

Workers in the vineyard

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0:00] Please can you turn to Matthew chapter 20. The trade's description.

This is not a sermon. I haven't prepared a sermon. I've just brought a thought which has meant a lot to me over the years. That's all I'm going to do. Read this and just explain it in the way of the thought that has helped me.

And then Chris will come and lead us in some prayer. I think we're not going to try and prolong the meeting. We'll pray as far as we pray. And then when we've run out of prayer we'll sing a song and go home.

Because we've had a good day, haven't we? We've had a good day. So Matthew chapter 20. This is just coming up to the triumphal entry, isn't it?

And Jesus tells this parable. Matthew 20. The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men for work in his vineyard.

[1:35] He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing.

He told them, you also go and work in my vineyard and I will pay you whatever is right. So they went. He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing.

And about the eleventh hour, so this is eleven out of twelve, so this is a long way through the day. About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing round and he asked them, Why have you been standing here all day doing nothing?

Because no one has hired us, they answered. He said to them, you also go and work in my vineyard. When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, call the workers, pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.

The workers who had hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those who were hired first, they expected to receive more.

[2:51] Sorry, when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner.

These men who were hired last worked only one hour, they said. And you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day. But he answered one of them, Friend, I'm not being unfair to you.

Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous? So the last will be first and the first will be last. Let's pray.

Lord, even though we come to your word just for a few thoughts, we pray that our thoughts might be true thoughts and thoughts that bring glory to you and help us to live the Christian life in whatever capacity we are.

[4:12] So we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I thought I wanted to say just a couple of things looking back on what the Lord has used to help me in service.

John Benton was absolutely right when he said, do you remember him saying, pastors are just ordinary blokes? And that's right.

It's wrong to think of pastors being super Christians. I always feel a little bit embarrassed when people seem to think that if the pastor prays for all of them, it has more power than anybody else.

I mean, it's the God who answers the prayer who has the power, isn't it, rather than the priestly figure who's praying the prayer. Pastors are just ordinary blokes who serve the Lord.

I want to say one of the things that's really helped me has been the prayer of the church.

[5:19] So I think I mentioned this this morning, that we've had some difficult days. We've had some difficult times. So those of you who are new to the church might not even have thought that that was the case, but it is.

I look back over the years, some of the times were really difficult. And one of the things that sustained me was just coming together, as we would do every Wednesday, and hearing Christian people pray.

So I remember Mr. G, your father-in-law. He was not a sophisticated man, but he would pray to the Lord, and that would be a tonic, an uplifting, helpful to one's spirit.

And there were other dear people who prayed. And I'm just thinking, Mr. Clark, Mr. Clark, you will have heard me mention him before, who would stand at the door there and say, give out hymn books and say, I was a dirty old engine driver, but the Lord loved me and saved me.

And his sense of the sort of social hierarchy of the railway industry, that he felt he was at the bottom of the pile, but the Lord even had mercy on dirty old engine drivers.

[6:40] And that's the way he would have put it, isn't it? I'm not distorting my memory of that. So things like that. Doris Pocock was a wonderful praying lady.

She had, so correct me if I've remembered this wrong, I think she had TB in her jaw when she was little. The doctors made a right mess of trying to sort that out.

She had a distorted jaw and a distorted eye, and she was told that she wouldn't live beyond her teenage years. Well, she was here until she was what? 98. That lived in the system. Okay. 98.

98. And I remember Mrs. Was it Mrs. Lake? There were ladies who sat at the back and all had hats on. And there was one lady, I might have got her name wrong.

So she said, lean on the Lord, young man. The harder you lean, the more he likes it. And I thought that's good advice. Lean on the Lord.

[7:40] I mean, it's just very simple, isn't it? But it's pretty close to the heart of things. Lean on the Lord every day. Francis Schaeffer, who was more sophisticated, said moment by moment, dependence on the Lord Jesus.

It comes to the same thing, doesn't it? So it was things like that that have helped me. And I remember Spurgeon saying, Spurgeon, I don't remember him saying it.

It's written down in a book. Somebody asked him, Mr. Spurgeon, what is the secret of your fruitful ministry? And he said, it's simple, my people pray for me.

And so I want everybody to know that. When we gather together to pray, and we pray for the various works of the church, but including the sort of pastoral work and the preaching work, that's not nothing.

That's not just a formality. God has used prayers, prayed over the years. And if I might be allowed just to sort of wandringly reminisce.

[8:50] Remember Barbara Davs? She was in one of those pictures. I think she's still going strong in Hailsham. Who was it telling me that? Somebody was. And she prayed, so however many years ago this was, 30 years ago, Lord, make this church full of people.

And so that was prayed, well, I'm guessing 30 years ago, 40 years ago. And that's a prayer that has been answered. So I think faithful prayer is really an important thing.

And we can all do that. So when I said a little bit earlier that it's a team effort, I think that team effort includes everybody in the church. None of us is just a passenger.

We're all participants. We all contribute to the ongoing life of the church. Now, that's not the passage, but there are just some things that I wanted to say.

