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Conducted by  
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**“Do you think it was fair that the labourers who worked all day in the vineyard should get no more than those who only did an hour’s work?”**

I suppose in the context in which the questioner uses it the word ‘fair’ would mean just, equitable. I suppose God is represented by the householder, and the Kingdom by the vineyard. The workers are those who are employed in the vineyard and who enter it at various times. The context suggests that there will be those who will enter the Kingdom early or late, and that they must understand how a just and equitable God will deal with them all.

### **The Context**

The incident under consideration is recorded for us in Matthew 20:1-16. Prior to this, Peter had said to Jesus, “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” (19:27). Jesus told the Twelve the special task which was reserved for them, but He also indicated that *anyone* who had left people or things precious to them would not go unrewarded. He also made it very clear that ‘first in’ would not of itself qualify for special treatment. He then embarks on the parable.

The first thing we notice is that the labourers who were engaged in the early part of the day *agreed* with the householder what they should be paid. There seems to have been no dialogue regarding what they had to do nor how long they had to do it. There was no Law of Contract then, but it was evidently held, by the householder anyway, that a binding agreement had been entered into by *both* parties.

I have little doubt that the significance of this parable would not be lost on the disciples, nor ought it to be lost on us. Some of the disciples saw themselves as having borne the burden and heat of the day with the Lord, and consequently they had the impression that they were entitled to greater consideration; perhaps some of us think like that also. But we should realise that to labour in the Kingdom is a blessing *in itself* no matter how arduous or demanding the tasks may be. To receive a reward on top of that is a measure of the love and concern of our Divine Householder.

### **Righteousness**

The next thing we notice is the answer given to those who were engaged later in the day, “Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you.

And they went their way" (v4). These latter weren't even offered any set sum of money, but to their credit they were obedient (some of their present-day compatriots might even say foolhardy). The lesson here is plain; anyone who enters the Kingdom doesn't barter with God over the conditions which *they* expect to have. They trust that a Righteous God *can only* give what is right, and so they get on with their work and rest content in His assurance. I wonder why so many of us cannot simply rely on the specific assurances of God? We ostensibly labour in the Kingdom but we seem always to have a weather eye cocked to take advantage of what we term the legitimate rewards of the world in order to supplement what we consider to be the boundless Grace of God; rather paradoxical I have always felt. "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Well, of course He will.

### Motivation

It seems today that motivation to do *anything* depends very much on the incentives offered. There are a number of well-established factors which govern the motivation process but I want to bring just two to your notice. These are expectancy and availability. Let's take the case of a man coming home from work and he has a strong desire to eat some fish and chips so he decides he will call at the local 'chippy'. Unfortunately when he gets there the 'chippy' is closed. 'Ah well', he thinks to himself 'I'll make some when I get home', and so on his way he goes, salivating like Pavlov's dog in anticipation of the treat awaiting him. His expectancy is paramount. When he reaches home, no fish has been taken out of the freezer and there are no potatoes. There is now an acute problem of availability. In this condition the man has a frustrated need which will change his whole attitude to people and things.

The labourers in the vineyard had an expectancy that they should have received more than the late-comers. The availability was there, they thought, with the householder, and they began to complain when the extra reward wasn't given. They had a frustrated need and it showed in their conduct. How many times do we act like spoiled children when we don't receive those things to which we think we are eminently entitled? We complain what God has done for other people, and sometimes we even go so far as to blame *Him* for what we term as our misfortune. God will give us what is *right*, not what *we* believe we have merited. There may be some who would look at a person who came into the Kingdom in the twilight of life and think, 'Ah, its alright for some. They can enjoy themselves for the greater part of their lives and then come to reap the blessings of the Kingdom when they die.' May God forbid that any Christian should think like that.

There is also jealousy to consider. Our petty jealousies can consume us and do untold harm to the Church. We should lay them at one side; they are sins.

Did the householder act fairly? Maybe not, the worldly man would say, but as regards the Kingdom, there can certainly be no doubt that God will. His ways are so much higher than ours. His eye will not be evil because ours is.

*(All questions please to Alf Marsden, 377 Billinge Road, Highfield, Wigan, Lancs.)*

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*Never attempt to bear more than one kind of trouble at a time. Some people try to bear three kinds—all they have had, all they have now, and all they expect to have.*

*I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies; for the hardest victory is the victory over self.* Aristotle