

WHATEVER IS RIGHT
Parable 23: Workers in the Vineyard
Mt 20:1-16

I. ILLUSTRATION

II. THE UNEXPECTED NATURE OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

❖ GOD'S GREAT REVERSALS—MATTHEW 19-20

1. NOT HUMAN WISDOM
 - The Kingdom belongs to **children**—such as these—**19:13-15**
 - Revealed not the wise and intelligent—but to infants—**Mt 11:25**
2. NOT HUMAN WEALTH
 - How hard it is for the **rich** to enter the Kingdom—**19:16-26**
3. NOT HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS
 - But giving up **family** and farm to follow the Lord—**19:27-29**
4. NOT HUMAN WORK ETHIC
 - But **God's goodness** and generosity—**19:30-20:16**
5. NOT HUMAN POWER
 - But by **humiliation** and suffering—**20:17-19**
6. NOT HUMAN AMBITION
 - But humble **servanthood**—**20:20-28**
7. NOT HUMAN ENTHUSIASM
 - But Christlike **compassion**—**20:29-34**

III. BIBLICAL TEXT—Mt 20:1-16

1 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 marketplace; **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.”

IV. EXPLANATION

A. CONTEXT

1. ‘FOR’—v1—POINTS BACKGROUND—TO RICH YOUNG RULER

a. Jesus’ command

19:21—*Go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me.*

b. Peter’s observation—and burning question

19:27—*Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?*

c. Jesus’ two promises

- Specific for Apostles—to rule with him and judge the 12 tribes of Israel—**v28**
 - For all followers—many times what they have left, plus eternal life—**v29**
- ##### d. Rewards are biblical
- For the persecuted—great is your reward in heaven—**Mt 5**
 - Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth nor rust corrupt—**Mt 6**
 - Good and faithful servant . . . I will put you in charge of many things—**Mt 25**
 - If anyone’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward—**I Cor 3**

2. BUT WARNINGS TO DISCIPLES FOLLOWED

- Don’t be **presumptuous**—assuming you have priority—Vineyard Parable—**20:1-16**
- Don’t be **triumphal**—instead—following Me means suffering—**20:17-19**
- Don’t seek **power and authority**—even the Son of Man is a servant—**20:20-28**
- All highlighted by two reminders

19:30—*But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.*

20:16—*So the last shall be first, and the first last.*

B. PURPOSES OF THE PARABLE

1. THIS PARABLE IS **NOT** ABOUT

- Equal rewards—negating any concept of greater responsibility in the Kingdom

- o Efficiency—quality over quantity—latter workers more efficient—earned equal pay
- o Economics—social redistribution of wealth—to eliminate class division
- o Social solidarity—everyone has a right to work—everyone has a right to a living wage
- o Election—God choosing some to enter the Kingdom—but rejecting others

2. THIS PARABLE IS ABOUT

- o God's **Sovereignty** and **Goodness**
- o **Equal Access** to the Kingdom of Heaven
- o Our **Contentment** with God's Provision

C. PARABLE

1. THE CONTRACT

- a. **Workday** was 12 hours—sunrise to sunset—**Ps 104:22-23**
 - Times were—6am—9am—12 pm—3 pm—5 pm
- b. **Situation**
 - Probably grape harvest—end August, early September
 - Optimal point of ripeness—before threatening rains came
 - Race to bring in harvest—every available person needed
- c. The **plight** of day workers
 - Daily survival
 - Jesus understood workingman's plight—as a carpenter
- d. The **pay**
 - One day's pay = 1 denarius
 - Subsistence was half a denarius—poverty line was 200 denarii per year
- e. Paying workers **on time**—as soon as they finished—required by law—**Dt 24** and **Lev 19**
- f. Landowner **negotiated** with first group—*quid pro quo*
 - So they had assurance of certain pay

2. THE COVENANT—**vv3-7**

- o No contractual agreement
- o They trusted Landowner to do *whatever is right*
- o But latecomers' needs were just as urgent as early workers' needs

3. THE GENEROUS LANDOWNER—**vv8-9**

- a. Paid *everyone* the same—one denarius
- b. Logic of His decision

- He **cared equally** about **everyone**
- He met the **minimum survival needs** of even the latecomers
- c. The principles—basis for His decision
 - He was ‘good’ = **generous** = **αγαθός**
 - He was **trustworthy**—to do *whatever is right*
 - He was **sovereign**—free to do as He chose—with impunity
- 4. DISAPPOINTED COMPLAINERS—**vv11-12**
 - a. ‘First’ ones—included *all* the previous workers—from 6 am through 3 pm
 - b. Imagine—their anticipation of a *bonus*!
 - c. Grumbling
 - **γογγυζω** = murmuring—like Israel in the wilderness
 - **Do not grumble as some did and were destroyed by the destroyer—I Cor 10:10**
 - d. Their argument—was based on human system of justice
 - e. A frontal attack on the character of the Landowner
 - Challenged His goodness—fairness—and trustworthiness
- 5. THE GENTLE REBUKE—**vv13-15**
 - a. Landowner’s basic message
 - I have been **fair**—fulfilled my contract with the early ones
 - I have been **gracious**—gone beyond what you later ones expected
 - I have a **lawful right**—to do what I have done—because I am **sovereign**
 - **Be content** with what I have paid—and **don’t be jealous** of others
 - b. Contrast between evil and good
 - 1. Workers were **envious** = had an ‘evil eye’
 - **Pr 28:22—A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth**
 - 2. Landowner was ‘generous’—**v15**
 - Generous = **αγαθός** = good
 - Implied—He had a ‘good eye’
 - **Pr 22:9—He who has a good eye will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor.**
 - ‘**good**’ landowner—goes back to Jesus saying *only God is ‘good’—19:17*
 - He is good because He gives to the poor—**unlike the rich young ruler**
 - c. Jesus’ rebuke—was aimed indirectly at His disciples
 - 1. Disciples were calculating rewards
 - **Peter’s** question

