

The Gospel of Matthew #54

The Parable of the Workers

Matt 20:1-16

Introduction:

1. This parable is connected to the last part of the previous chapter of Matt.
 - a. The previous chapter ended with the subject of rewards.
 - b. The parable teaches that rewards are a result of grace not debt.
2. The parable is about a farmer who hires laborers to work in his vineyard.
 - a. The hiring goes on throughout the day.
 - b. At the end of the day all the laborers are paid the same.
 - c. Those hired first complain, for they thought they should receive more than those who worked fewer hours.
 - d. The parable reveals, the complainers had no ground for their complaint
3. When men doubt the justice and fairness of God, it is always because of their own perverted views of justice and of Him.
 - a. God Himself is the standard for righteousness, and it is as impossible for Him to be unjust as to lie.
 - b. In no area is God's impartiality more significant and wonderful than in regard to salvation.
 - c. No matter what men's circumstances might be when they come to Christ, and no matter how well or poorly they may serve Him after coming, they receive the same glorious salvation.

I. The Calling of the Workers – vs 1-7

- The calling or hiring of the workers to work in the vineyard has much to do with the discrediting of the complaint at the end of the parable.

A. The Area in the Calling – “marketplace” – vs 3

3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,

1. The “marketplace” was the town square where men who needed work assembled in the morning and throughout the day looking for jobs.
2. Whether preparing a new vineyard, or pruning the vines of an existing vineyard or harvesting grapes, much labor would be needed
3. If a farmer or other employer wanted to hire extra workers he went to the marketplace and hired from those men gathered at the marketplace looking for work.
 - a) *Those laborers were unskilled and desperate for work*
 - b) *They were near the bottom of the socio-economic scale not far above beggars*

B. The Agreement in the Calling – vs 2

2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

1. Pursuit in the agreement.
 - a) *It is evident by the language in the text that these workers who were first hired early in the morning were in a bargaining mood and insisted on specific terms before they went to work.*
 - b) *As we will see later, those hired later in the day did not insist on any agreement for pay but left it up to the farmer to do them right.*
2. Pay in the agreement. “Penny.”
 - a) *It is unfortunate that the word “penny” is used by the translators, for it implies a very small wage inasmuch as penny in our language is a very small piece of money.*
 - b) *The word translated “penny” is denarius and in that day it was worth a good deal more than our penny.*
 - c) *It was the wage of the Roman soldier.*
 - d) *Therefore, the workers would feel they had struck a good bargain to get a denarius for a day's work.*
 - e) *When the day ends they will not be so happy about their bargain.*

BYZ Matthew 20:1 Ὁμοία γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ἀνθρώπων οἰκοδεσπότη, ὅστις ἐξῆλθεν ἅμα πρωτὶ μισθῶσασθαι ἐργάτας εἰς τὸν ἀμπελῶνα αὐτοῦ.

Early in the morning (hama prōi). A classic idiom. Hama as an “improper” preposition is common in the papyri. Prōi is just an adverb in the locative. At the same time with early dawn, break of day, country fashion for starting to work. To hire (misthōsasthai). The middle voice aorist tense, to hire for oneself.

BYZ Matthew 20:2 Καὶ συμφωνήσας μετὰ τῶν ἐργατῶν ἐκ δηναρίου τὴν ἡμέραν, ἀπέστειλεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν ἀμπελῶνα αὐτοῦ.

For a penny a day (ek dēnariou tēn hēmeran). See note on §Matthew 18:28. “Penny” is not adequate, “shilling” Moffatt has it. The ek with the ablative represents the agreement (sunphōnēsas) with the workmen (ergatōn). “The day” the Greek has it, an accusative of extent of time.

BYZ Matthew 20:3 Καὶ ἐξελθὼν περὶ τρίτην ὥραν, εἶδεν ἄλλους ἐστῶτας ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ ἀργούς.

Standing in the marketplace idle (hestōtas agorai argous). The marketplace was the place where men and masters met for bargaining. At Hamadan in Persia, Morier in Second Journey through Persia, as cited by Trench in his Parables, says: “We observed every morning, before the sun rose, that a numerous band of peasants were collected, with spades in their hands, waiting to be hired for the day to work in the surrounding fields.”

