

Short Stories By Jesus
Session 5: The Laborers in the Vineyard

1. Best and Worst Bosses

Complete These Sentences with descriptive words:

- The best boss I have ever had ...
- The worst boss I have ever had ...

2. This week's parable: Read Matthew 20:1-15

Imagine you were one of those hired to work at the beginning of the day. Would you have been “grumbling against the householder” who hired you when you received your wages? Why or why not?

Imagine you were one of those hired to work just before the end of the day. How would you have reacted to receiving a denarius—a full day's wage—for such a short amount of work?

Do you think the householder offers sufficient explanation and justification for the payments he gives? Why or why not?

What is a common interpretation that you have heard regarding this parable? Is there any weakness with that interpretation?

Can you think of a different way to view this parable?

3. Watch Video

4. Looking to the Old Testament:

Read Isaiah 5:1-7; Leviticus 19:9-10; Proverbs 24:30-34

What is the significance or the symbolism of the vineyard in each passage?

What associations or connections, if any, do you imagine Jesus's original audience might have made when they heard the mention of a vineyard in the parable about the laborers that he told?

How much, if at all, do any of these Scriptures influence the way you interpret Jesus's parable of the laborers?

5. Call to Action:

Read aloud these quotations from Short Stories by Jesus:

"Dismissing the parable's practical implication is to make the parable safe and so to lose its challenge."

"If we refocus the parable away from "who gets into heaven" and toward "who gets a day's wage," we can find a message that challenges rather than prompts complacency. If we look at economics, at the pressing reality that people need jobs and that others have excess funds, we find what should be a compelling challenge to any hearer. And in that story, we learn what it means to act as God acts, with generosity to all."

If we read this parable as a lesson in "what it means to act as God acts," what might we infer from it about Jesus's definition of "the best boss"?

What would be a practical application of this parable in our daily life?

Closing Prayer

Ever-living, ever-giving God: may your Spirit move us to act with generosity, being especially generous toward those who have little in a world where others have too much. Make us restless for a world where, as in your kingdom to come, all have what they need to live. Stir us to make changes, beginning in our own lives, for the sake and glory of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.