


A PRELUDE TO *BIBLICAL* EVANGELISM

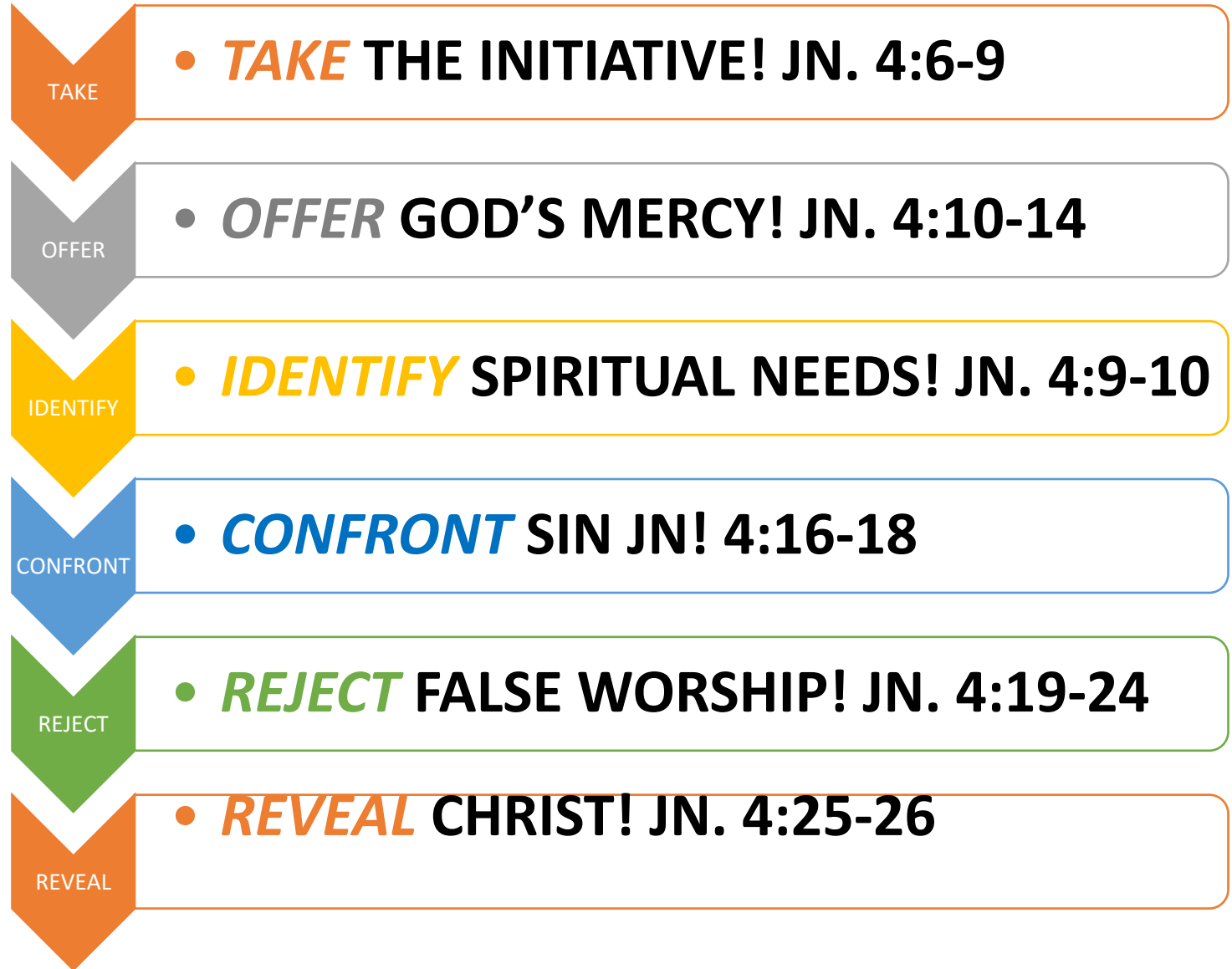


A large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled roots growing over stone ruins. The tree's trunk is massive and textured, with roots spreading out across the ground and over the stone structures. The background shows more stone ruins and lush green foliage. The scene is set in a natural, outdoor environment.