Let me also just excuse myself by saying, it's an interesting day today, isn't it? Because I haven't, in any sense, sort of, for the last 30 years been thinking, what will I say when we get to year number 30?

[10:03] You know, here we are, year number 28, I should get a few things. I mean, you just do week by week by week and it suddenly comes up. So I haven't really thought thoroughly what to, how to reflect on this.

But anyway, here's the passage. Matthew 20, it's about hiring, it's about a vineyard owner and he hires workers in his vineyard and he says he'll give them a denarius, which is a day's wages.

So the people who work at the beginning, work through the 12 hours of the day, they get a denarius. Now, it's also the case that rather strangely he's hiring people later on in the day.

So he hires people halfway through the day. So they work half a day. And there are people that he hires even right at the very end. So they only work for an hour.

And when they come to get paid, he gives all of them a denarius. And it says, so verse 8, call the workers, pay them their wages, beginning with the last one's hired and going on to the first.

[11:10] The workers who were hired about the 11th hour came and each received a denarius. So they've only worked an hour, but they get a whole day's wages. And the people who've worked for the full day, they just get the same.

They get a denarius too. But in verse 11, they grumble. They say, this isn't fair. We've worked far longer. We should be paid more. And the landowner says, no.

I said I'd give you a denarius. You said that was fair enough. These other people who've worked shorter, I've given them the same. And you shouldn't complain about this.

And he says, verse 15, don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I'm generous? Let me explain to you why this was helpful to me.

As the, when I started off back in full time and the church had been very unsettled and there was a lot of building to do and a lot of effort to be put in and things to be worked through, it was hard work.

[12:32] It was hard. And one of the things I tried to do was get to know other ministers in the area.

And not just the ones that agreed exactly with our reform doctrine, but gospel ministers in general. And one of the things, let me just tell you this about when ministers get together.

It is a temptation for the ministers to compare themselves to each other by the size of their churches. And the ministers of the big churches have more kudos than the ministers of small churches.

It's not a very good thing really, is it? It's not a very good way of assessing people, but there's a temptation for that. And I was going along to these meetings with a church of whatever membership we were.

We were in the teens or twenties in those days. And I thought, these are the sort of thoughts that go through your mind.

[13:47] You say, well, why? Why can't our church grow? I'd like our church to grow. We pray for our church to grow. We want our church to grow. Why can't our church grow? And we prayed.

We did. And the Lord has answered those prayers. But when you're sort of two or three years into full-time ministry, you're thinking, what's, you know, why isn't God doing this stuff?

And I went to a minister's conference. And the, it was a one, a caring minister's conference. And a gentleman, I think from Canada, preached on this.

And he applied it to churches. And church growth. And he said, this is the way God works. How does God work?

In this parable, he gives people generously.

[14:56] There are some people who came in right at the end, just worked for an hour, and he generously gave them the same amount as the people who'd worked for a long, long time. And he said, and the workers who had worked for a long time and got that denarius had no right to complain about the workers who had just worked for an hour and got that disproportionately large amount of money.

And the, the preacher said, the word for this is grace. God is generous and gracious. The fact that he gives some people more is not a reason to complain.

Do you get this point? The fact that he gives some people is not a reason to complain. He's been fair to you. If he's given other people more blessings, you can't complain.

That's his generosity. That's the way he works. And he applied it to, he applied it to himself. He said, I've been working in my church in Canada for X number of years. The church around the corner, they've been working just the last six months.

They've grown hugely. And he says, and I, and I'm inclined to say this isn't fair. And he says, you shouldn't say that because God has been good to them. extra good to them.

[16:27] There's no reason to complain because God works by grace. And this is my thought. That's all it is. I found that so helpful. We were a small church.

We were not like CCK, not like Holland Road, not like Bishop Hannington. And then if you bring it on, more up to date, not like St.

Peter's. This is where we are. This is who we are. God's been good to us. God's been very good to us. And so, you know, I say this to myself, let's just be grateful.

Let's not be grumbling and think, oh, well, we're not. That's God's business, to be gracious and generous to who will be gracious and generous. grace. But let's just be grateful for the grace that's shown to us.

That's my thought. Does that make sense? Yeah. Yeah. Let's pray and then I'll hand over to Chris. Lord, we don't want to be grumbling because you've blessed other people.

[17:44] but rather we want to be grateful for the grace that you've shown to us. We don't deserve even the least of your mercies, let alone to find your abundant salvation.

We don't deserve the least of your mercies, let alone to be found in a family of your people who care about us and love us. And the fact that it isn't hundreds and thousands of people like some churches, well, Lord, we don't want to complain about that.

We're here. We have experienced your grace. We know one another. We have seen answers to prayer. And teach us, Lord, to be extremely grateful to you, extremely appreciative for all that you've done for us.

And may you, Lord, bless many gospel churches in many ways with much abundance. Even bless us here. we thank you for answered prayers over the years.

But we come to you to lift our hearts to you in thanksgiving as we are just now. And we pray and thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

[18:56] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.