

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16 (NASB, my emphasis in bold)

*“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 go into the vineyard also, 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 *“Now when evening came, the owner of the vineyard **said* to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, starting with the last group to the first.’ ⁹ When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. ¹⁰ And so 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 who were hired last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day’s work and the scorching heat.**’ 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 want to give to this last person the same as to you. ¹⁵ Is it not lawful for me to do what I want 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

The sermon series on the Kingdom of God continues. In today’s parable, Jesus uses a story of the vineyard. You might have noticed that He uses different stories to speak to different audiences but stays on the same topic: the Kingdom of God. Whoever He spoke to, the audience got it right away what the Kingdom of God was like. For instance, to the women folks, He used the parable of the Leaven. To the fishing community, a dragnet story. To the farming community, the story of wheat and the tares. Today, speaking to the wine-making community, the owners of vineyard and the workers thereof, He uses a parable of the vineyard.

In today’s story our sense of fairness is being challenged. Please bear with me as I recap the story in my own words: the Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain man who owned a vineyard. It was a harvest time (typically, July through September). He needed workers in the vineyard. One day, early in the morning, before 6 a.m., he went out to a field where the dayworkers gathered around with a hope that they would be picked up for the day. The owner negotiated the wage with the laborers there (a denarius=daily wage for a field worker in Jesus’ days) and sent them into the vineyard. At nine o’clock, he went out again

to the field and found more workers. He sent them to the vineyard promising to pay whatever was right. He repeated three more times: at noon, three o'clock in the afternoon, and lastly at five p.m.

At the end of the day, after 6 p.m., he ordered his foreman to pay the workers- beginning with the latest workers to the first. The ones who only worked for an hour received a denarius. They were delighted! So were the other three groups (3 p.m., noon, 9 a.m. workers). When the first ones who worked all day long for 12 hours came, they supposed that they would get more than a denarius. Surprise! Surprise! They got the same amount: a denarius!

So, they grumbled at the owner saying, "It's unfair of you to pay us equally as the late comers. Pay us more!" The owner replied that he wasn't being unfair to them because that's exactly what they had agreed on for the wage: a denarius for a day's work. Furthermore, he said that he was entitled to do whatever he wanted to do with his own money.

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In the story, the owner is God. The vineyard is His Kingdom. The workers are those who are invited to be part of God's Kingdom. They are us. God has called us to be in His Kingdom. Some of us joined early. Others joined later. We all are in God's Kingdom.

The bone of contention is found in verse 12: *the owner's generosity for the last hired workers*. The owner's generosity clashes with the early workers' sense of fairness.

If I summarized the whole story in one word, it would be the word "grace." The story revolves around the owner's grace, doesn't it? The owner's generosity toward those who do not deserve.

In fact, that's how God treats all of us: He offers salvation through Christ beyond our imagination and merits. None of us deserves such a gracious offer from God, yet it is offered as a free gift. Christ further commands, when you receive the gift of salvation, don't complain about others' receiving it too, even though you may think they don't deserve it. That's the lesson.

Now with that understanding, let's think about God's grace; what it is and what it is not.

What God's Grace Is.

First, through His grace, **God wows us all**. God overwhelms us with an unimaginably generous grace. This grace defies and blows away any human logic and reasoning! For example, consider the workers in the story who only worked one hour and got paid twelve

times more than they deserved!!! We surely understand why the first comers were so upset with the owner's generosity to those who didn't deserve it. It is mind-boggling. That's how God's grace works. That's how generous God is to all of us!! E.g., John Newton, the slave trader for decades responsible for over 20,000 slaves traded —touched by God's grace, he penned the lyrics of the song "Amazing Grace" (1779 A.D.). God's grace was, is, and will be extended to such a wretched man.

Next, through grace, **God incessantly reaches out to humanity** who needs God's salvation. Consider the owner in the story. How many times did he go out to the field to hire the laborers? Five times. Normally, one visit at the dawn of the day would have sufficed. In fact, had the day been longer, he would have done more. The point is: he diligently went out to the field to find anyone and everyone available. Same is true with God's grace. God's grace is constantly seeking and reaching out to those who need salvation. It never rests until it finds the last soul on earth for salvation. It reaches to all with no exception because everyone needs salvation.

