

Matthew 20:1-16; I Cor. 12:27-31; Working in the Master's Vineyard I. The Diversity of Labor II. The Generous Wage III. The Perceived Offense

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who are you working for and why do you work? I imagine that most of us work because we know that only those who work get paid- right? But not always. I heard of one hospital worker in Italy that was paid over 650K over 15 years but never actually went to work! Also seen in the guaranteed income program in California- which pays people who don't go to work. But that is not normal- you expect to go to work instead of being paid to not work. It is not fair for people to get paid if they did not do the work, right? The problem is that this concept of fairness starts to cloud our view of God's generosity. So today we are going to consider what faithfulness looks like within the household of God. How do we know who will be great- and what it means to be first in the kingdom? We consider this theme: Jesus Christ emphasizes God's grace as He reorients our concept of being first and last.

### **I. The Diversity of Labor**

In our first point we consider the diversity of labor- how our passage brings different people and times before us. In verse 1, the master of the house goes out early and he starts hiring laborers to work in his vineyard. So if Jesus is the master of God's house, then this is a parable about Jesus hiring people- or we could say- sending laborers into the field. So laborers are invited, called and sent into the field at all hours of the day. Some are called and sent at 6AM- and then other at 2- or 3-hour intervals- until 6PM. So there are many laborers called and sent at all hours of the day. Some of these men worked the whole, 12-hour shift while others only worked 1 hour. At the end of the day, each laborer is given the same wage- every worker receives the payment of one day's earnings or 1 denarius. Now the parable hinges on the diversity of labor and shared reward- and Jesus is emphasizing this point. Within the kingdom of God, there are many different people and times in which people are called. This diversity can be seen in many different ways. The first way that this diversity is seen is in the ages of those who are called. For example, some people become a Christian early in their lives and live a consistently holy life for many years. This would be like

John the Baptist or Timothy who were set apart for sacred service from childhood. Others would become Christians later in life- even being born again only a short time before death- such as the thief on the cross? Now which one of these groups- the Timothy group or the thief on the cross group- which one is a true believer? Which one is a faithful Christian? Another way to consider the diversity of the church is in its diversity of gifts. We read this in I Cor. 12:28- some were called to be apostles, prophets, evangelist, pastors, teachers, helpers and administrators. Now which group is more important to the life and maturity of the church? Is one group more important than another? So also as I Cor. 12 continues, within the body there are many parts. Different abilities and gifts again- each called at a different time and set apart for a different task. So the foot, eye and ear are each a part of the body. Just as those who were called to serve at the 11th hour share in the same task as the one called to serve at the 1<sup>st</sup> hour. Or compare the different ages of the church itself. Who is better off- those who were called first- the Jewish people? Those who saw the signs and wonders in the desert? Or those who were called latter- the Gentiles? Living after the pouring out of the Spirit. In some way- being called later is a blessing! So the first will be last and the last first! As great as John the Baptist was, the least in the kingdom of heaven will be greater! As Mt. 11 says, John was great, but whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he! Or even consider the apostles and their being called to follow Jesus? Would we say that Philip is a more important apostle than Paul because Philip was chosen first? And of these two- Philip and Paul- who was more deserving to be called an apostle? So you can see- being first into the field does not mean that you are better or more important than those called and sent later! Paul planted and Apollos watered- but who gives the increase? Whose harvest is it? As you can see, faithfulness within the Kingdom of God is a simple obedience. To heed and obey for as long as you are in the field! To serve the master of the house with all your ability as soon and as long as you are called to serve within the vineyard! At the end of the day, when we think about who it is that owns the vineyard. To whom does the harvest belong? Who has called and sent the laborers into the field and who rewards them at the end of the day? When we keep these truths in our mind, we see that we are but

servants- unprofitable at best! We are simply doing what we are called to do with the strength and opportunity given to us!

