

PARABLES OF JESUS

THE PARABLE OF THE LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD - MATTHEW 20:1-16

A. Introductory Notes

1. Matthew was the only disciple to record this parable.
2. The parable in Matthew 20:1-16 is a teaching moment by Jesus in response to Peter's question recorded in Matthew 19:27, *Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?"*
3. Also, Jesus explained His statement to Peter in Matthew 19:30, *But many who are first will be last, and the last first.*

B. Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a master who sought laborers for his vineyard (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.*

1. Notes

- a. *For*, This refers to the issue of rewards which took place in 19:28-29, *Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.*
 - b. Jesus introduced this parable as He did with other kingdom parables in Matthew 13, how it will be in the messianic kingdom.
2. The master went out early to hire laborers.
 3. A vineyard commonly represents Israel in Old Testament, Isaiah 3:14-15, The LORD will enter into judgment with the elders and princes of his people: "It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?" declares the Lord GOD of hosts.

C. The master set the wage for the laborers and continued to hire laborers throughout the day (2-7), *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.'*

1. A denarius was the normal day's wage for a day laborer in Jesus' day.
2. The third hour was 9:00 a.m., the sixth hour was noon, and the eleventh hour was 5:00 p.m.
3. The landowner did not promise a particular wage to those who came later but said he would do what is right.
4. Did the landowner misjudge his need or was he being compassionate to those who still were unemployed? Could it be that God does not call us because He needs us but because He wants us?

D. At the end of the day, the master paid the workers from last to first, each one denarius which upset the laborers who worked longer (8-12), *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.'*

1. The landowner paid the laborers in reverse order in which they started work.
2. Everyone was paid the same amount which angered those who worked first.
3. The landowner had been just with them but generous with the latecomers.
4. R. T. France, *The principle appears to be of payment according to need rather than desert... In the kingdom in which the first are last and the last first there is no room for envious comparisons.*

E. The master declared that he had not done wrong to them but had the right to be generous (13-15), *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?'*

1. The landowner referred to one of the grumblers as *friend* and reminded him that he was paid what was promised.
2. Why are many of us uncomfortable with this parable? Maybe work is ingrained in us instead of grace.
3. The landowner declared that he chose to do with his resources what pleased him.
4. R. T. France, *God is no one's debtor. The God who is generous far beyond what could be expected is also never less than just.*

F. The point of the parable is that the kingdom of God is based on God's grace not our works (16), *So the last will be first, and the first last.*"

1. Jesus may be implying that Jewish disciples would not necessarily receive more than Gentile disciples.
2. God is not bound by our ideas of right and wrong.
 - a. Isaiah 55:8, *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.*
 - b. Louis Barbieri, *Many who have prominent places will someday find themselves demoted. And many who often find themselves at the end of the line will find themselves promoted to the head of the line: The last will be first, and the first will be last.*
4. Jonah in Jonah 4:1-11 and the Prodigal's brother in Luke 15:11-32 illustrate those who misunderstood God's dealing with mankind.
5. The landowner represents God and how He rules, Norman Huffman, *Jesus deliberately and cleverly led the listeners along by degrees until they understood that if God's generosity was to be represented by a man, such a man would be different from any man ever encountered.*
6. Any reward from God is an act of His grace not a payment for work earned.

CONCLUSION

A. Considerations

1. God is not impressed by our works but we should be grateful that God does not give us what we deserve.
2. God rejects our comparisons with others because accountability is to Him.
3. God rewards as He sees fit because all we have is by grace and it is never less than just.

B. Maybe a test of whether I have received grace is, can I be thankful and gracious?

C. A story concerning Thomas Aquinas (13th century theologian), *Worshiping one day in the chapel in which he was accustomed to perform his devotions, it is said that the Saviour thus addressed him: "Thomas, thou hast written much and well concerning me. What reward shall I give thee for thy work?" Whereupon he answered, "Nothing but thyself, O Lord!*