

SERIES:

Pre-Easter - Walking with Jesus in his last few days before the Cross.

30 March 2025 – Scottsville Community Church, 9 am

SERMON TOPIC:

THE SCORCHING HEAT OF NOT LOOKING AT JESUS

READING:

MATTHEW 20:1-16

SERMON OUTLINE

- Work in the Vineyard
- Recruitment in the Vineyard
- Rewards of the Vineyard

INTRODUCTION

I have been a victim of a major salary discrepancy!

I worked as a Mathematics and Advanced Programme Mathematics teacher in a school that is **owned by a JSE-listed company**. **At the time my CTC package was about R 530 000 per annum**. A young Maths teacher of the same skin colour and gender as me, disclosed to me that he wanted to leave the same school for another. At the time he was earning about R 760 000 and the new school was offering about R 820 000. He was still negotiating with them to move to R 850 000. W

So, his CTC per annum was R 200 000 pa more than mine, though **I was his senior and he did not teach AP Maths!**

It was not long, and I left that school. I have never felt so undervalued 😊. It is **against this backdrop** that I now want to venture into the parable Jesus tells us today.

Let's **now take a closer** look at this parable.

	What the 1 st century audience saw and heard	What we must see and hear in 2025
Work in the Vineyard	'For (gar) the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning (proi) to hire (misthosasthai) labourers (ergatas) for his vineyard' Matthew 20:1 The sentence begins with a conjunction 'for' because it continues from 19:30 where Jesus promises Peter and the disciples of his care as they have left all to follow him. But the promise came with a caution that 'many who are first will be last, and the last first' 1st century vineyards – a glimpse from Isaiah 5: 1-7: • Very fertile hill ...dug it ...stones...planted...built a watchtower...hewed out a wine vat...produces grapes (found wild grapes) ... So, the land is not even. It is full of stones. They must be removed. A hedge is built around the vineyard, for protection. There are watchtowers in the middle of the fields to ward off predators and thieves who come to devour the fruit. Storage and production houses must be built. These are the images that the disciples and his 1st century audience must have had in mind when this parable was told. It makes a lot of sense then that the master has to recruit from throughout the day. There is a lot of work to be done. There are different season requiring different needs. Planting needs differ from harvest needs. While God promises care for his followers, he also wants them to fix their minds on the task and on his mission as their main priority. Jesus has been recruiting servants for his kingdom since his days on earth – 'early in the morning'. The kingdom and the labouring began with him. Those that he recruits are called labourers. Their job is to labour. There is work to be done. This work only ends when he comes back. The promise has a context and a perspective – work in the kingdom.	'Vineyards aren't automated' In the home • Chores glorify God. • Devotions need time and intention. In the church • Hands are needed to get this venue ready for worship. • Time and mouths are needed to pray for people. • It takes time and effort to prepare a message. • It takes time and effort to prepare coffee and wash the cups afterwards. • Money is needed to pay for the rent. • This is not 'consumer/spectator' church. It is a church for producers. We care about others. In the marketplace • Apart from drawing a salary, how are you adding value to your employer? • How is God using you to extend his kingdom where you work and play? In the kingdom of God • Are we adding value to the advancing kingdom? • Are we loving the brethren outside our church? • Are we bringing in people into the kingdom? We are labourers!

