

# The Workers in the Vineyard

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

In Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus gave the parable of the workers in the vineyard. As the parable begins, a landowner goes out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them each a denarius and sent them into his vineyard. A denarius was the usual wage at that time for one day’s service from a laborer or a soldier.

At about nine in the morning, the landowner went out and found others standing around in the marketplace, doing nothing. He told them also to go and work in his vineyard, and he would pay them whatever was right. These also went. He went out again at about noon and then again at about three in the afternoon and did the same.

He went out yet again at about five in the afternoon and found others standing around, and he asked them why they had been standing idle all day long. They replied, saying that no one had hired them. He told them also to go and work in his vineyard.

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard told his foreman to call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and moving on to the first. The workers who were hired at five in the afternoon each received a denarius. When those who were hired first came to be paid, they expected to be paid more, but each of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they complained against the landowner, saying that he had made those who worked

only one hour equal to them, when they were the ones who had borne the heat and burden of the day.

The landowner replied to them saying: "... 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?' So the last shall be first, and the first last." (Matthew 20:13-16)

This parable is an example of a Scriptural teaching that can have meaning on different levels. It is fine to interpret scriptural teachings on different levels, so long as our interpretation is not contradicted by any other teachings in the Scriptures.

On one level, the laborers hired first can represent the Jews, who were angered to think that the Gentiles would be made equal to them (Matthew 20:12) by being included in God's salvation. We can see a teaching with a very similar message that Jesus gave to us in the parable of the prodigal son, where the older son (symbolic of the Jews) was angered at the forgiveness that his father extended to the younger son (symbolic of the Gentiles) who had squandered his inheritance through riotous living.

On another level, we can interpret the marketplace in this parable as the world, and we can interpret the "hiring" or appointing of certain individuals in the marketplace to go and work in the landowner's vineyard as symbolic of the effectual calling of God of an individual to faith in Christ (John 6:44). There can be no fruitful labor in the kingdom of God by those who are not believers (Matthew 7:15-20, John 15:1-8, others).

Another lesson that can be gleaned from this parable is that the calling of an individual to faith in Christ can occur at any time in their life, even very late in life, at the "eleventh hour" (Matthew 20:6). God calls individuals to faith in His Son in His time and according to His plan and purpose for their lives, and they will all provide fruitful labor in His vineyard, as He assigns for each of them.

