

LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD

BIBLE TEXT : Matthew 20:1-16

LESSON 183 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Many be called, but few chosen" (Matthew 20:16).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Matthew 20:1-16

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.

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

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

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

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?

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.

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.

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

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

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

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.

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

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

Workers for the Vineyard

This parable that Jesus taught is about the Kingdom of Heaven. No doubt the Lord Himself is represented by the man who wanted workers for his vineyard. God uses men and women, boys and girls to spread the Gospel, to tell others the story of salvation through the Blood of Jesus. God could have used the angels or some other means, but He gave that privilege to His own people. He still wants workers. There is a place in His vineyard for everyone who will answer His call.

In the parable, the man went out early in the morning to hire workers. He made an agreement with some workers to pay them a penny a day. We are told that a penny was a Roman coin worth more than the one cent to which we are accustomed, and that it was a just and reasonable wage in those days. When the wage agreement was made, the workers went into the vineyard.

Standing Idle

The householder went out again to hire more workers. At the third hour (nine o'clock in the morning) he saw others standing idle in the market place. He invited them to work in his vineyard, promising to pay what was right.

At the sixth and ninth hours (at 12 o'clock noon and at 3 o'clock in the afternoon) he went out again. He found more people standing idle, whom he asked to work for him. At the eleventh hour, just before the day's work was done, he went out once more. The unemployed he asked to go into his vineyard as laborers. He promised to pay what was right.

To the Jews First and Also to the Gentiles

God's call for workers has been going forth for many, many years. Perhaps the early morning call was like the one to the Jews, who were the first people to be called by the Lord. Jesus came first to the Jews. When Jesus sent forth the twelve disciples to preach the Gospel (Lesson 81), His instruction was, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles." They were to preach to the Jews (**Matthew 10:5-6** ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not: ⁶ But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel).

Even though the Jews were the first to be called, they were not the only ones called by God. Later on, the call went forth to the Gentiles also. In the eleventh chapter of the Acts, Peter tells his experience of being sent by God to preach to the household of Cornelius, the Gentile centurion, at Caesarea. Peter said: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34, 35). After hearing the report of Peter's experience, the disciples said, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18).

Down through the years, God has sent forth the invitation to work in His vineyard. Those who have accepted, have "borne the burden and heat of the day" to establish the Gospel when there was

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

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

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

great opposition. They have labored and prayed to spread Christ's teachings into the uttermost parts of the world.

We have been told that we are living in the last days of the harvest. No doubt the call today for workers is like the call at the eleventh hour. The harvest is nearly finished but there is still an opportunity to answer God's call.

Laborers Not Idlers

God does not compel a person to work in His vineyard. He hires laborers for a wage, to save them from spiritual poverty. The choice is one that everyone must make. Some day each person will stand before God to give an account of his life (**Romans 14:12** ¹² So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.) and the deeds he has done, whether good or bad. Are you standing all the day idle, doing nothing worth-while for God, doing nothing of purpose?

Many Kinds of Work

God hires laborers for a purpose — to labor in His vineyard. There is no room for those who will not work, no place for those who want to be idle. The workers in the parable were not hired for any special work like planting, pruning, cultivating, or harvesting. God, too, wants people who will do the work that He wants done.

In a vineyard there are different kinds of work to be done before a crop can be harvested. In the first place, the vines must be planted, and in due season they must be cultivated; watered, pruned, weeded, sprayed, and perhaps fed. All these things are done in order to produce a harvest. In the Lord's vineyard, too, there are many branches of work, which are included in the spread of the Gospel and the salvation of souls. Every one who answers the call of God cannot be a minister nor the worker who counsels with those who are seeking to be saved. What kind of meeting would there be if the musicians did not play their instruments, if no one sang the hymns, if none testified, and no one prayed? What kind of office would there be at our headquarters if no one read the mail, if no one answered the letters, if the printing plant were idle, if no person sent out literature, if no one swept the floors or dusted the furniture, if no encouragement and advice were given, and if none prayed?

Perhaps you are wondering what a child can do. People must be invited to Sunday School and to the meetings. Someone must pray for lost souls. Songs must be sung, and testimonies given. Someone must pray for the meetings, and for the literature. Are these things not work that can be done by every child who is saved? Do people want to be standing idle when they can, by receiving their spiritual experiences and developing their talents, be improving themselves and becoming better workers, if the Lord should tarry?

God's Call to Children

Sometimes the early morning call is also compared with God's call to children. Some have answered and, as Jesus has tarried, they have spent many years in the Lord's service. Others did not accept the invitation when they were children. Maybe God has been faithful to call them again, at different times in their lives, yet they will find themselves at the eleventh hour in their lives, perhaps old people and unsaved. Do they not realize that their time to labor for the Lord is nearly finished? How pitiful when people refuse God's call! How sweet and profitable are their lives when they accept the invitation to labor in God's vineyard!

The Eleventh Hour

How fear strikes the heart when one sees young people

refuse the call to God's service! Perhaps they intend to go into the "vineyard" at the third, the sixth, or the ninth hour. There is no certainty that they will live to be old; perhaps this is the eleventh hour of their lives. Many seem unaware that the harvest is nearly finished. The eleventh hour is passing swiftly. God is issuing an invitation to enter His vineyard today. Who knows but it may be the last call?

Wages

There is another part to this parable that Jesus taught — the paying of the wage. When it was evening, the workers were called to receive their pay. Those who worked only one hour received the same amount as those who had worked all day. They received a penny, and received it before the others. This was, indeed, a different way of paying than that which is used in the world today. Neither is God's way like the way of men. Even though one who is saved works for the Lord because he loves to do so, God has also a wage for those who are faithful.

Some complained, but their complaint was not justified before God. The complainers were held to their bargain, and sent on their way. God is not pleased to have people feel that they are doing too much while others do too little, or that they have too little and others too much of God's favor.

To the Faithful

God does not pay more to the ones who have been saved the longest, or who have seemingly done the most for Him. Our work in the Lord's vineyard is measured by the kind of service we give, not the amount. You will receive your "penny" if you have been faithful to do the work that God has given you, if you have done your very best for Jesus and for His honor and glory. "Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive."

If your service to God has been to display your talents instead of showing the love and mercy of God, if what you have done has been done grudgingly rather than "heartily, as to the Lord," if you have selfishly accepted only the privileges that you like while you were too busy for the humble or unseen tasks, are you entitled to a wage?

Called and Chosen

The parable ended with this saying, "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen." Those who are last to be saved, yet have given faithful service to God, shall receive "whatsoever is right," even as those who were saved first.

The call to be a laborer in God's vineyard goes out to everyone. Many are called; but all men do not accept the invitation, so they are not chosen. God does the calling; whether you are chosen depends on you. You can be chosen of the Lord as well as called. You have been called. Are you chosen?

QUESTIONS

- 1 For what purpose were the laborers hired?
- 2 Why were some standing idle?
- 3 What did the man agree to pay?
- 4 What kind of wages does God pay?
- 5 To whom does God give "a penny a day"?
- 6 In what way can the last be first?
- 7 What is the difference between being called and being chosen?