

## Episode #841 Matthew 20 Part 1-Parable of the Laborers

I. The purpose of the gospel of Matthew is to present Jesus as the Christ, the King of Israel. It is another grand treatise like John to prove to Israel Who Jesus really is. It is the book of being “in Israel,” in contrast to believers today who are “in Christ.”

II. The Lord had just stated that, in the kingdom of the heavens, many who are last will be first, and many first will be last. Now, He tells a parable illustrating what He means by this.

III. Parable of the Laborers. Matthew 20:1-16.

- A. Verse 1. This is another parable, found only in Matthew. Again it is a likeness of the “kingdom of the heavens.” “Early” is at the time of the fourth night watch, or before dawn. He wanted to hire laborers to start as soon as it was daylight. In the Old Testament, a vineyard is used figuratively for the nation of Israel. Jeremiah 12:7-12.
- B. Verse 2. A denarius was the average day’s salary for a laborer at that time. “Sent” is the Greek *apostello*. He didn’t just send them, but he commissioned them under his authority. They are authorized to go into his vineyard and do what needs to be done.
- C. Verse 3. We would guess the first group were hired about 6:00 in the morning, or at daybreak. This would now be around 9:00 AM. The third hour is the hour of the Lord’s crucifixion. Peter says it was not customary to be drunk at the third hour of the day. These were idle, meaning without work. They had not been hired.
- D. Verse 4. Receiving no promised salary, these trust in the goodness and fairness of the householder, and go.
- E. Verse 5. The sixth hour was about noon. This was when darkness fell during the Lord’s crucifixion. The Lord met the woman at the well at this hour. Peter prayed and had his vision of the great sheet at this hour. The ninth hour was about 3:00 in the afternoon. The darkness during the Lord’s crucifixion ended at this hour, and the Lord died. Peter and John went into the temple and healed the lame man at the beautiful gate at this hour. Cornelius saw his vision of the angel at this hour.
- F. Verse 6. The eleventh hour would be about 5:00 PM. Only about an hour of daylight for laboring remains. This is the only mention of this hour in the New Testament.
- G. Verse 7. We might wonder if they had searched diligently or not, but the Lord makes no statement regarding this whatsoever, only the fact and their answer. Again, they must trust in his honesty and generosity, as no salary is set.
- H. Verse 8. “Steward” is not *oikonomos*, house-ruler, as it often is, but *epitropos*, a guardian, overseer. They are to be rewarded in the reverse order of the amount of work they had done. This is *eschatos* for “last” and *protos* for “first.”
- I. Verse 9. These had only worked an hour, and yet they received a full day’s wages!
- J. Verse 10. These were thinking that they should get more for more work and a longer day. The Lord is not setting up a principle that one ought to pay the same for a partial day as a full day, but He is telling them an imaginary story that taught these precepts having to do with the kingdom of God. One who is saved later in life does not receive less reward from God than those who believed earlier. Those who live a short life do not receive a lesser reward than those who live longer.
- K. Verse 11. They murmured and complained against the householder as they realized that this was his doing, not that of his steward, who was only following his orders.

- L. Verse 12. They resented this, due to their superior effort. They had experienced noon's burning heat, whereas the eleventh hour men had only worked in the cool of the evening.
- M. Verse 13. "Friend" this seems to be a kindly manner of address. Like "comrade," more distant than a "friend." No injustice was done. Indeed, he had paid him a fair day's wage, and moreover what He had promised to pay him before he ever started working. But seeing the gracious increase others received, he now wants more.
- N. Verse 14. "I will" is the Greek *thelo*, I will or wish. It is his desire to give the laborers who worked less time the same wage. This great generosity did not cheat the original laborers, who had agreed to take the payment of one denarius for the day. Things are the same when God shows outrageous generosity today. We praise God for His grace, but this does not mean He cheats those who receive less in the way of grace, and are much more rewarded strictly according to their works. Grace is never owed, and it never incurs a debt. I hesitate strongly to go with Bullinger, that those hired at first are the twelve, then the 120 at the beginning of Acts were the third hour, those later in Acts the sixth hour, those toward the end of Acts the ninth, and those right before the kingdom the eleventh. The Lord does not set forth such details, and we should not make them up. The point is not to point to certain companies, but to point out a principle: that the Lord can reward as deserved or graciously beyond what is deserved as He sees fit. With us today, He chooses to be outrageously gracious. He cheats none.
- O. Verse 15. We could compare this to people like Zecharias and Elizabeth, Luke 1:6; as opposed to a man like Matthew, Matthew 9:9. When he followed the Lord he received all the same privileges as every other disciple. It is lawful for the Lord to do as He wills with his own, as he did here. This, of course, is when there is no contract. The Lord is not saying that everyone will receive exactly the same. Some will receive rewards that others do not receive. But this will not just be based on how much time one has been a believer. "I wish" is again *thelo*, as I will or desire. The "eye" is put for their opinion or reaction to what they see, their judgment of it. Not *ego eimi*, "I am," because in Greek the "good" is in between.

IV. Conclusion: The Lord desires to be generous with those who labor for Him. Those who die early in life or those who are saved later in life should not think that they have less opportunity to receive the Lord's favor than those who have more time to do it. The Lord desires to be generous, and He will always reward faithful service, whether it is short or long. Let us all use the time He has given us to serve Him faithfully!