

## The Grumbling Workers Outline

### *Matthew 20:1-16*

#### I. The communion connection.

- A. *“The Lord’s Table is a place of commonality: it is not a common place but it is a place of commonality.”*
- B. The parable of the *Laborers in the Vineyard* (Mathew 20:1-16) is connected to communion in its message of Christian equality and commonality.

#### II. Context of the parable.

- A. The parable begins with the conjunction **“For”** connecting it to the entire chapter 19.
  - 1. Regarding divorce (1-12) **“For the sake of the kingdom of heaven”** (19:12)
  - 2. Regarding the little children (19:13-15) **“For the kingdom of heaven belongs to each one of these.”** (19:14).
  - 3. Regarding the rich young ruler (19:15-26) **“...it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.** (19:24).
  - 4. Regarding Peter and the disciples (19:27-30) **“We’ve left everything, what then will there be for us (in the kingdom of heaven.)?”** (19:27).

#### III. The proverb (19:30)

- A. **“But many who are first will be last; and the last first.”**
  - 1. An “upside down kingdom”.
- B. The parable is about the kingdom of heaven.
  - 1. Mathew refers to the “kingdom of heaven” 38 times.
  - 2. The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are interchangeable.
  - 3. There are “physical” and a “spiritual” aspects to the kingdom of God.
    - a. The kingdom of heaven is an actual place.
    - b. The kingdom of heaven is a spiritual rule over the hearts and lives of those who willingly submit to God’s authority.

#### IV. The elements of the parable.

- A. The landowner/employer, implied permanent workers, day laborers, the foreman, the vineyard, the marketplace, a denarius.

- V. The parable.
- A. It is the time of grape harvest, many additional temporary workers are needed.
  - B. The landowner himself goes to the market place to hire day workers.
    1. 1<sup>st</sup> time—6:00am hires dayworkers for “whatever is right”
    2. 2<sup>nd</sup> time—9:00am hires dayworkers for “whatever is right
    3. 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> times—12:00pm and 3:00pm hires dayworkers for “whatever is right.”
    4. 5<sup>th</sup> time—6:00pm hires dayworkers for “whatever is right”.
  - C. Evening is payment time: God’s law stated poor dayworkers get paid at the end of each day—Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:15.
    1. The last hired are paid first. The first hired are paid last.
    2. EVERYBODY GETS THE SAME PAY! ONE DENARIUS!
    3. All are extremely happy, EXCEPT those hired first—they “grumbled”.
      - a. Jesus kindly rebukes the hired first—“**Friend...**” an ironic address.
  - D. The elements revealed:
    1. The landowner is God, the day laborers are all believers, the foreman is Jesus, the denarius is salvation, the vineyard is the kingdom of heaven.
- VI. The lessons.
- A. God is extremely generous—a denarius was an extremely generous wage
  - B. None of us deserve what God has given us—none of them “deserved” the denarius.
  - C. In God’s kingdom, God is “no respecter of persons.”
  - D. In God’s kingdom, God sees all people as equals—there are no rankings in God’s kingdom.
  - E. Salvation—has no time factor as long as the door is still open!
  - F. The long time saved should not be “envious” of the person who comes late (20:15).
    1. “Eye envious” = a Hebrew idiom *Ayin Hara*, “*an evil eye*”

**So the last shall be first, and the first last = all there at the same time! All are equal in God’s kingdom**

## The Grumbling Workers Pastoral Notes

### *Matthew 20:1-16*

For us here at Trinity...All Sundays are special... but the first Sunday of every month is *very* special...for we as a church partake of the Lord's Supper together...some traditions observe the Lord's Supper every week when they gather... others once a quarter, others once a year...but we gather around the Lord's Table every month...keeping this Sunday a very special Sunday

When the apostle Paul addressed the Corinthian church about the Lord's Supper, he said we proclaim (**in the present**) the Lord's death (**in the past**) until he comes (**in the future**)... At the table of our Lord, our proclamation stretches backward to the Last Supper and signals forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Every Lord's Supper is another stop on the journey from the upper room to the everlasting feast. When we eat the bread and drink the cup, the past and future rush into the present, extending the moment in both directions, eternalizing an experience that grants spiritual nourishment.

One commentator said *the Lord's Table is a place of commonality... it is not a common place but it is a place of commonality...* I think that means the Lord's Supper is a place each one of us stand on equal ground...no one has a more privileged place at the table...nobody is a more valued guest at the Lord's Supper... we are all equal guests...

