



WORKERS IN GOD'S VINEYARD

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Good morning and welcome to Let the Bible Speak. Thanks for joining me today. The first Labor Day holiday was celebrated in New York City in September 1882. By 1894, 24 states had adopted Labor Day celebrations and in 1894. President Grover Cleveland declared the first Monday of every September a national holiday. It all began as a suggestion from a labor union official who thought workers deserved a day of recognition for their critical role in building America. America has always depended upon hard workers to make the country what it became. While men did not design, plan, nor build the kingdom of God, God does commend those who work for His kingdom and His glory. God designed the church in such a way that it in many respects relies upon the work of His people to maintain and expand it in this world. That doesn't mean that God is somehow powerless without us, nor does it mean that our work has put God in our debt, but simply that God's design is for His people to work for His cause and help get heaven's will accomplished here on earth.

Christ pictured His people as workers in at least one of His parables. In Matthew 20:1, the Savior said, ***"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard."*** Jesus goes on to describe how the landowner hired workers at the beginning of the day but also hired workers after the day was nearly gone and how all received the same pay. There are several principles to be gleaned throughout the parable – one of which is the underscoring of His great kingdom teaching that the last will be first and the first will be last. But for this lesson, I simply want us to see that Jesus likens us to workers in a vineyard. We don't earn our keep. Our labor certainly does not merit salvation or any other benefit from the Master. But He does intend for us to be workers in His spiritual vineyard. Not only is that the illustration He draws from in this parable, but there are also many other references in the word of God which teach us that we are to be a working people if we are to please Him. I want to talk about the vital role of the worker in the Lord's vineyard today and talk about what kind of workers the Master is looking to employ.

Work is an honorable thing in the eyes of God and conversely, laziness and idleness is a sin. The apostle Paul, a scholar and intellect, worked with his hands to make a living, in part, that he might set an example to the church. He then said that if a man will not work, neither should he eat. (2 Thessalonians 3:10) Solomon likewise commended the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 saying “She watches over the ways of her household And does not eat the bread of idleness.” (Proverbs 31:27) Paul told Timothy that the church is not to support younger widows who can marry or are yet able to make their way in the world because they will “learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies...” (1 Timothy 5:13) Yes, there’s danger in the life of a person who doesn’t have work to do and something to occupy their time and their hands. If at all physically possible, we are to be working and productive people and hard work should be celebrated by society and by God’s people. But we’re not merely talking about laboring for our physical bread. We are to be busy workers in the kingdom of the Lord as well.

In the parable we cited in the beginning of the program, Jesus pictured His subjects as being workers put into His employ. Then, in Mark 13:34 he pictured the kingdom this way saying, “It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.” Much later, the apostle Paul would tell the Christians in Corinth, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58) Paul also told them in 2 Corinthians 6:1 that he and the other apostles were “workers together with Christ...”

There’s much work to be done in the kingdom of God. The Lord does not save men and women so that they can sit idly by and wait to go to heaven. He gave us responsibilities and tasks to attend to here on earth. And those responsibilities never cease so long as we live here, and the church remains in this world. What kind of work does God have for us to do? Well, one thing is the work of enlarging the borders of His kingdom – that is – to bring souls to him. This is a work in which every Christian should be engaged in one form or another. Paul referred to our labors to spread the truth and win converts as “our work” in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15. Are you engaged in that work? Do you use the influence you have over others in your life as a means of introducing them to Christ and pointing them to the truth? There’s the work of building up the church. We are to encourage and exhort one another (Hebrews 10:25). We are to bear one another’s burdens by strengthening the spiritually weak and restoring the fallen. (Galatians 6:1-2) We are to be busy attending to our own growth in Christ and in the faith (Galatians 6:4-5). We’re to be busy ministering to the needs of others, as others have said, being the hands and feet of Christ in this suffering world. There’s no shortage of work to do as long as we live, and God expects those who He allows into His vineyard to be about that work. Paul said in Ephesians 2:10, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

What kind of workers is God counting on? Anyone who runs a business knows there’s much more at stake than just finding people who want a job and a paycheck. The owner or the manager wants good workers. When they put out the ‘help wanted’ sign, they usually have a certain quality of worker in mind. And it’s not just knowledge of the field they’re looking for. You can have all the expertise in the world, but you haven’t got much of an employee if he or she doesn’t possess some characteristics that describe a desirable worker in any field. In fact, the education and training will be a lot easier if they bring to the workplace certain attitudes and behaviors. They will excel – they will go far – and they will win the praise and the appreciation of the person who hires them. Let’s think about some of the characteristics of spiritual workers who please the Master and ask yourself, does God see you as that kind of worker?

