


A PRELUDE TO *BIBLICAL* EVANGELISM

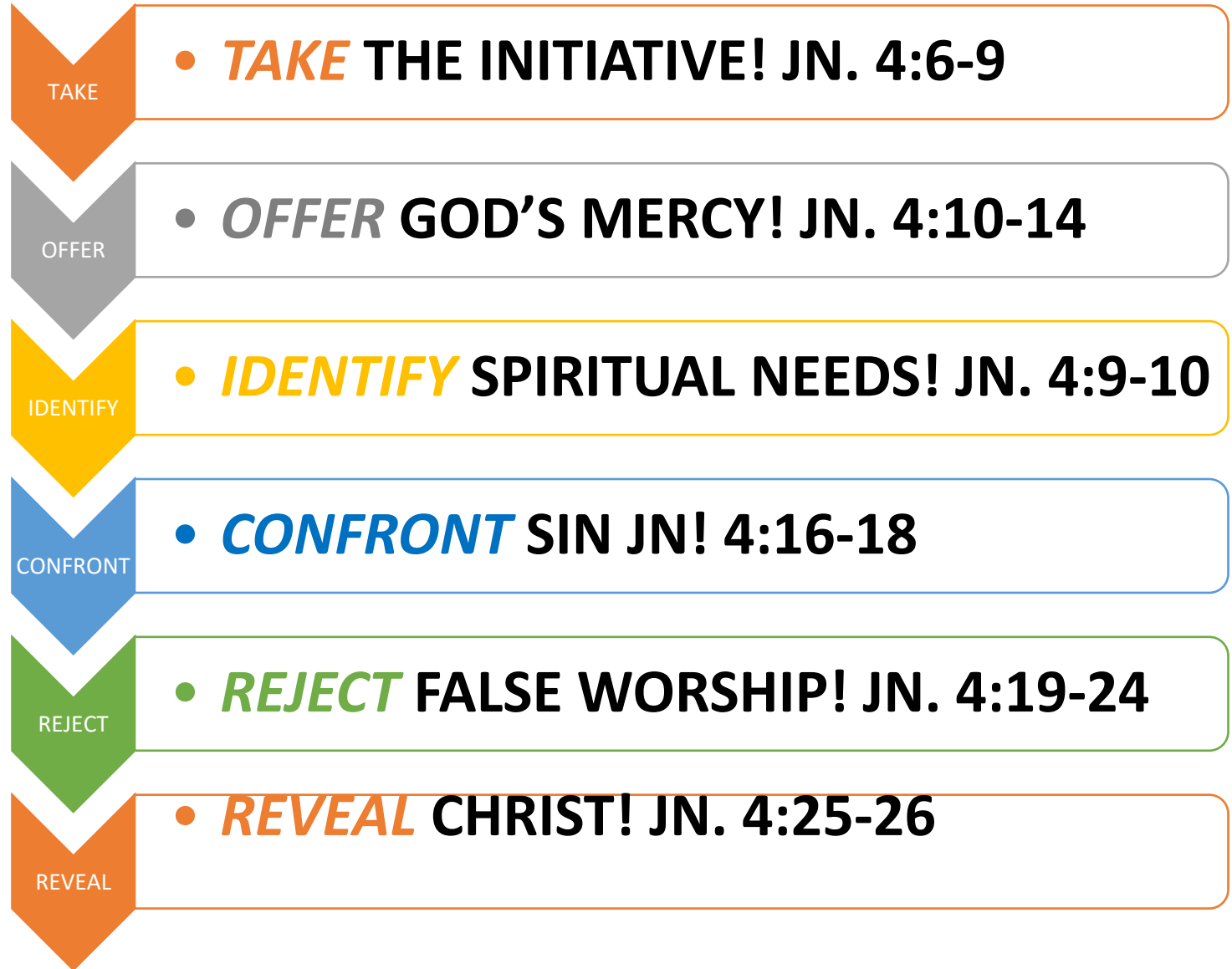


A large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled roots growing over stone ruins. The tree's trunk is massive and textured, with roots spreading out across the ground and over the stone structures. The background shows more stone ruins and lush green foliage. The scene is set in a natural, outdoor environment.

THE FRUIT OF
THE RIGHTEOUS IS A
TREE OF LIFE,
AND HE WHO IS WISE
WINS SOULS.

