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EQUAL PAY FOR UNEQUAL WORK

Bible Text for today: Matt. 20: 1-16

With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible-Matt. 19:26

*The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations, which sets and supervises international labour standards for the whole world. In one such standard, countries are required to reflect in their national law and practice that people (male and female) are **entitled to equal pay for work of equal value**. Work can be measured in terms of how long it takes to complete it (in which case, workers get paid by the hour) or how much work there is to do (in which case you get paid for the work done). However, there are some jobs, such as those of executives and professionals, which are not easy to measure by time and output. In that case, your worth is influenced by how indispensable you are to your organization.*

*In today's lesson, we shall discuss the **Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard [Matt. 20:1-16]**, which an average believer finds difficult to comprehend. In the story, all the labourers were each paid one penny per day, even though some of them were hired one hour to the end of the day. On the surface, it looks like equal pay for unequal work. What does our Lord want to teach us? Let's find out!*

1. The Parable at a glance [Ref.: Matt. 20:1-16]

(a) The Employment Contract

The householder (employer) agreed with the labourers as follows:

<u>Time hired</u>	<u>Agreed</u>
6.00 a.m.[v. 1]	One penny per day[v.2]
9.00a.m.,12 noon, 3.00p.m.,5.00p.m .[vs. 3-7]	"Whatsoever is right" [vs. 4, 6,7]

We are not told what work they were hired to do. However, since they were called "labourers," it could have been hard work.

(b) The Pay and the Grievance

Everybody was paid one penny per day [v. 9]. Even “worse”, the last person to be hired was paid first [v. 8]! The labourers who were hired earlier and claimed to “have borne the burden and the heat of the day”[v.12] felt cheated to receive the same amount as those who were hired later. The householder, on the other hand, maintained that he paid them what he had contracted with them, namely, a penny per day. The real grievance, therefore, is that the labourers who had put in the longest time were envious of the “unmerited favour” shown by the householder to the late comers.

If you consider that unfair, life itself is unfair! For example, we don’t die in order of age. The best-educated and most experienced person is not occupying the highest position in every profession. The hardest worker is not the highest paid. The richest people are neither the most hardworking, nor the poorest the laziest. That is why the Preacher says, “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, *but time and chance happeneth to them all*”[Eccl. 9:11]. When Moses asked God to show him His glory, God’s reply was “I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy”[Ex. 33:19]. That is why He makes the sun shine and the rain fall on both the good and the evil [Matt. 5:45]. Christ died for all of mankind, yet there are many who have still refused to accept Him as their Lord and Saviour but have not lost God’s blessings.

2. Analysis from a spiritual perspective

The story begins with “For the kingdom of heaven is like unto...” [v.1]. Therefore, it is a continuation of the discussion in **Matt. 9:27-30**. Peter had asked Jesus what reward there was for those of them who had forsaken all to follow Him. His reply was that such people would have *double* the material things that they had lost *plus* everlasting life after death.

A good illustration of the doubling of material things can be found in **Job 42:12-13**:

<u>Before the trial[Job 1:2-3]</u>	<u>After the restoration[Job 42:12-13]</u>
7,000 sheep	14,000sheep
3,000 camels	6,000 camels
500 oxen	1,000 oxen
500 asses	1,000 asses
7 sons	7 sons
3 daughters	3 daughters

Wait a minute! The number of children remained the same even with the doubling of his material blessings! Lesson? *More is not always better!*

The householder represents God Himself, the Lord of the harvest who chooses the labourers for the harvest [Matt. 9:37-38]. The harvest is “plenteous” but the labourers are few [v.37]. Therefore, we can understand why it was necessary to keep hiring until the last minute. Winning souls for the Kingdom of God is the work [Matt. 9:35-37; Matt. 28:19], and Jesus has promised *eternal life* to His “labourers” [Matt. 19:28-29; Matt. 6:33]. According to Rom. 14:17, the Kingdom of God is “not meat and drink but *righteousness* and *peace* and *joy in the Holy Ghost*.” Now, examine the highlighted words: *eternal life, righteousness, peace, joy*. All of them are uncountable and indivisible. In other words, you can’t cut them into fractions. What is 10% of joy? 75% of peace? Therefore, *a penny per day* can be equated with the fruits of the Holy Spirit [Gal. 5:22], love, joy, peace, perseverance, etc., here on earth, and eternal life here after.

It is immaterial *when* we began to evangelize (i.e., serve as a labourer in the vineyard): whether as a child, like Samuel [1 Sam. 3:19-21], or as an adult, like the Apostles, or even at the point of death, like the Good Thief [Lk 23: 39-43]. Unfortunately, older or more experienced labourers tend to react negatively when younger/newer converts are more favoured than they are. Peter was envious of John’s special place with Jesus [Jn 21:18-23]. Zedekiah, the head of the 400 prophets deceived by a lying spirit concerning Ahab, slapped young Prophet Micaiah, saying, “which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee? [1 Kgs 22:24].

3. Conclusion

Salvation is *not earned*, it is not a reward for our effort as labourers [Eph. 2:8-9]. Therefore, when God calls us as labourers into His vineyard, it is an honour, a duty [Eccl. 12:13-14]. When we are born again by faith in Jesus, we shall be admitted into Heaven. However, **the rank we occupy in Heaven is the reward for our labour in the vineyard** [Matt. 19:28; Matt. 5:19; Rev. 22:12]. But, since a gate man in Heaven is better than a deputy-Satan in hell, no rank is superior to others in God’s eyes [Matt. 11:11]! Therefore, we should stop comparing our workload with anybody else’s because only God knows what we are doing and how He will reward us.