



Rev

Adult Education Lesson 3

Trust - Vineyard workers

Matthew Chapter 20, verses 1 through 16.

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Mt 20:1-16



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Much of this tract is commentary - don't take it as Gospel. It is here to encourage meditation and study. Use your gift of discernment, to find the truth.

Matthew Chapter 20, verses 1 through 16.



“For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is **an householder**, which went out early in the morning to hire **laborers** into his vineyard. And when **he had agreed with the laborers** for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and **whatsoever is right I will give you.**

And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the **eleventh hour** he went out, and **found others** standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, **Because no man hath hired us.** He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; *and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.* So when even was come, the **lord of the vineyard** saith unto his **steward**, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the **eleventh hour**, they received every man a penny.

But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they **murmured** against the good man of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

But **he answered one of them**, and said, **Friend**, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? **Take that thine is, and go thy way:** I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: *for many be called, but few chosen.*”

No Trust

Trust, He decides

Trust, whatever they need

murmuring is not good.

Capitalized

Go away from the vineyard.

This parable was told to the Disciples just before Jesus went to Jerusalem for his trial and execution. I think that they must have felt very nervous about their future. It would be expected that during the last days, all the talk would be about the immediate future. Most of His followers were expecting some sort of catastrophe to occur when Jesus died. So it would be incongruous to think that the disciples, when they heard this parable, were thinking about fair wages, or about being treated fairly. They had for the previous 1- 3 years been without any wages of any kind and had been completely dependent on the generosity of others. Their experience had been that Jesus treatment of his fellow men had always been fair. Conversely they could not have seen this parable as an indictment that the world wasn't fair, this was 'old' news to these seasoned missionaries.

The most probable purpose that this parable could have for the Disciples, in my opinion, was to reassure and comfort them. Jesus promises that they have no need to worry about how they are going to survive.

His guarantee that they would be the first into the Kingdom, and that they would be rewarded must have seemed incredible to them considering the immediate future, but they soon learned that He had been prophetic.



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The story - has a deeper meaning. Jesus told the story to answer the Disciples concerns about what was going to happen to them now that they had forsaken everything. Jesus had warned them that His end was near - it was *the eleventh hour* (see Matthew chapter 20, verse 18).

God the Father is the lord of the vineyard in the synoptic gospels. And He is also Lord of the House (Universe) in Jewish literature. Here God the Father is called 'an householder'^A and lord of the vineyard. Vineyard is another name for Israel (land and people). Jesus is sent by the lord of the vineyard^B and he is the Steward in this story.

The laborers **that had agreed to a penny a day** for their services is a metaphor for the Pharisees who were priests and teachers in the service of God and who were paid wages as prescribed by law.

The people that **no one had hired** means - those on the outside of society, the sinners, harlots, publicans, and those (including his disciples). who were despised by the pious Jews.

At the eleventh hour, God the Father **called** these people and told them they would *receive whatsoever is right* (from the Steward). They trusted the Steward and in faith began the work with no promise of financial reward.

At the end of the day, God the Father tells Jesus to pay the workers. The last group to be hired were rewarded by Jesus, (and accorded righteousness for their trust in him, and their faith, that is what I think is implied by "*receive whatsoever is right*")^C. They were allowed to remain in the Vineyard, and they received a penny^D.

The first group hired by the householder (God the Father) and the last group to be paid, were **laborers** (Pharisees). The Steward paid them what was due by law (*take that thine is*).

^A(see also Matthew chapter 21 verse 33 for the same usage)

^B(see Matthew chapter 21 verse 38)

^CAs was Abraham.

^DThe payment was generous for the work done.

(Matthew 20:18) Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death,

(Matthew 21:33) Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:

They argued with the Steward (Jesus) that it was not right to treat the latecomers equal to them, as they had worked longer hours^A, so they demanded more money (which was unlawful). They murmured against the man of the house (God the Father) who had set their wages. This made the Steward angry. Also he did not appreciate these laborers (Pharisees) considered themselves more worthy than the others. Who were they to say what a man was worth? And what had the hours they worked to do with anything? The Steward was not paying for the hours worked, but for the contribution each had made. Therefore he paid the laborers only what was theirs by rights (by law), and then asked them to leave the vineyard^B.

The priests always considered the poor last, and often neglected them, but Jesus treated the poor with respect, and welcomed them to join him. The priests criticized Jesus for treating the poor equally and murmured amongst themselves. In fact in God's new kingdom. Jesus would put the priests last and the poor first.

"*So the last* (to be given any consideration by you Pharisees) *shall be first* (to be called to the new kingdom), *and the first* (you Pharisees who always put yourself first, always get the best seats at the synagogue, and the place of honor at the banquet) *last* (to be called to the new kingdom)".

The wages of the laborers (Pharisees) had been previously set by God the Father (Priestly remuneration was set by law). Here in the vineyard (Kingdom of God), Jesus has authority to decide what a man is worth, and how he is to be rewarded - not society nor the law.

The phrases "*and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive*". and "*for many be called but few chosen*"^A appears in all bibles based on the Tyndale 1534, Great Bible, Bishop's Bible, KJV AV. 1611 to the KJV 21st Century, NKJV, Webster, Darby, WBS, YLT, etc.

I think that "*and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive*". which identifies Jesus as the decision maker and 'paymaster' makes the story more understandable, as Jesus is to be the final judge, and to reward each mans works not with money but with righteousness.

^APerhaps this was a comparison between the Pharisees who had been working the vineyard for God for 200 years and the latecomers who were being adopted into the kingdom by Jesus without the necessity of education etc., for which there was probably some resentment.

^BThey left with no reward, only the wages due to them.

This manuscript was written after the fall of the temple, probably in Antioch between AD 80 and AD 90 and was addressed to a predominantly Jewish audience and we can assume that few, if any Pharisees were present. Some of the converts could have been Greek speaking Jews.

Mark chapter 10 verse 31 But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last first.

Luke chapter 13 verse 30 And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.

Matthew chapter 21 verse 31, ...the Publicans and the Harlots will go in to the Kingdom of God before you (Chief Priests and Elders).

Laborers (Greek word **εργατης** ergates *er-gat'-ace*) means toilers and this word meaning includes teachers and manual laborers. In the story they are the manual laborers but , I think, Jesus is really suggesting they are the Pharisees.

It would require great faith to become fully dependent on Jesus for all our needs, though I have met missionaries who seem to have no source of income, and who, through the love and generosity of others, manage to raise a family, while doing the work of the Lord.

I met a man named John Joseph who has nothing but his bible and even that he said he would give away if someone needed it. I asked him how he had managed for these last few years. "On generosity of others?", I asked. "I couldn't depend on the generosity of others", he said. " I have often slept in the open air, and sometimes not eaten, but I always trust in God. I never worry."

Those of us who are not clergy and are called to work in the vineyard, must do so without bargaining with God for any payment. We are to enter into our labors with trust in Jesus and with faith that we will receive what is right. At the end of the day, Jesus will reward us as He sees fit.

Jesus wants no murmuring or complaints about this.

How can we apply this today in our life?

Are you trying to decide whether or not you have the time to do your duty to God? Is there some work at church that you are well qualified to help with? Has God called you but you hesitate because *no one at the Church has asked you?* You need to step up to the job, and do your duty towards God. If you don't seem to have time, ignore one of your worldly duties. Don't count the price of working for God. Don't wonder how you will benefit from the job. Don't try and bargain with God . Put your faith in Jesus, that He will reward you with righteousness, what more could you want?



The Views expressed here are strictly those of the author and probably disagree with what you have previously thought. Read other commentaries - meditate on the original KJV.

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