## II. The Generous Wage

So now that we understand our place- and how we are really blessed because we have been called, chosen and sent. In our second point we consider the generous wage that is given at the end of the day. The parable that Jesus gives in ch. 20 comes after the question made by Peter at the end of 19. Remember that Jesus has just spoken to the rich, young ruler about the need to be rich towards God and having treasures in heaven. The rich young ruler loved his riches more so he went away. However, Peter says that he and all the disciples have forsaken everything and followed Jesus. To His disciples Jesus says in v. 19:29, whatever you have left for my names sake you will receive 100-fold and you will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last and last, first. Jesus repeats this again in 20:16, the last will be first and the first last. So this parable is teaching us about rewards- specifically what will those who follow after Jesus receive. Yes, there will be different rewards for some- degrees of glory received as Jesus taught in ch. 19. But the point of chapter 20 is that all those who follow after Jesus will receive the same reward! As 20:10 says- they each received the same denarius. So the workers were all given a day's wage- no matter how long they worked. So the point of this parable is that everyone who works in the field gets the same wage- they will inherit eternal life! Or as Rom. 2:7 puts it, they will obtain the gift of eternal life. One of the points Jesus is making is that everyone who is called will be rewarded with the same blessing- and that blessing is the gracious of gift! The generosity of the master of the house is clear. But who are the last- and who are the first? Well, the last one brought into the field could be those who are born again later in life. A dramatic conversion as it is sometimes called- tends to bring about a radically changed life. During Jesus lifetime- this group was made up of sinners and tax collectors! Those who have been rescued from a life of slavery to sin later in their lives tend to be very grateful- they are on fire- really dedicated to serving the LORD! Why? Because they are grateful! The ones who are first are those who have spend many years in the field. Those who

have lived many years serving God. Even many within our own church have followed after Jesus for many years- being born again early in their life. Should these be less grateful? Having been spared from a life of futility and bondage? The fact is- if you are a baby Christian or a mature Christian- the reward of eternal life is shared by both! The reward is entrance into heaven and an inheritance in glory! This is the reward that Jesus gives to all those who work in His field- a wage granted to all who labor as they have been called! But do not make this reward something small! Nor think that you have earned it! It is a gracious reward- a wonderful blessing that we have each received! Jesus has earned this reward for us- and He gives it to those whom He chooses! As Jesus says in v. 15- I am free to give this reward to all I choose! Does not this reward belong to me? Jesus is free to give the right to be called children of God- He is free to call and enlist anyone He chooses for service in His field! So do not think little of the reward you have received- it is just as was promised! It is a gracious reward- one that Jesus was not compelled to give to you! Since God's gifts are in fact from God- doesn't He have the freedom to give to any as He sees fit?

### **III. The Perceived Offense**

But not all of the workers saw it that way? Some were offended as the apparent slight. Those who came early and stayed late- who worked hard and long- expected to get more than those who only worked a few hours as seen in v. 10. We could say it this way- those who are called early in life- who spend the bulk of their lives in ministry- those who have certain accomplishments and abilities- or those who have sacrificed so much for the sake of their calling- should these ever despise or look down on those who were called later or who have sacrificed less time in the field? Contrast Peter and the thief on the cross? Which one deserved- which one earned the right to eternal life? The answer is- neither! But which of these two will get the reward of eternal life? The answer is – both! So early disciples- workers in the field- get the same reward as those called and sent late. And that reception is one of grace- and should not produce strife. But the workers see it another way- the ones who worked the longest feel slighted. So in v. 11 they grumbled- they complained. Don't we deserve more than those who came late? We have worked harder and longer-

right? This does not sound fair to our ears- we tend to agree with their complaint. But Jesus does not see it that way- rather Jesus rebukes them softly in v. 13. Friend, you have what I have promised. You are overlooking what you have received. Do not think that my giving more to others is in any way giving less to you. I am free to give to others- just as I have to you. Jesus warns them in v. 15- you begrudging my generosity. Literally Jesus says- do not have an evil eye. An evil eye is one that is always looking at others- wanting what they have while ignoring what they have received! Its not fair- we say in our hearts. If I have the choice, I would have stood around all day doing nothing and then got the same thing! Right? Well, don't judge the kindness of Jesus on the basis of your own sinful desires. This reminds me of the one of Aesop's Fables- The Dog and his Reflection. Do you remember that one? A dog has a huge bone in his mouth and as he carries his prize across a bridge he sees his reflection- thinking that this other dog had a bigger bone than he had- he opened his mouth to take the prize of the other dog- and in the process lost what he had. So we are all to prone to want what others have while ignoring what we have received!

So, who will be last? Well, those who presume on God's kindness and think that they deserve His mercies. Rather, as Rom. 2:4 puts it- God's kindness is means to lead us to repentance- not pride! Those who will be first are those who are surprised by God's grace- who think of themselves as unprofitable and unworthy! That is the great reversal that God has in store! Both those called early and those called late should rejoice that they have been called at all at all- each giving thanks to God for this great reward! We should use our gifts and talents faithfully- whatever time or gift you have! The first will be last and the last will be first. I am certain that there will a lot of surprises in heaven! As 12:26 says, if you would be great, you must be a servant to all! Jesus Christ emphasizes God's grace as He reorients our concept of being first and last. So the greatest in heaven will be the lowliest servant on earth! And this fact is testified to in the life of the suffering servant Jesus who is now high and exalted over all! May we all rejoice in our calling to serve knowing that the reward of eternal life has been secured for us by Jesus!