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.”**


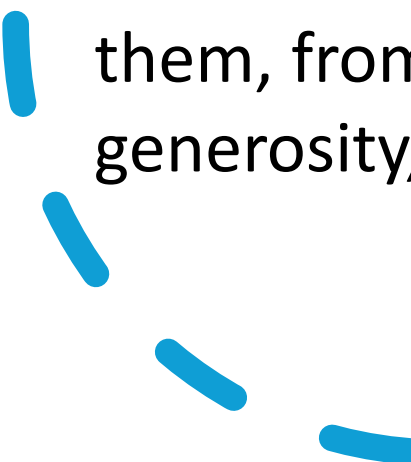


- I. THE HIGH COST OF *REJECTING* GOD.
- II. REJECTING GOD'S *RESTRAINTS*.
 1. THE *CONSCIENCE*.
 2. THE *FAMILY*.
 3. THE *GOVERNMENT*.
 4. THE *CHURCH*.
- III. IS GOD EVER *UNJUST*?
- IV. APPARENT *INJUSTICE*.
- V. JUSTICE VS. *GRACE*?
- VI. A LESSON ABOUT *JUSTICE* AND *GRACE*

THE *POINT* OF THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD

- **JESUS** made a regular habit of upending established social conventions. The Lord spent much of His earthly ministry illustrating the sharp contrast between the world and His heavenly kingdom. One of those key teaching moments is found in the preface and epilogue to Christ's *parable of the vineyard*.
- Christ's story is framed with a single, simple proverb: **"MANY WHO ARE FIRST WILL BE LAST; AND THE LAST, FIRST"** (MATT. 19:30). The same concept is repeated at the end of the parable: **"SO THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST, AND THE FIRST LAST"** (MATT. 20:16). An echo of the proverb is also found in the parable itself—in that key phrase in (MATT. 20:8) where the landowner instructs the steward how to pay the workers their wages: **"CALL THE LABORERS AND PAY THEM THEIR WAGES, BEGINNING WITH THE LAST GROUP TO THE FIRST"** (MATT. 20:8)

- Jesus used variations of that same proverb on other occasions. We find it, for example, in **(LK. 13:30)** ***“AND BEHOLD, SOME ARE LAST WHO WILL BE FIRST AND SOME ARE FIRST WHO WILL BE LAST”***; and in **(MK. 10:3)** ***“MANY WHO ARE FIRST WILL BE LAST, AND THE LAST, FIRST.”***
- The proverb is also something of a riddle. What does it mean? It’s not saying precisely the same thing as **(MK. 9:35)** ***“IF ANYONE WANTS TO BE FIRST, HE SHALL BE LAST OF ALL AND SERVANT OF ALL.”*** Or **(MK. 10:43–44)** ***“WHOEVER WISHES TO BECOME GREAT AMONG YOU SHALL BE YOUR SERVANT; AND WHOEVER WISHES TO BE FIRST AMONG YOU SHALL BE SLAVE OF ALL.”*** Those verses elevate **HUMILITY** and **SELF-SACRIFICE**. Those are **IMPERATIVES: COMMANDS INSTRUCTING US TO BE HUMBLE SERVANTS RATHER THAN SEEKING PROMINENCE AND POWER.**

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- But the **PROVERB** that goes with this **PARABLE** is an indicative, a simple statement of fact: **“THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST, AND THE FIRST LAST.”** What does that mean, and how would it work? In a foot race, for example, the only way for the last to be first and the first to be last is for everyone to finish simultaneously. If everyone crosses the finish line at exactly the same instant, the first are last and the last are first. Everyone ends in a dead heat.
 - That, of course, is precisely the point **JESUS** was making in the parable. Those hired first and those hired last all got exactly the same pay. All of them, from the first to the last, got the full benefit of the landowner’s generosity, in equal shares.
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WHAT *SPIRITUAL LESSON* IS WOVEN INTO THAT STORY?



