Devotion #314

**Underdogs**

**Matthew 20:16 (NASB)** *"So the last shall be first, and the first last."*

Some of you will remember the Saturday morning cartoon, “*Underdog*”. He was the crime-fighting dog who came to the rescue of all when the criminals were doing their worst. The opening theme song went like this, “*There’s no need to fear, Underdog is here. When criminals in this world appear, And break the laws that they should fear, And frighten all who see or hear, The cry goes up both far and near for Underdog, Underdog, Underdog, Underdog.*” Those were the days. The days when right was right and wrong was wrong.

The truth is that most every person on the planet loves the underdog. Watch any sports tournament, and there is usually a cry from the stands louder than any other game when the underdog is doing well - the team that has the least chance for winning.

But the underdog is not always welcomed especially by the team that is on the top of the rankings. After all, they are the top team and with good reason. The coaches are top-notch, and they recruit top players, so winning is normal. So when a team that is not heard of starts to win, it’s not always welcomed by everyone.

So it was with the people that Jesus was talking to about who will and who will not enter into His Kingdom. The religious leaders were aghast that Jesus was spending His time with sinners and reprobates, the underdogs of the world, and saying that they, too, would enter into the same joy that the Pharisees and Scribes thought they would enter one day. For the religious leaders, that was unthinkable.

One of the many joy of knowing God as Lord and Savior is that He is no respecter of persons, (Acts 10:34) but He is willing to give the same blessing of the Kingdom to anyone who will repent of their sins and follow Him fully from their hearts – underdogs and over-achievers alike.

The parable that Jesus told in the preceding verses of our verse for today speaks of those who were hired to do a day’s work. No matter what time of day the worker started, they received the same wage as the guy who began his day much earlier. The worker who worked from sunup to sundown was disgruntled because he didn’t think the worker who only worked a few hours should get the same wage, but Jesus was teaching us all that God is not like man. Yes there will be rewards that are given in heaven to those who worked much of their lives for the Lord that will be different from those who worked only a few years or days. (Matthew 5:12) But when it comes to who is able to be in the Kingdom, that is for all who put their trust in Christ.

All will receive the same wage or joy in this case as the worker who worked all his life for Jesus - such as the thief on the cross. The one who surrenders his heart to Jesus in his dying breath enters into heaven along with Jesus just like the most righteous man who served God all his days.

The point is that no matter who people are or what they have done, God wants them to put their trust in Christ.

The joy of God is knowing that no matter what this life has been like, once a person accepts Jesus as their substitute payment for their sin, they get their ticket into heaven. They get to “play” with the big dogs. That should be a great encouragement.

To be clear, a person should never consider living in sin until his dying day and plan to repent in the end. That would be wrong and tempting of God.

So, again, be encouraged. There is always hope for lost loved ones, and there is hope for anyone who sees their need of Jesus and surrenders to Him, no matter how long or short they have served Him. So keep serving. Keep living your godly life. Keep praying for the lost loved one. Keep cheering for the underdog – the one least likely to surrender to Jesus - because, in the end, what matters most is that they make the decision to follow Jesus. The when is not what is most important.