

THE PARABLES OF JESUS, #26 A Chronological Study

*"To Him who opened His mouth in parables and
uttered things hidden since the creation of the world."
Psalm 78:2*



"The Laborers In The Vineyard" "The Lord and His Grace" Mt 20:1-14

THE INTRODUCTION

We've already talked about Jesus parables offering different messages to those who are His different targeted audiences using the same words. The actions of the Holy Spirit in the individual's mind and their pre-conceived ideas will work together to create these targeted messages.

Jesus' audience: First, some background information about Judean land owners in first century.

First is **the Disciples**, they will hear what God's Holy Spirit gives to them. They will hear the message of the Gospel and their places within the Kingdom of Heaven, as well as their places as the forerunners of the Church, the body of Christ Jesus. They left their homes and occupations to follow Jesus. Many of them were mere fishermen.

Then there is **the general audience** that follows Jesus and His disciples all around Galilee and Judea. Some of those would become believers, and some would follow Him all the way to Jerusalem and shout, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him, Crucify Him." Most of them would be people who rent their homes or become slave/servants working for their rent. There were many who left their towns and traveled living in tents as they followed Jesus. Some would hear the Gospel message, many would hear something different, often not making sense to them - just cute stories "thrown alongside" His messages. The Holy Spirit would be active in their understanding or lack of it.

And then there were **the Pharisees, Sadducees and other religious leaders**. The message they heard would have inflamed their religious passions, the Holy Spirit would make sure of that. They had long-ago left the Word of God behind and followed their oral tradition - the Oral Law - which they made up placing an enormous burden upon God's people - the keeping of legal minutiae which God did not require of them, in an effort to control the masses to give both parties political power. It was they who were often the rich landowners.

So, in our present parable, as we consider the time and culture where the parable takes place we should see that they were "in tune" with their world and aware of their culture. The elements of the parable would just seem natural to them - except for the spiritual lesson Jesus is about to teach them.

The Landowner's workers are those who willingly agree to be His workers, for a certain price. For that price they will tend the vineyard, provide irrigation, weed control, pruning for growth, and control of insects and animals, so that at certain times in the year they will bring in the harvest and the winepress.

SO, OUR FIRST ISSUE IS ABOUT WHEN

if you are perceptive at all we should notice that the kingdom of heaven is like this landowner. Having been with Jesus for some time now and hearing many of His parables, the disciples would understand the landowner to be God. Later... with Christ's death and resurrection, we would further understand that the landowner in this parable is Jesus-God. The Vineyard belongs to Him – **He is the King**. He sows the seed (the Word of God) hires workers (believers) for a price (grace through His death on the Cross), and the workers (believers) tend the vineyard (the world of men, women and children), planting the sown seed, irrigating, weeding, pruning for growth (growing up those who are believers), controlling the pests and animals (keeping the vineyard clean), so that at certain times in the year the workers will bring in the harvest (new believers) and bring forth the wine (the Joy of the Lord and His flock). **Each at the same price... The life of His Son.** So as you travel through this parable - think upon the **timing** of each of their hiring... rather than the value of their work.

THE BIGGER TIME ELEMENT

This parable covers at least three major time categories.

As stated before, this parable is still under the topic of "Who will be the greatest in the kingdom."

So **first**, our interpretation will concern **His disciples**, and **when** they joined His movement and in **what order** they became His

disciples. Should someone who was acquired first be the highest in authority among the members?

Our **second** interpretation will concern **when** in history individuals committed themselves to God. Does **Adam** hold a higher position in God's kingdom because he became God's child **first** of all humans. Or **Abraham**, being the **founding** father of the "Chosen People?" Or how about the **disciples** since they walked with and talked with Jesus?

Our **third** interpretation will concern which group will be the **leadership** in the kingdom, the saved **Jew**, saved **Gentile**, those who came **later** with historic and deep Bible teaching skills?

So this little parable of Jesus will teach us an important lesson that **spans all time** – not just what is of personal importance to you or I in a moment of our time, but **what is the one thing that satisfies the heart of God** – that's the secret of this parable.