PROVERBS 11:30 NASB

**PRINCIPLES
FOR
BIBLICAL
EVANGELISM
FOUND IN
JOHN 4, “THE
WOMAN AT
THE WELL.”**



I. THE HIGH COST OF *REJECTING* GOD.

II. REJECTING GOD'S *RESTRAINTS*.

1. THE *CONSCIENCE*.

2. THE *FAMILY*.

3. THE *GOVERNMENT*.

4. THE *CHURCH*.

III. IS GOD EVER *UNJUST*?

IV. APPARENT *INJUSTICE*.

V. JUSTICE VS. *GRACE*?

A LESSON ABOUT *JUSTICE* AND *GRACE*

- *LIKE ALL PARABLES*, the one found in (MATT. 20:1-15) aims to teach a profound spiritual truth. *JESUS* is not making a point about *fair labor laws, minimum wage, equity in our business dealings*, or any other *earthly principle*. *HE IS DESCRIBING HOW GRACE WORKS IN THE SPHERE WHERE GOD RULES*.
- *TRUTH IS, WE ALL LOVE TO BE ON THE RECEIVING END OF A GOOD DEAL*—at least until someone else finds a better one. The perception of *INEQUALITY* and *UNFAIRNESS* fosters *BITTERNESS, ENVY, and RESENTMENT*—attitudes that the flesh thrives on, even among believers. And one of Christ's parables plays to the heart of that inclination.

- **THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD** (MATT. 20:1–15) **DEFIES** most popular concepts of **JUSTICE** and **FAIRNESS**. Christ’s story introduces us to a **“LANDOWNER” V.1**, who refused to pay his workers proportionately for the labor they had performed on his farm. When this master asks, **“IS IT NOT LAWFUL FOR ME TO DO WHAT I WISH WITH WHAT IS MY OWN?”** he indicates that the money paid to all the laborers belongs to him (MATT. 20:15).
- **VERSE 8** calls him **“THE OWNER OF THE VINEYARD”**—and it was a sizable estate to require so many workers to help with the harvest. So, this was a man of great influence and wealth.

- The multitudes listening to Jesus were very familiar with **VINEYARDS**. Vast parts of **ISRAEL** were covered with neatly arranged grapevines growing in terraced vineyards. Grapes were planted in the spring and pruned during summer. Harvest was a very short season near the end of September.
- The rainy season began immediately after that. So, harvest time was hectic, because the crop had to be brought in before the rains came. The owner needed extra help during the harvest. Therefore, he went to the marketplace to hire day laborers. That was the most public location in the village, and it served as a gathering place for workers whose only hope for employment was temporary unskilled labor.
- **VERSE 1** says the ***“LANDOWNER WENT OUT EARLY IN THE MORNING”***—no doubt prior to 6:00 a.m., when the twelve-hour workday began.

- **WAGES FOR DAY LABORERS** were notoriously lower than the standard pay for a **FULL-TIME** employee or household servant, which was about a denarius a day.
- The **DENARIUS** was a typical day's pay for a soldier serving in the Roman army, and it was a respectable living wage. (The name *denarius* derives from a **Latin word** signifying "**TEN**," because the original value of the coin was equivalent to the worth of ten donkeys.)
- **A COMMON, UNSKILLED DAY LABORER** could of course be hired for a small fraction of that, because he was in no position to negotiate. If he didn't work, he might not eat that day. Plus, competition for temporary jobs was fierce.
- The **LANDOWNER** in **JESUS'** parable was unusually generous to offer day laborers a full denarius for a day's work. It was an honorable wage, much more than temporary workers would normally receive for menial labor.

- Naturally, the early-morning crew *heartily agreed* to those terms and went to work. So, at the *third hour (9:00 a.m.)*, the **LANDOWNER** went back to the marketplace. The parable portrays him as a kind and generous man, not abusive or a profit-monger. So perhaps he didn't need these extra workers so much as he felt compassion for them because of *their* extreme need. **THERE WERE STILL MANY IN THE MARKETPLACE WHO WERE OUT OF WORK.** They were standing idle—not because they didn't want to work, but because no one had hired them yet.
- This time he negotiated **NO SPECIFIC WAGE** before hiring workers and sending them into his vineyard. All he said was, **“WHATEVER IS RIGHT I WILL GIVE YOU” (MATT. 20:4).**

- In **VERSE 4** the **BIBLE** says, ***“SO, THEY WENT.”*** They must have known him to be an honorable man, and they took him at his word even though the terms were vague. **3 HOURS** into the workday with no job prospects yet, they weren’t in a negotiating position. They needed to take whatever they could get.

“AGAIN, HE WENT OUT ABOUT THE SIXTH AND THE NINTH HOUR AND DID THE SAME THING” (MATT 20:5). He continued to go back to the marketplace at regular intervals—noon and three o’clock—gathering all he could to work in his vineyard.

- The workday was virtually spent when **VERSE 6** says he went yet again ***“ABOUT THE ELEVENTH HOUR”*** (5:00 p.m.). ***Only an hour was left in the workday***, but still he found more workers waiting. These were persistent men who had been waiting all day but were so desperate for work that they had not yet given up.

