





Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

Parables of Jesus

Jesus opens the parable with “for the kingdom of heaven is like...”. He’s showing a contrast here between the way that we see things here on earth and the way that God’s kingdom works. It usually operates in a completely opposite way of what we are accustomed to.

Where is the kingdom of heaven? Who lives there?

The kingdom of heaven does not just refer to the heavens and God’s home; there is a coming kingdom which will be established in the future upon Christ’s return. **But right now, the kingdom of heaven is here, but you cannot see it.** It wasn’t ushered in the way the disciples thought it would be; they were expecting a physical kingdom where Christ would redeem Israel, overthrow Rome, and sit on the throne. They did not understand that it was not yet time, and that instead faith in his death and resurrection brought the kingdom to earth within us. The kingdom exists, and those who put their faith and trust in Jesus are living in it here on this earth. It operates differently than the world, and Jesus is constantly telling people how the kingdom works, and how we should see things with a kingdom mentality.

In the kingdom, the last will be first, and those who wish to be first must be a servant to all (Mark 10:44).

... the kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to be seen. No one will say, “look, here it is!”, or “There it is!”, **because the kingdom of God is within you.** Luke 17:20-21

The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. 1 Corinthians 4:20

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17

Jesus begins his story.

A man who was the master, a householder, or a landowner, went out early in the morning (about 6:00 a.m.) to hire workers for his vineyard. I think we can probably assume this was the first hour of the day. They agreed on a price and he sent them into the vineyard to work. Some translations say a denarius, and some translations say a penny. It was the standard Roman coin at the time, and was equal to a one day’s wage. It was actually a fair wage, and some sources say it was the price of ten donkeys.

In the third hour (9:00 a.m.) the man went out and saw other people standing in the marketplace, not having any work. **He told them to also go into the vineyard, and he would pay them “whatever is right.”**

This happened again at the sixth hour (noon), and the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.)

Then at the eleventh hour (5:00 p.m.), he went out and found some others standing and not working, and he asked them why they were standing there all day not working. They replied that it was because no one had hired them.

He told them also to go into the vineyard, and whatever wage is right is what they would receive.

When the evening was come, the master told his steward to call all the workers and give them their wages beginning with the last workers and ending with the first. It was customary at that time to be paid wages daily.

When the workers that started at the 11th hour came, they received the wage agreed on, the denarius. When the first workers came, they assumed that they would receive more, after seeing how much the last workers received. But everyone was paid the same exact wage.



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Discuss:

How would you feel? Does this sound fair?

It's very natural of us to think this seems unfair.

But did Jesus think it was unfair?

If we think one thing, and Jesus thinks another, who is wrong? We are the ones that are wrong!

The workers who had been there longer started complaining against the master. They said, these last workers have only been here one hour, but you *made them equal* to us who have worked out in the heat all day.

Notice that they wanted more based on what they had done.

Then the master said, I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for me for this amount? Take what is yours, go on your way, and I will give to everyone just as I gave to you. Isn't it lawful for me to do what I want with my own? Are you jealous because I am kind to others?

Jesus ends with, the last will be first, the first will be last. Many are called, but few are chosen. This doesn't mean that God hasn't chosen them. They were called by God, but they weren't chosen because of their own jealousy and their own grumbling.

Jesus in the Story



Jesus gave no explanation for this parable, but it speaks of those who try to earn salvation. If you take this back to Matthew 19:27-30, He is answering Peter's question about what the disciples will have. Jesus answers him, but it is still what we may consider to backwards from what we normally think. It's not for all the good deeds that people will be rewarded, it is for following Christ, and leaving everything for Him.

Then Jesus goes into the story of the wages.

These workers did not think it was fair that everyone was paid the same, even though they received what they agreed to when they were hired. They thought it wasn't fair that the people who got hired at the end of the day got just as much as those who worked all day.

As humans we often think this way.

We want to try to earn our way into the kingdom by doing good deeds and obeying all the commandments. We compare ourselves with people who aren't as "good" as we think we are. We build ourselves up by all the good things we have done, and it makes us proud. Salvation has nothing to do with us. It has everything to do with Jesus and what he did FOR us.

Salvation is a gift from God, and no one can brag about what they have done, or that they were so good that God chose them.

Discuss:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

What does this mean? By grace we have been saved. Talk this through with the students.

It was by faith, and only faith, that we received this grace.

It was a gift. Talk about a gift. Did you pay for it? Did you earn it? - no, not if it was truly a gift.

You cannot earn your salvation. If you could do enough good works to earn it, then you could brag to others about what you have done. If it's a gift, it gives honor to the one who gave you the gift - God - and brings glory (attention, honor, praise) only to Jesus.

He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

For they don't understand God's way of making people right with himself. Refusing to accept God's way, they cling to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law (Romans 10:3).



Lesson Questions & Memory Verses

37. The Lost Coin

1. What did this lady do when she lost her coin?
2. What did she do when she found it?
3. Who did she tell?
4. What do the angels of God do when someone repents?

Zephaniah 3:17

For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, He will calm all your fears.

38. The Lost Son

Read Romans 8:35-39

1. What can separate us from God's love?
2. We cannot be separated from God's love by death or?
3. We cannot be separated by angels, heavenly rulers, or?
4. We cannot be separated now or?

1 John 4:7-8

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

39. What Fills Your Heart?

1. Where do our words come from?
2. What comes out of the heart of a good man?
3. What comes out of the heart of an evil man?
4. What will we give account for to God?

Luke 6:45

A good man out of the treasure of his heart brings forth good; an evil man out of the treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

40. Workers in the Vineyard

Read Ephesians 2:8-9

1. What have we been saved by?
2. What have we been saved through?
3. Were we saved by anything we did?
4. What was our salvation from God?
5. If it were by our works then we could do what?

Titus 3:5

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit....

