushy retirement. He certainly deserved it. Right? No, what he truly desired was to skip retirement entirely and go straight to death so as to become united with Christ and begin eternal life with God. He said it in Philippians 1:20-21: “I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better”. But he also realized that because he was currently in jail, with everyone knowing it was because he’d been advocating The Way of Christ, many believers in the church in Rome were emboldened by his example, as he reports in verse 14: “because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God’s message without fear”.

It seems crystal clear from just this one passage, that Paul maintained that the propagation of the Gospel was the prime directive of not only his life, but for all believers’ lives. Which is also why he was so joyful with the Philippian church because they actively and enthusiastically supported his work. There are many facets to the grand, divine work of spreading the Gospel. And beyond what the Philippians could do in their own city, they eagerly sent funds to support the work of missionaries who were each in their own way spreading the Good News in far-off places.

In Rome, the capital of the Empire, the center of the pagan,

idolatrous, sin-filled Roman world, even here the Gospel was advancing. Despite Paul's imprisonment, people were being saved. Or perhaps, because of his imprisonment. In jail, all he could do was praise and pray. Joyfully praising God gives us strength, regardless of whatever circumstances we may find ourselves. For "the joy of the Lord is our strength", says Nehemiah 8:10. So Paul was strengthened in jail, in the midst of his pain and suffering, by joyfully praising the Savior. Because he was on the inside, the believers outside felt freer to share their faith. They were sincerely working to advance the Gospel. Others, however, were jealous of Paul, or otherwise had bad feelings toward him. They preached the Gospel in order to gain followers for themselves, raise their own profiles, and make themselves famous. Their motives were selfish, but, nevertheless, the Gospel was being proclaimed, and people were being saved. That was all that mattered; that more people were coming to know the Resurrected Lord. Even today, many well-known preachers may be using the Gospel for their own selfish ends, but in the midst of it, other people are getting saved, and that brings God joy.

So, it is with us. In whatever ways we live and display to the world the ways of Christ, we are doing our duty as soldiers of the Cross, showing others that there is right way to live, that is truly higher than the ways of this world, as high as God's ways are higher than man's ways. That is worth spending all the overtime we can get on this earth!

