

Matthew 20:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

Analysis

So when even was come (όψιας δὲ γενομένης, opsias de genomenēs)—Evening marked the workday's end and, according to Mosaic law, the time when day-laborers must be paid (Lev. 19:13, Deut. 24:15). This timing emphasizes the master's legal righteousness and foreshadows eschatological judgment when each receives recompense.

Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first (κάλεσον τοὺς ἐργάτας καὶ ἀπόδος αὐτοῖς τὸν μισθὸν ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τῶν ἐσχάτων ἕως τῶν πρώτων, kaleson tous ergatas kai apodos autois ton misthon arxamenos apo ton eschaton heos ton proton)—The reversal of payment order is deliberate and pedagogical. By paying the last first, the master ensures the early-hired workers witness the grace shown to latecomers, testing their reaction. This ordering enacts Jesus's principle: the last shall be first, and the first last (20:16, echoing 19:30).

Historical Context

Jewish law protected day-laborers from exploitation by requiring same-day payment. The master's obedience to Torah contrasts with the early workers' later complaint, showing that legal righteousness and gracious generosity coexist in God's character. The payment order mirrors redemptive history: eleventh-hour Gentiles and sinners receive full Kingdom inheritance alongside faithful Israel.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does the master's obedience to Torah's labor laws demonstrate that grace doesn't contradict justice but fulfills it?
2. What does the reversed payment order reveal about God's intention to expose and sanctify the early workers' (and our) hearts?
3. In what ways does this verse challenge merit-based thinking about salvation, suggesting that God's grace is the great equalizer in the Kingdom?

Interlinear Text

ὅψιας δὲ γενομένης λέγει ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος
when even So was come saith G3588 the lord G3588 of the vineyard G290
G3798 G1161 G1096 G3004 G2962 G290

τῷ ἐπιτρόπῳ αὐτοῖς Κάλεσον τοὺς ἐργάτας καὶ
G3588 steward them Call G3588 the labourers and G2532
G2012 G846 G2564 G2040 G2532

ἀπόδος αὐτοῖς τὸν μισθὸν ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τῶν ἐσχάτων
give them G3588 their hire beginning from G3588 the last G2078
G591 G846 G3408 G756 G575 G2078

ἔως τῶν πρώτων
unto G3588 the first G4413

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 24:15 (References Lord): At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee.

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