

"First, Last, 1st"  
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"For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' So the last will be first, and the first last." (Matthew 20:1-16)

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Webster's 1828 Dictionary defines fairness to mean "equality of terms" when speaking of a contract. In today's version of Webster's dictionary, the definition of the word has been expanded to mean that there must be a "lack of favoritism toward one side or another". When I challenge the fairness of something, how much of my idea of what is "fair" is based on my perception and how much is based on facts?

When we discuss what is and is not fair, where does my viewpoint of what I "deserve" come in to play and why?

When we discuss what is and is not fair, how important is the concept of "value" and how does value come in to play and why?

When seeking "fairness" how much time do I spend discussing my obligations and how much time do I spend discussing the other person's obligations or do I tend to only present what the other person "owes" me? Explain.

How often do I link my idea of what I believe I'm worth...what my value is with the idea of fairness (e.g., wanting an increase in salary) and why?

What was the terms of the contract between the master of the house with the first work crew that he hired to work in his vineyard and what was the terms of the contract between the master of the house with the other work crews that he hired?

Charles Spurgeon, speaking on Matthew 20:3-4 on May 16, 1897, pointed out that: "This parable sets forth the great God as a householder going forth to find men to work for Him, but let no man imagine that God needs any of us! He was perfect—perfectly happy and perfectly glorious—long before wings of angels moved in space, or before space and time even existed! God was always and still is self-contained and all-sufficient and if He chooses to make any creatures, or to preserve or use any of the creatures He has formed, that is not because He needs them, or is in the least degree dependent upon them. If God comes forth in wondrous Grace to call any of us to work in His vineyard, it is not because He needs us, but because we need Him. He does not set us to work because He needs workers, but because we need work. He calls us not because He requires us, but because we require to be called. Please notice what it says in the first verse of this chapter, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning." Then it says in our text, "He went out about the third hour." In the fifth verse, "Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hours." And in the sixth verse, "And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle." How may God be said to go out? This language is used, first, to teach us that the impulse to serve God always comes from God to us. It never comes from within ourselves...(emphasis added)." Do I, at times, leap to the idea that God "needs" me when He calls me to help in some ministry? If so, why so? If not, why not?

Do I agree or disagree with Spurgeon's assertion that "the impulse to serve God always comes from God to us...It never comes from within ourselves" and why?

Spurgeon then discusses the nature of the workers when the master of the house comes out: "There are also others who are laboriously idle, wearied with toils which accomplish nothing of real worth. The man who is spending all his life in his business, living simply to get money, has but trifling goals, for temporary objects engross him. He who lives for God, for Christ, for the good of men, lives for an objective worthy of an immortal being, but he who lives only for his own aggrandizement, lives for such a temporary and trifling objective that he may be said to be

idle though he wears himself to death with his labor!" We've previously discussed the concept of value and here Spurgeon speaks of someone living "for an objective worthy of an immortal being." How about me? On what (or whom) do I spend my energy on a day-to-day basis? Explain.

John MacArthur pointed out in one of his messages that in "verse 15, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?" It's not illegal, is it? It's not unjust. It's not unfair, is it? Of course not. They received what was promised. They were paid in full by the one who had a right to give what he wanted and did give it. They hadn't worked all day. But listen to this, they hadn't all worked all day, but they all had the same need. So, he met that same need with his generosity. And he says to them, "Is your eye envious because I'm generous?" Are you just envious? Are you just jealous? Does my compassionate kindness to others irritate you? What an indictment." What part do I allow jealousy, envy and/or ego to play when it comes to my idea of "fairness" and why or why not?

MacArthur explains the parable this way: "The householder is God. The vineyard is the kingdom. The laborers are believers in the kingdom. The day of work is time. The evening is eternity, when we receive our reward. The wage is eternal life. The steward is Jesus Christ who is given the task of rewarding his own. And all of that comes together to mean this: all who come into Christ's kingdom to serve him, no matter how long, no matter how short, no matter how hard, no matter how easy the circumstance, will in the end equally receive the same full reward. What is that reward? Eternal life, eternal glory, eternal Christlikeness. Those who come first to God will receive no more than those who come last. Those who come last will receive no less than those who come first... Jesus is saying that the eternal benefits of the kingdom of God are the same for all who are subject to the rule of the king whenever and however may be their place or time of service. It's a tremendously encouraging thing. Life may be inequitable, but God isn't, and eternity won't be either. Every believer, no matter when converted or what manner of service or for how long, will receive the crown which is eternal life spoken of in James 1:12, will receive the crown which is righteousness spoken of in 2 Timothy 4. How wonderful it is to realize that the same glorious, eternal life will be given to the penitent thief as was given to the faithful apostles. The same eternal life will be given to that sinner who near death turns from a life of wickedness to embrace Christ as is given to that missionary who spent 50 years in a jungle in deprivation and difficult labor...It's a tremendous truth. Is this a truth that I need to share with my "Who's Your One? If so, how and when will I get "a round TUIT"? If not, why not?

MacArthur said that another "...point that comes out of this is that all who came into the vineyard worked. There were no deadbeats. No freeloaders. There weren't two people working and four supervising. And what is the work? Evangelism. That's what it is. Harvest, harvest, harvest. I mean that's the work, isn't it? That's the only work we do here, really, that we couldn't do in heaven. I mean we could praise in heaven, and we could worship in heaven, and we could live those holy lives in heaven, and we could fellowship [in heaven]." Does my "bucket list" of things to do before I die contain evangelism? If so, how's that going for me? If not, why not?