



Is God Too Generous?

The Lord of the vineyard will never be content leaving us to stand around doing nothing. And, fortunately, the wages he is offering sure beat the ones we deserve.

Is it just me, or do the words of Jesus ever remind you that you're awfully glad he's God and you're not? His parables pack such a punch they often leave me winded. All too often I see myself reflected in the self-centered, self-righteous guys he is calling on the carpet. One parable that gets me every time is the story of the workers in the vineyard.

The parable goes something like this: There are a bunch of guys hanging around the Jerusalem Home Depot, when the owner of a vineyard starts looking for some seasonal workers. He finds a few guys first thing in the morning, agrees on a decent wage, and they hop in the back of his pick-up truck and head out.

But when the vineyard owner makes another marketplace run a few hours later, he notices there are more folks loitering about looking for work. So, he hires a few more, then at noon a few more, and on and on it goes. He keeps finding guys hanging around with nothing to do, and inviting them to come work in his fields. He hires his last crew in the 11th hour (5 p.m. our time).

These latecomers have barely worked an hour when the day is done, and it's time for the books to be reconciled. The owner of the vineyard invites the 11th-hour hirelings up first to get their paychecks. Imagine their surprise when they see a full day's wages on their check.

The rest of the workers standing around watching this transaction must be tingling with anticipation. If guys who only worked one hour got a full day's pay...those who worked three, six, nine or eleven hours must be looking forward to a whopper of a check!

But it turns out the people who worked three hours get paid the same as the 11th hour bunch. Okay. Chalk it up to ease of bookkeeping. But when those who worked six hours get paid the same, nerves start setting in. And, finally, when those who worked a full nine and eleven-hour day get

handed the same check—a check that was exactly what they had agreed on when they took the job—they couldn't hold back.

"They began to grumble against the landowner. 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour...and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'"

("How UNFAIR!!" I find myself shouting along with them...)

"But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'" (Matthew 20:11-15).

Ouch. Yes, I must confess, I am envious of his generosity. And it's oh, so embarrassing. The parable painfully points out my lack of gracious good-will as well as my failure to completely celebrate the Lord's generosity in my life.

Once again I'm glad he's God and I'm not. Once again I'm reminded that "It's not about me" or who's equal to or not equal to, more than or less than. It's all about him and his perfect kindness.

The Lord of the vineyard keeps giving. He keeps searching. He keeps looking to write freedom checks to all who are loitering about, lost, not knowing what they should be doing with their life. He doesn't want to leave anyone standing aimless and unwanted in the marketplace.

And let me ask you, those who have been laboring for him for a while; is there any better job you could have? And for those who climbed in the truck at the 11th hour, Hallelujah! Our Savior keeps coming back for more. The Lord of the vineyard will never be content leaving us to stand around doing nothing. And, fortunately, the wages he is offering sure beat the ones we deserve. □

—Susan Reedy