

The Hired Labourers

(Matthew 20:1-16)

- I. This parable emphasizes two major themes.
 - A. God is sovereign and altogether just in His dealings; no charge of unfairness can be levelled against Him.
 - B. Oftentimes the first shall be last and the last shall be first.
 1. Late converts may outshine earlier ones.
 2. Sometimes the least likely elements in God's kingdom shall be the most glorious.

- II. The parable was spoken on the heels of Christ's promise to His apostles, who had wondered what reward they should receive for following Christ. **MAT 19:27-30.**
 - A. It would serve to temper any notions which the apostles might entertain about merits and rewards due them for services rendered.
 1. There is a common reward to all saints, regardless of the level of personal service rendered in the kingdom. **GEN 15:1; ROM 2:6-7, 10-11.**
 2. So, whatever task or burden God metes to us should be done with zealous integrity. **COL 3:23-24.**
 - B. It would remind the apostles that God may not give all labourers in His kingdom the same burdens to bear. Others which should enter the kingdom after the apostles may not be required to endure what they would endure.
 - C. It would prepare them for the opening of the door of faith unto the Gentiles, who by grace would be made fellowheirs and fellowcitizens with Jewish saints. **EPH 3:6.**
 - D. It would inspire them (and us) to remember that it is God's kingdom.
 1. We must ever remember that He is the potter and we are only the clay.
 2. We are not in a position to dictate terms of service or reward to our Master. **LUK 17:7-10; ROM 4:4.**

- III. The church is the vineyard and the Lord is the householder to Whom the vineyard belongs. **1CO 3:5-9; 1TIM 3:15.**

- IV. The parable has manifold applications, but observe in general:
 - A. Men are called to God's work. Those who would follow Christ are expected to labour for Him. **MAT 11:28-29.**
 1. Time spent without the vineyard/church is idle time, profitable for nobody.
 2. Idleness and slothfulness are alike condemned and are inroads to greater sins. **PRO 19:15; EZE 16:49.**
 3. It is the diligent, not the slothful who have hope of a full reward. **HEB 6:11-12; 2JO 1:8.**
 - B. Men are called to labour IN THE VINEYARD (the church) as repented, believing, baptized, submitted members of Christ's kingdom.
 1. The householder did not simply find idle men and tell them to go do something useful anywhere they saw fit.
 2. This opposes the false idea that a person can be a true labourer for Christ outside of His church.
 - C. Those who labour IN the vineyard and ONLY those who labour in the vineyard are seen to receive a reward for their labour.
 1. This illustrates the hope of true saints. Everyone who embraces Christ through His church may expect glory. **2TH 1:7-10; 2PE 1:10-11.**

2. It is a foolish assumption that one has hope of eternal reward if he avoids identification with Christ through His church. Sin is no evidence of grace. **JAM 4:17.**
- D. The householder is a just recompenser. He does not defer payment when the time of reward is due. **v. 8 c/w LEV 19:13; PRO 3:27.**
1. All those who embrace Christ in baptism may expect the reward of a place in His church by day's end and the seal of God. **ACT 2:38-41; EPH 1:13-14.**
 2. At death, all true saints may expect to be with the Lord. **LUK 16:22; PHIL 1:23.**
 - a. This opposes the concepts of purgatory or limbo.
 - b. This also opposes the idea of soul-sleep (psychopannychism).
 3. At Christ's return, all true saints shall be made incorruptible heirs of glory. **1CO 15:51-52.**
- E. There was murmuring among the labourers because of envy at the goodness the Master showed towards someone else. **vs. 9-12.**
1. **(JAM 4:5)** Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?
 2. They found fault with the way the Master handled His affairs, believing themselves more righteous than Him. **JOB 40:8.**
 3. The murmuring invited rebuke. Therefore we ought not to murmur against the Lord when He doesn't do things our way. **PHIL 2:14-15.**
- V. Consider that the lifespan of a man is likened unto the day of an hireling. **JOB 14:5-6.**
- A. God does not call everyone to serve in His kingdom at the same time of life.
 - B. Some, like Samuel, may be called to labour in the early morning of their life, as youths. **1SAM 2:18.**
 - C. Others may be called to labour in God's kingdom later in life.
 - D. Those who have laboured faithfully all their days should not be bitter if the Master should reward a late-comer. **LUK 15:28-30.**
- VI. What if God should allow some to bear a greater burden than others in His kingdom?
- A. Is God unjust to grant that some heroes of faith work great victories and witness great deliverances while others suffered great tribulation? **HEB 11:33-36.**
 - B. Is God unjust if He should require Peter to bear more than John? **JOH 21:19-22.**
- VII. Consider that these apostles were those who *continued with the Lord in His temptations*. **LUK 22:28.**
- A. The Apostle Paul was not one of them, but was called much later, "...as of one born out of due time" (**1CO 15:8**).
 - B. What if God should choose to use Paul to an even greater degree than the other Apostles? **1CO 15:10.**
 - C. Is it unfair that God should take someone as unlikely as Saul of Tarsus and use him as an example of the mercy and longsuffering of God? **1TI 1:15-16.**
- VIII. Consider that the Jews, who had borne the burden of the law and were the firstfruits of the gospel kingdom would witness Gentiles suddenly being granted gospel privileges. **ACT 11:15-18.**
- A. In many ways, the Gentiles would far excel the Jews in devotion to God once they were introduced to His kingdom.
 - B. This parable was a frank warning to not place too much emphasis history or pedigree. **LUK 13:28-30.**

- IX. “So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called but few chosen” (v. 16).
- A. It is an observable phenomenon that sometimes those who are the first converts to the faith, having speedily answered the gospel call, are outdone by some who are called later. This sometimes breeds resentment in the first-called, as here.
 - B. As it was for many Jews, who first had the kingdom, but no real grace (for God’s election is only a remnant, **ROM 11:5**), so in the church there may be tares among wheat, bad fish among good. **MAT 13:37-43, 47-50**.
 - C. Matthew Henry put it this way: “...Many are called with a common call, that are not chosen with a saving choice. All that are chosen from eternity, are effectually called, in the fulness of time (**ROM 8:30**), so that in making our effectual calling sure we make sure our election (**2PE 1:10**); but it is not so as to the outward call; many are called, and yet refuse (**PRO 1:24**), nay, as they are called to God, so they go from Him (**HOS 11:2, 7**), by which it appears that they were not chosen, for *the election will obtain*, **ROM 11:7**. Note, There are but few chosen Christians, in comparison with the many that are only called Christians; it therefore highly concerns us to build our hope for heaven upon the rock of an eternal choice, and not upon the sand of an external call...”
 - D. This parable should encourage us to labour for our Master all of our days, and be satisfied with His dealings with us, regardless of how He may deal with others.