

THE HOUSEHOLDER AND THE LABORERS

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SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 20: 1-16

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an house holder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. And again, he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go yea also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the Lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong; didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee, Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called, but few chosen.

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For many generations the popular interpretation of this parable has been that the vineyard is the church; that the householder is God; that the day is the life span of man. God calls for laborers in the early morning of life in childhood. But some do not heed the call, until it comes again in youth. Others postpone their acceptance of the call until adult manhood or womanhood. And still others postpone the acceptance of Christ until the eleventh hour, when they are on their deathbed and ready to pass over.

Many a good old fashioned revival sermon has been built around this parable, as the preachers exhorted people to accept Christ NOW, because none of us can be sure that this is not the eleventh hour for us. But even a superficial examination of the exact wording of the parable will suffice to show that this interpretation does not jibe with the facts as set forth in the parable itself.

On some things we may agree. The householder is God. The vineyard into which he seeks to send laborers is his church, or his earthly kingdom. His steward, who eventually rewards the laborers, is his Son, Jesus Christ. The laborers are his ministers, who are sent to sow and reap and tend and prune his vineyard. The individual Christians, who are simply lay-members in the church, are the plants or vines which the ministers are to tend. Except that in one sense we are all laborers together with God, all the members of the church could not be specially called, specially hired, commissioned laborers -- or there would be no vineyard plants on which to labor.

The point on which some of us may disagree is this: That the several "hours" at which these laborers were called from the market place are not intended to represent the different ages, such as childhood, youth, maturity, and old age, in

a man's life. The call did not come to the same men twice. There is no indication that some of the men who were in the marketplace in the early morning refused to work and came back at the third or the sixth or the ninth hour to change their minds. The parable very explicitly states that each time the householder returned, there were "OTHERS" -- some who had never been there before, and who had never heard the call, standing idle. They were standing in the market place, because they wanted to work, and that was the customary place to find employment. There is no record that any one of them ever refused the job the householder offered him. They were in the market place because they wanted to work, and because no man had yet hired them. They had just come on the scene.

We take it then, that this parable of the first, the third, the sixth, and the ninth hours refers to different times, or generations, or dispensations in the history of the WORLD, rather than to several ages in the life of man. At different times in the world's history, the call has gone forth from God for laborers to go and work in his vineyard. That call has been repeated in several dispensations. Whenever there appeared a group of people on earth who wanted to serve the Lord, but who did not know how to go about it -- a group of people standing idle because no man had hired them -- the householder did something about it. He went to the marketplace, issued his call for workers, and the laborers went forth into his vineyard. The same call never went to the same group twice. Some people who had not even enough interest to gather to the market place, where employers always came to find labor, never even heard it. But those who did seek the market place in a desire to be of service, heard the call, and went to work.

The gospel of Christ was not a NEW thing brought to men with the advent of Christ. It was a very old thing;-- it was a philosophy and a gospel as old as Adam. Adam looked forward to the day of Christ, the day when the "seed" of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent, the devil. (See Genesis 3:15) In the 11th chapter of Hebrews, Paul tells how Enoch, the seventh from Adam, pleased God by his faith -- and faith was one of the principles of the gospel of Christ which Paul preaches. 2 Peter, 2:5 tells us that Noah was a "preacher of righteousness," and since righteousness is revealed in the gospel, it is not unreasonable to infer that Noah was a preacher of the gospel. 1st Peter, 3:18-20 tells how Jesus went to preach to the spirits in prison, who were disobedient in the days of Noah. Disobedient to what? To the gospel as preached by Noah, to which God demanded obedience. Galatians 3:8 indicates that the gospel was preached to Abraham. Read on in the third chapter of Galatians, to include verses 16, 17, 18, and 19, This language tells us quite plainly that the covenant which was confirmed of God in Christ BEFORE the days of Abraham, could not be disannulled by the later covenant made with Moses 460 years after. The law of Moses, says verse 19, was ADDED TO the gospel of Christ because of the transgression of the people. The gospel was in existence and known to men long years before Moses received the law.

