

Be Thankful and Rejoice

Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) (NASB)

20 “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 market place; 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.”

Introduction

We all want to be in Heaven, don't we? How would you feel when you see someone whom you despise saved by God's grace? Someone, you believe, who never deserves God's grace and mercy as you do. Somehow, God decides to welcome that individual into His Kingdom. Through repentance and faith in Christ, of course.

Would you rejoice together with the Lord when that individual enters Heaven? By the way, you and that person will be together forever in God's presence. How would you feel?

Well, if you feel resentful about God's accepting some "jerks" into salvation, today's sermon is for you.

Content

I am leading you in today's text verse by verse.

v. 1: "For **the kingdom of heaven** is like a landowner---Jesus talking here. He talks about the Kingdom of God. What is your understanding of the Kingdom of God?"

Once a child asked his pastor what the Kingdom of God is like. Without getting into too much of theology, the pastor explained: the Kingdom of God is where God is the King. King rules. So does God in His Kingdom. Not we. We are the citizens therein. God is the Sovereign Ruler. He calls the shots. Not we. That's the Kingdom Jesus is talking about here.

He says, "I want you to listen and have the right understanding so that you may not presume or even impose your own opinion of what God's Kingdom should be like."

Sometimes, we insist on our own wishful thinking on God's Kingdom and end up distorting the ways of God's Kingdom. Here's an example. *I believe in God. I believe in Heaven and Hell. Heaven is the place for nice people. Hell is the place for bad people. All my family and friends, even my pets should be in there because they are my family. They are all nice. Some people shouldn't be there, for instance, my enemies. They are nasty. Some of my own family shouldn't be there either, because they are mean to me. All others should be welcome including Jews and Gentiles, Muslims, Communists, Buddhists, Hindi, and even those who don't accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Except Hitler. Except Stalin. But, as long as they promote peace, anyone should be in Heaven. Thus, we set our own rules on admission to Heaven and demand God to accept our conditions. That's not Christianity. It is a humanistic religion. E.g. A pastor. Gandhi not in heaven?*

Let's not forget. Christianity never proclaimed, or proclaims, or never will proclaim human kingdom on earth. The faith we confess is always about God and His Kingdom. We don't invite God to join in our own kingdom. He invites everyone to join Him in His Kingdom through His only Son Jesus. God calls us to be His people (Deuteronomy 7:6-8) and to be the citizens of His Kingdom. Therefore, we follow His rules. Anyone who agrees with His terms enters and abides in there. Those, who do not, will not.

²When he had **agreed** with the laborers for a **denarius** for the day, he sent them **into his vineyard**.

Agreed: a denarius for the day's work that consists of a 12-hour labor (from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.)-- dawn to dusk. In today's dollars: \$12/hour times 12 hours makes about \$150 a day. Sufficient for daily survival for a family.

³And he went out about the **third** hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; ⁴and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and **whatever is right** I will give you.' And so they went.

Whatever is right: In the story, the owner recruits the workers five times: at 6 a.m., 9 a.m., 12 noon, 3 p.m., and 5 p.m. At 6 p.m. the owner calls the day. Except the first shift, the other four groups agreed to get paid for whatever the owner deemed appropriate. None of them expected a full denarius.

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**.'

Interesting way to pay the workers, I must say. From the last group to the first.

⁹When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. ¹⁰When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹When they received it, they (began to) **grumble** at the landowner, ¹²saying, '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**.'

They vs. Us. Mentality. We can't help it. We do compare ourselves to others. Constantly. Two things are bound to happen when we do. Either, we feel

miserable and inferior. Or, we feel arrogant and superior to others. In today's story, the comparison generated a grumbling among those hired first about the owner's unfair compensation. They complained: *Don't forget we have worked all day under the scorching Sun. 12 hours! Remember our sweat and works. We deserve better! Pay us more! A denarius is not enough.* Let's check it out how the owner responded to their demand for more money.

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.*

Don't accuse me of any wrong. I am fair to you. You have agreed with me for a denarius, haven't you? Take a denarius and go, but don't stop me from being generous to this last man.

