

**Matthew 20:1-16** "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."

### **Keep it Simple**

One commentary on this parable a guy by the name of Trench, goes on for 20 pages pouring over every little minutia of detail concerning this parable. What does each hour mean? Who the first laborers compared to the last? What does the denarius stand for? Are the laborers believers? If so why are they complaining? What does it mean that they are last?

This is a classic mistake when it comes to parables. Jesus parables are not meant to be dissected like this. The whole point of a parable is to explain something in a very simple way.

Most parables are just a story, until something really odd happens. And you when find something really odd happening nine times out of ten you find an incredible picture of God's unbelievable grace.

Remember our old testament reading. His ways are not our ways. "As the sky is higher than the earth." That is the whole point of most parables. Jesus takes a very common human scene and he twists it around to show how God's ways are not our ways.

### **The Love of the Father**

This parable is no exception. It is in every way a common normal story about a guy hiring workers for his vineyard until the evening comes and its time to pay the laborers. Now all of a sudden the master pays the full days wage to people who only worked for an hour. Who does that? That's ridiculous.

Many of you I'm sure hire workers. Are you going to pay them a full days' wage when they only work an hour?

Reminds me of that episode of 30 Rock. The nurse is only working half days but she demands full pay, and Jack is irate, of course he is who wouldn't be. By every human standard this is absurd.

But that is the grace and love of our Father that He doesn't give us what we deserve, but instead in his grace He gives and He gives liberally.

Notice how the whole parable shows us a man who is far more concerned about the people than about making a profit. His motivation is his desire to help out these people not his own property.

This is seen not only in how he pays them, but in the fact that he goes out at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. What is anyone going to accomplish in one hour?

But the master doesn't care. He has compassion on these men and wishes to help. Just as our Father has compassion on us, poor sinners that we are, and wants to show us with his grace.

When we see such grace and love we should rejoice. That father is not going to punish us for our sins but instead He sent His Son to die in our place.

### **The Evil Workers**

Unfortunately however, instead of rejoicing there are those who are annoyed by our Father's grace.

What sinful, spiteful, selfish people we are, that our reaction to the Father's abundant grace is to get angry. When the Father has already given us more than we deserve, we attempt to demand more.

This is exactly the reason that so many people hate God's word. You are saved by grace alone, through faith. But says the sinner why should so and so be condemned, look at the good deeds that they do. The world does not want God's grace to be freely given to all, they want to earn it, they want to believe they deserve it, because if they earn it, if they deserve it that is something of which they can boast.

And what about us? We also want to believe that we are better. I come to church therefore I'm better. I read my bible every day therefore I'm better. I give more to church, or I volunteer more, or I teach Sunday school, therefore I'm better.

### **The First Shall be Last**

But what does Jesus say? "The first shall be last and the last first." Here again people get sidetracked unto all kinds of arguments as to what this means, but I think it's only because again they miss the simplicity of the parable.

Those who think that God owes them something are those who think they ought to be first, they are not first, but they think they should be first, they come before God demanding what they think is fair, and God sets them last. Others know the truth, they know they are nothing before God and come to Him admitting that they are nothing. They demand nothing from God, knowing they deserve nothing, but trusting solely in His grace, and such people receive grace for grace.

When I was young, we were out camping and it was time for smores. All the kids gathered around pushing and shoving trying to be the first to get the marshmallows. But my friend Mark and I knew better. We knew to stay and sit by the fire and not clamor or demand. Sure enough we were the first to receive the marshmallows. In that case our attitude wasn't any better than the other kids, we were just smarter.

But in the parable we are reminded that God gives to those who, not on the outside only, but in their hearts acknowledge that they are nothing before Him and instead of clamouring and demanding what they believe is their due, they trust to the grace and love of our Savior.

For we know the riches of His grace, he who did not spare His own son but freely gave him up for us all.

AMEN

THE PEACE OF GOD THAT SURPASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING WILL KEEP YOUR HEARTS AND MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS.