

TALK IT OVER

Stories Jesus Told

The Vineyard Workers

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Icebreaker: Share a time where you feel you were treated unfairly.

Matthew 20:1-16 (NLT) "For the Kingdom of Heaven is like the landowner who went out early one morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay the normal daily wage and sent them out to work. "At nine o'clock in the morning he was passing through the marketplace and saw some people standing around doing nothing. So he hired them, telling them he would pay them whatever was right at the end of the day. So they went to work in the vineyard. At noon and again at three o'clock he did the same thing. "At five o'clock that afternoon he was in town again and saw some more people standing around. He asked them, 'Why haven't you been working today?' "They replied, 'Because no one hired us.' "The landowner told them, 'Then go out and join the others in my vineyard.' "That evening he told the foreman to call the workers in and pay them, beginning with the last workers first. When those hired at five o'clock were paid, each received a full day's wage. When those hired first came to get their pay, they assumed they would receive more. But they, too, were paid a day's wage. When they received their pay, they protested to the owner, 'Those people worked only one hour, and yet you've paid them just as much as you paid us who worked all day in the scorching heat.' "He answered one of them, 'Friend, I haven't been unfair! Didn't you agree to work all day for the usual wage? Take your money and go. I wanted to pay this last worker the same as you. Is it against the law for me to do what I want with my money? Should you be jealous because I am kind to others?' "So those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last."

Discovering the Mystery

1. Context - that which surrounds the text

- ✓ Jesus speaking to disciples
- ✓ Follows parable of a rich man who chose not to follow Jesus because he was unwilling to part with his money to do so.
- ✓ Israel – grape harvest season -probably September
- ✓ Day laborers available – going rate was 1 denarius for a day's work

2. Observation – what is the story about?

Introduction

- ✓ *for the Kingdom of Heaven is like...*

Story

- ✓ Hiring of workers – 9am, noon, 3pm, and 5pm
- ✓ Paying of workers – everyone got the same amount
- ✓ Protest of full-day workers – payment systems is unfair
- ✓ Response to the protest – not unfair at all; don't be jealous

Conclusion

- ✓ *“So those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last.”*

3. Interpretation – what did the story mean to the original hearers?

Options:

- God's generosity
- Grace over works
- Gentile inclusion
- Grace is equal for all

Considerations – ties to parable of the Rich Man preceding it

- Danger of money: greed, jealousy, envy
- Proverb at the end

Matthew 19:30 (NLT) But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.

4. Application - principles from that apply to us today

- ✓ Choose gratitude
1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NLT) Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.
- ✓ Reject jealousy
James 3:16 (NLT) For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did the payment structure seem so unfair to the 9am workers?
2. Was their payment truly unfair? Why or why not?
3. Do you struggle to be grateful at times? Why do you think that is?
4. Do you struggle with feeling jealousy about what other people have?
5. How does social media affect our feelings of gratitude and jealousy?
6. What can we learn from this parable?
7. What are some practical steps we can take this week to move in a less-earthly, more-heavenly direction?