

## It's Five O'clock Somewhere! Mathew 20: 1-16

God's plan for diversity of humanity is expansive, and regardless of our heritage and backgrounds we do share some things in common with each other. One of those is the need to work. Just twenty- eight verses into the opening chapter of the first book of our Bible we find these words referring to the first two human beings God created, our ancestors Adam and Eve. "And God blessed them. And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Adams first job was to work and keep the Garden of Eden, and God created Eve to be his helper. Notice that God not only created and blessed them to work, God designed them to work together. God has done the same with us.

God has uniquely designed us and called us to have dominion over the earth. Another way of saying that is that God has called us work. For some, it means caring for our home or church families. For others, it might be working in a factory, office, farm, retail store or running a business. Still others are called to serve, whether it be in the medical field, law enforcement, first responders or military. People are designed and created to work. It is in our genes.

When people work together great things happen. The dinner that we served here yesterday evening was a perfect example. It is no easy task to plan, prepare, and serve and then cleanup for 100 + people and it could not have been successful without teamwork. People used the many skills and gifts God blessed them with to meet some real needs in our community. Some cooked, some served, some cleaned, some prayed, and some did all four. I once saw a sign on a church marquis that put it this way: The one that is busy rowing the boat will not have time to rock it. Vince Lombardi, one of the best coaches in the history of football said this: People who work together will win, whether it be against complex football defenses, or the problems of modern society. Today there is little doubt that the church and the world would benefit from more rowers and fewer rockers.

There are numerous passages in Scripture that deal with work and teamwork. The writer of Ecclesiastes in 5:19 tells us to “find satisfaction in our labors”. The author of those words was King Solomon, and he probably never had to work a day in his life to provide for his family. Even so, he still realized the importance of being satisfied with what God has given us and called us to do. In that same book, Solomon also reminds us that there is strength in numbers. 4:12 “Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Work is required, but so is rest. Exodus 23:12: “Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work”. Don’t you wish God had said four days? We are called to work, but also called to rest. Even God saw fit to rest on the seventh day.

In the NT, the words of Jesus in Mathew’s Gospel in 9:37 might come to mind: Speaking of reaching the lost, Jesus reminds His followers that the harvest is plenty, but the workers are few. The 90/10 principle is nothing new. Today they are getting fewer. But perhaps the best Scriptural advice we can follow when it comes to our work is that of the apostle Paul. He reminded the church at Colossae and for that matter the Millcreek Community Church to “do your work willingly, as though you were serving the Lord himself and not just your earthly master”.

The concept of work is so important that Jesus found it necessary to include it in some of the 40 parables that He used to teach about God and God’s will for people like you and I. In Mathew 20 we find the parable of the workers and it is no surprise that Jesus uses something common to all of us to teach about heaven. He compares the kingdom of heaven, which we know is His church, to a wealthy landowner who sets out to hire workers for his vineyard.

We are not sure what the chores were. Perhaps the grapes were ready to be picked, or maybe the vines needed pruned. There was work that needed to be done, the owner of the vineyard goes to unemployment office at 6:00 AM and hires a group of workers. The pay was one denarius for a day’s work. One denarius was a fair wage in those days for a day’s pay. A Roman soldier would have earned that same amount for serving in Caesar’s army.

Around 9:00 AM that morning, the vineyard owner returned to the marketplace to find additional workers. He finds a group of people doing nothing and arranges for them to work for him in the vineyard as well. Though he did not specifically say what the pay would be, he did tell them it would be right. This same thing happens again at noon and at 3:00 PM.

At 5:00 PM he returns and finds yet another group of people standing around. Verse 6&7 are key to understanding what Jesus is teaching in this parable. After asking why they are standing around doing nothing, he hires them as well. The owner of the vineyard now has 5 different crews of workers, all hired at different times of the day. The workday ended at 6:00 PM, and in those days, the Law of Moses required employers to pay their workers daily for their work, as most were poor and would need to buy food for their dinner that night. The first clue we have that something might be up is that the vineyard owner chose to pay those he had hired at 5:00 PM first. Do you wonder if that was when the first labor union got started?

Those in the last group each received one denarius for working about one hour. Can you imagine the excitement of those who had started at 6:00 AM that morning? If it were me, I would have quickly figured that I should receive about 12 denarii, since I had worked 12 hours. However, they were disappointed to find that they received the same pay- one denarius- as the ones who had only worked an hour. They “grumbled” (vs11) and accused the landowner of being unfair!

But was he? They were promised one denarius for a day’s work and they received one denarius for a day’s work. What is unfair about that? The workers who had started at 6:00 AM were not upset because they did not get paid a fair amount. No, they were upset that someone else appeared to receive more than they did. Other translations say they had an evil eye. They were envious of those who seemed to receive more for working less. The landowner reveals the problem with their reasoning. The vineyard is his, and he can pay those he hires whatever he chooses to. Take what belongs to you and go. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what (who) belongs to me?

That is an interesting story, but what does it have to do with heaven and the church? God can be compared to the vineyard owner. We are like the workers. Some of us he has chosen early to work for the kingdom and some of us may not meet him till late in the day. Early or late, God in His grace and generosity has a magnificent plan for all who seek Him to receive eternal life.

God's extends His grace to all of us, we simply need to decide to accept it. It is never too late to begin working in God's vineyard. That should make us all extremely grateful. However, there are those, particularly those who have worked hard their whole life for the church, who might say that plan seems less than fair. If we compare our work and faithfulness to others that may be the case. But if holiness is the standard, not one of us deserve a denarius for our work. We all fall short.

The good news is that God certainly will justly reward in us in eternity according to His plan. There are other parables that suggest we will be rewarded according to the deeds that we have done here on earth. Until that day comes, let us remember that none of us are worthy on our own to stand before Him and ask for anything, no matter what we have done for Him. Even those with an evil eye can ask God for forgiveness and a fresh start. 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:9 tells us of God's patience "for he desires none to perish".

God has chosen to give each of us gifts and graces. Some receive them sooner, some receive them later, and though some may get more no one gets less than the others. Regardless of when or how much is received God expects us to use those gifts to further the Kingdom. It is my prayer this morning that we will be obedient to His call. As the song says its 5:00 somewhere and Jesus has not given up. He is still seeking people like you and I to work for Him. I pray we will be willing to go and work together for the glory of the kingdom. Let us thank Him for coming back for us. Amen