

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. ² 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.' ⁸ 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.' ¹³ 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?' ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last."

Intro: The last three weeks, we've studied the rich young ruler & Jesus' instruction to His disciples about riches & wealth after this encounter. We saw the RYR chose his wealth & possessions over Jesus. We saw that Jesus is the good God Who demands perfection, provides perfection to all who follow Him, and is the Treasure of Heaven Who is so valuable that He is worthy for you to give up everything in order to gain Him. We saw that salvation for the rich (& everyone!) is difficult & even impossible apart from God, but God is able to do the impossible & save everyone who repents, believes, & follows Jesus. Last week, we saw that everyone who leaves everything to follow Jesus will receive rewards that far exceed what they leave behind, they will reign with Christ, and they will enjoy eternal life as His beloved first and chosen ones.

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

- **Matthew 20:16:** So the last will be first, and the first last.

From the world's perspective (and even from the disciples' perspective!), the rich young ruler seemed to be first, but unless he repented, he was not saved, he was last. But the last, the least, the small in this world, the disregarded & those viewed as unimportant; the weak & helpless – like children – they will be first!

There's another application of this "first will be last, last will be first" statement to Peter's response to the RYR: **Matt. 19:27:** Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?"

Leon Morris & Arthur Carr: Peter and the rest of the Twelve have indeed left all for Christ, but they must not think that their priority in time gives them an overwhelming advantage . . . Not only will the disciples not be the only called, but they may not reach a higher place or a higher reward than some who follow them at an apparent disadvantage . . . they must beware of a spirit very prevalent among hard workers, and not think too much of their own labors, or be displeased because others are equally rewarded.

In response to Peter's question, "What then will we have?" Peter & the disciples need to be reminded that all they have is by grace & grace alone; they need to be reminded that there will be no sinful comparisons or works-righteousness legalism in the kingdom of heaven; they need to be reminded that God always does what's righteous & just & that God is sovereign to freely give His grace & gifts to whomever He pleases, when He pleases, how He pleases; they need to be reminded that God is extravagantly & lavishly generous with His grace & rewards!

In the kingdom of heaven, there will be no sinful comparisons or works-righteousness legalism; God always does what's right; God is absolutely sovereign & free to give grace to whom He pleases; God is extravagantly generous, so we should be thankful & amazed by grace; & all God's children are fundamentally equal in His sight.

1. The Parable Of The Amazing Grace Of The Master (Kenneth Bailey) (Parable Of Workers In Vineyard)

Matthew 20:1-10: 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. ² 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.' ⁸ 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.

a. The kingdom of heaven is like a vineyard: The kingdom of heaven is the realm of God's rule & reign. It is like a vineyard. Israel was often compared to a vineyard in the O. T.

b. The master of the house goes out to hire laborers: God is the master of the house; the laborers are His people; Even in this parable, we are reminded that God is like the "Hound of Heaven" chasing after people with mercy!

c. The master of the house & the laborers agree on the pay: A denarius a day: this is a normal day's wage; 6am; They have an agreement: **V 2:** After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day; They work by agreement.

d. The master hires four more sets of laborers at four different times, later in the day: The master sees people standing around doing nothing at 9am (3rd hour), 12pm (6th hour), 3pm (9th hour) & 5pm (11th hour). **He cares!**

e. Those the master hires later in the day trust the master to do what is right: **V 4:** You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.

f. The master pays all five sets of workers the exact same wages: He directs that those hired last, at 5pm, be paid first & then those hired at 3pm, then those at 12pm, then those hired at 9am, & last, those hired at 6am. Every single group is paid the exact same amount! Those paid first (those hired at 5pm) get 12 times what the first group agreed to work for. Everyone except the workers hired first get a "bonus"! **This master is generous!**

g. The workers hired first think they'll be paid more: They've been out there working for twelve hours! These others hired last only worked for one hour, & the master paid them one denarius. Surely he will pay us more!

h. This doesn't seem fair: Albert Mohler: Deep down we don't really like this parable! It's not about fair business practices! Parables are earthly stories with heavenly/spiritual meanings.

2. What The Parable Of The Worker In The Vineyard Teaches Us

Matthew 20:11-16: And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, & you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day & the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' So the last will be first, and the first last.

a. Jesus condemns works-righteousness legalism & jealous comparison (envy): Don't be the first who will be last through a works-righteousness legalism & jealous comparison.

