

## 1. The Vineyard Workers

Matthew 20:1-16

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“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. <sup>2</sup> After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup> And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, <sup>4</sup> and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ <sup>5</sup> So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. <sup>6</sup> 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?’ <sup>7</sup> They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ <sup>8</sup> 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.’ <sup>9</sup> And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. <sup>10</sup> Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup> And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, <sup>12</sup> 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.’ <sup>13</sup> But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? <sup>14</sup> Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. <sup>15</sup> Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ <sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first last.”

### 1. What is a parable? Is it different than a story with a moral?

A parable is **an earthly story with a heavenly meaning**. It was used largely by Jesus to convey truths about the kingdom of God to men and women who followed Him.

A parable is different than a story with a moral because many of the characters in a parable represent characters in real life. In this way, a parable has more meaning than a simple moral. It is important, however, to not stretch the meaning of a parable beyond its intended purpose. This could result in erroneous interpretations and false teachings.

### 2. Why did Jesus speak in parables and not directly in plain speech? Read Mark 4:10-13 & Matthew 13:13-17

Mark 4:10-13 And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. <sup>11</sup> And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, <sup>12</sup> so that

“they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.”<sup>13</sup> And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?”

Matthew 13:13-17 - This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.”<sup>15</sup> For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’<sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.<sup>17</sup> For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

**3. The disciples did not understand the meaning of parables at first, but Jesus revealed it to them in time. Read the following verses and comment on the disciples understanding.**

The gospels are loaded with references to the disciples not understanding the nature of Jesus speech.

Mark 8:17-18 & 21 - And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?<sup>18</sup> Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? (21) And he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

Luke 9:44-45 - “Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.”<sup>45</sup> But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, so that they might not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.

Mark 9:30-32 -<sup>30</sup> They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know,<sup>31</sup> for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.”<sup>32</sup> But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.

Matthew 13:18-23 Jesus explains the parable of the sower to the disciples.

Luke 24:27 - And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

Luke 24:44-45 - Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses

and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

#### **4. What is the purpose of the passage? Why did God choose to incorporate this parable into the Gospel Matthew?**

**The context of this parable is helpful in understanding the meaning.** Matthew 19:16-22 is the story of the rich young ruler. Jesus tells him to sell all he has and to follow Jesus if he wants to have eternal life. This is because Jesus knows that to this man, his possessions are his god. The man goes away sorrowful because he is not willing to give up what he has. Jesus explains to his disciples that it is difficult for a rich person to come to God because of all of their earthly possessions. These things take hold of us and we love them more than God (idolatry). The disciples respond (vs. 27-30) that they have left everything for Jesus – “What do we get?” Jesus responds that in the kingdom of God the first are last and the last first, then he tells this parable. **This context helps us to understand this parable is about the economy of the kingdom of God.** A very different economy than we consider. The kingdom of God is not one of efforts and rewards.

The verse, “But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (19:30) is repeated at the end of the parable in 20:16 emphasizing the point of this parable. This statement is also mentioned in Mark 10:31 & Luke 13:30.

Jewish culture recognized wealth as a blessing (and sign of approval) from God. Jesus was showing that God’s economy is much different than ours and God is not a respecter of persons.

**Acts 10:34** - Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

**Romans 2:11** - For there is no respect of persons with God.

But there is more to this parable than just that God is not a respecter of persons. The kingdom of heaven will be filled with many who are weak and lowly, and poor. **The parable demonstrates that God (the vineyard owner) is urging all into His kingdom – regardless of their merit – and rewarding them with eternal life.** Keep in mind that Jesus was talking to many who were striving to be religious elites – to earn God’s favor. Jesus was talking to religious law keepers – men who thought that their adherence to the laws made them great in the kingdom. Even Peter said in 19:27, “*Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have.?”*” Many in Israel at that time wore their religiousness outwardly to impress men and to lord it over others. Jesus was telling them that the ones who you might think will be first will be last (if even included).

Luke 13:22-30 adds more context to this parable, although it does not reference this parable it ends with the phrase, “some who are last will be first, and some who are first will be last”

**Luke 13:22-30** - <sup>22</sup> He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. <sup>23</sup> And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, <sup>24</sup> “Strive to enter through the narrow door. **For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.** <sup>25</sup> **When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’** <sup>26</sup> **Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’** <sup>27</sup> **But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’** <sup>28</sup> **In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,** when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. <sup>29</sup> And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup> **And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”**

**Matthew 7:15-23** - <sup>15</sup> “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

<sup>21</sup> “**Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.** <sup>22</sup> **On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’** <sup>23</sup> **And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’**

##### **5. Was the master of the house fair to the vineyard workers? Why and why not?**

Yes & No. The master gave to each of them what he told them he would give, so in that sense he was fair. The greater truth, however it that **the master gave all of them a day's wage regardless of what they deserved.** This illustrates God's giving us eternal life and salvation regardless of what we deserve. We don't want what we deserve – we want grace. We don't want God to be fair with us, we want Grace.

This parable is a story of grace, and Jesus uses the day's wage to illustrate that God gives to us regardless of what we deserve based on His grace.

**6. How does this parable help us to understand that salvation is not based on our efforts or what we deserve? Read Matthew 19:30. Do we want God to be fair with us?**

Jesus accomplished all of the efforts and gives us the rewards. No man is worthy to enter the kingdom of God and **nothing we can do** can make a difference. **The parable of the Vineyard workers shows us that the master is generous and rewards the workers regardless of the amount of effort that they contribute. The efforts are not the measure by which the workers are paid. The master's generosity is the measure.**

Salvation is not based on our efforts, or works, or our merits. It is not based on what we do for the kingdom of God it is based solely on the work of Christ for us. A proper response to that is to rush into the kingdom and to forsake all other things because the kingdom of heaven is greater than the created things.

**Matthew 13:44** - <sup>44</sup>“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Jesus is looking for a heart that seeks after Him. Followers who are willing to give all of this life up for His glory. Followers who love Him more than they love the things of this world.

**7. How does this parable help us to understand that our works for Jesus do not secure us a better place? Jesus saves us because He loves us not for what we can do for Him. Read Matthew 5:3; 1 Samuel 16:7; and 2 Corinthians 12:19 to understand who will be in the kingdom of God and how God uses our weakness for His glory.**

Jesus is not looking for people that are rich, or popular, or well spoken, or have great ability, or have great education. He has, and will accomplish everything needed for our salvation. There are no prerequisites from us, and no expectations that we be anything or that we accomplish anything of our own. The bible tells us the kingdom of heaven will be filled with poor, and wretched sinners that Jesus saved.

**Matthew 5:3** - “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

God uses people not because of what they can offer Him, but because of what He can offer them.

- Abraham – he was a coward who offered his wife (twice) to the king so that his life might be saved.
- Jacob – a lying manipulative cheat who in the end repented and sought resolution with his brother.
- Moses – a murderer and a traitor to his upbringing.
- Gideon – who refused to believe with an angel standing in front of him, and was the least in his father’s house (Judges 6:15)
- David – a murderous adulterer who was repentant and sought God for forgiveness.

**1 Samuel 16:7** - <sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

**2 Corinthians 12:8-10** - <sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. <sup>10</sup> For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.