

**Work in the Vineyard**  
Harmony M.B.C., August 26, 2012  
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**Matthew 20:1-15**

**I. Mat 20:1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that is* an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.**

- ❖ Most of us have never thought about the kingdom of heaven as a kind of employer, but Jesus' parable here should cause us to realize that one aspect of the kingdom is exactly like that.
- ❖ Now, the kingdom of heaven is God's corporation. Everything that has to do with God's ownership or business is part of that corporation. That means that the earth is drawn into the corporate business of God. Likewise, humans are also
- ❖ The vineyard in this parable should be viewed as the Lord's church;
  - In a vineyard, the main business is about grape production.
  - In the Lord's church the main business is production of spiritual fruit. Although there is no mention here of grapes, the fact that the object of labor here is a vineyard should make us think of grapes as the product that is being cultivated. We won't get into the quality of work of these laborers, but we ought to recognize that their work involves something about fruit production.
- ❖ Some people may imagine that being in the Lord's church is just a privilege where a member can walk into a nice shaded garden and sit down and rest. I don't believe this lesson or any other about the Lord's church gives us any instructions which say that is the way church membership goes.
  - In **John 15:5** Jesus' uses a metaphor to draw a word picture where He says "I am the vine, ye are the branches." I don't think we have to try to associate Jesus' teaching in the use of this metaphor where He says "I am the vine, ye are the branches" with what He is teaching about a vineyard in our text. I think Jesus is using vineyard here in one way and using vine and branches in yet another way there.
  - We will stick to the meaning of the vineyard and the suggestions it makes to us here. In that **John 15** lesson, Christ is teaching about the essential relationship between Himself and believers and how that determines fruit production. Here, He is teaching a lesson about His sovereignty, how His power is revealed in the hiring of laborers into the work of the kingdom of heaven, and the snares of questioning or resenting His sovereignty.
  - The two lessons (the one in **John 15**, and the one here) about things related to a vineyard are like using the sun to teach about light on one hand and using it to teach about heat on the other.
- ❖ So, let's learn from our Lord today the lesson He is teaching here.
  - First, if we simply take our Lord's words in the way He spoke them, the man that is the householder is like the kingdom...or vice versa. Many times, scholars and teachers get off course right here by making the householder to be Jesus Christ. We need not translate the householder to be Christ if we simply remember that the influences of the Kingdom of heaven are a direct reflection of Christ's power and really reveal His activity.
  - So, to get off to a good start, we want to say that the manifestation of Christ's influence as He unfolds His plans for the Kingdom is like this householder (who went out early to

hire laborers to work in His vineyard)

- ❖ From the beginning, Christ always intended to stock His church with people who would tend to the things in it.
  - In a vineyard, there is hoeing to do, pruning to do, weeding to do, watering to do, fertilizing to do, getting rid of pests, etc., etc.
  - This is a great illustration of the many things there are to do in the Lord's church
  - Many people don't realize how much work there is to do in the Lord's vineyard. I think that may be why the Lord's churches are faltering and decreasing today. There's always something to do, but there isn't always someone to do it.

## **II. Mat 20:2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.**

- ❖ I want you to notice that there's no discussion about how this vineyard owner and the laborers agreed on how much the pay would be, but there seems to be some kind of collaboration in reaching an agreement on how much.
  - What this should teach us (since this is a statement about how the kingdom processes work) is that the Lord does not draft (draft implying that we are ordered to go) us to work in His church...rather, there is a spiritual understanding between us and Him about the reward (represented in our text by the penny) coming for such work.
- ❖ I also notice that this parable doesn't say anything about other people besides laborers being let into the vineyard, and this very thing may suggest to us that if the Kingdom of heaven is the power that brings somebody into the vineyard, they are laborers.
  - Paul mentioned something about this working in the vineyard in **1Cor. 9:17** as he wrote about his own labor: "For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me."
  - Notice that he understood that if working voluntarily (willingly) there would be a reward, but if he was unwilling, then He had a "dispensation" responsibility anyway.
  - When God's people are saved, I believe they set the stage for a contract with the Lord to do His work in the place where He puts them. If they are placed in the Lord's church, I believe this parable teaches us that it is a certain token from the Lord that they have been placed there to labor in the church (the vineyard). In this parable it would be at the time where these laborers agree for a penny a day.