- No doubt after a day of fruitless waiting these men were utterly discouraged, thinking they would be unable to provide any sustenance for their families that day.
- Again, we must not mistake their **IDLENESS** for **INDOLENCE**. When the owner said, **“WHY HAVE YOU BEEN STANDING HERE IDLE ALL DAY LONG?”** they replied, **“BECAUSE NO ONE HIRED US.”** Perhaps they were older, weaker, or otherwise less qualified for hard work in the field. The owner hired them on the spot with the same vague terms he had used with the **9:00 a.m. group**: **“YOU GO INTO THE VINEYARD TOO”** (MATT. 20:7).
- Elsewhere **JESUS** says, **“THE LABORER IS WORTHY OF HIS WAGES”** (LK. 10:7; 1 TIM. 5:18). This was a strict principle in **MOSES’S LAW**: **“THE WAGES OF A HIRED MAN ARE NOT TO REMAIN WITH YOU ALL NIGHT UNTIL MORNING”** (LEV. 19:13). That rule applied particularly to **THE POOR** and **DAY LABORERS**:

- ***“YOU SHALL NOT OPPRESS A HIRED SERVANT WHO IS POOR AND NEEDY, WHETHER HE IS ONE OF YOUR COUNTRYMEN OR ONE OF YOUR ALIENS WHO IS IN YOUR LAND IN YOUR TOWNS. YOU SHALL GIVE HIM HIS WAGES ON HIS DAY BEFORE THE SUN SETS, FOR HE IS POOR AND SETS HIS HEART ON IT; SO THAT HE WILL NOT CRY AGAINST YOU TO THE LORD AND IT BECOMES SIN IN YOU.” (DEUT. 24:14–15).***
- This **LANDOWNER** was an honorable man, faithful to the precepts of God’s law, so ***“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” (MATT. 20:8).***
- It is significant that he instructed his steward to pay the workers in reverse order. ***NOTICE THAT THE MEN AT THE FRONT OF THE LINE HAD WORKED ONLY ONE HOUR. THOSE AT THE END OF THE LINE HAD WORKED TWELVE.***

- Yet as the steward began to distribute pay, those who had worked the **shortest** amount of time **“EACH ONE RECEIVED A DENARIUS.”** They received a full day’s wage at a soldier’s pay scale in return for just **one hour** of unskilled labor! They must have been overflowing with gratitude for the generosity of the landowner.
- No doubt the men at the end of the line began salivating. By their reckoning, he had now committed himself to paying a denarius an hour. They must have assumed that by the time he got to them, they would receive twelve days’ wages.
- There’s an ellipsis in Jesus’ telling of the story at this point. He doesn’t actually describe how the **THREE O’CLOCK, NOON,** and **NINE O’CLOCK** groups were paid, but the clear implication is that they also each received **ONE DENARIUS.**

- **VERSES 10–12 CONTINUE:** When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a **DENARIUS**. When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, 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.”**
(MATT. 20:10–12)
- **IS THAT FAIR?** What had the landowner promised to give them? **“A DENARIUS FOR THE DAY”** (MATT. 20:2). Not only was that a **FAIR WAGE**; it was unusually generous for minimum-wage workers. Moreover, **IT IS WHAT THEY HAD HAPPILY AGREED TO.**

- ***YET THEY RESENTED THE LANDOWNER.*** The word translated ***“GRUMBLED”*** in the Greek text is ***gongyzo GONE-GOO-ZOE***. The word itself forms a sound that evokes its meaning. It sounds like a grumble or muttered complaint. They were murmuring under their breath, bellyaching about the pay they received.
- When the landowner heard the complaint, he answered one of them:
“FRIEND, I AM DOING YOU NO WRONG; DID YOU NOT AGREE WITH ME FOR A DENARIUS? TAKE WHAT IS YOURS AND GO, BUT I WISH TO GIVE TO THIS LAST MAN THE SAME AS TO YOU. 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?” (MATT 20:13–15)

- **JEALOUSY (THE ENVIOUS EYE)** is an intrinsic aspect of *fallen human nature*. Almost anyone at the end of that pay line would probably have felt some welling up of resentment. After all, those men had worked the full **twelve-hour** day—most of it under the hot sun—while the workers hired at **5:00 p.m.** began work under a cooling breeze at twilight and worked for only **1 hour**.
- But we must not lose sight of the fact that when the **6:00 a.m.** crew were hired, they had been **QUITE HAPPY, HAPPY, HAPPY** with the offer of **A DENARIUS A DAY**. They began the workday in high spirits, thrilled that the landowner was being supremely generous with them. He was offering more in wages than they could reasonably expect.
- **WHAT CHANGED THEIR MOOD SO DRASTICALLY?** Just that someone less deserving (or so they thought) was treated with even **more generosity**. Instantly they felt mistreated—envious of the other’s good fortune.

- Their whole attitude changed. They couldn't stand the thought that other workers would get the same pay without working as hard as they did. ***SUDDENLY THEIR GRATITUDE AND ADMIRATION FOR THE LANDOWNER'S EXTREME GENEROSITY GAVE WAY TO BITTER RESENTMENT.***
- Their grievance may even find sympathy among some of us. How easily is our joy and contentment derailed by the revelation that someone else is getting an even better deal? ***AS WE'LL SEE NEXT TIME, THAT KIND OF THINKING REFLECTS A FAILURE TO COMPREHEND THE ESSENCE OF THE GOSPEL AND THE NATURE OF GOD.***