by the **For** to the conclusion of chap. xix., and arose out of the question of Peter in ver. 27, *what shall we have therefore?* (1) Its salient point is, that the Kingdom of God is of *grace,* not of debt; that *they who were called first, and have laboured longest, have no more claim upon God than those who were called last :* but that *to all, His covenant promise shall be fulfilled in its integrity.* (2) Its *primary application* is to the *Apostles,* who had asked the question. They were not to be of such a spirit, as to imagine, with the murmurers in ver. 11, that they should have something super-eminent (because they were called first, and had laboured longest) above those who *in their own time* were to be afterward called (see 1 Cor. xv.8—11). (3) Its secondary applications are to all those to whom such comparison, of *first and last called,* will apply :— *nationally,* to the **Jews,** who were first called, and with a *definite covenant,* and the Heathens who came in afterwards, and on a covenant, though *really made* (see Jer. xxxi. 38: Zech. viii. 8: Heb. viii. 10), *yet not so open and prominent :—individually,* to those whose call has been in early life, and who have spent their days in God’s active service, and those who have been summoned later ; and to various other classes and persons between whom comparison, not only of *time,* but of advantages, talents, or any other distinguishing characteristic, can be made: that none of the first of these can boast themselves over the others, nor look for higher place and greater reward, inasmuch as there is but one “gift” of God according to the covenant of grace. And the “first” of these are to see that they do not by pride and self-righteousness become the “last,” or worse—be rejected, as nationally were the Jews; for among the many that are called, there are few chosen —many who will fail of the reward in the end. (4) In subordination to this leading idea and warning of the Parable must the circumstances brought before us be interpreted. The *day* and its *hours* are not any fixed time, such as the duration of the world, or our Lord’s life on earth, or the life of man, exclusively: but *the natural period of earthly work* as applied to the various meanings of which the parable is capable. The *various times of hiring* are not to be pressed as each having an exclusive meaning in each interpretation : they serve to spread the calling over the various periods, and to shew that it is again and again made. They are the *quarters* of the natural day, when the aliquot parts of the day’s wages could be earned, and therefore labourers would be waiting. The *last* of these is inserted for a special purpose, and belongs more expressly to the instruction of the parable. (5) The **hire** bears an important part in the interpretation. I cannot with Stier (whose comment on this le I think much inferior to his remarks) suppose it to mean “the promise of this life” attached to godliness. His anxiety to escape from the danger of *eternal life being matter of wages,* has here misled him. But there is no such danger in the interpretation of the parable which I believe to be the true one. The **hire** is the *promise of the covenant,* uniformly represented by our Lord and His Apostles as a *‘reward,’* Matt. v. 12: Luke vi. 85; xiv. 14: John iv. 86: 1 Cor. iii. 14: 2 John 8: Heb. x. 85; xi. 6 al., *reckoned indeed of free grace:* but still, forensically considered, answering to, and represented by, ‘ wages,’ as claimed under God’s covenant with man in Christ. (The freeness and sovereignty of God’s gift of grace is pointedly set before us in ver. 14, It is my will to give &c.) This **hire** I believe then to be *eternal life,* or, in other words, GOD **HIMSELF** (John xvii. 3). And this, rightly understood, will keep us from the error of supposing, that the parable involves a declaration that all who are saved will be in an absolute equality. This gift is, and will be to each man, as he is prepared to receive it. To the envious and murmurers, it will be as the fruit that turned to ashes in the mouth: by their own unchristian spirit they will “lose the things that they have wrought” (2 John 8), and their reward will be null: in other words, they will, as the spiritual verity necessitates, *not enter into that life to which they were called.* God’s covenant is fulfilled to them —they have received their denarius—but from the essential nature of the “hire” are disqualified from enjoying its use: for as Gregory the Great remarks, “the kingdom of heaven none who murmurs, inherits: none who inherits, can murmur.” To those who have known and loved God, it will be, to each, as he has advanced in the spiritual life, joy unspeakable and fall of glory.

**1, early in the morning]** See Jer. xxxv. 14, and other places.

**labourers]** in the primary meanings of the parable, ‘apostles, prophets, ministers:’ distinct from the *vines* in the vineyard.