THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD
Matthew 20:1-16

Introduction:

1. A frequently asked question is: “Are there degrees of punishment?”

2. A similar question is: “Are there degrees of rewards?”

3. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard answers this latter question.

4. Jesus had just told the rich young ruler to sell all he had and give it to the poor (Matt. 19:21).

5. The apostles were astonished at this and asked, “Who then can be saved?” (Matt. 19:25).

6. Peter said, “We have left all and followed You. What shall we have?”

7. Jesus said: “Many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Matt. 19:30; 20:16).
   a. Perhaps the Jews thought they would have priority in the kingdom.
   b. The apostles probably felt they should have priority also.

Discussion:

I. THE FACTS OF THE PARABLE ARE SIMPLE.

A. The landowner went out early in the morning and hired laborers for a denarius a day.
   1. He went again the third hour (9 AM), the sixth hour (12 PM), and the ninth hour (3 PM) and hired laborers for a denarius.
   2. At the eleventh hour (5 PM), he found others idle.
   3. They told him they were idle because no one had hired them.
   4. He also sent them into his field to work “for whatever is right.”

B. At the end of the day, the landowner paid his workers beginning with the last hired.
   1. He gave all a denarius regardless of when they were hired.
   2. The first hired protested that they should have more.
   3. He reminded them of their agreement: “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?”
C. The landowner represents Christ.

1. The vineyard is His church.
2. The laborers are the members of Christ’s church.
3. The hour when each was hired is the time of life when each heard the Gospel.
4. The wages is eternal life.

II. THE VINEYARD IS THE CHURCH.

A. A vineyard is a place to work.

1. There are many reasons we obey the Gospel.
   a. To have remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
   b. To enjoy all spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3).
   c. To have hope (Rom. 8:24, 25).

2. We also come into the church to work for the Lord.
   a. We must give of our time in study, prayer, worship, service, and teaching others.
   b. We are to give liberally, cheerfully and sacrificially.
   c. Many do little more than warm a pew.

B. One must be in the church for his work to be accepted by the Lord.

1. “The landowner “hired laborers for his vineyard.”
2. If a farmer hired a man to work in his field, but he toiled in another’s field, the farmer would not pay him.
3. Many do good works in worldly organizations but they are not in the Lord’s vineyard and should not expect His reward.

III. PEOPLE HEAR THE GOSPEL AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF LIFE.

A. Young people are blessed “who grow up in the church” and obey at an early age.

1. They “remember their Creator in the days of their youth” (Eccl. 12:1).
2. They have their whole lives to give to the Lord.

B. Others come to the Lord at other stages of life.

1. Those who come in early adulthood can rear their children in
the faith.
2. Those who come in middle age bring wisdom and experience.
3. Those who come in old age are a special cause of rejoicing for they obeyed before going into eternity.
4. That some come at later stages of life does not encourage procrastination for they came at their first call.
5. Those who procrastinate are “playing Russian roulette” with their souls.

C. Jesus’ point is: “The first shall be last and the last first.”
1. All will receive the same reward regardless of when they heed the Gospel call.
2. The apostle Paul may enjoy Heaven more than some who did not suffer as he did, but we will all receive the same crown of life.

“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also who love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:6-8).
3. The late Ira North said: “I don’t care whether I have a mansion in Heaven. I’ll gladly sleep on the back porch. I just want to be there!”

Conclusion:
1. The Lord has the right to bestow eternal life to all who serve Him, whenever they come into His kingdom.
2. We need to be in the kingdom so we can labor for the Lord.
   a. If you came into the kingdom in youth, rejoice that you have given so many years to Christ.
   b. If you are old, and have not been in the kingdom long, spend the time you have left in service to God.

   “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).
3. Will you not heed the Master’s call today to “Go work in My vineyard?”