

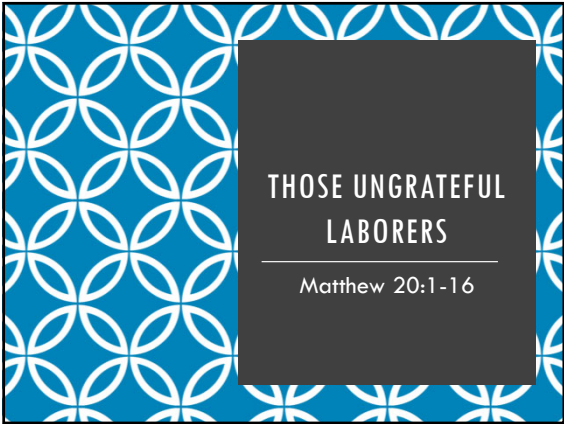
The Parables of Jesus

WEEK 3: THOSE UNGRATEFUL LABORERS

(MATTHEW 20:1-16)

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1

MATTHEW 20:1-16

For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place; and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went.

2

MATTHEW 20:1-16

Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.'

3

MATTHEW 20:1-16

And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the householder, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'

4

MATTHEW 20:1-16

But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' 16 So the last will be first, and the first last.

5

THE LIFE OF DAY-LABORER

A seasonal worker, owning no land, with no contractual relationship
Not unlike a migrant worker, except work was not guaranteed
Day-laborers may be better off were they slaves

6

THE LIFE OF DAY-LABORER

A healthy and ambitious day-laborer might find 200 days of work annually
The “going rate” is a denarius = .50-1.00 / hr

You can “make it” on this—provided the wife and children find supplemental income

Some days you make \$12; some days you go home to your wife and family with nothing.



7

THE WORK OF A FOREMAN

After his first round of hiring, “early morning” (= 6:00 AM) four times it says, “He went out. . .”

- 3rd hour = 9:00 AM
- 6th hour = noon
- 9th = 3:00 PM
- 11th hour = 5:00 PM



8

THE WORK OF A FOREMAN

Everyone knows what the foreman is doing:

- Given the surplus of labor, he is keeping his costs down.
- Why hire too many people for 12 hours and run out of work?
- He's not being cheap; he is not unjust; he's being frugal.




9

WAIT . . . WHAT?

Given the foreman's obvious cost-saving tactic, what happens next makes no sense.

- How on earth is he paying a one-hour worker a full day's wage?!
- And what does that mean for the all-day worker?!




10

IT'S HOW YOU TELL THE STORY

Could have paid the one-hour workers a denarius, and the rest proportionately.

Could have paid the all-day workers first and showed generosity to all the others by paying the same.

But no: the all-day workers had to watch the whole thing and get a single stinkin', no good, you-cannot-be-serious, denarius.



11

THREE, POINTED QUESTIONS

Did I not give you what I promised? (v. 13)

Am I not permitted to do what I want with what belongs to me? (v. 15a)

Or are you envious because I am generous? (v. 15b)

- Literally: "Or is your eye evil because I am good?"
- Isn't the real problem not my injustice but your envy?


12

WHAT THE FOREMAN ACTUALLY DID

He wasn't cutting costs; he was creating jobs, including for the undeserving.

No one was shorted, and most were excessively rewarded.

The "problem" is not with the foreman, but with the perception of the workers.



13

OUR RESPECTABLE SINS

We are all-day laborers.
Or so we think.

God is "Our heavenly Quid Pro Quo, who art in heaven . . ."

But when our respectable sins meet a sovereign and gracious God, something's gotta give.

Have we joined our all-gracious God who longs to bless the least deserving?

14

OUR RESPECTABLE SINS

We're all 11th hour workers!

15
