

Laborers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20.1-16

Jesus' parables go to the very heart of our motives in the Christian life. What we do is important, but also *why we do it*. God graciously offers us rewards for serving Him *for the right reasons* – as the parable of the laborers in the vineyard graphically illustrates.

Context: Sacrificing for Christ is Worth It!

- *Encounter with the 'Rich Young Ruler' (Mt. 19.16-26)*
- *Sacrificial followers of Christ have great reward (Mt. 19.27-30)*

A Parable about rewards and motives

- *Avoiding wrong conclusions*
- *Those who give up all for Christ receive great reward*
- *Those who serve with wrong motives forfeit rewards*
- *Work for the King – He's fair, and generous!*



1. The context in which Jesus told the parable of the laborers in the vineyard is important. As He did throughout His ministry, Jesus is teaching about 'kingdom living' – how to experience abundant life now, and have a reward in His coming kingdom. Theologians often view the "rich young ruler" (Mt. 19.16ff) as someone asking Jesus how to be 'saved' (go to heaven), but if this is so, Jesus' answer is puzzling! He tells the man to "keep the commandments" (17) and "give to the poor" (21). Is this the way to get to heaven? No! But if the man already believed in Jesus and wanted to know how to save his life from having no eternal value, Jesus' answer makes sense. How do Jesus' words to His disciples in vv.28-29 confirm this?
2. Immediately before (Mt. 19.30) and after (Mt. 20.16) the parable, Jesus says virtually the same thing – 'the last will be first, and the first will be last.' We've just reviewed the preceding context; now read the narrative *after* Jesus told the parable (Mt. 20.17-28). How do all these events help us understand who will be 'first' and 'last' in the kingdom – who will be great in it, and who won't?
3. In the parable Jesus told (Mt. 20.1-15), who does the landowner represent? Who are the laborers? Was the landowner unjust in the way he treated any of his workers? Why were those who worked all day upset? What did the landowner's payment of a denarius to those workers who were hired at 'eleventh hour' show? What did the attitude of those who worked all day show? How does this go to the heart of our *motives* in our service for Jesus Christ?
4. It is said that at his trial where he was sentenced to death, Socrates stated that 'the unexamined life is not worth living.' That is good advice for us. Have you examined your life? What are you doing for the Lord now to 'invest your life' for eternity? Are you more like the 'rich young ruler' or the disciples? Are you giving of your time, talent, and treasure to the Lord? Beyond this, the parable of the vineyard laborers tells us that our motives are also important. Why are you doing what you are doing for Jesus? Let your work be your "Thank you!" to Him for all He's done for you!