C. The Additions in the Calling →

1. 4x after the initial hiring, the farmer went back to the marketplace to hire more workers.
2. Hiring additional men after the first hiring indicates the that farmer was not able to hire enough workers at the first calling of workers.
3. There was a lack of workers available.
4. This problem of lack of laborers is often found in the Lord's work.
5. In fact Christ said this was a problem in His work. *"The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few"* ([Matt 9:37](#))
6. The people are plenteous, but not the workers.
7. Too many folk do not want to work—be it in church or in society.

D. The Admonishment in the Calling

6 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?

1. The admonishment was given to those hired last, at the eleventh hour.
2. Though they had an excuse (*"because no man hath hired us"* –vs 7), it was a very poor excuse; for had they been in the marketplace earlier in the day, they would have been hired.
3. Like so many, they were lazy and so did not show up early in the day.
4. Though failure blighted their life, they were willing to work and did.
5. This is an encouragement to those who are saved late in life or who have wasted much of their life not doing anything for God.
6. True repentance will endeavor to use what is left.
7. Vance Havner wrote a book after he was eighty entitled, "Lord of What's Left" which exhorted folk to be diligent and use what was left.
8. They may have wasted much in the past but they still can be diligent and make what's left worthwhile.
9. It is surprising how much you can do with what's left if you are diligent and dedicated.

E. The Acquiescing in the Calling

4 And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.

1. The first workers hired bargained for a denarius for the day.
2. The ones hired later simply acquiesced to the farmer's assurance he would pay them what was right.
3. They ended up getting as much as those hired early in the day.
4. What is the lesson? The lesson is that we need to quit bargaining with God and let God take care of the compensations.
5. You concern yourself with your responsibility; let God take care of the remuneration.

II. The Compensating of the Workers – vs 8-9

- Pay time finally came and the pay for the workers caused a controversy with some of the workers.

A. The Season of the Compensation

8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

1. *"When even was come"* pay was distributed.
2. In our day, we generally pay by the week or semi-monthly or monthly
3. But in those days, one was generally paid at the end of each day.
4. The farmer in the parable was a good man and faithfully made arrangements to pay his workers when the day was over.
5. The principle is that God will reward when the day (life) is over.
6. Some of the faithful may think the time is quite long from the work to the wages, but God will never be tardy in bestowing His blessed compensations.

3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, 5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. 6 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?

4 καὶ ἐκεῖνοις εἶπεν, Ὑπάγετε καὶ ὑμεῖς εἰς τὸν ἀμπελῶνα, καὶ ὁ ἐὰν ἦ δίκαιον δώσω ὑμῖν. 5 Οἱ δὲ ἀπῆλθον. Πάλιν ἐξεληθὼν περὶ ἕκτην καὶ ἐνάτην ὥραν, ἐποίησεν ὡσαύτως. 6 Οἱ δὲ ἀπῆλθον. Πάλιν ἐξεληθὼν περὶ ἕκτην καὶ ἐνάτην ὥραν, ἐποίησεν ὡσαύτως.

BYZ **Matthew 20:6** Περί δὲ τὴν ἑνδεκάτην ὥραν ἐξεληθὼν, εὗρεν ἄλλους ἐστῶτας ἀργοῦς, καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς, Τί ὧδε ἐστήκατε ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν ἀργοί; All the day idle (holēn tēn hēmeran argoi). Extent of time (accusative) again. Argoi is a privative and ergon, work, no work. The problem of the unemployed.

Y2 **Matthew 20:7** Λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Ὅτι οὐδεὶς ἡμᾶς ἐμισθώσατο. Λέγει αὐτοῖς, Ὑπάγετε καὶ ὑμεῖς εἰς τὸν ἀμπελῶνα, καὶ ὁ ἐὰν ἦ δίκαιον λήψεσθε.

Y2 **Matthew 20:8** Ὁψίας δὲ γενομένης λέγει ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος τῷ ἐπιτρόπῳ αὐτοῦ, Κάλεσον τοὺς ἐργάτας, καὶ ἀπόδος αὐτοῖς τὸν μισθόν, ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τῶν ἐσχάτων ἕως τῶν πρώτων.

