

Matthew 20:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house,

Analysis

And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house (λαβόντες δὲ ἐγόγγυζον κατὰ τοῦ οἰκοδεσπότου, labontes de egonguzon kata tou oikodespotou)—The verb γογγύζω (gonguzō, to murmur, grumble) is the same used for Israel's wilderness complaints against God (Exod. 16:7-8, LXX). Their murmuring is not against fellow workers but **against the goodman** (κατὰ τοῦ οἰκοδεσπότου, kata tou oikodespotou), the master of the house. This exposes the heart issue: their quarrel is with God's sovereign grace, not merely wage distribution.

The tragedy is that **when they had received it** (λαβόντες, labontes)—having obtained precisely what was promised—they complain. Receipt of covenant blessing doesn't guarantee a grace-shaped heart. Like the Pharisees who resented Jesus eating with sinners (Luke 15:2), these workers reveal that long tenure can breed entitlement rather than gratitude. Their murmuring demonstrates that time served doesn't automatically produce mature faith.

Historical Context

Murmuring (γογγυσμός, gongusmos) was Israel's characteristic sin in the wilderness, expressing distrust of God's provision and character. Jesus's original audience would hear echoes of their ancestors' faithlessness. The parable confronts first-century Jewish believers tempted to resent God's grace to Gentiles and sinners, viewing it as injustice rather than mercy.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does murmuring reveal that the root sin is not merely ingratitude but theological objection to God's character and sovereign grace?
2. What does this verse teach about the danger of long-term religious service breeding entitlement rather than deepening dependence on grace?
3. In what ways do you find yourself murmuring against God when He blesses others in ways that seem disproportionate or undeserved?

Interlinear Text

λαβόντες δὲ ἐγόγγυζον κατὰ τοῦ
when they had received And it they murmured against G3588
G2983 G1161 G1111 G2596

οἴκοδεσπότου
the goodman of the house
G3617

Additional Cross-References

1 Thessalonians 2:16 (Parallel theme): Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

Luke 19:7 (Parallel theme): And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.