

LABOR DISPUTE

With the recent Wisconsin teacher's union dispute with the state government, I thought about how Jesus might have addressed it.

I remembered a parable that He taught regarding a similar situation. One thing I have learned is that Jesus would use it as an opportunity to teach biblical truth in a positive way.

Remember that a parable is an earthly story of everyday life with a heavenly or doctrinal meaning in it.

A brief history of the conditions of the times behind this parable is important for understanding it. The priest-nation of Israel (Ex.19:6) was under divine discipline (Lev.26; Deut.28) and plagued with hard times. The Israelites listening to this parable were one generation away from a national collapse under the 5th cycle of divine discipline by Rome (Lev.26:27-35).

At the time of this parable, the priest-nation was being propped-up in the Plan of God because of the first advent of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus was God's bright light to Israel and from Israel to the world (John 1:9; Isa.42:6; Phil.2:15).

This lesson will study six aspects of the earthly side of the Parable of the Vineyard – “The Labor Dispute.”

1. The reason for this parable was a question posed by Peter and the answer given by Jesus to His disciples

Peter's question followed the discussion with the legalistic Rich Younger Ruler (Matt.19:16-26).

The doctrinal point is established in Matt.19:30 – “But many who are **first will be last**; and the last, first.”

This is significant because Peter was among **the first** to become a worker in the Kingdom of Heaven (Lk.5:1-11).

(Matt.20:1) “For the kingdom of heaven is **like a landowner** who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.”

2. It is important to observe the way Jesus addressed some of the problems of living in a declining nation. He kept it spiritually oriented towards walking by faith rather than by sight (2 Cor.5:7).

In this parable, Jesus taught the importance of living by the biblical principles of divine institutions in a declining nation.

- DI #1 Freedom (Gen.1:26-27)
- **DI #2 Employment** (Gen.2:8-9, 15)
- DI #3 Marriage (gen,2:18-25)
- DI # 4 Family (Gen.1:28; 3:16-4:1)
- DI #5 Nation (Gen.10-11)

3. This parable puts the spot light on free enterprise (DI #2).

The owner went out early in the morning and hired laborers and paid them a just day's wages.

DI #2 was important to remind us that God promised to provide food.

(Gen.1:29) "Then God said, 'I will give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.' [Decreed]

It also reminds us that God established that man should work to eat (Gen.2:15)

(2 Thess.3:10) "For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat.'"

The owner hired five groups of laborers in one day that understood this principle. He hired laborers to get the harvest completed on deadline.

In this parable, DI #2 biblical principles were practiced by the worker, the business, and the government.

4. The curse of AOS inflicted painful toil, thorns and thistles, and sweat of brow on employment

Jesus taught us to stay focused on divine good – "God saw all that He had made, and it was very good."
(Gen.1:31; Rom.8:28)

He didn't dwell on the evils of His declining nation but rather on the good news of the kingdom. The laborer who was willing to work for his daily bread was in the market place all day looking for work (6am to 6pm), He was looking to free enterprise to work for daily bread (food) on his table.

5. Another DI #2 principle taught in this parable is the merit of the laborer's pay is based on the owner's value of the harvest as well as the hours of the labor.

For the owner, the harvest takes priority because of business today and tomorrow. For the laborer, it is about his daily bread.

The owner establishes the work contract and the worker establishes the availability of labor. The work contract should discuss wages, working conditions, hours, and job description.

6. In this parable, the DISPUTE was not with the contract, wages, working conditions, or job description.

It was over the generosity of the owner to reward reaching the harvest deadline (Matt.20:13-15).

His generosity meant that every laborer would receive daily bread (denarius) – "Give us today our daily bread."
(Matt.6:11)

Only the first group of workers had a legal contract with guaranteed wage. Everyone else agreed to work on the generosity of the owner in hopes of daily bread. The first group or legalists were the ones complaining about **the equality of grace** (RYR and Peter) (Gal.2:16, 21).

Notice the difference in statement at the end of this parable compared with the previous one given to Peter – "**So the last will be first, and the first will be last.**" (Matt.20:16; 19:30) [Ref. point #1]