B. The Sameness in the Compensation

9 And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

- Every worker was paid the same.
 1. Principle in the sameness
 - a) *Those who left the amount of pay up to the farmer discovered that grace provides a bigger blessing than merit*
 - b) *Those who bargained for the pay were compensated by merit.*
 - c) *If you want Divine blessings in large amounts, come via mercy not merit.*
 2. Prospects in the sameness
 - a) *The fact that all the workers got the same pay at the end of the day illustrates the fact that no matter when you get saved, you still get just as much of heaven as anyone else.*
 - b) *One who is saved late in life gets no less salvation than one saved earlier in life.*
 - c) *All the redeemed are equally saved.*

III. The Complaint by the Workers – vs 10-16

- When the fanner gave out the pay, there was some bitter complaining by the workers who were hired first.

A. The Cause of the Complaint

10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. 12 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.

- The cause of the complaint was twofold.
 1. Their expectation. "...have received more."
 - a) *This was unwarranted expectation, they had agreed for a denarius*
 - b) *This was a normal reaction – "That's not fair"*
 2. Their endurance. "Have borne the burden and heat"
 - a) *They have no complaint, for they agreed to bear the burden and heat of the day by their willingness to work all day for a denarius.*
 - b) *They may have been overdramatizing their case, but their basic description was correct*

B. The Contempt in the Complaint

11 And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,

1. Goodman of the house is from the same word as "householder" of v1
2. There was not a third person involved here.
3. The contempt was unjustified, because the workers had agreed at the beginning of the day for a denarius.
4. They had no one to blame but themselves, if they did not like their pay.
5. The householder/goodman was not at fault. He kept his word for the agreement.
6. We have many like these complainers today who sign contracts then want to renegotiate the contract when someone else gets a better deal.
7. They forget they signed the contract and are duty bound to fulfill it.

C. The Countering of the Complaint

- The farmer countered the complaint with some good arguments.
 1. The agreement in the countering

13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

 - a) *Friend = "hetairoi" – a casual friend, not a close friend*
 - b) *The owner let them know firmly, but courteously, that they were out of line*
 - c) *As we have already noted, the complaint was not justified, for the farmer paid the complaining workers exactly what they agreed upon before they began working in the vineyard.*

BYZ **Matthew 20:9** Καὶ ἐλθόντες οἱ περὶ τὴν ἑνδεκάτην ὥραν ἔλαβον ἀνὰ δηνάριον.

BYZ **Matthew 20:10** Ἐλθόντες δὲ οἱ πρῶτοι ἐνόμισαν ὅτι πλείονα λήψονται· καὶ ἔλαβον καὶ αὐτοὶ ἀνὰ δηνάριον.

Every man a penny (ana dēnariion kai autoi). Literally, "themselves also a denarius apiece" (distributive use of ana). Bruce asks if this householder was a humorist when he began to pay off the last first and paid each one a denarius according to agreement. False hopes had been raised in those who came first who got only what they had agreed to receive.

BYZ **Matthew 20:11** Λαβόντες δὲ ἐγόγγυζον κατὰ τοῦ οἰκοδεσπότου, They murmured (egogguzon). Onomatopoeic word, the meaning suiting the sound. Our words murmur and grumble are similar. Probably here inchoative imperfect, began to grumble. It occurs in old Ionic and in the papyri.

BYZ **Matthew 20:13** Ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν ἐνὶ αὐτῶν, Ἐταῖρε, οὐκ ἀδικῶ σε· οὐχὶ δηνάριον συνεφώνησάς μοι;

2. The advice in the countering

14 Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.