SETTING THE DEFINITIONS

THE TEXT

Mt 20:1

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner (Gk oikodespotes - master of the house) (funny how words change their meanings over time!) who went out early in the morning (Sunrise) to hire laborers (Gk ergates - workers) for his vineyard.

In the previous chapter (19) Jesus has begun His move from Galilee to Judah. We find Him now just East of the northern border of Judea, but on the Eastern shore of the Jordan river. He's on His way to Jerusalem... and to the Cross. His parables are becoming more centered on **maturing His disciples** as He travels to that destination.

Once again we need to be reminded that the "Kingdom of Heaven" refers to the place on earth where God is exercising His Sovereignty. The very definition requires us to know and understand Him and His attributes--for He can only act according to who He is. This parable is all about the nature of our LORD and the expression upon us of His infinite grace. Understanding Him will help us deal with many of the pressures of everyday life, especially when it comes to **who** gets saved, **when** in history they get saved, **when** in their lives He gets saved, and **what** it cost, and **what** is the ultimate requirement.

So, the metaphor here is that, first of all, the sovereignty of God in this case, is like a man who is the master of his own house. We really need to take a few moments and consider that statement. Being a man in this case is not the point - both men and women can be masters of their own house. The point is, in their Jewish culture, the man was the sovereign power in the home. Knowing some of their culture helps us know what was written back then.

Our home owner, the master of his house, is also the landowner, a farmer who owns a vineyard, and thus needs to hire workers to tend the vineyard, and provide irrigation, weed control, pruning for growth, and control of insects and animals, and at certain times in the year... the harvest and the winepress. Lots of help needed.

So, what has that got to do with us? Remember back in Genesis and the Garden of Eden? It was then that *God said,*

"Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Gen 1:26).

You should know: Man's place is to be the image of God and have sovereignty over life on the earth.

Our vineyard owner is being presented as the very picture of the Sovereignty of God (as seen in His Son Jesus) delegated to mankind.

THE AGREEMENT CONCERNING WAGES #1
THE TEXT

MT 20:2

2 When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius (an accepted day's wage) *for the day, he sent them into his vineyard.*"

While there are a number of interpretations I've seen for this parable, I want to focus in on one: The members of the Kingdom of Heaven for any particular "Kingdom of God" age, expressed here on earth. Each believer has been "hired" by our LORD to be "workers" "tending the "vineyard" - His heavenly kingdom. Jesus paid for the laborers with His life at the Cross (the Denarius).

Jesus, in our last 3 parables (#23-24-25) has been dealing with the question brought by His disciples, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" This parable continues on this theme. Only the thrust this time will be: "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven based on when they were chosen, called, or saved?" For the Disciples it was a question of which one of the 12 was first, which one was last, according to when they joined the Disciple group. We'll also explore this same issue as we look at when, in a lifetime, one gets saved, and does being saved early in life give one an advantage in the final eternal Kingdom of God. We should also consider the question, "Is there any importance, or value, to having been saved dispensationally - right after the fall, after the flood, after Abraham, After Isaac, Jacob, David, Jesus... etc.?" In our study we'll also focus on today.

We'll focus on the "denarius," and think upon it as the representative price Jesus (the vineyard owner) paid for each and every one of us to become His workers in His vineyard - His kingdom. Now keep that in mind as we walk through the rest of the text - remembering that the first group of workers agreed upon a denarius as their day's wage.

In the parable, the sun came up (first light) and he (the vineyard owner) went looking for workers for the vineyard. He found some who received His offer right away. We're not trying to create a "mystery story" here, so... Some of the Lord's believing people... loved Jesus' payment (The absolute grace of God) and they believed at a very early age (as a child).

THE AGREEMENT CONCERNING WAGES #2

THE TEXT

Mt 20:3-4

"And he went out about the third hour (about 9 am) 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.

