

UPPER ROOM BIBLE CLASS
“Famous People You Never Heard Of”
Spring, 2019
Pastor Jim Otte

Laborers in the Kingdom
Matthew 20:1-28

Opening Discussion:

- a. Much has been made in the news lately about the higher education scandal with wealthy families, who paid exorbitant amounts of money, to allegedly buy their children’s way into top universities/colleges.
- b. What do you think about all that?
- c. What do you believe is at the root of the issue?

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius^[a] a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴ and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ ⁵ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶ And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ ⁷ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’

- a. **“for his vineyard.”** – metaphor for the people of Israel, to which the gospel was, initially, to be preached.
 - a. *Isaiah 5:7. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!*
- b. **“for a denarius a day”** – a day’s wage for laborers
- c. **“third hour...sixth...ninth...eleventh”** – every 3 hours, a new group was hired!
- d. **“you go into the vineyard, too.”** –
 - a. The continuous need for those who work in the Kingdom.
 - b. Worker shortages in professional church work circles (denomination wide) are triggering anxiety, as well as creating more opportunities for lay involvement.

⁸ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’

- a. **“beginning with the last, up to the first.”** – the master appears to be setting the stage for a protest.

⁹ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰ Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but

each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, ¹² saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’

a. **“These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us”**

a. **Question: Did the original workers have a legitimate gripe?**

i. Where was the flaw in their thinking?

1. They forgot whose vineyard it was.
2. They forgot it was due to the generosity of the owner, that they could even work in the first place..
3. They forgot the agreed upon wage at the start.
4. They compared their time spent to the latecomers.
5. They turned this into an equality issue, based on how much they had done and burdens they had borne (works righteousness) compared to the others.
6. They allowed resentment to creep into their souls.

¹³ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’^[b] ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last.”

i. **“Did you not agree with me”** – The master reminded them of what was agreed to

j. **“Take what belongs to you”** – the only legitimate claim of ownership they could make was the wage they had earned

k. **“with what belongs to me?”** – the master reminded them of who owned the land

l. **“do you begrudge my generosity?”** – the seeds of resentment are planted by a lack of gratitude and an assumption of privilege.

a. At the heart of it is the temptation of coveting, flowing out of the voice of: “I deserve better than...”

¹⁷ And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, ¹⁸ “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”

i. **“will be delivered over...condemn...crucified”** – Having taught them in the parable, Jesus gave them the real lesson in what it would mean to work in His kingdom.

²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. ²¹ And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” ²² Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are

able.”²³ He said to them, “You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.”

- i. **“sons of Zebedee”** – James and John, who were called with Peter, away from the fishing boats to become “fishers of men.”
- j. **“one at your right hand and one at your left”** – places of honor and high responsibility; one having the king’s ear and the other to do his bidding!
- k. **“Are you able to drink the cup”** – the cup of suffering, to which Jesus was referring, was the farthest thing from James’ and John’s minds!
- l. **“You will drink the cup”**

²⁴ And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. ²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,^[c] ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave,^[d] ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

- i. **“they were indignant”** – the other disciples began to resent the audacity of James and John, while harboring the same ambitions.
- j. **“rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them...It shall not be so among you.”** – the unbelieving world does not operate the same as the kingdom of God.
 - a. Equality (in value & personhood) is given by God, not earned by heritage or length of service.
- k. **“whoever would be great...servant; whoever would be first...slave.”** – a radical principle is at work in God’s kingdom: serving as a choice; not seeking advantage over others
- l. **“even as”** – Jesus would soon show them the precise way in which this principle would work

Application:

- a. Jesus cautions His workers to be mindful of the temptation to compare ourselves to others’ output, rewards, effort, and sacrifices as a way to determine equality of value or worth to Him.
- b. When you allow resentment into your life, and feed it, the desire to “lord it over” (as a way to create equality) will always feel justified!