- a) *This was good advice.*
- b) *The way the sentence is constructed it suggests that the complainers in their protest refused to take their pay.*
- c) *The farmer advises them to take their pay; or if they are not careful, they will lose that for which they bargained and have no pay for their work.*
- d) *Their continued protesting could make matters a lot worse.*
- e) *We would like to see officials today deal this way more often with the greedy demands of unions.*

3. The authority in the countering

15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

- a) *The farmer had authority to pay as he pleased.*
- b) *The problem was not with the owner, but with the jealousy of the workers*
- c) *He could agree with workers as he wanted.*
- d) *He is sovereign; the workers cannot complain.*
- e) *So it is even more so with God.*
- f) *We cannot complain to God about our circumstances, for God is sovereign and can do as He pleases.*

4. The admonition in the countering

15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

- a) *This was a strong rebuke.*
- b) *Charity to the other workers was begrudged by the complainers.*
- c) *Those 11th hour workers were probably less capable and more needy than the all day workers who were hired first because they probably were the best workers*
- d) *They cannot stand for others to have more privileges and blessings than they have.*
- e) *This admonition applies to many in our day, too.*

5. The arrangements in the countering

16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

- There are two parts to this arrangement which reflect Divine arrangement.

a) The reversal part.

- (1) The reversal statement also preceded the parable ([Matt 19:30](#)).
- (2) The first hired were the last paid ([Matthew 20:8](#)).
- (3) When God reverses things, there is a justified reason. Esau was first, but Jacob was made first.
- (4) Why? Because Jacob valued spiritual matters. Many who are saved for a long time are passed in spiritual growth by new converts and are given higher positions in church.
- (5) The "charter" members get very upset when the "last" become "first." But it is their own fault.

b) The rejection part

- (1) *"Many be called, but few chosen."*
- (2) Many are called but few are chosen because many of the called fail to respond to the call.
- (3) Many given opportunity fail to use that opportunity, so they do not gain ("chosen") the blessing.
- (4) God's arrangements are justified.
- (5) Eternity will vindicate all reversals and rejections.

BYZ **Matthew 20:14** Ἄρον τὸ σὸν καὶ ὑπάγε· θέλω δὲ τούτῳ τῷ ἔσχάτῳ δοῦναι ὡς καὶ σοί.

Take up (aron). First aorist active imperative of airō. Pick up, as if he had saucily refused to take it from the table or had contemptuously thrown the denarius on the ground. If the first had been paid first and sent away, there would probably have been no murmuring, but "the murmuring is needed to bring out the lesson" (Plummer). The dēnarius was the common wage of a day labourer at that time.

What I will (ho thelō). This is the point of the parable, the will of the householder.

With mine own (en tois emois). In the sphere of my own affairs. There is in the Koiné an extension of the instrumental use of en.

BYZ **Matthew 20:15** Ἡ οὐκ ἔξεστίν μοι ποιῆσαι ὃ θέλω ἐν τοῖς ἐμοῖς; Εἰ ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς σου πονηρὸς ἐστίν, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἀγαθὸς εἰμι;

BYZ **Matthew 20:16** Οὕτως ἔσονται οἱ ἔσχατοι πρῶτοι, καὶ οἱ πρῶτοι ἔσχατοι· πολλοὶ γάρ εἰσιν κλητοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἐκλεκτοί.

Conclusion:

1. Jesus explicitly said this parable was about the kingdom of heaven – vs 1
2. The vineyard is the kingdom itself, the land owner is God the Father
3. The foreman is Jesus Christ and the laborers are believers
4. The penny is eternal life which all receive equally when trusting in Christ
5. The penitent thief who turned to Jesus on the cross received the same salvation as the apostles
 - a. He did not even have one hour to serve Christ whereas some of the apostles served the Lord far into old age
 - b. The thief knew just enough to trust Christ as Savior and the apostles spend three years living with Jesus and then years serving Him
6. They were equally saved and stand equally before the Lord in heaven
7. The Lord here is not teaching about rewards, but the equality of salvation
 - a. Believing tax collectors, prostitutes, criminals and social outcasts will have the same heavenly residence as Paul, Spurgeon, Carey
8. It is true that believers will be rewarded for service and faithfulness

1Co 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.
9. Just as the landowner went out looking for workers, it is the Lord who sovereignly initiates and accomplishes salvation
10. A tenth and final principle is that of God's sovereign, overarching grace. From beginning to end, the parable pictures God's divine, boundless grace. The men's work had absolutely no relationship to what they were paid. Even less do men's works of supposed righteousness have any relationship to what they receive through faith in Jesus Christ.