- The lesson is actually quite simple: ***THE STORY IS A PRECISE PICTURE OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN, SAVING GRACE***. Since sinners are all unworthy, and the riches of God's grace are inexhaustible, all believers receive an infinite and eternal share of His mercy and kindness, though no one really deserves it. ***"IN HIM WE [ALL OF US] HAVE [COMPLETE] REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR TRESPASSES, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE"*** (EPH. 1:7).

- **HE “RAISED US UP TOGETHER AND MADE US SIT TOGETHER IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST JESUS, THAT IN THE AGES TO COME HE MIGHT SHOW THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE IN HIS KINDNESS TOWARD US IN CHRIST JESUS” (EPH. 2:6–7).** That speaks of all who are redeemed. It is the Father’s good pleasure to give them the kingdom (**LK. 12:32**)—**ALL OF THEM, AND IN EQUAL ABUNDANCE.**
- The **DYING THIEF** who repented in his **final moments** entered paradise, where he is enjoying eternal life and everlasting fellowship with Christ just the same as **PETER, JAMES,** and **JOHN,** who literally **gave their lives** in service to the Savior.

- THE LANDOWNER IN THE PARABLE REPRESENTS GOD.
- THE VINEYARD IS THE KINGDOM, THE SPHERE OF GOD'S RULE.
- THE LABORERS ARE BELIEVERS, PEOPLE WHO COME INTO THE SERVICE OF THE KING.
- THE DAY OF WORK IS THEIR LIFETIME.
- THE EVENING IS ETERNITY.
- THE STEWARD, PERHAPS, REPRESENTS JESUS CHRIST, TO WHOM HAS BEEN COMMITTED ALL JUDGMENT.
- THE DENARIUS REPRESENTS ETERNAL LIFE.

- ***NOTE: THIS PAY IS **NOT** SOMETHING THE WORKERS **HAVE EARNED**.*** It is not given to them like a minimum wage in a fair exchange for labor done. It is far too much for that. Rather, ***THIS REPRESENTS A GRACIOUS GIFT,*** a lavish endowment that exceeds the best reward any day worker could ever merit.
- So, this is the point: If you are a ***GENUINE BELIEVER***, you receive the full benefits of God's immeasurable grace, just like everyone else in God's kingdom. Your place in heaven is not a timeshare where your access is determined by the length of time you spent doing the Lord's work.
- ***THE **BLESSINGS OF REDEMPTION** ARE NOT DOLED OUT IN QUOTAS BASED ON ONE'S PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENTS. **FORGIVENESS** IS NOT MEASURED BY WEIGHING OUR GOOD DEEDS AGAINST OUR SINS, NOR IS IT PARTIALLY WITHHELD IF WE HAVE SINNED FOR TOO LONG OR TOO BADLY.***

- ***EVERYONE WHO ENTERS THE KINGDOM RECEIVES THE FULL ABUNDANCE OF GOD'S GRACE, MERCY, AND FORGIVENESS.***
- ***That's true*** no matter how long you have worked in God's kingdom. ***It's true*** no matter how hard or how easy your circumstances are. ***It's true*** whether your service was minimal or maximal; whether you die as a martyr in the prime of life or live a fairly peaceful life and die of old age. ***It's as true*** of those who come to Christ in adolescence as it is of those who genuinely repent of their sins at the end of a profligate life.
- When this earthly life is over, if you are a ***TRUE BELIEVER***, you will go to be with Christ, just like that ***THIEF*** on the cross (**LK. 23:43**); just like the ***APOSTLE PAUL (2 COR. 5:8)***; and just like ***EVERY OTHER SAINT*** who has died since.

