

The Parable of the Hired Workers – Matthew 20:1 – 16

For some, the practice of choosing teams for a game is an affirming experience. For others, it's a form of cruel and unusual punishment. The way this procedure usually works is that two team captains are chosen to pick teams. Next each captain takes a turn of choosing one team member at a time. Of course the best players are enthusiastically snapped up first, followed by the average players, and so on, until the two least-wanted players are left. This moment marks the cruelest part of this process as the least-*unwanted* of these two players is reluctantly chosen by one captain, leaving behind a sad reject who isn't actually chosen by either captain, but is defaulted to the team lumbered with the last pick. This process leaves no doubt about who are the most and least valued team members.

By contrast, as Christ calls people to become citizens of his kingdom he tells us that, '*The last will be first and the first will be last.*' So what does this saying mean?

Read Matthew 20:1 – 16 and answer the following questions.

1. Jesus begins this parable with the word 'For'. Therefore we need to look back to see what comes before it. Read Matthew 19: 13 – 30. What context do these stories give to Jesus' parable that follows in 20:1 – 16?
2. This parable seems to assume a 12 hour working day. Therefore, the first group of men would have been employed by the landowner at dawn (6 am). Thus the third hour = 9 am, and so on. Based on this understanding, how many hours did each group of hired men work? (20:1 – 7).
3. Why do you think the land owner instructed his foreman to pay the last group of hired men before the first group? (20:8)
4. Why did the group that worked all day expect to be given more than a denarius even though they were clearly told from the outset that this would be their day's wage? (Compare 20:2 with 20:9 - 10).
5. What is the essence of the workers' complaint against their boss? (20:11 – 12)
6. What is the essence of the landowner's defence to his workers? (20:13 – 15)
7. In this parable, who is represented by the landowner and by the hired workers?
8. Jesus' statement, '*The last will be first, and the first will be last*' bookends this parable (19:30 and 20:16). Explain what this statement means?
9. How do Jesus' instructions to his disciples that directly follow this parable give further insight into the meaning of this saying? (See 20:17 – 28)
10. How has this teaching of Jesus challenged you?