

Are Deathbed Confessions Relevant?

This is a question many of us have struggled with at some time over the past with on the one hand, the argument that a compassionate Elohim would never ignore a repentant confession from a contrite heart, even if it was via a person's last breath. Whilst on the other hand, the apostle categorically tells us that for righteousness we must have observed YHWH's laws,

"For not the hearers of the Torah are righteous in the sight of Elohim, but the doers of the law shall be declared righteous." (Rom.2:13).

A last breath confession leaves no time for observance of the Torah (Law). Even a forgiving and compassionate Elohim has rules. Indeed this statement from the apostle correlates with Mashiach's declaration in Matthew 4:4, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Father." Considering the whole of the Torah (Law) was given to humanity by the Father there is nothing ambiguous in what Mashiach is saying.

So if deathbed confessions are really meaningless how are we to understand the parable of the vine grower?

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who went out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the workers on a wage of one denarius (the standard daily wage) he sent them off to his vineyard. Then on going out at nine in the morning he saw more men standing around in the market square doing nothing and he said to them, 'You go to the vineyard too – I'll pay you a fair wage,' so they went. At noon and again around three in the afternoon, he did the same thing. About an hour before sundown, he went out, found still others standing around and asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day doing nothing?' They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' 'You too,' he told them, 'go to the vineyard.'

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last ones hired and ending with the first.' The workers who came an hour before sunset each received a denarius, so the workers who came first expected they would get more but each of them also received a denarius. On receiving their wages they began grumbling to the farmer, 'These late comers have worked only one hour while we have borne the brunt of the day's work in the hot sun, yet you have put them on an equal footing as us!' But he answered one of them, 'Look friend, I am not being unfair with you. Didn't you agree to work today for a denarius? Now take your money and go, I choose to give the last worker as much as I am giving you. Haven't I the right to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' Thus the last will be first and the first will be last."

Now let us establish the symbolism and the teaching behind this parable. The vineyard owner is the Father; YHWH, the vineyard represents the Word of Elohim and the workers are humanity. Informing the men of the work required in the vineyard is akin to telling humanity about the Kingdom of Elohim and the work itself represents that which flows from accepting employment - accepting the Word of Elohim, that is living in obedience to the Word. Finally, the reward being in the form of wages offered by the vineyard owner is akin to receiving the Fathers grace and ultimately salvation.

The essence of this parable is that salvation is available to all who change from unrighteousness to righteousness no matter how late in life they make the change. The only variable is the amount of 'work' – the length of time a person lives in a proper relationship with YHWH. The earlier in life a person is called the more YHWH expects from that person,

But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. (Matt.13:8).

Returning to the vineyard owner, the parable would appear to infer that no matter how late in life a person repents salvation is available. We can find support for this philosophy in Ezekiel,

“And you, O son of man, say to your people, ‘The righteousness of the righteous man shall not save him in the day of his transgression. And likewise the wickedness of the wicked person, he shall not cause him to fall in the day he turns from his wickedness. And the righteous shall not be able to live because of his righteousness in the day that he sins.’ When I say to the righteous that he shall live, and if he trusts in his former righteousness, and shall do unrighteousness, none of his former righteousness shall be remembered, but because of his unrighteousness that he now does, he shall die. Again, when I say to the wicked, ‘You shall certainly die,’ if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right, if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen, and walks in the laws of life without doing crookedness, he shall certainly live; he shall not die. None of his sins which he has committed shall be remembered against him – he has done that which is lawful and right; he shall certainly live. And the children of your people have said, ‘The way of YHWH is not fair.’ But it is their way that is not fair. When the righteous turns from his righteousness and does unrighteousness, he shall die because of it. But when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live because of it. (Ezek.33:12-19).

Salvation is given by YHWH through His grace but to receive grace a person has to be in a correct relationship with YHWH. For that, a person must have observed YHWH’s laws of life, that is, they must have lived a Torah (Law) observant lifestyle. The apostle tells us this in plain terms,

“For not the hearers of the Torah are righteous in the sight of Elohim, but the doers of the law shall be declared righteous.” (Rom.2:13).