Moses, too, was under the gospel of Christ. Read Hebrews 11:25-6, in which it is stated that Moses ESTEEMED THE REPROACH OF CHRIST greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. The gospel of Christ was known to Moses, and to the children of Israel in his day. Read 1 Corinthians, chapter 10, verses 1 to 5, telling how all the Israelites who were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, "drank of that spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ."

Now, if we admit what seems obvious from the scriptures we have quoted, and which could be supported by many more if there were time, the gospel of Christ was known and preached unto men from the beginning of the world.--It was known and preached by Adam, by Enoch, by Abraham, by Moses, by John the Baptist, by Paul. That gospel remained the same in all ages, though the law of Moses was superimposed on it because of transgression. Paul said that if even an angel

angel from heaven preached any other gospel, he should be accursed. So, we may expect to find the same gospel being preached today.

But at several periods in the world's history, men have departed from and lost sight of that gospel. They have earnestly desired to do God's will -- at least some few of them have -- and they have gone to the market place to make themselves available if God wants them. Every time when the supply of laborers dwindled, and the knowledge of the gospel was about to be lost to men, God went to the market place to call laborers. In Adam's day, man fell by sin, and needed the gospel. God went to the market place, and called Adam and Noah to preach the gospel. In Abraham's day, people were again losing sight of the gospel; God needed laborers; he went to the market place where those willing to work were gathered, and chose Abraham and others to go and work in his vineyard. The same thing happened in the days of Moses, and of John the Baptist. John came to prepare for Jesus, who was to come in the "meridian of time, or at "about the sixth hour."

We should note that in each of these dispensations or "hours" of the world's history, there was a prophet or leader chosen from among those who were willing and waiting in the market place to serve. Each of these leaders, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses -- had his call from God. Each one of them received the ministry of angels. We do not need to rehearse to you how Abraham entertained angels in his tent; how Moses saw God's presence and heard his voice from the burning bush; how angels prepared for Christ's first advent by appearing and ministering to Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary, John, Joseph, and even the shepherds abiding in the fields. Angels still ministered to the aged John, the beloved apostle, on the Isle of Patmos, showing him the future. Whenever men have been sent into the vineyard, they have been called by God -- the householder; and they have had the instruction and guidance of angels and miraculous powers to assist them in their work.

Now what shall we expect in the 11th hour -- in the final dispensation before all the laborers are called before their lord and given their reward. At the eleventh hour, when the householder again visited the market place where there were congregated those willing to work, he found others standing idle because no man had hired them. They, too, were sent into the vineyard. Does it not seem plausible that these would be sent to preach the same gospel, in the same way? Does it not seem plausible that if the other laborers had been entitled to angelic direction, the laborers in the 11th hour might expect it too? Does it not seem plausible, if God is unchangeable, that we might expect to find a prophet, and revelation through him, in the eleventh hour -- as well as in the first, the third, or the sixth?

Open your Bibles to the 14th Chapter of Revelation, and read the 6th and 7th verses. "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come, and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Here is a prediction of something to happen in the 11th hour -- the hour just preceding that in which "his judgment is come!" An angel is again to fly through heaven, having the EVERLASTING gospel -- the same gospel which was preached in the first, the third, the sixth, and the ninth hour -- which is to be preached once more before men come to judgment.

Latter Day Saints make the strange claim that this is exactly what happened to bring their church into existence. In a time when men were again standing idle in the market place because no one had hired them, and they knew not what to do, the householder came and called them to go labor in his vineyard. Joseph Smith was the prophet of this 11th hour dispensation. The angel flying through the midst of heaven, deposited the everlasting gospel again with him -- restored the gospel which had been lost through neglect and apostasy during the dark ages. The eleventh hour dispensation has its prophet, its angelic ministrations, its miraculous powers. We are in that eleventh hour dispensation now, and the laborers who were hired to go into the vineyard in that hour repeat again the message of the angel who flew through the midst of heaven: "Fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come."