

"The Parable of the Vineyard" Matthew 20:1-16, Sermon Notes
Pastor Marc Wragg
Saving Grace Bible Church
May 5, 2019
Morning Worship Service

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.² "When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard.³ "And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place;⁴ and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And so they went.⁵ "Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing.⁶ "And about the eleventh *hour* he went out and found others standing *around*; and he said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day long?'⁷ "They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.'⁸ "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last *group* to the first.'⁹ "When those *hired* about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius.¹⁰ "When those *hired* first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius.¹¹ "When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner,¹² saying, "These last men have worked *only* one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.'¹³ "But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?'¹⁴ "Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you.¹⁵ 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?'¹⁶ "So the last shall be first, and the first last." (Matt. 20:1-16 NAU)

Introduction

Our parable, which we are considering this morning, begins with a conjunction indicating that it is continuing the thought which came before it

And when you go back to Matt 19:30 you read

"But many *who are* first will be last; and *the* last, first. (Matt. 19:30 NAU)

- That this statement of the first being last and the last first also begins with a conjunction making it dependent on what came before

This section starts back in Matt 19:27

- Where Peter asks about the sacrifices that he and the other Apostles have made
- Will God reward us for giving up and following you?
- What will our reward be for this kind of sacrifice?

Christ responded to Peter's question by giving him the instruction which followed. We observed three truths from Christ's response

1. God rewards us with particular service to Him. Our reward is in usefulness to God. This is one aspect of the many fold blessings of God
 - a. God's people will judge the World
 - b. We will be used by God to vindicate His justice

- c. The disciples are going to sit with Christ and Judge the 12 tribes of Israel
2. God is able to reward greatly for our sacrifices
 - a. Whoever gives up family and jobs for Christ's name sake will receive much more.
 - b. This is both now and into eternity
 - c. God unfolds His grace and mercy continually
 - i. First in new life, the resurrection or rapture
 - ii. Then in usefulness to Christ's service
 - iii. Then in the reign of Christ
 - iv. Then in the new Jerusalem
 - v. And beyond – We cannot even begin to imagine what God has instore for His people

"Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away;⁷ but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory;⁸ *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;⁹ but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." (1 Cor. 2:6-9 NAU)

God has things instore for us that we cannot even begin to imagine

- Man has not seen these things or heard of these things or even imagined them

He rewards us abundantly

3. Now the final principle is that God is fair with his rewards. God treats all people fairly

"But many *who are* first will be last; and *the* last, first." (Matt. 19:30 NAU)

- The rich and the poor are treated the same
- The black and the white
- The North American and South American
- The young and the old
- The man and woman
- The slave and the freeman

The Bible is clear about equality in Christ. Everyone are equals in Christ. We may have differing roles and responsibilities here on Earth. But in regards to Christ's kingdom and salvation through Christ we are all equals

As Paul said to the Colossians:

"Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices,¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him--¹¹ *a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all." (Col. 3:9-11 NAU)

And to the Romans:

“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him;” (Rom. 10:12 NAU)

“knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.” (Eph. 6:8 NAU)

“Opening his mouth, Peter said: “I most certainly understand *now* that God is not one to show partiality,³⁵ but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.” (Acts 10:34-35 NAU)

- God is a fair and impartial judge
- God is going to treat all people fairly

Now this issue of fairness is brought out in Matt 19:30

- The question is what kind of fairness are we talking about here?
- Are we talking about the righting of injustice?
 - The wicked oppress the righteous so in the new life we will have a reversing of this corruption?
 - Many have viewed this text in that way
 - The haughty are made low and the lowly and lifted up in honor
 - That is how this verse is treated

(This is important to see, because context clearly indicates for us exactly what Christ is referring too when he makes the statement “the first will be last and the last first.” We will better understand our bibles if we spend more time paying attention to the context that we find our verse.)

This text is not about righting early injustices by exalting the lowly and casting down the exalted. This is obvious because of the context

- Peter starts with a question about how they will be treated by God for the sacrifices they have made
 - And in Peter’s mind he is thinking financial gain
 - This is obvious because the Rich Young Ruler would not give up his resources. Peter and the other disciples on the other hand have
- The parable begins with a conjunction indicating that Jesus is now going to explain what He has just taught

Let us look at the Parable

Body

As I said this is a parable which means that it is a story which makes a spiritual point

- The people are not real
- The events are not real events but the story which is based on human circumstances illustrates a Spiritual point which teaches the hearer about “The Kingdom of Heaven”

What is a parable?

