

Laborers In the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)

Scripture Text:

1. "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.
2. When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard.
3. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place;
4. and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And so they went.
5. Again, he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing.
6. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he *said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day long?'
7. They *said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He *said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.'
8. "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard *said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.'
9. When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius.
10. When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius.
11. When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner,
12. saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.'
13. But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?'
14. Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you.
15. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?'
16. So, the last shall be first, and the first last." (Matthew 20:1-16 NASB1995)

Outline:

- I. The Gathering of the Laborers (vv.1-7)
- II. The Calling of the Laborers (v.8)
- III. The Paying of the Laborers (vv.9,10)
- IV. The Response of the Laborers (vv.11,12)
- V. The Response to the Laborers (vv.13-16)

Worksheet:

- I. The Gathering of the Laborers (vv.1-7)
 - a. "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard." (v.1)
 - i. **What** is being compared in this verse?
 - ii. **How** are they similar?
 - iii. **Who** is the "landowner"?
 - iv. **What** or **Who** is the "the kingdom of heaven" given the use of the phrase by Matthew throughout his gospel?
 - v. **What** does "early in the morning" denote in God's timetable?
 - vi. **Who** are the laborers?
 - vii. **What** is the "vineyard"?
 - viii. **What** time was it when the "landowner" sent the first group of "laborers" into the vineyard?
 - b. When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. (v.2)
 - i. **What** took place between the "landowner" and the first group of "laborers"?
 - ii. **What** did they agree to?
 - iii. Was this a *fair* agreement to both the "landowner" and the "laborers"?
 - iv. Was this a *fair* wage that they had agreed upon? Was the landowner ripping them off? Were the laborers getting a "fair" wage for a days work?
 - v. **What** was a denarius worth in Jesus' time relative to a laborers wage?
 - vi. **When** did the "landowner" send "them into his vineyard"?
 - c. and he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; (v.3)
 - i. **What** time was it when the landowner when out a second time to find laborers?
 - ii. **What** were these "others" doing in the market place?
 - iii. **Who** can they be compared to in our day and age?
 - d. and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And so they went (v.4)

- i. **What** was missing from the interaction between the “landowner” and this second group of “laborers” hired during the “third hour”?
 - ii. **Why** do you suppose this was not included in their interaction?
 - iii. **What** did the landowner promise to pay them?
 - iv. Was this sufficient for them?
 - v. **How** do we know this?
 - e. Again, he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. (v.5)
 - i. **What** time was it at the “sixth hour”?
 - ii. **What** time was it at the “ninth hour”?
 - iii. **What** was missing from the interaction between the “landowner” and those hired in the “sixth hour” and those hired in the “ninth hour”?
 - iv. **What** was the agreed upon wage from both of these two groups?
 - v. **How** do we know this?
 - f. and about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he *said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day long?’ (v.6)
 - i. **What** time was this last group “found” standing around?
 - ii. **How** much time was left in the workday at this particular time?
 - iii. **What** form did the question of the “landowner” take when addressing this last group of workers at the “eleventh hour”?
 - iv. **Why** do you suppose the “landowner” spoke to them in this way?
 - g. They *said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He *said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ (v.7)
 - i. **What** was their response to Jesus’ question posed to them in the form of a rebuke?
 - ii. Was this response a *good* excuse? Was it intended to be so?
 - iii. **What** can be said about this group’s work ethic? **How** much time had they wasted?
 - iv. **What** time was coming “when no man can work” literally?
 - v. **What** time is coming “when no man can work” figuratively?
 - vi. **Where** did the “landowner” send them?
 - vii. **What** was the point?
- II. The Calling of the Laborers (v.8)
 - a. “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard *said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, (v.8a)
 - i. **When** did the work day end?
 - ii. **Who** declared that the workday had ended?
 - iii. **Who** was told to “call the laborers”?
 - iv. **What** was the foreman told to do?
 - b. beginning with the last group to the first.’ (v.8b)
 - i. **Who** was to get paid first?

- ii. **Who** was to get paid last?
 - iii. **Was** this fair? **Why** or **why not**?
 - iv. **Who** had to wait the least amount of time to get paid?
 - v. **Who** had to wait the greatest amount of time to get paid?
 - vi. According to human wisdom **who** should have gotten paid first?
 - vii. **Why** was this done this way?
- III. The Paying of the Laborers (vv.9,10)
- a. When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. (v.9)
 - i. **How** much did those who worked “one hour” get?
 - ii. **What** was this equivalent to again?
 - iii. Had they worked enough for a “days wage”?
 - b. When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. (v.10)
 - i. **What** caused those who were “hired first” to believe that they should receive more than what they had agreed to work for?
 - ii. Were they right to assume that they would get more? Did they deserve more?
 - iii. Were they taken advantage of by the landowner?
- IV. The Response of the Laborers (vv.11,12)
- a. When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, (v.11)
 - i. Were the laborers who had worked twelve hours justified in their “grumbling” at the landowner?
 - ii. Was the landowner “unjust” or “unfair”?
 - iii. Was it right for everyone to be paid “equally” as much? **Why** or **Why not**?
 - b. saying, ‘These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day. (v.12)
 - i. **What** was the rationale offered for their “grumbling”?
 - ii. If they had been paid first and went on their way, would they have grumbled?
 - iii. **Where** they more angry that they had received what they had agreed upon, or more so because others who worked less time than they, had received the same pay?
 - iv. **What** reason did they offer to the landowner as to why “these last men” should not have received the same pay as they?
 - v. Had the landowner cheated them or swindled them in any way?
- V. The Response to the Laborers (vv.13-16)
- a. But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? (v.13)
 - i. The first group of laborers had treated and spoken to the landowner as if he were an _____, whereas the landowner spoke to them as if they were _____.

- ii. **What** was the rationale that was offered by the landowner to the first group of laborers hired in the first hour of the day?
 - iii. The landowner use a “friendly _____” to prove that he had done them “no _____.”
- b. Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. (v.14)
- i. **What** was revealed about the true source of the anger held by the first group of workers?
 - ii. **What** does this say about their heart?
 - iii. **What** modern day examples do we see today that mirror this same situation and attitude?
 - iv. From a spiritual standpoint, **what** does this parable speak of considering Jesus’ initial words, “the kingdom of heaven is like”?
 - v. Is there a difference between “eternal *life*” and “eternal *rewards*”? If, so **what** is the difference?
- c. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?’ (v.15)
- i. **Who** does “eternal life” come from, who does it belong to and who gives it?
 - ii. **Who** has a right to dispense it as they see fit?
 - iii. Did the landowner do something that was “unlawful” by doing what he did?
 - iv. **What** was the true point of contention in this parable and who was responsible for it?
 - v. Is this not the same problem we face today? Name some examples of how people today react in much the same way when someone seems to be getting more than they should. Getting more than their “fair share” or paying less than their “fair share”.
 - vi. **What** is the concept of “fair share” based upon? **Who** decides this? Is that fair?
 - vii. **Where** does envy come into this subject matter?
- d. So, the last shall be first, and the first last.” (v.16)
- i. **What** does this cryptic statement mean?
 - ii. **What** hour would you say that the Apostle John came into the vineyard? The Apostle Paul? The thief on the cross who believed? **What** were they all given? Is God “unjust” for allowing this to be the case?
 - iii. Only God knows what our rewards will be in the end...so be careful how you build! (I Corinthians 3:8-15)
 - iv. God is not “unjust”, nor guilty of “injustice”, but rich in “non-justice.”