

ought to be read in connection with this parable. Compare also Rom. iv. 1-4. The disciples should not indulge in a mercenary spirit.—“We have done so much for God—what will he give us? How much does He owe us? We do or suffer so much more than such persons—what shall be our reward? If they receive so much, what shall we receive?” Christ seeks in this parable to discourage this spirit and to evoke true love, and the willing, joyous obedience which flows from it. The vineyard is the church of the living God. God himself is the husbandman. Those who are called are all such as hear the invitation of the gospel.

Vv. 1, 2.—God seeks His labourers *early* (literally “with the dawn,”) and sets them to work in his vineyard, the church. A “penny,”—a *denarius*—about ten pence of our money. The custom of seeking and hiring labourers at sunrise in a public place, still prevails in the East.

V. 3.—*Third hour*—say nine o’clock. The Jews divided the day into twelve hours from sunrise to sunset. The first hour would correspond with our 6 o’clock in the morning; the third hour with nine; the sixth hour with 12, noon; the ninth hour with 3, p. m., &c.

Vv. 4-7.—He made no bargain with those who were hired after the first hour. They trusted fully in his fairness and generosity. They do not say, like Peter, “What shall we have?” “No man hath hired us:”—those who are brought up in christian lands, hear the gospel preached, and have bibles to read, can never urge this excuse if they stand idle out of the vineyard till the evening of their day. God is always seeking to “hire” us—to set us to work in his church: we hear the invitation “early in the morning,”—“with the dawn” of life, and we should at once respond. This parable is no encouragement to those who refuse God’s invitation up to the *eleventh* hour, that is, the hour before sunset. All the labourers here referred to are willing to work whenever the invitation is extended to them. We must never infer from this parable, or from any part of God’s word, that it is no matter how long we resist His invitations, how late we enter into His service. Those who have entered the vineyard at the eleventh hour had no opportunity of doing so earlier.

V. 8.—Christ is the “steward” of God’s house. God is a prompt paymaster. (The Jewish law provided for the speedy payment of wages: Deut. xxiv. 16.) The last day is the “great day of account;” Christ shall then dispense their just rewards to all. All His labourers shall receive enough, and vastly more than they ever deserved.

Vv. 9-16.—Those who were sent to work just before sunset were paid first, and received a “penny” (a *denarius*;) those who

had laboured twelve hours thought that they would receive twelve times as much as the *one-hour* men, but they received only the “penny” for which they had bargained.—This led them to murmur against “the good man of the house,” as if a gross injustice had been done to them. The master shows that *they* had their due, while the others received what he saw proper to give them: he gave what was his own, and no one had any right to complain. They ought to be thankful for receiving the “penny” they had earned, and glad that their fellow labourers were treated still more bountifully. Labourers in God’s vineyard, if they indulge the spirit of envy, the “evil eye” will forfeit the kingdom of heaven altogether. No real christian will murmur at the last day at the rewards given to others; he will rather be astonished at the gracious reward reserved for himself. But we are warned against the tendency to over-rate our own services and under-value those of others.

LESSONS.

1. The Lord always amply rewards those who serve Him.

2. The salvation of others causes true christians to rejoice, not to murmur. See Luke xv., &c.

3. God looks not so much at our work and the amount we do as at our *motives*—at the state of our hearts towards Himself. Not “How much hast thou done?” but “What art thou?” will be the great question at the last day.

4. The church is God’s vineyard, and there is room and work enough in it for all, and however late we enter it the reward is ample and sure.

5. Those who stand all day idle outside of the vineyard can excuse themselves because no one has called them. This excuse cannot possibly apply to any sabbath school teacher or scholar, or any hearer of the gospel. We should obey promptly the divine call.

6. “Here” (says Trench) “is encouragement for those who have delayed to enter on God’s service till late in their lives—not encouragement to delay, for we everywhere find in scripture a blessing resting on early piety—but encouragement now to work heartily and with their might.”

7. Murmuring against God, and envying our fellow-labourers are alike displeasing to God.

8. Make your calling and election sure: for many are called, but few are chosen.

DOCTRINE TO BE PROVED.

Salvation is all of grace. Acts xv. 11; Eph. ii. 8-10, &c.