“Parabole (parable) is a compound word made up of a form of the verb ballo (to throw, lay, or place) and the prefix para (meaning alongside of). The idea is that of placing, or laying, something alongside of something else for the purpose of comparison.” JFM, “Parables”

- In this case we have a moral or spiritual truth told in a story
- Instead of directly declaring the truth, a story is told which explains or illustrates the truth

This is different than using similes and other graphic language to illustrate a point

- A Parable tells a moral or spiritual truth in a story

The last major instruction by Christ in Parables was made by our Lord back in chapter 13

- These parables were given to hide the truth from the unbelieving and to reveal it to those who believe
- Here the parable is given to His disciples to explain to them God’s fairness

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.” Vs 1

Jesus begins His parable with a landowner who needed day laborers

- This would be a common business that the disciples would have been familiar
- A landowner who had property which he used to cultivate a product to resell
 - It could have been livestock or grains or other produce
 - We know by this verse it was to work in his vineyard
 - This land would likely be on a mountain side
 - It would require work to build walls in order to protect the crop
 - There would be the need to prune the vines so that new growth could form
 - There would be the need to train all the new growth
 - Then of course there was the need to harvest the crop
 - It is likely in this harvest time the laborers were called in to help the landowner’s servants
 - He was looking for laborers to harvest grapes likely for the production of wine.
 - Since wine was used both to purify drinking water AND for religious practices like the Passover Sadder this was a necessary commodity

The business man becomes the source of illustration for the principle that Christ is going to make about the kingdom of heaven

This landowner desired workers so he went out and enlisted workers early in the morning

- For this particular story the time reference is important
- The land owner would go out very early in the morning, maybe even before sunrise to gather workers

Secondly notice the kind of laborers that he selected in verse 2:

²"When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard"

- *He went out and found laborers to work for a Denarius for 1 day*
 - A Denarius was very generous as wages as it is likely the day laborer would have been paid less
 - The Roman soldier was paid a Denarius
 - Common day laborers were paid less
 - But there is evidence that laborers in Palestine were paid better
 - Most certainly better than minimal wage
 - *But the emphasis here is not on the amount other than to say it was fair and agreed upon by the Landowner and workers for a full 12-hour work day*
- In any case this as a generous and fair payment
 - There would be no dispute about the day's work and the price paid.
 - This was a good job to get
- The landowner was hiring day laborers
 - They worked day by day
 - No long-term security to their jobs
 - One day work then pay day
- These laborers were used to working for little wages

These laborers would likely have been low skilled workers

- The OT gave instruction for how to treat these laborers. And Jesus uses the OT custom and instruction as part of His parable
- They were to be paid after each day

"You shall keep My sabbaths and revere My sanctuary; I am the LORD. (Lev. 19:30 NAU) 'You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob *him*. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning.'" (Lev. 19:13 NAU)

"You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he will not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin in you." (Deut. 24:15 NAU)

The Law demanded that a business owner paid a man that day

- So this tells us that the landowner was both fair and righteous as he fulfills his lawful obligation at the end of the parable
- This law was given because most day laborers are living day to day and need to care for their needs and their family's needs
- These laborers are making just enough to get by

They are hard workers just not highly skilled workers

To sum up simply, these are common workers making a healthy wage

One more note, here this was the first shift and would have been around 6 am

- This is the first hour of the day in the Jewish account of time
- These workers are committing to a full day's work which was from 6 am to 6pm
- They were going to make the handsome wage of 1 Denarius
- And they agreed to this price when the day started

Next notice the need for more laborers:

³"And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; ⁴and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And so they went.

⁵"Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing."

The scene repeats itself more times, one at 3 hours and another at 6 hours and then at the 9th hour he did the same thing

- So the first group was hired for 1 Denarius at 6 am
- The second group was hired for a fair price at 9am
- Another group hired at Noon
- And another group hired at 3pm for a just wage

The Land owner is going to pay a right wage

Each time the land owner goes back he sees more laborers and hires them

- There is no discussion about this man's planning
- Or the size of his fields
- Or his management

Simply put there were more laborers hired at different points in the day

- Maybe it was because the landowner was desperate

But the text indicates more than that, it demonstrates that he was generous

³"And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; ⁴and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And so they went.

⁵"Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing."

He saw workers standing idle and in need

- The emphasis is upon the landowner's generosity
- This generosity is also later demonstrated
- He hired because they were there without employment

Each time he went back he picked up more workers

- He was not giving money away he was giving an opportunity to work and be a part
- Seeing the workers in need and knowing their families would be blessed, he hired them
- Each time he brought in new workers he was being gracious to everyone

He was gracious to the new workers as they were gaining the opportunity to work and provide for their families. He was being generous to the existing workers as they had their agreed upon wage and now more laborers to help

- The landowner's generosity was manifested in the wages and the continuing to hire new crews to help with the same work

Now the outrageous act of generosity from the landowner:

⁶"And about the eleventh *hour* he went out and found others standing *around*; and he said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day long?' ⁷"They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.'

Here again we see another generous act on the part of the landowner. He goes out at the 11th hour. This is 5pm

- The laborers are going to work for an hour

These men are also desperate as they are out waiting for work in the final hours of the day

- To be at this place they are holding out hope that someone else was also desperate

The Landowner asks "why have you been standing here idle all day long?"

- Why aren't you working?

Their answer, because no one hired us

- We have been here waiting and there has been no work

So now we have workers hired in the first hour and the last hour and all the hours in between

Time for reconciliation and the plot twist:

⁸"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last *group* to the first.'⁹ "When those *hired* about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius."

