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Did Jesus Support Wage Discrimination?

Matthew 20:12: (NASB) *These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.*

Equal pay for equal work! When you hear that statement, you think, who wouldn't think that is a good idea? Who in their right mind would argue against such a thing? Did Jesus teach us a contrary lesson to this principle of equality? When we read the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, it sure seems to be teaching that God cares more about playing favorites than about treating people equally. Is that really the lesson that Jesus is teaching here?

To understand what the lesson is, we need to see why the lesson was needed. Jesus taught progressively, so let's go to the verses *before* the Parable. **These verses follow the sad departure of the rich young ruler:** Matthew 19:23-30: The disciples are dismayed because their social structure had taught them that a man who knew the Law, followed it and was wealthy, was blessed and surely fit for the kingdom. In Israel during Old Testament times, God's blessing was tied to the land and people being favored with physical goods. ²⁶*And looking at them Jesus said to them, with people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.* ²⁷*Then Peter said to him, Behold, we have left everything and followed you; what then will there be for us?*

Jesus gave them hope, but their reception of the hope had a twinge of personal ego attached: In other words, what are we going to get? We are better than that rich guy who is so blessed! Jesus gave them a very honest, hope-filled answer in verses 28 and 29. **This answer proves a really important principle of God's grace:** ³⁰*But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.*

This is not about order, but instead about stature. Here is a paraphrase of verse 30: "Those who you look at as privileged and closer to God because of their physical blessings and their strong desire to follow God's (Jewish) Law - those with the greatest (Jewish) social stature - are not necessarily the ones who will receive the greatest blessing. That is reserved for those who simply follow me with their whole heart, mind, soul and strength." This absolutely disputes today's idea of a "Prosperity Gospel."

Having said this, Jesus sees a need to deflate the potential egos of his closest followers:

Matthew 20:1: (NASB) *For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.*

- *The kingdom of heaven/vineyard:* The context of the development of the true church.
- *Landowner:* God Himself.

John 15:1: (NASB) *I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.*

- *Early in the morning:* Jesus was talking to those disciples with him in the earliest stage of the Gospel - their particular time in history.
- *Laborers:* Those who would be working (following Jesus) for the sake and spread of the Gospel.

Matthew 9:35-38

Matthew 20:2: (NASB) *When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

(Source: Biblical commentary by Adam Clarke) A penny. A Roman coin... worth about seven-pence halfpenny or seven-pence three farthings of our money, and equal to the Greek drachma. This appears to have been the ordinary price of a day's labor at that time.

The reward for the Christian working in the vineyard for the "day" of the Gospel was a fair wage: John 14:1-2: A common wage in the story represented what is really an uncommon, heavenly reward. Before Jesus came, this was never an opportunity. This shows God's inexhaustible grace!

- *Sent them into his vineyard* - Jesus prepared his disciples for their true ministry by sending them out while he was still with them.



Luke 10:1-4: The story tells us that early in the morning some went to work. The work day began at 6 am.

Matthew 20:3-4: (NASB) ³And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; ⁴and to those he said, you also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you. And so they went.

- *About the third hour* - Perhaps signifying the Gospel call to the Jews. Jesus began with his Apostles and disciples and built upon that foundation.

Others standing idle - needing to work; fellow Jews needing a cause.

Pentecost, as witnessed by a Jewish audience: Acts 2:5-6

The timing here is what gets our attention: Acts 2:14-15: ...¹⁵For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, *for it is only the third hour of the day.*

The third hour of the day - 9 am, note this was the same hour Jesus said in the Parable was when the next wave of workers were called to work.

The initial workers were the Apostles and any disciples that followed Jesus at the beginning when he physically was there. He was crucified, raised and after 40 days, ascended to heaven. Ten days later, the whole object of the Gospel message would shift. Something different happened with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost - and the Parable predicted this shift.

Peter at Pentecost continues the "third hour call" to the Jewish nation to work in the "vineyard": Acts 2:32-36

Matthew 20:4: (NASB) ...and to those he said, you also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you. And so they went.

The response of the "third hour workers" at Pentecost: Acts 2:37-38: This call went out to the Jewish nation. These workers were given a specific and limited task of vineyard work: witness to other Jews.

There was a hint given that others would be called later: Acts 2:39

Matthew 20:4: (NASB) ...and to those he said, you also go into the vineyard, and whatever is **right <1342>** I will give you. And so they went.