1) Avoid a works-righteousness legalism: You cannot earn God's favor! **V 12:** [We] have borne the burden of the day & the scorching heat; We earned this! We worked harder than anyone!

Romans 4:4-5: Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness

Not pastoring; not parenting; not success; not obedience; not pleasing others; nothing justifies – only Jesus!

Nehemiah 8:10: the joy of the LORD is your strength; **Psalm 37:4:** Delight yourself in the LORD

2) Avoid jealous comparison & envy: V 12: These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us; **V 15:** Or do you begrudge my generosity? (Is your eye evil because I am generous?): Like the elder brother in the prodigal sons parable; Like if the disciples envied the thief on the cross or the Apostle Paul!

Jonathan Edwards (Heaven A World Of Love): There will be perfect love there, so there will be no envy or jealousy. Those given authority over only five cities (Luke 19) will not be jealous of those given authority over ten cities, but the fact that someone else enjoys more blessings of God will only serve to increase your joy!

Do you think God has been unfair to you? Do you think God has not given you the gifts/life He should give you? He's calling you to trust Him & rest in Him – that He loves you & that He knows best.

b. Jesus shows that God always does what's right: V 4: (3rd hour workers) You go into the vineyard too, & whatever is right I will give you; **V 13:** I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?

God always does what's right, even when what He does doesn't seem right to us: Job; Joseph; Jesus' death

- **Charles Spurgeon:** Remember this: Had any other condition been better for you than the one in which you are, divine love would have put you there.

- **Elisabeth Elliot:** God never withholds from His child, that which His love and wisdom call good. God's refusals are always merciful. They are "severe mercies" at times – but mercies all the same. God never denies us our hearts desire – except to give us something better.

c. Jesus teaches the absolute freedom and sovereignty of God: This parable is the Romans 9 of Matthew's Gospel! **Vs 14-15:** 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?

Romans 9:9-24: For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return & Sarah shall have a son." ¹⁰ & not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born & had done nothing either good or bad - in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call - ¹² she was told, "The older will serve the younger." ¹³ As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." ¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, & I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, & that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, & he hardens whomever he wills. ¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use & another for dishonorable use? ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath & to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory - ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

d. Jesus teaches that God is extravagantly & lavishly generous: V 13: But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong’; **V 15:** Or do you begrudge my generosity? God is generous; He love to give to us!

Steve Dehais sent me this: John Piper: We go up and down in our enjoyments. We get bored and discouraged one day and feel hopeful and excited another. We are like little geysers that gurgle and sputter and pop erratically. But God is like a great Niagara, you look at it and think, surely this can't keep going at this force for year after year after year. It seems like it would have to rest. Or it seems like some place up stream it would run dry. But, no, it just keeps surging and crashing and making honeymooners happy century after century. That's the way God is about doing us good. He never grows weary of it. It never gets boring to him.

- **Psalm 35:27:** Let those who desire My vindication shout for joy and be glad, and say evermore, “Great is the Lord, who delights in the welfare of his servant!”

- **Jeremiah 32:39-41:** I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. ⁴⁰ I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. ⁴¹ I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

1) I will not turn away from doing good to you!

2) I will rejoice in doing you good!

3) With all My heart and with all My soul I will rejoice to do good to you!

e. Jesus teaches that we should be thankful & amazed by grace: These workers shouldn't be grumbling or begrudging the Master's generosity! They should be amazed that He chose to hire them! They should be amazed that He gave them what He gave them!

These grumbling, first group workers should have responded this way: Luke 17:7-10: Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? ⁸ Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? ⁹ Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'

All that we deserve is everlasting torment in hell. **D. A. Carson:** Do you really want nothing but totally effective, instantaneous justice? Then go to hell.

Yet look what God has given us! **GOSPEL!**

Hymn: Amazing grace how sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found Was blind but now I see

f. Jesus teaches that there is a fundamental equality that we all share as His disciples: Craig Blomberg: Latecomers receive the same reward: tax collectors & sinners; Gentiles who join God's people later than the Jews; People who come to faith later in life; Christians who have different degrees of commitment & faithfulness.

