

## **Unfair Labor Practices** **Matthew 20:1-16**

There is a lot of controversy today surrounding pay inequalities based on gender, or race. It is based on our sense of fairness, that there should be some semblance of equal pay for equal work. Believe it or not, Jesus told a parable during his final week on earth that relates to this. There is one word you need to keep in mind as you listen, and it is the word grace.

### **I. God's Early Recruits - Vss. 1-2**

Day laborers then and now tend to be on the lowest rung of the social ladder. They didn't hold down a regular job; they didn't enjoy the benefits of continual employment. If they didn't work, their families went hungry. As one commentator said, these workers were destitute, desperate, and dependent on being hired for the day.

There were two kinds of workers in this parable. First were men who were hired early, but they would not work until they knew how much they would make. "Agreed" in the Greek is *symphōneō*, from which we get our word symphony. In other words, they had harmoniously entered into a legally binding verbal contract. They would work for a solid day, 6 AM to 6 PM, and would make a denarius, which was a day's wage for an average worker. Their guarantee was the law.

I am grateful as 1 Cor. 3:9 says, "I am a co-laborer together with God." I'm grateful every day that He chose me to work in His vineyard. But I am also well aware He was under no obligation to choose me. He doesn't invite you to be a part of His family or a part of His kingdom or to labor in His vineyard because He has to; He does it because He wants to. It's called GRACE.

### **II. God's Later Recruits - Vss. 3-7**

The owner of the vineyard comes back four times to hire more workers. These workers had no legally binding agreement under the Law. The first workers relied on the law to guarantee their pay. The rest of the workers had their pay guaranteed by the owner. So, what kind of workers were left at 5 o'clock? To put it simply, they were the least of the least. These were people nobody else would hire. This is such a beautiful picture of God's grace.

Because they had no steady employment, these workers were much more dependent on the grace of the employer than the employer was dependent on them.

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Not every Christian has the same opportunity to serve God. Some people are saved when they are young, but some people are saved when they are older. Some people are called to preach to thousands of people, while others are called to hand out bulletins to dozens of people. Does this mean that people who are saved later in life shouldn't get the same benefits and blessings of heaven as those who are saved earlier?

### **III. God's Final Rewards - Vss. 8-16**

Now the controversy is going start. The early workers can't believe that they got paid exactly the same for 12 hours of labor that others got for 1 hour. In reality they had no right to complain because they got exactly what they had agreed to.

Here's the question. Do you serve God for what He will give to you or do you serve God for what you can give to Him and then trust Him to do what is right? The Lord rewarded these last workers not for their time, but for their trust; they were sent, and they went. It was not what they did, but why they did it that got them a full reward. Bottom line, the amount of time we spend in the Lord's service isn't nearly as important as the spirit in which the service is rendered.

Your attitude ought to be what is in Luke 17:10 where Jesus said, "When you have done all those things which you are commanded, you should say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" God has every right to require perfect obedience and faithful service from all of us without obligating Himself in the least. We owe Him our obedience and our service. As God said to Job in Job 41:11, "Who has a claim against Me that I must pay?"

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