

The landowner hires workers throughout the day

It's a common practice for workers to wait in the marketplace for someone to hire them

1. Early in the morning (probably at dawn)—for the usual daily wage
2. 9 am—for whatever is right
3. Noon—the same
4. 3 pm—the same
5. 5 pm—no mention of pay

At the end of the day, they all received the usual daily wage for a laborer—one denarius

It isn't so surprising to me that he hires more workers throughout the day

Or even that he pays them all the same wage, no matter how long they worked

That is the landowner's privilege—each was paid the agreed upon wage

What surprises me is the order in which he paid them

He paid them in reverse order

—starting with those hired at 5 pm, then 3 pm, then noon, then 9 am...

The last to get paid were the first hired early in the morning

And for the exact same wages as the ones hired at 5 pm

Why set them up to be angry with the landowner and with each other?

He apparently wants them to know everybody was paid the same wage

The parable starts out with this phrase: *"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who..."*

Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God—Matthew prefers the kingdom of heaven language

But they are the same thing

It is this upside-down kingdom where things don't operate as the world around us

He just told them *"Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."* Matthew 19:30

An idea which is repeated several times by Jesus in the Gospels

Then he tells this story... *"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who..."*

It is about the kingdom of God and how it operates—I think we need to start here

I'm thinking the vineyard is the kingdom of God

It is the place that the landowner owns—it's the landowner's property

Nowhere in the parable does it mention the work that the laborers are hired to do

We assume that it is work on the vines or harvesting the grapes—but nothing is said about that

Nor does it ever mention the volume of work as a reason for hiring the laborers

Especially as the reason he keeps going back and hiring more workers

In fact, I get the impression that the reason for hiring the workers is that they needed a job

They are standing idle in the marketplace, waiting for someone to hire them

He could have hired them all on the first pass—assuming they were all there in early morning

Maybe he thought others would hire them

Maybe more workers appeared throughout the day

We don't know so it probably isn't important to the parable

But it looks to me like he keeps going back to the marketplace to check on those waiting

Clearly, they were there hoping for work

The landowner has compassion on them as they wait, hoping for work, and hires them

Once they agree on the wages, the landowner “*sent them into his vineyard*”

We assume they go there to work and that they all work hard—but nothing is said about that

It is apparently not important to the story

If the vineyard is the kingdom of God—they are all sent to the kingdom of God

Then we get to this odd piece about paying the wages...

The last people hired, were the first people paid

Everyone was paid the same amount—a day’s wages or one denarius

Everyone knows what everyone else got paid

The parable closes with the reminder that “*the last will be first, and the first will be last*” *Matthew 20:16*

This is the upside-down world of the kingdom of God

The world operates on a system of hierarchy and a sense of perceived justice and fairness

I work longer for the same kind of work—I’m paid more—it’s only fair!

But, instead, this is the kingdom of God and there is a new culture in this kingdom

All are welcome in the kingdom—a radically inclusive welcome to the kingdom of God

Not because God needs us to do God’s work

But because we need place and purpose—something that calls us from standing

The workers are standing idly, hoping to be chosen

They are all chosen, simply because they are waiting

There is no indication that the landowner only took a few workers each time

In fact, the implication is—that in the end, all were chosen

The message to each one is to “*go into the vineyard*”

As if that’s enough—next steps will be given when you get there

The implication is that you will have work, purpose and place

There is no sense of hierarchy in the kingdom of God

It matters not when you arrived—first or last—all have full place and purpose

Our place in the kingdom is not based on our worth...

Our value to God, length of service, the kind of work done, etc.

Our place in the kingdom is given to us simply because we were invited

Radical inclusion—we, along with everyone else, are chosen for the kingdom

The invitation secures our place as full and equal members of the kingdom

Nothing else is needed and nothing else changes that

But we bring our “earthly sense of justice and fairness” into the kingdom of God

Like moving to another country where the culture and laws are different

There are many stories of having to learn the new culture

We do the same thing when we enter the kingdom of God

The first workers hired assert their earthly values and say it isn’t fair

The landowner gently chides them, saying, “*Friend...*”

The worker has received the full pay promised

The landowner chooses to be generous and pay all the same

The culture of the kingdom is all about invitation, inclusion, generosity and grace

Everyone can know what others are paid because it isn’t about the work

It’s about the invitation to come into the kingdom—for all of us

Then we learn to live fully in the kingdom