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- **HEAVEN IS NOT A REWARD FOR LONG SERVICE OR HARD WORK.** Some people serve Christ their entire lives, and some for a very short time. We all enter into the same eternal life. We all will receive the same spiritual blessings in heaven.
 - **IF THAT SEEMS INEQUITABLE, REMEMBER THAT IT IS FAR MORE THAN ANY OF US DESERVE.**
 - The **BENEFITS OF THE KINGDOM** are the same for everyone because we are redeemed in the first place only by God's grace, and nothing else. That's truly good news for you and me; **WE DON'T HAVE TO EARN OUR WAY INTO THE KINGDOM. HEAVEN IS NOT BASED ON OUR MERIT.**
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THE **PURPOSE** OF THE PARABLE OF THE **VINEYARD**

- **CHRIST'S PARABLES** were never delivered in a vacuum. They were always provoked by the circumstances, discussions, and debates that surrounded Him. That kind of contextual background information is especially critical concerning the parable of the **VINEYARD (MATT. 20:1–15)**.
- While the story itself delivers **A PROFOUND LESSON ABOUT THE GRACE OF GOD**, we don't feel the full weight of Christ's words until we consider their immediate context.

- **WHY DID JESUS DEVISE THIS PARABLE?** Our Lord gave this analogy primarily for the benefit of *His twelve disciples* immediately after His conversation with the rich young ruler. This young man of great wealth and influence had come to Jesus asking, ***“TEACHER, WHAT GOOD THING SHALL I DO THAT I MAY OBTAIN ETERNAL LIFE?”*** (MATT. 19:16). He may have been fishing for praise, because he clearly thought he had fulfilled every spiritual duty and that his life was well in order. He certainly looked like a promising evangelistic prospect.
- But rather than simply giving him the good news of the gospel, **JESUS** challenged him on his **OBEDIENCE** to the law. When the fellow insisted, ***“ALL THESE THINGS I HAVE KEPT; WHAT AM I STILL LACKING?”*** (MATT. 19:20), **JESUS** told him to sell all his possessions, give the profits to the poor, and follow Him. **THAT WAS A SACRIFICE THE YOUNG MAN WASN'T WILLING TO MAKE.**

- **JESUS** thus exposed the fact that the *young ruler* loved his possessions more than he loved either God or his neighbor. In other words, although he claimed to have kept the entire law of God, he was in violation of both the **first** and **second** great commandments (**MATT. 22:37–40**). But the man still did not acknowledge that. UNWILLING TO FACE HIS SIN AND REPENT, he **“WENT AWAY GRIEVING”** (**MATT. 19:22**).
- The disciples were clearly stunned when Jesus seemed to put obstacles in the **RICH YOUNG RULER’S** way rather than encouraging him. They were baffled: **“THEN WHO CAN BE SAVED?”** (**MATT. 19:25**).
- **JESUS’** answer stresses the fact that salvation is God’s work, not something any sinner can accomplish for himself: **“WITH PEOPLE THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE, BUT WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE”** (**MATT. 19:26**).

- So, the **DISCIPLES** were thinking about the **IMPOSSIBILITY** of meriting God's favor. They were no doubt examining their own hearts. Unlike the rich ruler, they *had* in fact left all to follow Christ (**MATT. 19:27**). And they were looking for some **ASSURANCE FROM CHRIST** Himself that their sacrifice wasn't all for naught. **THAT IS WHAT PROMPTED THIS PARABLE**.
- As the **RICH YOUNG RULER** walked away, it was **PETER** who spoke up on behalf of all the disciples and said, **"BEHOLD, WE HAVE LEFT EVERYTHING AND FOLLOWED YOU; WHAT THEN WILL THERE BE FOR US?"** (**MATT. 19:27**).
- **THE TWELVE** were like the **6:00 a.m.** group in the parable. They were the **first** ones Jesus called at the start of His ministry. They had been working through the heat of the day, for a lot longer than **twelve hours**. It had already been nearly three years. They had given up homes, jobs, and relationships to serve Christ.

