

A Puzzling Parable

Matthew 20:1-16

PROPOSITION: One must not think himself "worthy" of some greater reward than another. All who serve faithfully will receive a just reward, whether the service is long or short, great or small.

INTRODUCTION:

1. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard is typical of Palestinian life in AD 30.
2. Who would pay someone who has worked only one hour the same as one who had worked twelve?
3. "The kingdom of heaven is like...."

DISCUSSION:

I. The Recruitment

- A. The master of the house went himself to hire the workers (Matt. 20:1).
 1. There was much work to do.
 2. He was anxious.
- B. God is seeking workers for His kingdom (cf. Isa. 65:1, 2). The kingdom is a place for work (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10).
- C. An agreement was made for a denarius per day (Matt. 20:2).
- D. God does not want men and women to be idle. He wants you to work in His church.

II. The Reward

- A. Hired laborers were to be paid at the end of each day (cf. Lev. 19:13).
- B. Those who came into the vineyard last were paid first and for a full day's work.
- C. Those who were hired at the first hour thought they would get more (Matt. 20:10).
- D. When they did not, their complaints were an acknowledgement of the master's generosity.
- E. The same idea was expressed by the householder: "Do you begrudge my generosity?" (v. 15).
- F. The owner's actions did not represent unfair treatment.
- G. The sovereignty of God is being emphasized.

III. The Reason

- A. "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (Matt. 19:30; 20:16).
- B. Greatness comes from the heart of the servant.
- C. The disciples were in danger of lapsing into feelings like those of the Pharisees.
- D. Peter made a boastful declaration in a bargaining spirit (cf. Matt. 19:27).
- E. The Lord made great promises to the apostles but with caution: "...and the last first."
- F. The principle: Nothing done for the Lord will lose its reward, but it does not follow that the more work that is done the more the reward will be (cf. Luke 17:7).
- G. Other lessons:
 1. Judgment Day will be a great "leveler," for God does not see as man sees.
 2. We must avoid a disposition that seeks to bargain with God.
 3. It is service, not seniority, that counts with God.
 4. God supplies our need, not our greed.

CONCLUSION: The Lord's teaching here does not contradict what He has taught at another time.

1. It does not negate the concept of degrees of blessedness (cf. Luke 19:11-27)
2. Neither does it encourage you to delay your obedience and service to God (cf. Matt. 25:13).

--Andy Kizer; 9th Ave. church of Christ; March 27, 2011