

THE HUSBANDMAN . . . , who paid strange wages
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(Matthew 20:9)

You are a most interesting character, Mr. Unknown Husbandman, and your delightful ways have caused a great amount of discussion. A man whose actions are unpredictable is always a source of interest, but you succeeded in surprising a world. Many of us would have liked to accompany you that morning when you went into the market place in search of labourers. Your first employees were sent into the vineyards at 6 a.m. After you had eaten your breakfast, you visited the workmen and decided that it had become necessary to employ more hands. These commenced their belated shift at 9 a.m. This unusual procedure was repeated at 12 noon, and again at 3 p.m. Your method of seeking workmen seems totally foreign to western ways, and we have often wondered why you did not save time and trouble by hiring sufficient men when you first visited the market place. Yet at 5 p.m. you asked others to go and work for one hour, and at the end of the day these received a full day's wages. In the attempt to explain this unexpected generosity, we have asked several questions. Mr. Husbandman, we wish you were here to answer them.

Why hire so few men at 6 am.?

We rejected the idea that you were mean, and expected a few men to do the work of many. Your magnificent gesture toward the last batch of men outlaws any suggestion of meanness. We also asked if you were inexperienced in assessing the number of men required for the completion of the task. The successive hirings denote that had such been the case, you were very slow at learning your trade. When a business man has to be taught the same lesson four times in one day, there is obviously something wrong with his business. We decided, therefore, that the fault was in the workmen. They had a go-slow policy in order to lengthen the time of their employment. And since you were anxious to get the job finished on that particular day, it became necessary to increase the number of your workmen. The later arrivals worked well for a time, but were eventually influenced by their leaders. Dear friend, weren't you disgusted with them?

Why did the five o'clock men wait so long?

It was a very trying experience to wait eleven hours in a market place. As the day began to pass away and the shadows of night gathered, common sense would suggest a homegoing with a promise to return early the following morning. It must have seemed most unlikely that a man would engage labour at such a late hour; yet these would-be employees continued their weary vigil. Husbandman, were they desperate? Were they anxious to obtain food for their families? Were their prayers answered when you appeared on the scene? How we would love to obtain your answers to all these thought-provoking questions! Yet one thing needs no explanation. These men worked conscientiously when they entered into your vineyard. They put their best endeavours into the task, and while they could not equal the number of baskets filled by the men who had slowly worked for twelve hours, they at least did their best.

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Why did you pay them a full day's wages?
Obviously you were very pleased with their efforts. They had fewer boxes of grapes to place at your feet, but they had more perspiration on their brows. It seems to us that you were more concerned with the way they had worked than with the results achieved. They had done their utmost at the job, and you revealed your appreciation in the magnificent wages which left them speechless with surprise. Mr. Husbandman, we heard about you because Jesus of Nazareth introduced you as the theme of one of His outstanding sermons. When thinking of eternal rewards, Simon Peter said, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said - . . . And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother . . . for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matt. 19 :27-29), It seems quite clear to us now that the Lord Jesus realized He would have many followers who would prove to be half-hearted and unenthusiastic. He therefore desired to teach that, when He returns at the end of life's day to reward His servants, His awards will be given not to those people expecting them, but to the faithful people who did their utmost in His service.

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