Do you hear what I hear? The owner does whatever he wishes to do. So does God. Such a poignant truth is repeated in the next verse. The truth of God's sovereignty.

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?'*

Eye envious. Dirty look. Envy. Don't be jealous of your neighbor's getting a denarius. Salvation in this case. Don't be jealous of their getting salvation as you do.

Once again, the point of the story is not to discourage hard working for Kingdom of God but to learn to submit self to God's sovereignty.

¹⁶ *So the last shall be first, and the first last."*

Jesus here talks about a **surprise** factor in God's Kingdom. Unless we are fully in sync with God's ways, we will be surprised to see something quite different from what we have anticipated in God's Kingdom. Consider the Sermon on the Mount. How do you take it when Christ commands you to love your enemies? How about praying for those who persecute you? What about giving something to eat/drink when they are hungry/thirsty? How about this one? Forgiving 490 times not just three strikes? You want to be in Heaven? You better get used to Kingdom principles and Kingdom ways.

Three Lessons from today's parable. God's consistency, sovereignty, and generosity.

God's Consistency (fairness)

v. 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?'*

Notice here: the owner is right. He didn't change the terms. He kept what He had promised, therefore, no one can charge him for the wrong. The grumble for more pay than what they had agreed on is not acceptable.

Likewise, when it comes down to God's Kingdom entry, God doesn't change the terms of salvation or what He has promised to all. First, He invites them all. Next, He promises eternal life in the name of His Son Jesus Christ. Those who agree will get salvation as God promised. God abides in the rules as exactly as He and you agreed with. Salvation in Christ. That's what He has promised. That's what we will get from Him. Nothing less. Nothing more. When we begin to impose our own rules on salvation, then we are bound to grumble about God's unfairness. God is always fair and consistent.

God's Sovereignty

v. 15. *Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?*

Sometimes, we say God is not fair: Sure, for reasons we don't understand, He seems unfair. Especially when He loves our enemies and grants salvation to them as well. Ask Jonah the prophet about it. When it comes down to who gets saved and who not, sometimes God and we clash with each other. We say, God should love us more than our enemies. He says, No, I love everyone equally. We say, our own merits must get us in. He says, no, rather My own goodness does. We say, I earned my own salvation, God says, no, salvation is a free gift. We say, works. God says, grace.

We better learn early that His ways are not our ways. He commands us to change our perspectives and conform to His. Not the other way around. The sooner we do, the better we will understand His Kingdom ways.

Simply put, God says, know your place. He never does wrong. Don't grumble about what He is doing with what is His own (v. 15). He does according to His will, and no one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:35) Neither can we.

God's generosity (works vs. grace)

v. 15. *Or is your eye envious because I am **generous?***

Besides the workers who went into the vineyard at dawn, nobody else expected to be paid a full-day's wage nor complained about the owner's generosity. I must say, it was indeed very generous. Especially, for those who worked only for an hour.

Imagine, you just worked for an hour and get called out first to be paid. Looking down at the full day's wage in your hands, you would say, *It's been a great day*. You cannot thank the owner enough for his generosity. Imagine, however, you worked all day long, your back hurts, and called out to be the last to be paid. You look at the same denarius in your hands, you feel awful almost cheated. You begin to grumble against the owner's unfairness.

The punchline of the story is this: When it comes down to God's Kingdom and salvation, don't look at how much you deserve, but discover God's amazing grace and appreciate His generosity. Once you discover how gracious God is to you, you will never complain about His generosity to others. I wonder how many of us find ourselves in the 6 a.m. crew. By the way, what makes you think that you belong there? Have you ever thought about the other possibility that you just got in the 5 p.m. crew and got equally paid? Just coming in and getting the full salvation! How blessed you are!

Conclusion

Be humble. We all are saved by grace, not by our own goodness or merits. No one in Heaven will think that they deserve to be there because of their good works. Be thankful for your salvation in Christ. Rejoice together with others who also receive the same salvation in Christ through the same grace that you received. Amen.