Thirdly, through His grace, **God constantly invites all to His kingdom** (note: although not everyone accepts it, God still invites all to take salvation). Why does He do that? Because God wants everyone to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). *He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9). The truth is that Christ is the Savior of all people, the deserved and the un-deserved, sinners and the righteous (1 Timothy 4:10). Even today, Christ calls everyone: *Come to Me and find salvation in Me. Come into my Kingdom. You're welcome to join. Come. It is never late!* God keeps calling sinners home until the very end. Now, let's think about

What God's Grace Is Not.

First, **God's grace has nothing to do with our own merits.** We cannot earn salvation no matter how hard we try. Human goodness has no place in salvation. No one can boast that their own goodness brings them into salvation. Rather, it is God's grace alone that qualifies us to be in God's Kingdom. Salvation exclusively depends on God's generosity and compassion. Think of the complaint of the first comers to the owner: *You can't treat these guys in the same way you do with us! Treat us better than them! We deserve better than they!* Such an outcry for human merits has no place in Heaven. We'd better get used to how God's grace works.

Salvation doesn't rely on our merits: no matter how rich we are, no matter how good we have been, or even no matter how much we are educated, human qualifications have no place in God's grace and salvation. Salvation solely relies on God's grace. Ephesians 2:8-9: *"⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast."*

Next, **God's grace urges us never to envy others' salvation.** We are never to give an evil eye to God or to whatever He does with others' salvation. No matter how little we think

some people deserve to receive the same salvation as we do, we have no right to challenge God for what He does. He does whatever He wishes to do with whatever He has (v. 14, v. 15).

The point is this: no one would boast his/her merits for salvation. Likewise, in the Kingdom of God, no one would complain about God's generosity and goodness that offers salvation to all, especially to those whom we don't think deserve it. E.g., The criminal on the cross was admitted into Paradise (Luke 23:43).

Finally, **God's grace never grants us 'a license for a sinful life.'** God forgives our sins through His grace for sure, but grace never means a permission to sin more. In Paul's time, some folks strangely claimed that to help God's grace abound, they needed to sin more: *"but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more"* (Romans 5:20). To them, Paul replied, *"Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? ²Far from it!"* (Romans 6:1). Similar teaching is being taught in some churches today. It is called 'hyper-grace.'

What is 'hyper-grace?' Literal meaning, 'too much' grace (with too little truth). It is *"a new wave of teaching that emphasizes the grace of God to the exclusion of other vital teachings such as repentance and confession of sin. Hyper-grace teachers maintain that all sin, past, present, and future, has already been forgiven, so there is no need for a believer to ever confess it."* Its doctrine discounts *"the Old Testament and the Ten Commandments as irrelevant to New Testament believers. Some hyper-grace preachers "teach that Jesus' words spoken before His resurrection are part of the Old Covenant and no longer applicable to born-again believers. They also "claim the Holy Spirit will never convict Christians of their sin." "When God looks at us," they continue, "He sees only a holy and righteous people." "The conclusion of hyper-grace teaching is that we are not bound by Jesus' teaching, even as we are not under the Law; that believers are not responsible for their sin; and that anyone who disagrees is a pharisaical legalist. In short, hyper-grace teachers "pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality" (Jude 1:4).*

So, please get this: *"Hyper-grace teaching is out of proportion to the rest of Scripture. Any time one doctrine is emphasized to the exclusion of the rest, we fall into error because we fail to "correctly handle" the Word (2 Timothy 2:15). Jesus was full of both "grace and truth" (John 1:14). The two are in delicate balance, and a tip to either side can result in a false gospel"* (<https://www.gotquestions.org/hyper-grace.html>)

Conclusion

The full appreciation of God's grace only begins with the full acknowledgement of God's sovereignty: the Almighty God does whatever He is pleased to do with whatever He has to offer us. As God's Word says, *"No one can restrain His hand saying, "What have you done?"* (Daniel 4:35). God is the Almighty Creator, and we are His creations. God is the Potter, and we are the clay. E.g., Beware of false teachings that elevate you almost equal to God (e.g., Buddhist teachings, New Age principles).

Once we fully acknowledge who God is and who we are, and once we know our place before God, then we can truly appreciate how generous our God is toward us all: offering the free gift of salvation in Christ Jesus through faith alone.

It is time to accept such a gracious offer of salvation in Christ. It is time to praise God for His unfathomable grace. It is time to rejoice together with everyone who enters the Kingdom of God not by own merits but by divine grace.

Amen.