First, God wants those who will work OBEDIENTLY. If a person cannot and will not follow orders and instructions, they will be a problem for any organization. I had an acquaintance who had a hard time keeping a job. It just never seemed to work out. What the problem ended up being was that she was never content to just go and do what they told her to do. She went into the job complaining and criticizing the way the company was run and decided she would do things her way. As you might imagine, that didn't go over so well. Christ doesn't need our counsel in how to run His vineyard. He knows what He is doing, and He wants workers who will be humbly obedient. Jesus asked in Luke 6:46, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" Jesus isn't looking for CEOs to revolutionize the church. He isn't looking for consultants to reinvent and refine His mission, message, and method. He is looking for obedient workers. We work for Him and not ourselves. We are to serve at His pleasure and not our own. We are to do things in the way that He specifies and not however we see fit. He defines the work that is to be done and it is His prerogative alone to tell us how He wants it to be done and He will reward us in the last day based upon whether we faithfully and obediently did His bidding. When our Lord told the parable of the pounds in Luke chapter 19, he left His subjects and told them to do business until He returned. You recalled that two of them did as he instructed them to do and one did not. The ones who conscientiously did with the money he left what he asked them to do were commended by the nobleman in verse 17 by saying, "...Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities." Notice He described the man as FAITHFUL. The word Jesus used means, according to Thayer, ones "who show themselves faithful in the transaction of business, the execution of commands, or the discharge of official duties. He is faithful because you know he will do his best to follow the instructions of the Master.

But not only does He want workers who work obediently, but He desires those who work DEPENDABLY. That word 'FAITHFUL' in the parable we just cited also refers to "one who can be relied on". Just like any employer values workers they can count on, so Christ desires laborers He can depend on as well. In fact, I don't know of anything any business, or any supervisor appreciates any more than one who is always at work when he or she is supposed to be and on time and ready to get to work. The same holds true in the vineyard of the Lord. In my years of secular work, it was very frustrating to work with people who could not be depended on. Something always came up. They might be at work, and they might not. It made it hard for that business to operate like it's supposed to; it made things more difficult for those who DID show up to work; and it gave the boss a low estimate of their value as an employee. Most companies will only put up with that so long, and then you're out. But friend, it's just as serious of a matter when the Lord cannot depend one in His church as well.

Could you be described as a dependable worker in the kingdom of God? Can the church count on you? Is your seat conspicuously empty when for some reason beyond your control you're not able to be present? The apostle said we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together as a church in Hebrews 10:25. Some of the early Christians were making a practice or a habit of doing just that. One of the meanings of the word forsake is "to leave helpless or in straits." Friend, if you're a Christian, the church depends on you. You can't criticize the church for not being any stronger, active, zealous, or fruitful than you are – because you're just as much a part of it as anyone else. The word faithful is used again and again to describe the Christian in the New Testament. When one is faithful, he doesn't put other things before the service of Christ. When one is faithful, he won't leave the cause of Christ in the lurch because jumps ship or runs and hides when the work gets difficult or even dangerous. Some people run hot awhile and then they run cold awhile. You can't depend on them. Be thou FAITHFUL even unto death and Christ will give us a crown of life, according to Revelation 2:10. Are you that kind of

laborer? Trustworthy? Dependable? Committed to the very end regardless of what obstacles, what distractions, or what difficulties may arise along the way?

But not only does God want those who work OBEDIENTLY and DEPENDABLY, but He also commends those who work EAGERLY. Here is another characteristic that just about any employer values – a worker with a willing and eager attitude; a grateful worker who looks for opportunities to make the business succeed – to help others – to pull their weight – and to go the extra mile when needed. Who wants to fool with a worker who begrudgingly shows up to work and who complains and murmurs about every task they are assigned to do. I would suggest that Christ is looking for laborers who come to work in His vineyard with a grateful and eager heart. And I can tell you something else, you'll enjoy the work a lot more when you approach it with such an attitude. The day will go much faster and the rewards will be far greater when you put your hand to the plow with a mind to work and a heart to serve.

Jesus told another parable that's recorded in Luke 17:7-10. Listen to Christ now. He says: "And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.' "" Do you see the attitude that Jesus exposes? Here's a man who did everything commanded of him. He did an honest day's work in the field. So, what's wrong? Is Jesus saying we should not do our duty? Of course not! He is showing us that we are not earning something by our service. Our reward is given by grace. That shouldn't make us sit back and do nothing. It should make us work all the more and do so with a humble and grateful attitude – not grumbling and complaining. Not doing the bare minimum to get by – but serving the Lord with all of our heart because of what He has done for us.

And finally, not only is He looking for those who will work OBEDIENTLY, DEPENDABLY, AND EAGERLY, but also URGENTLY. Just as their only so many hours in the day to complete the work a day demands in the office, the factory, the farm, or wherever it may be, there are only so many fleeting hours left in the day of life on this earth. Time is moving along in its rapid flight and the sun is racing toward the western horizon for us all. Jesus keenly recognized this fact during His own time on earth. Jesus lived just a little over 33 years. Only three and half years of that were allotted to His ministry and fulfilling the ultimate purpose in His coming to earth. He said in John 9:4, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work." Jesus knew He only had a short time to do the will of His Father and He set His hand to the task before Him and made use of every minute, every hour, and every day.

This life is short and the Christian has only a little time for God to use him here on earth. Paul said "...knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light." (Romans 13:11-12). He said in Ephesians 5:15-17, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." The work of God is serious business, and it is urgent business. And if we do not treat it as such, we may look up one day and say with the people of old: Summer is ended, the harvest is past, and we are not saved.

Is obedience to the gospel an urgent thing with you? Ananias asked Paul “What are you waiting for, arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling in the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16). Is the kingdom of God and its affairs urgent as far as you’re concerned, or are you more concerned with making a living, getting by in this world, pursuing the things of earth? Seek FIRST the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all those other things will be added to you, the Savior taught. Night is coming when no man can work – and therefore we need to be working for the Lord today. Not only do we need to be working obediently, faithfully, dependably, and eagerly – but we need to be working urgently.

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