Now comes the climax of the story

- The workers are to be paid for their labors
- But what is different, for effect is that those hired last are paid first
- And those who were paid first received a full day's wage

Again this is an act of amazing generosity

- These laborers would be overwhelmed with gratitude
- This is the best day's work ever
- They would be able to care for their family's needs for that day

Now the problem of unfounded expectations is revealed:

¹⁰ "When those *hired* first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius.¹¹ "When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, ¹² saying, "These last men have worked *only* one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day."

Now here is the accusation

- You are not treating us fairly
- We worked harder, we worked longer, we worked under tougher conditions, therefore we deserve more than what they received
- They cannot be treated the same way we have because we have put in more sacrifice
- You have made them equal to us

"Little seems more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals!" Craig Blomberg pg 303

This is our struggle. God why would you give this person the same gift as you have given to me?

- You must treat me better because I have been working longer

These workers could accept agreeing to working for 1 Denarius for a whole day's work. But they could not accept the idea that someone might work less and get paid the same. This felt unfair

- Maybe that is the same for you?
- Maybe that is why you do not serve the Church
 - You work all day, labor behind the scenes and the speaker gets the glory
 - You work and nobody sees you moving tables and folding chairs and you don't get the same reward
 - That is unfair that you should labor and in the end you both get the same reward from Christ

The explanation of the Landowners fairness:

¹³ "But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?' ¹⁴ "Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. ¹⁵ 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶ "So the last shall be first, and the first last." (Matt. 20:1-16 NAU)

The landowner asks three penetrating questions:

1. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?
 - Did we not negotiate and did you not agree that 1 Denarius was a fair wage for a full 12-hour day's work?
 - And you accepted those terms?
 - Did you not get what was promised?
 - Have I not fulfilled my end of the bargain as you have fulfilled your end?

The payment was exactly what was promised and nothing was withheld

2. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?
 - Do I have a right to do with my money what I please?
 - Can I give to whom I will?

These are rhetorical questions which are giving obvious answers

- The landowner can do whatever he wants with his own resources
- He can bless whoever he wishes
- And blessing another does not rob anyone

3. Is your eye envious because I am generous?

This is the heart of the matter

- The workers were envious that another received the same wage but did not need to do the same work
- It was unfair in their minds that they had to work harder

Yet they were envious at what others had received

- They coveted another's reward

After giving this parable Jesus then concludes where he ended chapter 19

Here what the statement "The last shall be first and the first shall be last" means: The people of God will be treated the same. "The first will be treated like the last and the last treated like the first."

Listen the issue is not about the people in the front of line are moved to the back of the line and the people at the back of the line get to move up to the front of the line. The point is that everyone gets treated the same

- We know this because in the story all received the same payment, 1 Denarius
- We know this this because even the people hired at the 3rd hour, 6th hour, and 9th hour all received the same payment
- And those who were first received the same as those who were last

The point is that God gives equally to all. He is no respecter of persons

Conclusion

What should we take home from this?

- We should not expect that God will treat us better or that he loves us more
- It does not matter when you were called to Christ. It matters that you have responded to His call

I have met people who have said they wished they were saved sooner. I have also met people who wished they were saved later

- It is the later who cause me to doubt whether they know God at all.
- All genuine believers wish they were called sooner. Why?
 - Because they know the consequences of sin and they wish to avoid it
 - Because they know the joy of following Christ and wish for more of it
 - Because they desire to be more useful for Christ
- The person who desires to live in the world more before coming to Christ does not know the grace of God and the work of God. He or she is caught up in themselves
- Like the laborers who think they deserve more for their efforts

What is this verse teaching us?

God is saving people at different ages and stages in life

- Young and old
- Some live long lives and some short lives for him
- Jim Elliot died at a young age as a missionary and received great glory in his death, while his brother lived a long life and planted many churches

God has called us all to different labor. We each have different duties in this work. Even when some share similar offices we have differing responsibilities and duties

- But we are all co-laborers and we work for a fair master

We are not working for a greater reward. This only entices bitterness and jealousy when we see others succeed

- BTW I think this is the source of much disharmony in the Christian world
- People attack faithful teachers because they do not like the success they see
- They are envious at the honor the person is receiving

Let each of us find comfort in knowing we wait for our honor to come from God

How should we respond if we are saved early or late in our lives?

- Work hard no matter when you were called
- Live by faith and seek to do His will
- Remember the Lord is fair to all

One more note, this passage should give us hope that while anyone is alive there is hope of their conversion. God rescues even in the last hour

- He saves even in the final moments
- While there is breath, life, consciousness there is a chance to respond and turn to God
- We just keep working faithfully and watch God surprise us

How do you know you have dealt with the jealousy that is natural in our hearts when we think we have been treated unfairly?

- When you can rejoice in another's success or blessing

The generosity that God pours upon one blesses all

- This is why I love gifted people blessed by God
- They use their gifts to bless others and all are the benefactors

Let us rejoice in God's generous fairness to us all

We don't want fair from God, we want His grace!

**Saving Grace Bible Church © 2019.
All rights reserved. www.SavingGraceBibleChurch.org**