Recruitment in the Vineyard	'After agreeing (sumphoneo) with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into the vineyard' Matthew 20:2 '...the third hour ...in the marketplace (agora)...going out again the sixth hour and the ninth hour...' Matthew 20: 3, 5 'An about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle (argos) all day?'. They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too'. Matthew 20: 6-7 <u>Nature of recruitment:</u> • This master hates idle hands. Whoever can be found/needs work is given work. In the 1st century Greco-Roman world 'idleness was both a personal failure and a threat to community's well-being and witness', according to Strong's Lexicon. • The recruitment is ongoing, no closing date. • He looks for workers in the marketplace, a heart of civic life/urban life. He found all of them there, idle! • No specific skills required beyond being able and willing to work in the vineyard. All are employable. <u>Terms of recruitment:</u> • A denarius a day (those hired first): ○ A fair day's wage. ○ A transparent 'remuneration package'. • Whatever is right will be given (the rest).	Why do you stand here idle all day? 'Consider your calling: 1 Cor. 1: 17, 26-31 We were all 'idle' when Jesus found us. We were dead in sin and trespasses. He washed us. He filled us with his Spirit. He equipped us. He gave us a privilege to be his people and his co-workers in the building his kingdom through the church. He is still calling the lowly, not the great speakers. 'No one has hired us!' He teaches you how to speak. You don't have to be a Canva, podcast and Ted talk expert. Those are not the qualifications God employs. Jesus recruits nobodies to proclaim a foolish message. But this message, when received, gladdens the hearts of those who receive him. The effect is better than that of wine which dissipates. I follow Jesus because he is honest. The terms of this process are open for all to see – one denarius. This is not a get-rich-quickly scheme. The first disciples were bluntly told, 'follow me'. The terms? I will make you fishers of men.
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		One of the things that mainline churches get right is the understanding that God is always calling people into his work! They have a committee in place to help people discern the call, they have a date on the year planner and have a budget to train those who they believe have heard from the Lord. By contrast, in charismatic churches, only the 'senior pastor' is called. You find yourself today in a missional church. What is it that you think God is calling you to do here? Why do you think he brought you here?
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Rewards of the Vineyard	‘And when the evening came...call the labourers and pay them their wages. Beginning with the last, up to the first.’ Matthew 20:8 ‘And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.’ Matthew 20:9 ‘10 Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. 11 And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, 12 saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat’. Matthew 20:10-12 ‘Friend (<i>Hetaire</i>), I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?’ Matthew 20:13 ‘So the last will be the first, and the first last’. Matthew 20:16 Those who only worked for an hour were received as payment the whole day’s wage! This master was generous. In paying them first, he also recognises their labour to be important as all other workers. Notwithstanding the short duration of their labour, the labour is significant. They have done what was expected of them and must be rewarded. Those hired first expected to receive more. The grumbled at the master for ‘making them equal’ to the newbies and because they had put up with heat, the long day and difficult parts of their work. The master points out that he has not paid them less than what they all agreed upon. They are rewarded but are the last to get paid. The recent encounter with the rich young ruler and Jesus’ promise to care for the disciples must have come back to mind. He will provide for their needs but they mustn’t expect that because they have left all then Jesus owes them anything. Grace alone allows them to serve Jesus. Walking with Jesus alone is great compensation. He owes them absolutely nothing.	‘Called by grace, rewarded by grace’ Jesus bought us at a price! It is not always clear to us, especially those of us who called into the ministry, that serving Jesus is also costly. One must balance the demands of the call and the realities of life. It is unwise to enter the ministry because you expect the rewards, Jesus has not promised any! And so, I still need the job, a full-time job. As such, I don’t expect rewards but I need help from people because I am carrying a heavy load. I can identify with those grumbling in this story, they worked hard! The pastor who will take over from me here will only have to pastor because the church will have money. That’s what happens later on in the parable. Others work a little but get rewarded instantly. That’s the nature of the job. At any given time, we must be grateful that we are faithful servants who are doing our job. Remuneration, outside the government, is confidential. We don’t talk about how we are paid, whether we think it is fair or not. In South Africa, there is also an unwritten code that if you are black then you must earn less than your white counterparts of the same rank in the same job. There are also salary discrepancies between wages of men and women. Women are preferred because they don’t often ask for more.
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		<i>‘grumbling during work’</i> I see something else in this story: there was no grumbling during work. This is the exact opposite of what I witness in the church today. The day of judgement lies in the future but we are constantly comparing ourselves to other churches, believers and pastors. We want everybody to give us a superior treatment because of our ‘superior experience of Jesus’. This explains the fascination with titles: apostle/prophet/senior pastor! We often feel that reward time is now! You hear song leaders shout, ‘nizonyakaza nini’. It’s a cry for recognition! This is probably the number one reason marriages break – we are not getting what we think we deserve. We wait for the spouse to dispense what ‘is due to me’ and it just never comes. The contemporary woman is wired differently. For starters, she has a full-time job. She comes home tired. You also come home tired. She really (and rightly) expects you to help with housework. But as a woman, she still feels that she must be looked after, celebrated and pampered. Those are all godly expectations! On the other hand, you also have needs as a man, sex being one of them. As a man, you will need to lead the marriage in humility and servitude.
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CONCLUSION

‘No one has hired us’

Are you a parent or do you live with children? Where do you think God is leading your children to? Are you spending time with them to help them in their discernment? Are bringing them to worship where God’s Spirit can reach them and shape them? **What about the middle-aged people** you work with who are contemplating a career-change or those close to **retirement** who seek a word from God? Are you adding value to their discernment by praying for them, at least? Can you honestly say that **you also are in God’s vineyard**? How are you consistently and diligently engaged in God’s work today?

‘The burden of the day and the scorching heat’

The contemporary person and believer needs a constant reminder: **Life is hard and that is normal.** Marriage is hard. It is hard to raise kids. Jobs are demanding. **Soul-winning is not for the lazy** and faint-hearted, its hard work! All the important things **in life demand hard work.** None come easy. **It is normal to feel burdened.**

Why am I preaching story **two weeks before Easter? Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem when he told this parable.** He was on his way to be crucified and killed to pay the penalty for the sins of those who would surrender their lives to him. **The writer to Hebrews** mentions this in his exhortation to believers:

‘...looking to Jesus, the founder (early in the morning!) and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him to endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted’

Hebrews 12: 2-3

John MacArthur:

Jesus persevered so that he might receive the joy of accomplishment of the Father’s will and exaltation.

We have a responsibility **to make every aspect of our lives obey Jesus.** Obeying his will should be our only motivation for that we do with our significant lives in this short time we have on earth. We labour on the **vineyard of life and kingdom**, for Him!

NEXT SUNDAY: We look at Jesus’ triumphal entry in Jerusalem.

Amen.