

Matthew 20:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

Analysis

And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny (καὶ ἐλθόντες οἱ περὶ τὴν ἐνδεκάτην ὥραν ἔλαβον ἀνὰ δηνάριον, kai elthontes hoi peri tēn hendekatēn hōran elabon ana dēnarion)—The denarius (δηνάριον, dēnarion) was a full day's wage for agricultural labor, sufficient for a family's daily needs. The eleventh-hour workers receive not a proportional fraction (one-twelfth of a day's pay) but full recompense, illustrating grace's scandalous generosity.

This payment reveals a crucial theological principle: Kingdom reward is not wages earned but gift received. The verb λαμβάνω (lambanō, to receive) emphasizes receptivity, not achievement. These workers model salvation by grace—those who contribute least yet receive full covenant blessing through trusting the master's righteousness (v. 7). Their one-hour labor pictures faith's minimal contribution compared to grace's infinite provision.

Historical Context

A denarius could purchase approximately 10-12 loaves of bread, barely adequate for a laborer's family. First-century audiences would recognize that receiving a full day's wage for one hour's work was extraordinary generosity. This parable challenged Jewish assumptions that covenant longevity and Torah obedience earned proportionally greater reward, anticipating Gentile inclusion on equal terms through faith.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does the full denarius given to eleventh-hour workers challenge your intuitive sense of fairness, and what does that reveal about residual merit-based thinking?
2. What does this verse teach about the sufficiency of salvation—that those who believe at life's end receive full eternal life, not a diminished version?
3. In what ways does this parable confront spiritual pride in long-time believers who view themselves as more deserving than recent converts?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἐλθόντες	οἱ	περὶ	τὴν	ἐνδεκάτην	ῥαν
And	when they came	that were hired about	the eleventh	hour		
G2532	G2064	G3588	G4012	G3588	G1734	G5610
ἔλαβον	ἅνα	δηνάριον				
they received	every man	a penny				
G2983	G303	G1220				

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 20:2 (Parallel theme): And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.