It is this fundamental that rules out deathbed confessions. Going back to the parable, even those workers hired at the end of the day still had time to earn (to work for) their reward (wages). I am not saying that salvation is the result of our works: the opposite applies; works is the result of salvation: works flows from salvation. Salvation is only by the favour of YHWH. However, it is through our works that we establish a right relationship with YHWH and hopefully we will, in His eyes, qualify to be cloaked in His robe of righteousness (Isa.61:10) Deathbed confessions leave no time for fulfilment of Rom.2:13. The deathbed confession is comparable with hiring a person right at the close of the day’s work that is, at the time the wages are being paid.

Let us consider another parable, that of the ten bridesmaids,

“The Kingdom of Heaven at that time will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went out to meet the groom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible. The foolish ones took lamps with them but no oil, whereas the other five took flasks of oil with their lamps. Now the bridegroom was late so they all went to sleep. It was in the middle of the night when the cry rang out, ‘The bridegroom is here, go out to meet him.’ The girls all woke up and prepared their lamps. The foolish ones said to the sensible ones, ‘Give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out. No,’ they replied. ‘There may not be enough for both you and us. Go to the oil dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ But as they were going off to buy, the bridegroom came. Those who were ready went with him to the wedding feast and the door was shut. Later, the other bridesmaids came, ‘Sir! Sir!’ they cried, ‘Let us in.’ But he answered, ‘Indeed I tell you, I don’t know you.’”(Matt.25:1-12).

Here the lamps are the Word of Elohim, the oil is our works = living in obedience to the Torah (Law) = our righteousness, the light given off from the burning of the oil is the sign of set apartness. Only those with the light will be claimed by Mashiach and invited to the wedding feast of the ‘Lamb.’ So what is to be learnt from this parable?

The five foolish bridesmaids had lamps – they had heard the Word of YHWH but chose to ignore it = they had no oil and therefore no light. When the bridegroom came the five foolish (unrighteous) bridesmaids did not want to be left out but wanted to join the wise (righteous) bridesmaids; asking for some of their oil. The righteous bridesmaids refused and told them to go and get their own oil = go, repent and accept the Word of Elohim but they had left

repentance too late, the bridegroom arrived, collected those with lighted lamps = His righteous bridesmaids, for the wedding feast and locked the foolish (unrighteous) bridesmaids out claiming He did not know them.

This parable also shows that for salvation a person must live an obedient lifestyle: *'Be a doer of the Torah (Law)'* (Rom.2:13). The repentant lip from a dying person is too late as is pleading with Mashiach (knocking on the closed door after He has arrived) by the foolish bridesmaids. In all things The Father is looking for a contrite heart but is it a contrite heart that confesses with its last breath? It is more likely a confession borne of fear, fear of what is to come. This latter situation is akin to saying sorry when in front of Mashiach at the time of judgement when, according to Enoch, all sinners will bow before YHWH, they will acknowledge Him and beg for forgiveness but Enoch explains it is too late, for we are told that after paying Him homage YHWH will banish them to punishment. A person truly wanting to find YHWH will not wait until their last breath, according to the parables from Mashiach and the information provided by Enoch, IT WILL BE TOO LATE.

To close this study let us look at a passage from Revelation,

And I saw a great white throne and Him who was sitting on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before the throne, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged from what was written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and death and the grave gave up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works (lifestyle). (Rev.20:11-13).

This passage refers to the day of judgement at the end of the millennium. The *'books that were opened'* are the heavenly record containing the lifestyles of every individual of humanity. We are left in no doubt that everyone will be judged according to the lifestyle (their works) they have lived. I can see no room for deathbed confessions in YHWH's Word.

One final comment I have is, YHWH's grace is not for free neither will everyone enjoy it however, it is available for everyone.

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