Right: Strongs #1342 δίκαιος dikaios dik'-ah-yos, righteous, observing divine laws

The third hour workers were not promised a denarius; rather, they were to be paid what was fair. They were not told exactly what they would make, but they could trust the vineyard owner. The Jews responded to the call because Peter at Pentecost showed them it was built upon the fulfillment of the Law. **Where the Law is fulfilled there is righteousness:** Romans 6:16-18: (NASB) ¹⁶Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in **righteousness <1343>**? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of **righteousness <1343>**.

Righteousness: Strongs #1343 δικαιοσύνη dikaiosune dik'-ah-yos-oo'-nay; 1) in a broad sense: state of him who is, as he ought to be, righteousness, the condition acceptable to God 2) the doctrine concerning the way in which man may attain a state approved of God 3) integrity, virtue, purity of life, rightness, correctness of thinking, feeling, and acting

Day labor was common in that day. But when you were someone's slave or indentured servant, you were compliant to your master's wishes. Here in Romans, thanks be to God that if you decide to be a slave to righteousness, the Master is our righteous God. It is hard work, but it will not be unfair. God will pay you for your dedication to righteousness.

Did Jesus support wage discrimination? We know the workers hired throughout the day will all get paid exactly the same amount of money. Is that fair? That is not the lesson being taught. Remember, the lesson started with *many who are first will be last; and the last, first*. This is about stature - where you think someone stands versus where they really stand in God's eyes - who are the most important by their attitude, humility and actions.



The symbol of *the early morning* shows us the Apostles (and a few disciples) are there first, to be joined by many who were ripe to be called of the Jewish nation in that *third hour*. There were just a few workers at the beginning, who worked hard to spread the Gospel when Jesus walked the earth. They were given the Holy Spirit (God's power and influence) first and it is then passed on through the ages. Remember the lesson of status given before this Parable and the human propensity to seek status among our peers. Ego gets in the way - the reason for the Parable of the Vineyard. Jesus would not allow ego to dominate the true church. Jesus taught that the workers would need to be humble as he was.

With this pattern of *the early morning* established, we now look for more of the same type of pattern as the Day of the Gospel unfolds and more workers are called in.

Matthew 20:5: (NASB) *Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing.*

The same thing happens as before: God called for work in the vineyard of the Gospel and offered "what is right" in lieu of a specific wage. Justification and its Gospel Age heavenly reward would be the payment to any who would heed the call.

The sixth hour and the ninth hour - Perhaps this means the call of the Gospel spreading on to the Gentiles in two distinct steps. (More on this soon!)

The sixth hour perhaps represented the door opening to the Gentiles: Acts 10:9-16: *The sixth hour* showed a monumental change, for no longer would anyone be excluded from God's favor. Cornelius would be the confirmation of this newly-opened sixth hour door, which would lead to the next phase of the call to work in the vineyard of the Gospel, the ninth hour.

The ninth hour represented the Gospel spreading far and wide as a result of the call of the Gentiles: Acts 10:30-35: *Ninth hour* - men of every nation could now work in the vineyard. Peter recognized the magnitude of the Gospel call being open to the whole world! **The opportunity for the Gospel to go worldwide had already been put in place - it just needed permission to spread outside of Judaism:** Acts 8:3-4

Matthew 20:6-7: (NASB) *⁶And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, why have you been standing here idle all day long? ⁷They said to him, because no one hired us. He said to them, you go into the vineyard too.*

About the eleventh hour - There is no hour of prayer to reference here; there is only the illustration of the very last call to the work of the Gospel, which would seem to be at the very end of the Gospel Age. John 9:1-4: As long as it is still the day of the Gospel, there is work to be done. Even at the very end, there would be workers called in. But at some point this will stop - *night is coming when no one can work*. Remember, the Parable of the Vineyard is not about time; it is about status and stature.

The idea of only one hour left: Matthew 26:40-41: Interestingly, Peter figures into the lesson again.

Matthew 20:6-7: (NASB) *⁶And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, why have you been standing here idle all day long? ⁷They said to him, because no one hired us. He said to them, you go into the vineyard too.*

There is a necessity for workers to always be entering the vineyard work. The eleventh hour workers were really recipients of grace, being given a chance at an opportunity that was almost over. But the amount of work they had to do was no less than the work of those previously hired. Everyone living today following in Jesus' footsteps at the end of the Gospel Age are those eleventh hour workers. We benefit greatly from those workers who went before us. Romans 10:12-15: We would be lost at the eleventh hour if not for those working in the vineyard the whole Gospel Age. We are in a special place of blessing with the increase of knowledge. We can do more work in this one "hour." This program is an example. We have hundreds of Bible translations and commentaries available with a mouse click, allowing us to prepare a comprehensive Bible study every week.

