

In Step
with the 
Master
Teacher

The workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

- 1. Kingdom introduction v.1**
- 2. Hiring the workers vv. 1-7**
- 3. Paying the workers vv. 8-10**
- 4. Complaint of the workers vv. 11-12**
- 5. Answer from the owner vv. 13-15**
- 6. Concluding proverb v.16**

Matthew 20:1

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.”

Kingdom – God’s rule looks like this...

- **Context of Matthew 19:13-20:34**

.... deals with status, wealth, greed and discipleship in a context that reverses the expected values of the world.

- The parable begins with a common scene but turns in unexpected ways.

- One could say that the story becomes provocatively scandalous to cultural assumption.

Matthew 20:1-16

Owner of a vineyard hiring workers

- 12 hour work day sunrise to sunset. (in the heat of the Palestinian sun).
- A denarii was the average daily wage for a day laborer.
- **Five Hirings –**
- Unusual for an owner to make five trips to hire day workers (unless the vineyard was close). But there could be a bit of urgency to harvesting the grapes before a rain season.

Five Returns to Hire workers

**Allegorizing the successive
ages of the world.**

- 1. Adam to Noah**
- 2. Noah to Abraham**
- 3. Abraham to Moses**
- 4. Moses to Christ**
- 5. Christ to the Present**

Spiritualization of the parable

- **Vineyard – the Kingdom**
- **Owner – God the father**
- **Forman- Jesus**
- **Workers – believers**
- **Pay – salvation**
- **Work day – the believer's lifetime of service**
- **Evening – eternity**

What we know with more certainty

- **By emphasizing who gets paid first (those who came last), Jesus exposed the condition of the hearts of the others.**
- **Could this be what God was doing in bringing gentiles to faith? (Rom. 9-11)**
- **A clear challenge to human standards of ranking and merit (first and last).**

- **Opponents** - it emphasizes tax collectors, sinners and Gentiles entering the kingdom.
- **Disciples** - it is to warn against envy based on perceptions of rank, superiority, and misplaced notions of merit.

Some facts to consider

- **No one deserves to become a worker but none receive a free gift of grace.**
- **Each one works and receive a wage, some more than expected; others less than they feel they deserve based on comparison.**
- **Not a big emphasis on generosity because the wage is not unusual.**

- **Contrast** is in the goodness of the owner with the complaint of those who felt they should have received more. (the evil eye)
- **God's treatment of people** and justice cannot be measured by human standards.
- We think it should be equal pay for equal work.
- **We continually compare ourselves** with others and judge fairness based on our perception of levels of accomplishment.
- **The first workers** would not have complained without a comparison with others.
- We think that justice means that no one gets an advantage.

Questions worth asking

- 1. Why is goodness often the occasion for anger?**
- 2. Why do we find it difficult to rejoice over the good things that happen to others?**
 - **I Corinthians 12:26** - If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.
 - **Romans 12:10** - “take delight in honoring each other.”
- 3. Why do we have a high alert system for calculating ways we feel slighted in comparison with others?**

Think about it

The life of God's kingdom cannot be experienced as intended as long as we are comparing ourselves with others, calculating what we feel is due us, and being envious and resentful of what others receive.

When our focus is on being first we show how far removed we are from God's kingdom – no matter how much we feign humility.