

The Laborers in the Vineyard

By Elder Jeffrey R. Holland
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles



Please listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit telling you right now, this very moment, that you should accept the atoning gift of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In light of the calls and releases the First Presidency has just announced, may I speak for all of us in saying we will remember and love always those who have served so faithfully, just as we immediately love and welcome those who now come into office. Our heartfelt thanks to every one of you.

I wish to speak of the Savior's parable in which a householder "went out early in the morning to hire labourers." After employing the first group at 6:00 in the morning, he returned at 9:00 a.m., at 12:00 noon, and at 3:00 in the afternoon, hiring more workers as the urgency of the harvest increased. The scripture says he came back a final time, "about the eleventh hour" (approximately 5:00 p.m.), and hired a concluding number. Then just an hour later, all the workers gathered to receive their day's wage. Surprisingly, all received the *same* wage in spite of the different hours of labor. Immediately, those hired first were angry, saying, "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day."¹ When reading this parable, perhaps you, as well as those workers, have felt there was an injustice being done here. Let me speak briefly to that concern.

First of all it is important to note that *no one* has been treated unfairly here. The first workers agreed to the full wage of the day, and they received it. Furthermore, they were, I can only imagine, very grateful to get the work. In the time of the Savior, an average man and his family could not do much more than live on what they made that day. If you didn't work or farm or fish or sell, you likely didn't eat. With more prospective workers than jobs, these first men chosen were the most fortunate in the entire labor pool that morning.

Indeed, if there is any sympathy to be generated, it should at least initially be for the men *not* chosen who also had mouths to feed and backs to clothe. Luck never seemed to be with some of them. With each visit of the steward throughout the day, they always saw someone else chosen.

But just at day's close, the householder returns a surprising fifth time with a remarkable eleventh-hour offer! These last and most discouraged of laborers, hearing only that they will be treated fairly, accept work without even knowing the wage, knowing that *anything* will be better than nothing, which is what they have had so far. Then as they gather for their payment, they are stunned to receive the same as all the others! How awestruck they must have been and how very, very grateful! Surely never had such compassion been seen in all their working days.

It is with that reading of the story that I feel the grumbling of the first laborers must be seen. As the householder

in the parable tells them (and I paraphrase only slightly): “My friends, I am not being unfair to you. You agreed on the wage for the day, a good wage. You were very happy to get the work, and I am very happy with the way you served. You are paid in full. Take your pay and enjoy the blessing. As for the others, *surely I am free to do what I like with my own money.*” Then this piercing question to anyone then or now who needs to hear it: “*Why should you be jealous because I choose to be kind?*”

Brothers and sisters, there are going to be times in our lives when someone else gets an unexpected blessing or receives some special recognition. May I plead with us not to be hurt—and certainly not to feel envious—when good fortune comes to another person? We are not diminished when someone else is added upon. We are not in a race against each other to see who is the wealthiest or the most talented or the most beautiful or even the most blessed. The race we are *really* in is the race against sin, and surely envy is one of the most universal of those.

Furthermore, envy is a mistake that just keeps on giving. Obviously we suffer a little when some *misfortune* befalls *us*, but envy requires us to suffer all *good fortune* that befalls *everyone* we know! What a bright prospect that is—downing another quart of pickle juice every time anyone around you has a happy moment! To say nothing of the chagrin in the end, when we find that God really is both just and merciful, giving to all who stand with Him “all that he hath,”² as the scripture says. So lesson number one from the Lord’s vineyard: coveting, pouting, or tearing others down does *not* elevate *your* standing, nor does demeaning someone else improve your self-image. So be kind, and be grateful that God is kind. It is a happy way to live.

A second point I wish to take from this parable is the sorrowful mistake some could make if they were to forgo the receipt of their wages at the *end* of the day because they were preoccupied with perceived problems *earlier* in the day. It doesn’t say here that anyone threw his coin in the householder’s face and stormed off penniless, but I suppose one might have.