## **III. Mat 20:3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,**

**Mat 20:4 And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.**

**Mat 20:5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.**

- ❖ The power that manages the Kingdom of heaven which calls men into the kingdom work did not end after the first century; neither did the job opportunities in the vineyard.
- ❖ There's another interesting fact about how Jesus mentioned this part. The third, sixth, and ninth hours in Jewish culture were, and still are among conservative groups, the hour of prayer. These hours of prayer were observed often by early Christians (The 120 were in the upper room in prayer at the third hour, and Peter was up on the roof top praying about the 6<sup>th</sup> hour when he had the vision about preaching to the Gentiles).

- ❖ So, I think Jesus hid a jewel of teaching in this statement that was meant to instruct and admonish us. What might that be?
  - That God may well choose times when His people get serious about praying for laborers for his vineyard to send in more laborers. Could this be the answer to why our churches are not growing? Are we not serious enough about the Lord sending more laborers into His vineyard?

**IV. Mat 20:6 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?**

**Mat 20:7 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.**

- ❖ There is still going to be work to be done...and additional laborers for that work...when we are very near to the Lord's coming
  - Churches are getting smaller and smaller, but the people of God in them are being pressured more and more by the evil of the world, by temptations snares, by the sophistication of temptations, by the weakening of spiritual principles worldwide and by the decay in religious principles and practice in the so-called Christian community.
  - So, laborers are needed as badly now as in the first century
- ❖ I want to pause here for just a minute and point out something. First, the attitude of this vineyard owner toward these men who appeared to be loafing suggests that whatever these guys represent, they are guilty by not being at work somewhere. Now, I can't help but suspect that the Lord is teaching us that these men represent believers who are loafing. If that is so, look at what this suggests:
  - There will be converts in the kingdom who are getting a free ride without assuming any responsibility; without even looking for a job in the kingdom, nor in the church.
  - Remember that the vineyard represents the church. When you think of a guy who owns some property where he has a vineyard, you have to conclude that the vineyard is not ALL of his property...this one was called a householder...which has broader meaning than just a "vineyard boss."
  - Note also that Jesus chose the words to have these men in the parable say, "no MAN hath hired us." I suspect that in His own deep way of teaching lessons within lessons that He is teaching us here that in the last days people will start getting the idea that unless some board of deacons, or some church pastoral committee, or some missionary association HIRES them, then they won't be having a job that has anything to do with the church.
  - (Briefly describe how you were led in pursuing laboring in the Lord's vineyard: the Sunday school teaching assignment; the missionary work, the witnessing, etc.).

**V. Mat 20:8 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.**

**Mat 20:9 And when they came that *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.**

**Mat 20:10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.**

**Mat 20:11 And when they had received *it*, they murmured against the goodman of the house,**

**Mat 20:12** 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.

- ❖ This is the part of the parable where we see the workers dissatisfied with their contract. They are probably wishing right about now that they had formed a union so that they could muscle the vineyard owner and maybe boycott to get more wages than they agreed to get at the start of the day.
  - Being dissatisfied with the way God does things is the first step toward messing up your spiritual life.
  - Bossing God is the second step toward trouble in one's spiritual life

**VI. Let's see how the householder answers them so we can see the reality of the sovereignty of God: Mat. 20:13** But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?

- ❖ First, people everywhere should learn not to blame God for their own decisions
- ❖ Second, people everywhere should avoid measuring fairness of God by what other people have versus what they have.
  - A lot of people in America are doing this today. You might say, "Well, they aren't measuring the fairness of God based on what they have versus what others have; they are measuring the fairness of their society by that."
  - I say that if we understand the sovereignty of God, we can't say that they are judging their society...they are judging the fairness of God, because He rules in heaven and on earth; no culture, no financial system, no group of people, no misfortune can decree that one man be in the lower income bracket while his neighbor is in the high income bracket. All things considered, the poor man cannot remain poor if God intends to make him rich, and the rich man cannot remain rich if God intends to make him poor. The sick man can't get well if God intends to keep him sick, and the well man can't get sick until God intends to make him sick. All things are of God. So, this noise in America about social justice (as the Marxists and communists in our society are calling it) is nothing more than what we see in our parable; it is men contending with God about their lot in life.