The inference of "whatever is right" would be that what the vineyard owner deems appropriate pay would be fine with them, "And so they went." They may have reckoned that the landowner would pay them that portion of a Denarius that working for 3 hours less than a full working day. Our focus is upon the Grace of God and Jesus' payment made for our salvation. Some who come to the Vineyard Owner, come to Him a little later in life. They see His offer and are willing to become His workers and let Him settle the price.

THE AGREEMENT CONCERNING WAGES #3

THE TEXT

Mt 20:5

5 Again he went out about the sixth and (again) the ninth hour (Noon and 3 pm), and did the same thing.

His laborers also agreed that the landowner would pay them the right percentage of a days wage. For us... some don't come to Jesus until mid-life or later.

THE AGREEMENT CONCERNING WAGES #4

THE TEXT

Mt 20:6-7

6 And about the eleventh hour (5 pm) 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.'

It's been my experience as a pastor and as a lay person, that some don't trust Him until they are on their death beds. According to the parable, each of these "last call" believers are at that time happy with the owner's idea of what would be right payment.

THE ORDER OF PAYMENT

THE TEXT

Mt 20:8

"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.'

So, When the laborers had finished their work, and each one stood in the group waiting to be paid... He will now pay them in the opposite order than which they were hired - **last first, first last.**



THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST

THE TEXT

Mt 20:9

"When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius."

Again, one can't help the feeling that Jesus uses a little "tongue-in-cheek" as He tells His parables. Each of the workers who worked the least number of hours - received a denarius - a day's wage. (you worked for me today, so here's a day's wage... regardless of how long you worked) And by the way, according to the parable... the work day is 12 hours long - "farmer's hours," sunup to sundown.

Each of the workers received a "Day's Wage" regardless of how long they worked. **When hired... each of the workers found the offer completely acceptable.**

THE GRUMBLING WORKERS

THE TEXT

Mt 20:10-14a

"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,"

Oh, the frailty of human nature. The workers who were hired first, for a day's wage--and worked a full 12 hours--are standing there when those who worked the least--from 5-6 pm, and also got a denarius - a day's wage. Those hired earliest were not

happy about it! He told the early guys that they would be paid a denarius, a day's wage. That's what THEY agreed upon for pay for the day. They were upset because they worked a 12 hour day and got paid the same amount as those who worked an hour. Be careful in what you think the point of the parable is!

We're not told, but this pattern probably continued on through all those who were hired before the last workers. Each group being upset because they worked longer than the last workers and they all received the same pay.

THE GRACE OF GOD - "O How He Loves You and Me"

THE TEXT

Mt 20:14b-16

Jesus continued and said, "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."

As the sovereign vineyard owner who made deals with each of the worker groups - deals that they were happy with at the time of the deal - he is absolutely righteous in all of his dealings.

Are you seeing Jesus' point about human nature, and how we need to re-think how we often see our fellow believers and their timing as to when they believed upon Jesus VS the lives they have lived in between birth and salvation.

We won't soon get to a set of parables that will come near the end of our studies. Near the end of these parabolic studies we'll find three studies that will be lumped together wrapping up this very discussion - the problem with human nature and the Grace of God. That three parable study involves... The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and The Lost Son. The very nature of God demands

that those who are first will be last, and those who are last will be first. The Shepherd who leaves the 99 to recover the One. The woman who loses an important coin only to search endlessly until it is found. The man who loses his son and comes running and rejoicing upon his return. Jesus says, *"In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents"* (Lk 15:10).

Let us not be unrighteous in our attitudes toward believers who have led a full lifetime of sin and only saved at the end, or even the believer who gets entangled in sin over and over, who knows how to ask for forgiveness. From God's point of view, the life-long search and work of the Holy Spirit to conquer sin and bring belief to the sinner... is of enormous value to Him.

THE VALUE OF THE WAGE PAID

As we look upon the parable we also need to focus on the symbolic use of the denarius. We who are believers have been "hired," or more accurately "paid for" no matter who we are, how important we are, or time wise when we were acquired. The payment was the willing substitutionary death of God's Son Jesus. It is the agreed upon price. Absolutely every believer, regardless of when in history, when in their lives, or any other qualification. One full payment of the death of God's Son Jesus based upon the believer's willingness to receive it, and upon its absolute value. The grace of God expressed through His perfect servant – who humbled Himself before every human being in order to accomplish the absolute will of His Father in the salvation of man.

