

Matthew 20:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

Analysis

Saying, These last have wrought but one hour (λέγοντες ὅτι οὗτοι οἱ ἔσχατοι μίαν ὥραν ἐποίησαν, legontes hoti houtoi hoi eschatoi mian hōran epoiēsan)—The workers' complaint emphasizes the disparity: one hour versus a full day. Their calculation is mathematically accurate but spiritually blind. They reduce Kingdom service to time-tracking and merit-accumulation, precisely the mindset Jesus seeks to dismantle. The contemptuous phrase **these last** (οὗτοι οἱ ἔσχατοι, houtoi hoi eschatoi) reveals disdain for eleventh-hour laborers.

And thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day (καὶ ἴσους ἡμῖν αὐτοὺς ἐποίησας τοῖς βαστάσασιν τὸ βάρος τῆς ἡμέρας καὶ τὸν καύσωνα, kai isous hēmin autous epoiēsas tois bastasasin to baros tēs hēmeras kai ton kausōna)—Their offense is **equal** (ἴσος, isos) treatment. The burden (βάρος, baros, heavy weight) and scorching heat (καύσων, kausōn, burning heat) describe legitimate hardship, yet their complaint reveals they view service as drudgery, not privilege. They want hierarchical reward structure, but the master's grace abolishes such categories.

Historical Context

Palestinian summers were brutally hot, with midday temperatures exceeding 100°F. The burden and heat were real physical suffering. Yet Jesus's parable uses this to illustrate that those who bear greater hardship don't thereby earn superior

status. In the Kingdom, the crown of righteousness is gift, not wages—received equally by all who finish the race, whether they ran decades or days (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the early workers' resentment of 'equal' treatment expose the human tendency to view suffering and service as merit-earning rather than grace-enabled responses?
2. What does this verse reveal about the danger of comparing your spiritual journey's difficulty with others', using hardship as grounds for superior status?
3. In what ways does the complaint 'thou hast made them equal unto us' mirror the elder brother's resentment in Luke 15, and what does this teach about religious self-righteousness?

Interlinear Text

λέγοντες	ὅτι	Οὗτοι	τὸν	ἔσχατοι	μίαν	ὥραν	ἐποίησας
Saying G3004	G3754	These G3778	which G3588	last G2078	G1520	hour G5610	have wrought G4160
καὶ	ἴσους	ἡμῖν	αὐτοὺς	ἐποίησας	τὸν	βαστάσασιν	τὸν
and G2532	equal G2470	unto us G2254	them G846	have wrought G4160	which G3588	have borne G941	which G3588
βάρος	τὸν	ἡμέρας	καὶ	τὸν	καύσωνα		
the burden G922	which G3588	of the day G2250	and G2532	which G3588	heat G2742		

Additional Cross-References

Luke 12:55 (Parallel theme): And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass.

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