

## The Parables of Our Lord

### The Parable of “The Workers In The Vineyard” - Matthew 20:1-16

(Part 1 of 2)

Wednesday, October 19th - 2022

Tonight, we're looking at the parable of our Lord known as “The Parable of The Workers In The Vineyard” from Matthew 20:1-16.

Quick review: We understand that with Parables, we are always looking for ONE particular point or meaning because with few exceptions, Parables contain within them ONE central theme or main idea. And though there is only ONE central meaning within this particular parable, there are many different APPLICATIONS to our own lives.

So let's go ahead and read the text together. (Text from the English Standard Version, ESV)

*“[1] “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. [2] After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. [3] And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, [4] and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ [5] So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. [6] And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ [7] They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ [8] And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ [9] And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. [10] Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive*

*more, but each of them also received a denarius. [11] And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, [12] saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' [13] But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? [14] Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. [15] Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' [16] So the last will be first, and the first last."*

Now, Jesus uses familiar imagery:

- The idea of a landowner, or "master of the house".
  - Was wealthy, had influence
  - His vineyard had to be large enough to need so many workers to help with the harvest.
- Features a vineyard.
  - Harvest time was short and frantic since the fields had to be harvested before the rainy season came

The landowner goes to the Marketplace to hire day laborers. Verse 1 tells us went out "early in the morning" (before 6:00am) since work begins at 6am.

Wages for day laborers were much lower than standard pay for full-time employees.

- Standard wage for an employee was 1 denarius per day (based on what a Roman soldier was paid) but day laborers were paid much, much less.

We see how generous the landowner was by his offer of a full day's wages to these day laborers. They would have been ecstatic at such a proposition.

At the third hour (9:00am), the landowner goes to hire more day laborers.

- Hires them under vague terms (ie, "I will give you what is right")

In verse 5, he goes again at noon and 3pm, and "did likewise" and in verse 6, he goes out again, this time at "the eleventh hour" (5:00pm). Only one hour left in the workday, yet the landowner hires them. Ecstatic wouldn't begin to describe how they felt.

The landowner was faithful to God's law.

- Leviticus demands that pay be given at the end of the workday and that the money owed to him or her not remain with the employer until morning.
- Deuteronomy chapter 24:14-15 says the same.

When evening came, the landowner had his Foreman call the laborers together to pay them, starting with the LAST to the FIRST.

- The guys who worked only ONE hour were at the front
- The guys who worked all day for the full TWELVE hours were at the back

The Foreman is instructed to pay the guys at the front a full Denarius - a FULL DAY'S PAY - for just ONE hour of work. The Foreman pays the guys at the back of the line the one Denarius that they originally agreed to be paid. And now the complaints come. "That's not fair", etc.

The landowner responds, "Friend, I've done you no wrong. Didn't you agree with the terms I offered you when I chose you at the Marketplace? Take what's owed to you and leave. I want to give to these other guys the same amount I've given to you. Is that a crime? To do with my things what I wish? Is that unlawful? Or are you jealous because I'm generous with my riches?".

What changed? Why did their initial happiness give way to grumbling? Because some who they saw as unworthy received just as much as they got - MORE than what they got (when you do the math). They couldn't stand the thought that these other guys would have been given more than they did despite working much harder and for much longer. So all of their gratitude vanished and gave way to bitterness and resentment. The workers who had been chosen for work at the eleventh hour would have been absolutely ecstatic and overjoyed. They understood better than anyone else in that line how generously they had been treated.

The last verse, "*So the first will be last and the last first*". What does that mean? The point Jesus makes is those that are hired first and those that are hired last **all** received the **exact same pay**. From the first to the last got the full benefit of his generosity.

All of the Lord's Parables deal with heavy themes. This is no different - we encounter questions of grace and merit. And especially in light of God's sovereign election in salvation; a topic that has become somewhat controversial.

Contrasting Judas and the thief on the Cross:

- **Judas** - in the close circle of the Lord, one of the Twelve, had power and authority to cast out demons and cure diseases, he shared meals with the Lord, witnessed the miracles of Jesus firsthand, he evangelized, and he was the treasurer for the Twelve
- **The thief on the cross** - a life-long cutthroat criminal, a highwayman/robber, an ambush killer, a co-conspirator of Barabbas, and who was now being punished for his crimes, being crucified next to Jesus.

