

MATTHEW 20.1-16

Highlight these themes in the text:

- hard work
- grumbling
- generosity

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; ⁴and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. ⁶And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ ⁷They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ ⁸When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ ⁹When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, ‘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.’ ¹³But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

I SAMUEL 30.21-25

²¹Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow David, and who had been left at the brook Besor. They went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him. When David drew near to the people he saluted them. ²²Then all the corrupt and worthless fellows among the men who had gone with David said, “Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except that each man may take his wife and children, and leave.” ²³But David said, “You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the Lord has given us; he has preserved us and handed over to us the raiding party that attacked us. ²⁴Who would listen to you in this matter? For the share of the one who goes down into the battle shall be the same as the share of the one who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike.” ²⁵From that day forward he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel; it continues to the present day.

QUESTIONS

1. Should people who have done lots of hard work for a long time, for example in a church community, have more power than newcomers?

2. In Verse 15b ‘envious’ is literally an ‘evil eye’. Do you have an evil eye: selfish, covetous, envious, that makes you grumble?

3. An alternative reading of the parable is that the landowner is a cruel exploiter of the workers. He wasn’t especially generous: the wage was barely enough to survive on. And he undermines the one thing that these peasants had: the value of their labour. Jesus was making the point that his kingdom, by contrast, is far more generous, and the work we do is valued. What do you make of this?

4. How is this good news today?

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[AT HOME]