

OUR WORTH IN GOD'S KINGDOM



Quite often, Jesus used parables (stories) to illustrate an important truth. He told “The Parable of the Vineyard Laborers” in Matthew 20:1-16 to explain His standard of worth for those in the Kingdom of heaven.

In this parable, the landowner (vineyard owner) is Jesus and the laborers are believers who became willing workers in Jesus’ vineyard. It is a story of Jesus looking for those laborers from early in the day until the day was almost done. Jesus’ unrelenting search is reminiscent of His earlier word to His disciples: “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (Matthew 9:37-38)

Jesus hired five separate groups of laborers, recruiting each group at different times of the day. The first group began their day of work at 6:00 a.m. and were promised a full day’s wage: a denarius. The other four groups of workers were hired, respectively, at 9:00 a.m., 12 noon, 3:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m., but were not promised a set wage as was the first group. They were promised to be paid “whatever is right.” No one in these groups disputed that indefinite offer, undoubtedly because they respected the integrity of the landowner (Jesus).

Everything seemed quite harmonious until the day’s work was concluded and the vineyard owner called for the workers to be paid. Jesus chose to pay the workers in reverse order – “beginning with the last to the first.” (verse 8). This meant that the laborers who worked only one hour were the first to be paid. Surprisingly, they were paid a denarius, a full day’s pay despite their abbreviated time of actual work.

When the first group, having worked all twelve hours, presented themselves to receive their wages, they assumed their pay would be more than a denarius. Their assumption was based on a denarius having been given those who worked only one hour. However, when they were paid a denarius, in accordance with their original agreement with the vineyard owner, they grumbled as those convinced they were mistreated. But Jesus repeated the terms of the agreement and advised them to “take your pay and go your way.”

Jesus then declared His motive in paying full pay to the last group of workers: “I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for Me to do what I wish with My own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?” (verses 14-15) Jesus fulfilled His promise to the first and was very generous to the last!!

So how is this parable a picture of Jesus’ standard of worth for those in the Kingdom of heaven?

1. The denarius, representing equal pay to **ALL** of the vineyard laborers, does not actually carry a monetary value in this parable. Instead, it represents **the equality of worth** that Jesus places on ALL who labor in His vineyard. The **equality of worth** extends to new, recent believers as well as to long-time believers who have labored the “entire day.”

2. Jesus wanted to prevent the long time believer from thinking his wages (his worth in Jesus' sight) should be more than the promised "denarius" because of his great length of service. He must not try to negotiate a new agreement with better terms. "Better" terms do not exist. It is as if Jesus told the believer of long duration "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think" (Romans 12:3); but to "be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another." (Romans 12:10).

3. Jesus will not tolerate complaints and grumbings about how He chooses to assign worth to the people in His vineyard (those in God's Kingdom). Kingdom worth is His to give and ours to receive by faith in Him – but not to gain by filing meaningless grievances against Him.

To conclude this study, an imperfect but interesting analogy is offered. Suppose an auto maker is unable to sell enough cars to keep all of its workers actively employed. The auto maker can either lay off excess workers or find a way to sell more cars, thereby retaining all of the workers without any layoffs.

In this situation, the automaker could significantly lower the price of each car in order to increase sales. If the lower price were equal to the employee's discounted price, do you think the workers would be jealous of the public's ability to buy cars at that employee discounted price?

Would it not be foolish for the workers to be jealous of the "good deals" available to the public when the downward pricing saved their jobs? Complaining and grumbling on the part of the workers in this situation would be unthinkable! May the Holy Spirit "nail" us when we are equally unthinkable.