**VII. Now, let's see more about the right of God to do things the way He wants to:**

**Mat 20:14** Take *that* thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.

**Mat 20:15** Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

- ❖ The response of God to men about their contending with Him about the status in life is this: Take what I have given you and consider it fair, because you contracted with me for that kind of payment
  - Now, I need to talk about that for a minute: I believe the Lord will be able to show every human being in the last day that they had the kind of salary, the kind of life, the blessings and the troubles as a direct result of who they were in their lives; that is, their relationship with God becomes the contract or agreement of what they will be paid.
  - (I sometimes think we handle our contract with God like we do those on the internet when we want to download something or use some program on the internet to do something and we have to agree to the contract that those companies always put before us. How many of us, after having read through a few of those contracts, know that they

all say about the same thing, so we just click AGREE when the contract comes up without half reading it. This may be how we try to handle our agreement with the Lord, and as a result we may be tempted to act like some of these laborers in our parable)

- Let me say here that I am not talking about earthly money or possessions, although those could be part of the deal.
- As laborers in the Lord's vineyard, I think we make a contract with God about our spiritual pay based on both His input and ours; regardless of the age or era that we work in.
- I think whatever He rewards us with is fair regardless of how it stacks up alongside the rewards of others...past or present laborers (it is fair because He owns the vineyard and He has the all- powerful right to do as He pleases with the situation. But, let's remember that we have agreed to the terms and conditions).

### **VIII. Mat 20:16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.**

- ❖ Here we see that Jesus closes with what actually appears as a concluding judgment, or a final lesson to be learned. And it is. But what is it?
  - To begin, note that in v. 8, the lord of the vineyard had the paymaster begin paying everybody by starting with the ones who hired on last...the eleventh hour employees. Doesn't that seem a little strange? If you were looking at this band of workers, you would see that the ones who began early in the morning were tired, ragged, dirtier than those who only worked one hour. Their very appearance would make you have pity and want to get them out the door and home to supper. But, this vineyard owner does not do it that way. So, what is the lesson here?
  - First, God does not see things the way we do. Why? Because He can see way beyond the superficial, the carnal, the things that we measure by.
  - Second, it is the way of God to do things exactly opposite to what the wisdom and judgment of the human mind would do. Not because He is contrary to the human way, but because the human way is contrary to His way.
  - Third, as you think about first century evangelism and church work, you immediately think about how the Holy Spirit showed the power of God in a huge way. You think about the powerful, convincing witness of apostles who had been in the presence of the Lord and had witnessed His glorious resurrection. When you think of this, you can't help but realize that they went to work in the vineyard with what was the equivalent of power tools and high-tech material to do sweeping work in that vineyard!
  - Also, when you study history, you learn that the Christian religion, even though a lot of it was corrupted, held sway over the world for more than 1800 years after Christ.
  - But at the eleventh hour, those laborers are going into the vineyard with what might be like dull pocket knives and sticks to get the job done. Not because the Lord no longer has power, but because the spiritual vigor of the people of God has eroded through the centuries. All the compromise that centuries of rubbing shoulders with the world has brought us to the place that we are all but hamstrung in our spiritual efforts. Also, the world has gotten so resistant to the Spirit and so steeped in wickedness.
  - **BUT WE KEEP ON LABORING IN THE LORD'S VINEYARD EVEN AGAINST WHAT LOOKS LIKE INSURMOUNTABLE ODDS AND TOTAL RESISTANCE;**

praise to the grace and power of God that keeps us keeping on.

- And what is our pay? It is the same as those who labored in the morning. Meaning that the worth of end-time laborers is as valuable as those who labored at the beginning and in the middle.
- Then, let's think of the many people in the world that are called Christians and contrast that with the number of people that are chosen (by the election of God) Christians. Many are called Christians, but few are chosen Christians.
- Last, I think this rule of God should teach us that we have something really big to look forward to in eternity. That is, the spotlight of Christ on us, and preference will be shown toward us in the presence of all the laborers of the Lord who went on before us. I believe in that day the grace of God will be revealed in its greatest power and glory in the fact that we were able by that grace, in the face of all the opposition of a wicked world, to continue to value the labor in the vineyard, and to continue to pursue it.