

Matthew Henry's Bible Commentary

The parable of the labourers in the vineyard.

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

The direct object of this parable seems to be, to show that though the Jews were first called into the vineyard, at length the gospel should be preached to the Gentiles, and they should be admitted to equal privileges and advantages with the Jews.

The parable may also be applied more generally, and shows,

1. That God is debtor to no man.
2. That many who begin last, and promise little in religion, sometimes, by the blessing of God, arrive at a great deal of knowledge, grace, and usefulness.
3. That the recompense of reward will be given to the saints, but not according to the time of their conversion.

It describes the state of the visible church, and explains the declaration that the last shall be first, and the first last, in its various references. Till we are hired into the service of God, we are standing all the day idle: a sinful state, though a state of drudgery to Satan, may be called a state of idleness. The market-place is the world, and from that we are called by the gospel. Come, come from this market-place.

Work for God will not admit of trifling. A man may go idle to hell, but he that will go to heaven, must be diligent. The Roman penny was sevenpence halfpenny in our money, wages then enough for the day's support. This does not prove that the reward of our obedience to God is of works, or of debt; when we have done all, we are unprofitable servants; but it signifies that there is a reward set before us, yet let none, upon this presumption, put off

repentance till they are old. Some were sent into the vineyard at the eleventh hour; but nobody had hired them before.

The Gentiles came in at the eleventh hour; the gospel had not been before preached to them. Those that have had gospel offers made them at the third or sixth hour, and have refused them, will not have to say at the eleventh hour, as these had, No man has hired us. Therefore, not to discourage any, but to awaken all, be it remembered, that now is the accepted time.

The riches of Divine grace are loudly murmured at, among proud Pharisees and nominal Christians. There is great proneness in us to think that we have too little, and others too much of the tokens of God's favour; and that we do too much, and others too little in the work of God. But if God gives grace to others, it is kindness to them, and no injustice to us.

Carnal worldlings agree with God for their penny in this world; and choose their portion in this life. Obedient believers agree with God for their penny in the other world, and must remember they have so agreed. Didst not thou agree to take up with heaven as thy portion, thy all; wilt thou seek for happiness in the creature? God punishes none more than they deserve, and recompenses every service done for him; he therefore does no wrong to any, by showing extraordinary grace to some. See here the nature of envy. It is an evil eye, which is displeased at the good of others, and desires their hurt.

It is a grief to ourselves, displeasing to God, and hurtful to our neighbours: it is a sin that has neither pleasure, profit, nor honour. Let us forego every proud claim, and seek for salvation as a free gift. Let us never envy or grudge, but rejoice and praise God for his mercy to others as well as to ourselves. (Mt 20:17-19)

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