Yet it was the thief on the cross that joined Christ in Paradise that same day, clothed in perfect righteousness, all of his sin paid for.

Many people think heaven is a reward for a good life lived here on earth and they may be upset with that kind of a contrast. Maybe they feel justice was thrown aside in this case. After all, the thief didn't do anything to deserve heaven. Lots of people suggest that Judas was treated too harshly or even unfairly.

Judas himself was the type that would keep score in those kinds of calculations. When the woman anointed the feet of Jesus with the expensive perfume, Judas knew the precise value saying, "Why wasn't this sold for 300 denarii (almost a year's wages) and given to the poor?". He would have been the type of person who would have said that Jesus' gift of grace was too generous and was wasted on the thief on the cross. Lots of really religious people resent it when God saves people that they believe are unworthy of such favor. And it's true - we ARE unworthy to receive God's grace; it's the resentment of it in others that's the problem in this parable. No one DESERVES God's grace. We are all guilty sinners and no one who has sinned has any CLAIM on God's grace. He is not OBLIGATED to dispense His grace to us. If it were OBLIGATED, it wouldn't be GRACE. In truth, we don't want justice and we don't want "fair". What we want and need is grace.

God DOES have the divine authority and the sovereign RIGHT to dispense His grace how He sees fit. He is sovereign. Everybody seems to be on the same page with regard to God's sovereignty UNTIL we get to the question of God's distribution of His grace. NOW comes the affront to a person's human sensibilities with regard to God's sovereignty. Paul even spells out the doctrine of election in the book of Romans, in the 9th chapter - verses 6-7 saying, "[6] *But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, [7] and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."*. And then he goes on in verses 10-14 saying, "[10] *And not only*

*so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, [11] though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— [12] she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” [13] As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”* Now, Paul understands human nature. He anticipates the reaction. He continues in verse 14, “[14] *What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part?...”*

But “THAT’S NOT FAIR!. They hadn’t even done anything! They hadn’t even been born, for crying out loud!”. Yet, God sovereignly, for the purposes of His election, in order to show His mercy, chooses one and rejects the other. So those who He elects and saves sovereignly, receive His grace and those who do NOT receive His grace, they receive His justice. Exactly what they deserve. Do we really believe that God is sovereign in His grace? Paul answers the question he asks rhetorically “is there injustice on God’s part?” by responding “God forbid!”. “...[14] *By no means!*”. God said to Moses, “*I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.*”. God sovereignly has the right - according to His sovereign purposes and His own will, to show mercy and grace upon whoever He chooses without being required to give it to the other.

The workers in this parable who worked all day got justice. The other workers however received WAY more than they bargained for; they received grace. The Kingdom of God is like that: God is the Owner and has the sovereign authority to be gracious to whom He will be gracious.

And that’s the point. That if you are in Christ, you are truly a believer, then you - just like everyone else in God’s Kingdom - receive the immeasurable benefits of God’s grace. The blessings that have been given to us in our redemption are not based on resumes, personal service, or achievements. Forgiveness is never weighed against the good things we have done

against the bad things. EVERYONE who enters the Kingdom of God receives the full measure of God's forgiveness, mercy, and grace DESPITE however long you've been doing the work of the Kingdom. That's true whether you die for the cause of Christ or you die peacefully while you sleep. It's true of folks who come to Christ as children and those who come to Him as they lay dying. We who are in Christ will all go to be with our Lord, just like Paul, and Moses, and the thief on the cross. Heaven isn't a prize for hard work.

Does that seem unfair? Well, it way more than ANY of us deserve. The benefits of the Kingdom are the same for everyone because we're redeemed only by God's grace and nothing else. That's fantastic news for sinners - that we can't merit or work our way into God's favor. Stop trying to get into His good graces. It wasn't because of you that He chose to love you anyway. It was because of HIM and Who HE is that He chose to show His grace to you in salvation.

Part 2 next week.