

Matthew 20:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

Analysis

And about the eleventh hour he went out (περὶ δὲ τὴν ἐνδεκάτην ὥραν ἔξελθόν, peri de tēn hendekatēn hōran exelthōn)—The eleventh hour, approximately 5 PM in a workday that began at 6 AM, represents the final opportunity before sunset when work ceased. The master's going out at this late hour demonstrates grace's extravagance, seeking workers when only one hour remains. This hiring seems economically irrational but reveals God's heart.

Why stand ye here all the day idle? (τί ᾧδε ἔστήκατε ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν ἀργοί, ti hōde hestēkate holēn tēn hēmeran argoi)—The master's question assumes desire for employment, not laziness. The adjective ἀργός (argos, idle, unemployed) describes involuntary inactivity, not sloth. These workers waited all day without opportunity, highlighting that exclusion from Kingdom labor is often circumstantial, not volitional. The master's question invites explanation, showing concern for their plight.

Historical Context

Workers hired at the eleventh hour faced economic disaster—a partial day's wage couldn't feed a family. The master's inquiry shows compassion, not accusation. In Jesus's parable, these represent Gentiles, sinners, and social outcasts who were excluded from covenant privilege through no fault of their own—like the tax collectors and prostitutes entering the Kingdom before the religious elite (21:31).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does the master's question challenge assumptions about those outside the church being uninterested in spiritual things versus being overlooked or excluded?
2. What does the eleventh-hour hiring teach about God's willingness to receive those who come to faith late in life or in history's final hour?
3. In what ways might the church, like the early-hired laborers, resent God's gracious inclusion of eleventh-hour converts?

Interlinear Text

περὶ	δὲ	τὴν	ἐνδεκάτην	ώραν	ἐξελθὼν	εὗρεν	ἄλλους
about	And		the eleventh	hour	he went out	and found	others
G4012	G1161		G1734	G5610	G1831	G2147	G243

ἐστήκατε	ἀργοί	καὶ	λέγει	αὗτοῖς	Tί	ώδε	ἐστήκατε
stand ye	idle	and	saith	unto them	Why	here	stand ye
G2476	G692	G2532	G3004	G846	G5101	G5602	G2476

ὅλην	τὴν	ἡμέραν	ἀργοί
all	the day	idle	
G3650	G2250	G692	

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 6:12 (Parallel theme): That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

John 9:4 (Parallel theme): I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

Acts 17:21 (Parallel theme): (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

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