WHO SHALL BE FIRST?

Our lesson teaches us two important lessons. First is that it is the desire of God that every saved individual puts himself/herself last

in all things for the sake of the Gospel, and to become more and more like Jesus in that endeavor. Then secondly, We can be absolutely satisfied in that humble position for the price paid and the income gained is exactly the same for every believer.

Oh, how He loves you and me,
Oh, how He loves you and me.
He gave His life, what more could He give;
Oh, how He loves you, Oh, how He loves me,
Oh, how He loves you and me.

Jesus to Calv'ry did go,
His love for mankind to show.
What He did there brought hope from despair.
Oh, how He loves you, Oh, how He loves me,
Oh how He loves you and me.

Oh, how He loves you and me,
Oh, how He loves you and me.
He gave His life, what more could He give;
Oh, how He loves you, Oh, how He loves me,
Oh, how He loves you and me.

Oh, How He Loves You and Me
By Kurt Kaiser

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANSWERS

1. What is the importance of this lesson beginning with knowing the state at the time of the parable of landowners and slave/servants?
 2. Why does the landowner of the vineyard hire his servants at different times throughout the 12 hour workday.
 3. Why does Jesus bring up "The Grumbling Workers?"
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FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

1. What is the importance of this lesson beginning with knowing the state at the time of the parable of landowners and slave/servants?

This issue wanders in and out of this parable. Overarching the entire story is the place of a sovereign God king. He owns everything there is, He is completely sovereign over everything - His heavenly kingdom, the solar system, our galaxy, the universe, and ultimately everything in His heaven, and everything everywhere that we can not even contemplate. And then... every living thing in everywhere is under and responsible to His sovereign will.

As to the time of this parable, most of Jesus' closest disciples would not be landowners. Each of them would have a deep understanding of what it means to be someone who is the slave or servant of someone else. In our time, many believe they are "owners" and are rightfully controllers of their lives and destiny. But the truth is, even the most rich are deeply under the control of their desires to be, even in their own minds, under control and independent of the control of others, money, or things.

In the parable, Jesus portrays all believers as slave/servants, and if we understand His meaning in the parable, then we are to understand that The father's grace filled gift of Jesus' life in order to bring full forgiveness to each of us is an unmatched gift anywhere in His creation. We are slave, servant, brother and sister to each other and to Him.

2. Why does the landowner of the vineyard hire his servants at different times throughout the 12 hour workday.

Jesus is building a scenario from "Minimum to Maximum" work for varying amounts of time for each worker - as they all work together. 12 hours VS 9 hours VS 6 hours VS 3 hours VS 1 hour... for the same daily wage. Men being paid... some less, and some more, than they expected at the end of the day.

This sets the stage for the lesson for the disciples,. The Grace of God, through the death of His Son, is greater reward than any of them deserved.

3. Why does Jesus bring up "The Grumbling Workers?"

The last big point that Jesus brings up brings us back to the previous study. And here, in this one, He says it again--"So the last shall be first, and the first last." The biggest battle in the Christian's life will always be what Paul called, "The Old man." The battle of the Spirit led life VS the human heart. In this battle we are so unlike our God. Our sin nature has a firm grip upon us... we want to be first. We want to be most important. We want to let everyone know how wonderful we are.

The very nature of our God's love for us is pure love. What is supremely important to us... needs to be understood and changed to align with what is supremely important to Him. He's the one who goes looking for the one of us that is lost - like the lost sheep, like the lost coin, like the Lost Son. He wants you to love like He loves. If one of us becomes lost in our human nature, He wants you to go and find and rescue that one, no matter the price. There is no room for our complaints that those who are found... are found later in life than we were.

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Jeremiah 18:15
"Don't stumble from the Ancient Path"
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