The feet of those who bring good news - Picturing the church as a body with Jesus as the head, the feet are furthest away but still part of the body. *The feet* are the last members who are called, chosen and faithful.



The lesson is not, "They worked only an hour"; but instead, "They worked under different circumstances." The lesson is about the attitude of the workers.

Here the parable changes: It is no longer a prophetic process; rather, is now a pointed question to the Apostles, putting them in the same light as the rich young ruler with his status, privilege and sorrow.

Matthew 20:8-9: (NASB) ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first. ⁹When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius.

Those who worked only one hour got paid in front of everyone else.

The workers are only identified by groups, reinforcing the lesson of God's Grace bestowed upon all who would receive the call of Christ. The Apostles, the called-out Jews, the opportunity for the Gentiles, then the worldwide harvesting of the Gentiles and finally those who would be working only at the very end of the Gospel age.

Matthew 20:10-15: (NASB) ¹⁰When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, ¹²saying, These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.

This is the practical application part of the story for the Apostles.

This was the type of thinking the Pharisees had - a pride of position: Luke 15:2: The Apostles had to be made aware of this trap so they would not fall into it. *They themselves were now in the same position as the rich young ruler - they had every advantage, they knew Jesus personally and were there from the start. Their personal egos expected recognition.*

¹³But he answered and said to one of them, Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. ¹⁵Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?

Romans 9:20-21: The Apostles and the earliest church *did have to go through a kind of heat that those at the end do not* - they only knew the kingdom would come. The Gospel was not yet written down and they could not see prophecy fulfilled, such as Israel becoming a nation in modern time. Their trials were far more (for the most part) physical and their persecution was a very outward manifestation... they bore the heat!

...Or is your eye envious because I am generous?

Romans 9:14-16: Could we also be the subject of this parable, looking upon ourselves as more blessed and more deserving than others? Are we misapplying God's grace as well? Have we done what we contracted our lives to do? We are not to be like that rich young ruler and end up sorrowful. We are not to be tied up in our self-worth and instead should focus on God's grace.

These are the words Jesus spoke immediately before AND after the Parable: Matthew 19:30 and Matthew 20:16: (NASB) *So the last shall be first, and the first last.* The proclaiming of the Gospel is what is focused on in this Vineyard Parable throughout the entire "day" of the Gospel Age. When it comes to receiving their reward, those who would have had to bear the heat of the day, those who had the most stature, will in fact receive their just reward (see what Jesus told the Apostles before the Parable) but *not above* those who labored under *seemingly less strenuous conditions*. This is a lesson of stature - all were called and all labored. Focus on what is most important and not ego. There is only one calling to only one body of Christ. It is a call of grace, by grace and for the bestowing of grace! God's grace recognizes no position; it only blesses those who align themselves with it. Do not judge others against ourselves. Thank God He is gracious to all His workers!

**So, did Jesus support wage discrimination?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!**

Workers in the Vineyard Representing Expanding Stages of the Gospel Call

Hired Early in the Morning	Hired in the 3rd Hour	Hired in the 6th Hour	Hired in the 9th Hour	Hired in the 11th Hour
The Apostles and early disciples with Jesus among them	Predicted the Gospel call would go out to the Jewish nation	Predicted the Gospel call would go out to the Gentiles	Predicted the Gospel call would spread far and wide beyond Israel	Predicted there would still be Gospel work to be done even at the very end
	<u>Acts 2:14-15:</u> Pentecost reference to the 3rd hour - the Gospel call went out exclusively to the Jewish nation	<u>Acts 10:9-16:</u> Peter and Cornelius - the Gospel call was expanded to the Gentiles	<u>Acts 10:30-35:</u> Peter announced the call was open to "every nation"	<u>Romans 10:15:</u> "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!"
PETER: <u>Matthew 19:27:</u> "What then will there be for us?"	PETER: <u>Acts 2:36:</u> "Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ."	PETER: <u>Acts 10:9,13:</u> Peter receives the vision. "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy."	PETER: <u>Acts 10:34-35:</u> "I most certainly understand...in every nation the man who...does what is right is welcome to Him."	PETER: <u>Matthew 26:40:</u> "You could not keep watch with me for one hour?"