- **James and John's** aspirations
- Probably thinking they should receive more than other late-comers
- 2. Key verse—**v10**—*they thought they should receive more*
- 3. Parable overturns our human **expectations**
 - Based on **works**—and our views of what is ‘right’—**human justice**
 - **Instead**—God shows mercy and rewards based on His sovereign choice
- 4. **Envy**—displeasure at others’ success—is ungodly
- 5. **Jealousy**—and desire for rank or privilege must be rejected

V. APPLICATION

A. GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY AND GOODNESS

1. HE IS PERFECTLY FAITHFUL—JUST—AND MERCIFUL
 - **Ex 33:19**—*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy*
 - **Is 55:8-9**—*My ways are not your ways*
2. OUR IMPERFECT SENSE OF JUSTICE
 - a. Is legalistic—"equal pay for equal work" is our law
 - b. Is self-centered
 - Nobody else—not even the poor—should have an advantage
 - This seems unjust and to our disadvantage—when someone else has an advantage
 - When something happens to our advantage—it is okay—it is our good fortune
3. GOD’S PERSPECTIVE
 - a. The Landowner everyone the **same** wage—because He **cared**
 - Without it the latecomers would not have enough to live on
 - b. The Landowner was **just**
 - Because He fulfilled the contract—paid what He promised
 - c. The Landowner was **merciful**
 - His justice included grace—to fulfill His covenant as He saw right
 - d. He could do as He pleased—because He was **sovereign**
 - Because it was His land and money—and He was trustworthy
4. DANGER OF A COMMERCIAL SPIRIT
 - *Quid pro quo* gets exactly what it bargains for—but no grace beyond!
 - But we don’t serve for wages—as hirelings—instead we serve the Lord
 - We are not hirelings serving a taskmaster—but children serving our Father
 - It is not a sacrifice—but a privilege

5. OUR DUTY IS TO SERVE HIM WITH GLADNESS—AND LET GOD BE GOD

B. EQUAL ACCESS TO THE KINGDOM

1. GOD MAKES PROVISION FOR GENTILES—JUST AS HE DOES FOR JEWS
2. GOD MAKES EQUAL PROVISION FOR LATECOMERS—JUST AS FIRSTCOMERS
3. LONGTIME CHRISTIANS SHOULD NOT FEEL SUPERIOR
 - o All God’s children have equal value in His eyes
 - o We are all undeserving—redeemed sinners
 - o God ‘*made them equal to us*’—v12—who came last
4. GOD CAN USE UPSTART LATECOMERS JUST AS EFFECTIVELY
 - o **Look at Saul!**
5. WE ARE ALL ELEVENTH-HOUR FOLLOWERS!

C. CONTENTMENT

1. EVERYONE THINKS THEY DESERVE MORE—AND BETTER
2. WE COMPARE OURSELVES WITH OTHERS
 - o Calculating fairness and levels of accomplishment—like the disciples
3. THE ‘EVIL EYE’ BEGINS WITH THE SIN OF DISCONTENT
 - o **Cain’s envy of Abel—Gen 4**
 - o **Peter’s envy of John—Jn 21**
4. DANGER OF A COMPETITIVE SPIRIT
 - o **Saul** delighted in victory over Philistines—until he heard David praised—**I Sam 18**
 - o Why is God’s goodness to others the occasion for our anger?
 - o Why is it so difficult to rejoice when good things happens to other people?
 - o Why do we spend our time calculating how we have been cheated?
 - o Serve within our lanes—and we will have joy!
 - o Try driving in another’s lane—and it will be disastrous—we will be miserable
5. RATHER—BE CONTENT WITH GOD’S CALLING AND PROVISION
 - o **Godliness with contentment is great gain—I Tim 6:6**
 - o Be happy with your job, even if someone else gets more pay
 - o Be not envious of others—but rejoice in their success—that enhances the Kingdom

VI. INVITATION

JESUS PAID IT ALL

I hear the Savior say,
"Thy strength indeed is small,
Child of weakness, watch and pray,
Find in Me thine all in all."

Refrain:
Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

Lord, now indeed I find
Thy pow'r and Thine alone,
Can change the leper's spots
And melt the heart of stone. [Refrain]

For nothing good have I
Where-by Thy grace to claim;
I'll wash my garments white
In the blood of Calv'ry's Lamb. [Refrain]

And when, before the throne,
I stand in Him complete,
"Jesus died my soul to save,"
My lips shall still repeat. [Refrain]