My beloved brothers and sisters, what happened in this story at 9:00 or noon or 3:00 is swept up in the grandeur of the universally generous payment at the end of the day. The formula of faith is to hold on, work on, see it through, and let the distress of earlier hours—real or imagined—fall away in the abundance of the final reward. Don’t dwell on old issues or grievances—not toward yourself nor your neighbor nor even, I might add, toward this true and living Church. The majesty of your life, of your neighbor’s life, and of the gospel of Jesus Christ will be made manifest at the last day, even if such majesty is not always recognized by everyone in the early going. So don’t hyperventilate about something that happened at 9:00 in the morning when the grace of God is trying to reward you at 6:00 in the evening—whatever your labor arrangements have been through the day.

We consume such precious emotional and spiritual capital clinging tenaciously to the memory of a discordant note we struck in a childhood piano recital, or something a spouse said or did 20 years ago that we are determined to hold over his or her head for another 20, or an incident in Church history that proved no more or less than that mortals will always struggle to measure up to the immortal hopes placed before them. Even if one of those grievances did not originate with you, it can end with you. And what a reward there will be for that contribution when the Lord of the vineyard looks you in the eye and accounts are settled at the end of our earthly day.

Which leads me to my third and last point. This parable—like all parables—is not really about laborers or wages any more than the others are about sheep and goats. This is a story about God’s goodness, His patience and

forgiveness, and the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a story about generosity and compassion. It is a story about grace. It underscores the thought I heard many years ago that surely the thing God enjoys most about being God is the thrill of being merciful, especially to those who don't expect it and often feel they don't deserve it.

I do not know who in this vast audience today may need to hear the message of forgiveness inherent in this parable, but however late you think you are, however many chances you think you have missed, however many mistakes you feel you have made or talents you think you don't have, or however far from home and family and God you feel you have traveled, I testify that you have *not* traveled beyond the reach of divine love. It is not possible for you to sink lower than the infinite light of Christ's Atonement shines.

Whether you are not yet of our faith or were with us once and have not remained, there is nothing in either case that you have done that cannot be undone. There is no problem which you cannot overcome. There is no dream that in the unfolding of time and eternity cannot yet be realized. Even if you feel you are the lost and last laborer of the eleventh hour, the Lord of the vineyard still stands beckoning. "Come boldly [to] the throne of grace,"³ and fall at the feet of the Holy One of Israel. Come and feast "without money and without price"⁴ at the table of the Lord.

I especially make an appeal for husbands and fathers, priesthood bearers or prospective priesthood bearers, to, as Lehi said, "Awake! and arise from the dust ... and be men."⁵ Not always but often it is the men who choose not to answer the call to "come join the ranks."⁶ Women and children frequently seem more willing. Brethren, step up. Do it for your sake. Do it for the sake of those who love you and are praying that you will respond. Do it for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, who paid an unfathomable price for the future He wants you to have.

My beloved brothers and sisters, to those of you who have been blessed by the gospel for many years because you were fortunate enough to find it early, to those of you who have come to the gospel by stages and phases later, and to those of you—members and not yet members—who may still be hanging back, to each of you, one and all, I testify of the renewing power of God's love and the miracle of His grace. *His concern is for the faith at which you finally arrive, not the hour of the day in which you got there.*

So if you have made covenants, keep them. If you haven't made them, make them. If you have made them and broken them, repent and repair them. It is *never* too late so long as the Master of the vineyard says there is time. Please listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit telling you right now, this very moment, that you should accept the atoning gift of the Lord Jesus Christ and enjoy the fellowship of His labor. Don't delay. It's getting late. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Matthew 20:1–15.

2. Luke 12:44.

3. Hebrews 4:16.

4. Isaiah 55:1.

5. 2 Nephi 1:14, 21.

6. "We Are All Enlisted," *Hymns*, no. 250.

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