Are there degrees of reward in heaven? Craig Blomberg: The significance of this parable can scarcely be overestimated. Luke 12:47-48 teaches that there are degrees of punishment in hell; Matt 20:1-16, that there are degrees of reward in heaven. Neither of these facts is commonly known or understood in Christian circles. To be sure, every individual will have a highly unique experience before God on Judgment Day (see esp. 1 Cor. 3:10-15). But no text of Scripture supports the notion that these differences are perpetuated throughout eternity. The very nature of grace & perfection preclude such a concept. The reason we object to equal treatment for all is precisely the objection of the workers in this parable – it doesn't seem fair.

We can at least say this: Everyone receives the same pay in this parable! There is a sense in which the reward is exactly the same for every true believer! If you are in Christ, you are all God's children! You are all loved by God with an everlasting love! You all have the same Holy Spirit! You are all equally justified before God! You will all be equally sanctified someday – conformed fully & perfectly into the image of Jesus Christ! You will all enter into the joy of your Master! You will all get God! You will all have fullness of joy & pleasures forevermore someday in God's very presence! You will all be fully saved, safe, & satisfied in the new heavens & the new earth someday! You will all be totally & fully happy! You will all have no more pain, no more death, no more sin, & no more tears!

g. God grants saved sinners lavish, extravagant grace: Lucy Letby, a neonatal nurse in the UK, was found guilty this month of murdering seven babies by deliberately injecting the babies with air, force feeding them with milk, or poisoning them with insulin. 13 babies suffered from her violent acts. **BBC Article:** The parents of twin brothers who were among Letby's 13 victims have told the BBC the nurse was a “hateful human being” who had taken “everything” from them. Letby murdered one of their baby boys, and tried to kill the other twin the following day . . . the jury was shown a note, found in her home, which read: “I am evil I did this”.

Law: This woman is evil! She deserves to die! She deserves God's wrath in hell forever. And what she did is basically what abortion is – this is the pro-choice position.

Gospel: Let's say she never shows remorse for these horrific crimes. She never says I'm sorry. She remains cold-hearted and hateful all of her life. Let's say a faithful prison chaplain shares the Gospel with her, over and over again, but she rejects and refuses Christ. But then, on her death bed, the chaplain visits her and shares the Gospel one last time. And this time, the Holy Spirit works, God's Word is a fire & a hammer, & it breaks her heart! She sees her sin for what it is – evil & ugly. She sees the beauty of Jesus Christ, & she repents & believes the Gospel! She's saved! She's born again! She will be with Christ in Paradise! She will enjoy heaven along with all of those who have faithfully served Christ all or most of their lives! And I need that same grace Lucy Letby needs!

h. And we get all of this, all because of Jesus Christ & His finished work: What about the Laborer of all laborers – the Worker of all workers: Jesus Christ! He worked like no man ever worked! He worked an infinite number of hours! He bore the greatest burden of the day & the most scorching heat of the day as He was tempted in all ways like we are, yet without sin! He conquered the greatest assaults of the devil, & perfectly obeyed God's law! On that cross, Jesus bore the great burden of our sin & the scorching heat of the infinite wrath of God that we deserve for our sin! And Jesus was not paid the wages He earned. He's the only One Who ever actually could & did earn eternal life by His own good works! But He was not paid this wage! He was paid the wage of the most vile sinner Who has ever lived: suffering, pain, death, & hell – He took all of this because He Who knew no sin was made sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him & have everlasting life! He got our wages: death & hell. We get His wages: everlasting life & glory! And He rose up from the dead, so that the last will be first, & the first will be last! This is extravagant, lavish grace!

In the kingdom of heaven, there will be no sinful comparisons or works-righteousness legalism; God always does what's right; God is absolutely sovereign & free to give grace to whom He pleases; God is extravagantly generous, so we should be thankful & amazed by grace; & all God's children are fundamentally equal in His sight.

Christ Is The God Of Lavish Grace
The Master Of Each House And Space
Who Came And Ran A Sinless Race
The Holy, Good, Grand, Giving Ace
Who Gave It All To Sin Erase
Upon That Cross God's Wrath Defaced
He Died And Rose To Death Displace
In Him We're Just, God Rest His Case

By Faith Alone Christ We Embrace
One Day By Grace We'll See His Face
All Tears And Pain He Will Replace
With Joys And Pleasures In That Place
Of Sin And Death There'll Be No Trace
But Everlasting Mercy Chase
All Because He Saves By Grace!