

INTRODUCTION

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a man who is a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a denarius 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 to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. "And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.'

He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.' "So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the labourers and give them their wages, beginning with the last of the first.' "And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. "But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise each received a denarius. "And when they had received it, they murmured against the landowner, 'These last men have worked but one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.'

"But he answered one of them and said, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? "Take what is yours and go your way. I want to give to this last man the same as to you. 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I want with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?' So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen" (Matthew 20:1-20).

The church is designated in many different ways. In each designation we learn something new about the nature of this blood bought institution. We have already noticed a number of these designations. In the verses just read we find it is called a vineyard.

This immediately suggests to us another aspect of the kingdom---that it is a place of work. If the kingdom is too successful it must contain the element of work. Work is essential to its existence. We have been slow to recognize this vital element. Many are content to warm a pew and nothing more.

Many assume that somehow the kingdom just functions, never realizing how much labor is involved. Someone has said about 10% of the members do the work and 90% are perfectly willing for them to do it. It seems in recent years it is becoming more and more difficult to get members to volunteer for various church works such as teaching, visitation, benevolence, etc.

To help us appreciate better the nature of God's kingdom the Lord has described it to us as a vineyard. Those of us living in our area probably know very little about the vineyards. Vineyards were very prominent in the land of Palestine.

1. THE VERY NATURE OF A VINEYARD DEMANDS CONSTANT WORK

A Without the proper care and attention a vineyard would fail to produce. It involves constant work and effort. Much pruning has to be done. If the vine is covered with too many leaves then the grapes do not get enough sunlight thus they cannot properly develop. The vines have to be strung out in such a way that they get plenty of sunlight and grow.

If they grow along the ground they get covered with dirt or dust and are never able to produce grapes. The vine is pulled up from the ground, washing all the dirt away and suspended above ground so it will produce. So a vineyard requires a great deal of personal attention.

B The work is not always easy. In **verse 12** we have the statement, "These last men have worked but one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day."

C The church which is God's vineyard is a place of labor. Notice these passages from the N.T.

"You see then that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

"That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give" (1 Timothy 6:18).

"Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities to obey, to be ready for every good work" (Titus 3:1).

D Consider for a moment the great task that is before the church today before each congregation. Jesus commanded, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

This command was originally given to eleven men. But the command was passed on down to each new convert. One has only to follow in the footsteps of Paul to realize how much labor is involved in carrying out this command.

Most of us never stop to ponder the great and difficult work being done by our present day missionaries who are now far from home in a different and strange culture. Most missionaries are making many sacrifices in order to do this work.

Not only do we need the workers who are willing to go but we need senders and encouragers who pray for their work and supply their physical needs.

E The Lord is constantly seeking those who are willing to labor in his vineyard. The church is never overcrowded with workers.

In Matthew 9:37, 38, Jesus said, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest that He will send out labourers into His harvest." Not only do we need to pray but we need to encourage young men to become evangelist.

F It seems there are never enough workers to reap the harvest.

Jesus said, "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and fathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.'"

G Many congregations and individual members do absolutely nothing to lead the lost to Christ. They meet and worship and that is all they do. In most of these cases they are slowly dying out. They will die out just as a vineyard will cease to produce when the proper labor and attention is not given to it.

H In John 15:1- 4 Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me."

2. FRUITAGE MUST BE BORNE

A Jesus further said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:5 – 8).

B To the Philippians Paul said, "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account."

C Fruitage will be proportion to the amount of attention given the vineyard. Jesus said, "Therefore by their fruits you will know them."

D We reap according to what we sow. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."

E You can tell much about a congregation by the fruits it bears.

3. THE REWARD FOR DILIGENT WORK

A This parable of the vineyard must be viewed in connection the last verse of the previous 19th chapter. "But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

B Notice that the householder went out at different times during the day, the 3rd, 6th, 9th and 11th hours. This is not encouraging people to wait until the very last to become labourers in the Lord's vineyard. However, it does teach that the Lord calls us up until the very last hour.

Regardless of how much or how short a time a person has to live the Lord welcomes him into his vineyard.

C At the end of the day all were paid the same wages regardless of the time spent in the vineyard. Those coming at the eleventh hour may be compared to the Gentiles who came into the kingdom long after the Jews.

Mercy is exercised toward all who have not had advantages equal to the others. Eternal life is the reward for all. The one who has worked 50 years in the vineyard receives the same as the one who has only worked a few years.

All labourers were equal in that each one was ready to work when called upon. The eleventh hour man responded at the very first opportunity.

CONCLUSION

Considering now the teaching of this parable how do you stand in relation to the vineyard of God?

Have you been a good vine dresser or have you fallen down on the job?

If a faithful worker you can enjoy the fruits of your labor.

You have been called but have you responded to the Lord's invitation?

Are you willing to work in the Lord's vineyard?