- With the sole exception of **JUDAS**, they certainly loved Jesus. All of them would go on to give their lives for the gospel's sake. **THEY WANTED TO KNOW WHAT THEY WOULD RECEIVE FOR THEIR SACRIFICE.**
- **THE DISCIPLES** no doubt thought they were going to get **SPECIAL BENEFITS**. They believed they were going to inherit the kingdom very soon, and that excited them. They were well aware that **JESUS** was Israel's Messiah.
- They fully **expected** an earthly, political kingdom with all the glory and riches one might gain through world dominion. **THEY WERE THE FIRST DISCIPLES**, so it made perfect sense to them that one of them would sit at Jesus' right hand, in the highest place of honor.

- This was a **NAIVE** and **IMMATURE** view of Jesus' mission, and they retained it even after the resurrection. While the **RISEN CHRIST** was meeting with them as a group, preparing them for Pentecost, they asked, **"LORD, IS IT AT THIS TIME YOU ARE RESTORING THE KINGDOM TO ISRAEL?"** (ACTS 1:6).
- **NOW THAT CHRIST HAD SHOWN HIMSELF TRIUMPHANT EVEN OVER DEATH, THEY WERE HOPING FINALLY TO GET THEIR CROWNS AND THRONES AND PLACES OF HONOR.**
- At the end of **MATTHEW 19**, when **PETER** asked, **"WHAT THEN WILL THERE BE FOR US?"** **JESUS** answered by addressing their thirst for **SPECIAL HONOR**. He reassured them that they would indeed have places of honor in the kingdom. **BUT HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT EVERYONE IN THE KINGDOM WOULD BE HONORED:**

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- ***“TRULY I SAY TO YOU, THAT YOU WHO HAVE FOLLOWED ME, IN THE REGENERATION WHEN THE SON OF MAN WILL SIT ON HIS GLORIOUS THRONE, YOU ALSO SHALL SIT UPON TWELVE THRONES, JUDGING THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL. AND EVERYONE WHO HAS LEFT HOUSES OR BROTHERS OR SISTERS OR FATHER OR MOTHER OR CHILDREN OR FARMS FOR MY NAME’S SAKE, WILL RECEIVE MANY TIMES AS MUCH, AND WILL INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE.”***

(MATT. 19:28–29)

- It is intriguing how little effect the lesson of this parable had on the **twelve disciples**. They were so **OBSESSED** with the idea of **SPECIAL HONOR** that even after they heard this parable, they continued scheming and jockeying for **FIRST PLACE**. In fact, the very next episode in Matthew's account records this:
- Then the **MOTHER OF THE SONS OF ZEBEDEE** came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. And He said to her, ***“What do you wish?” She said to Him, “Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.”*** (MATT. 20:20–21)
- **MATTHEW** (one of the Twelve himself) goes on to say, ***“AND HEARING THIS, THE TEN BECAME INDIGNANT WITH THE TWO BROTHERS”*** (MATT. 20:24). They were annoyed because they all craved the **INSIDE SEATS!**

- This became a constant source of bickering among the Twelve. Even in the Upper Room on the night of Jesus' betrayal, it was Jesus who washed the others' feet, because all of them desired to be considered "**GREAT,**" and foot washing was a duty of the lowest servant (**JN. 13:4–17**). Later that same evening, right after Jesus broke the bread and consecrated the wine, "**THERE AROSE . . . A DISPUTE AMONG THEM AS TO WHICH ONE OF THEM WAS REGARDED TO BE GREATEST**" (**LK. 22:24**).
- So, although the **PARABLE OF THE LABORERS** was given to confront the selfish, envious, confused perceptions of the disciples, it took a while to sink in. But Christ's lesson eventually penetrated the disciples' hearts and permeated their lives—**LIVES THAT WOULD GO ON TO BE MARKED BY SELFLESS SERVITUDE FOR CHRIST'S CHURCH.**