

The Landowner's Workers Worked Overtime

I continued to think about the landowner¹ and his relations with his workers, and I wondered about a slightly different twist to the story. In the original story, the landowner hired people at various times during the day. In my imagination I wondered what would happen if the workers were asked to work beyond the day's normal work hours. In this case, the story might go like this:

“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, but ask them if they will stay longer tonight to enable us to store the grain that has been gathered. A great storm is brewing and the grain will be ruined unless we protect it.’

“Some of the workers simply refused, and left to pursue their own interests. Others were very reluctant to stay, but the prospect of the extra money convinced them. But there were a few who were loyal to the owner, and worked for the master without regard to pay. They knew that if they worked for the master's benefit it would in turn benefit themselves, and they were very concerned about the risk of loss.

Those in the first two groups both grumbled about the situation. But the true servants had long-since dedicated themselves to be worthy workers and routinely did more than their duty². The landowner was indeed fair and paid each one for the extra time they stayed, but he was especially grateful to those who showed loyalty.

In the first story, Jesus said that the “last will be first, and the first will be last.” In this variation of that story, we could add as He did at another time, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all³.” Perhaps we should say that they must be “servants always.”

1. Matthew 20:1-16
2. So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty’; Luke 17:10
3. Mark 9:35