

Sermon: What Will WE Get?

By Bob Young

Kingdom Values

What values do we bring to the work of the church? Which values are cultural; which are biblical? Typical US values concern priorities, schedules, processes and methods, relationships, routines, and the use of resources. People frequently disagree about these things.

Consider an example of the “values challenge” (Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross-Culturally*, Baker Academic, 2008).

An example of contrasting values can be seen in a questionnaire that was given to two different cultural groups. The participants were separated by their cultural backgrounds—U.S. participants and Latin American participants. When asked to define the nature of partnerships, to describe desirable character qualities of those involved in a partnership, and to suggest what they would give to others in the partnership relationship, the answers from the two groups varied widely. The U.S. participants defined the partnership according to tasks and results; sought character qualities such as reliability, humility, commitment, and work ethic; and committed to provide training, money, facilitation, critical feedback—all reflecting a superior/inferior relationship. The Latin American participants defined the partnership as a relational ministry; sought character qualities such as love, God’s calling, generosity, and high social values; and committed to provide people, relationships and spiritual resources, in the context of shared/complementary relationships.

Both groups were giving priority to their cultural values more than to kingdom values. Both groups were seeking to establish working relationships based on their cultural understandings. This provides an adequate introduction for our study.

What Does One Get for Kingdom Work?

In the text of Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus tells the story of the landowner who hires men to work in his vineyard. The text is an answer to Peter’s question of 19:27, and that text immediately follows the encounter with the rich young ruler. Jesus addresses a series of “human questions” about work and reward.

- What can I do to guarantee what I will get?
- What will I get for my labor? (19:27)
- Why don’t I get more? (20:11)
- What is fair? (20:12)
- In view of our willing to make a greater sacrifice, will you give us more than the rest? (20:21-22)

People want to know what they are going to get for their participation in the kingdom. This is often a source of conflict. One can illustrate and understand the application of these questions in a mission context as well as in the local church context. Jesus answers the questions.

What must I do to inherit eternal life?

We have left all—what will there be for us (19:28-30)? Jesus' response is that while they have left everything, they have left nothing. One cannot out-give God. There will be future abundance and even position (19:30).

What about fairness—why don't we get more? The landowner responds that he has done what he promised. The point is that God is generous to all, regardless of our performance, ability or inability to perform.

What will we get? Will we get more? Jesus asks, do you want what I am going to get? Their affirmative response belies their misunderstanding. Jesus is challenging their basic values. He came to serve and to give his life (20:26-28).

In summary, Jesus makes the following points that demonstrate that a differing set of values is to be applied to kingdom work.

- He calls many diverse people to work (20:3-6)
- He pays "whatever is right" (20:4)
- He is generous but not "fair" (20:13-15)
- He gives "a hundred times as much" (19:29)
- He gives "his life as a ransom for many" (20:28)