It is a place where we all have something in common... we are all sinners...in need of a Savior. A place where we come and recognize that our sin is a serious offense to our Holy God... it is a place where we are all called to repent from our sins.

It is a place where we all equally stand at the foot of the cross and as sinners... remembering what Jesus Christ our Savior did for each and every one of us.... Equally we all stand before the same gospel... the same salvation... the same hope.

Please turn with me to Matthew 20 for our parable this morning...This commonality of communion is connected to this parable... this parable underscores this idea of equality and commonality...especially in considering our salvation and our eternal hope...

The parable begins with a conjunction...**For**... a word that connects what is being said to what was previously said... so this parable is connected to what comes before it... so we need to know what it is connected to...why?...so we can better understand the parable by putting it in its context. so we go back to the verses before it in chapter 19.

This is interesting...[Hermeneutics class!...context]... so we begin to go back starting with verse 30 of chapter 19 and we run into another conjunction... “but”... and it doesn’t take long to realize that every previous verse is connected to the next.... “and” “and” “and” “but” “then” “and” “and”... all the way at least to the beginning of chapter 19....**Now it happened...**

So what happened in chapter 19 that caused Jesus to tell us this parable?... it begins with Jesus teaching about divorce... (we won’t get into that this morning)... but after hearing Jesus’s teaching the disciples basically say *If that’s the case wouldn’t it be better not to marry in the first place?...*

And Jesus says something like... *well there are some men who have chosen to be eunuchs...won’t get into that either)...but they chose to not marry for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven...* The Kingdom of Heaven...

Some children are brought to Jesus so that **He might lay His hands on them and pray...** the disciples rebuked them... **Jesus said “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN BELONGS TO SUCH AS THESE...**The Kingdom of Heaven...

Ahh... you know the Rich Young Ruler... **Teacher what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?...** *What shall I do!...*you have everything.. you’re rich... and apparently you can do anything!

**If you wish to enter into life.... Keep all the commandments... which ones?...**You know... the 10 Commandments... just keep ALL of those. ...*I’ve done that!...* **then sell all your possessions and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven...and come follow Me...**

*That’s too much... I can’t do that...* **he went away grieving... for he was one who owned MUCH property...and Jesus said to His disciples, “truly I say to you, it’s hard for a rich man to enter THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN...the Kingdom of Heaven...**

(24) **And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, that for a rich man to enter into the KINGDOM OF GOD....The Kingdom of God.**

Hearing all this...the disciples are seeing that this kingdom of Heaven is a bit upside down...I think they are beginning to worry about their status... in other kingdoms...the one with status... the rich man becomes a powerful man in the kingdom... in THIS kingdom... it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to even enter the kingdom!

In verse 25 it says that the disciples were very astonished at all this... *If a rich man can’t enter into the kingdom of heaven with his wealth...and all his effort. WHO THEN CAN BE SAVED?...* Jesus answers them... **with people this is impossible... people can’t save themselves...** no matter what they do...no matter what they have!!!... it’s impossible!...

Jesus just showed them that being a religious person... keeping the commandments doesn't save you.... And being a rich person... a person with huge influence in the world... cannot do it either...it is impossible for a person to DO ANYTHING to be saved....**But with God all things are possible...**Only through God and His grace can ANYONE be saved!

Peter couldn't hold it in any more... Peter when he first met Jesus... he put down his fishing nets... he left his business... to follow Him...to become one of His disciples... the others did as well.. John... Matthew... the 12.... (27) **Behold we have left everything and followed you, what then will there be for us?**

*We've done this, and this and that... for you Jesus... how are you going to reward us?... so many implications in that!... Peter was basically putting Jesus in debt... we did this for you now you owe us!...of course... Peter and the 12 were thinking about what?... their position in the Kingdom of Heaven!*

That they would have privileged positions in His kingdom....because of all that they have done...all that they had sacrificed...they're the first ones right?... is that unreasonable?

Jesus still is revealing to them an upside-down kingdom... where you gain everything by losing everything... (29) **and everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My sake will inherit eternal life...**

*You will enter My kingdom IF you leave everything that is of most value to you...*

And if that wasn't upside down enough... Jesus says something that had their heads spinning...possibly an old Jewish proverb (30) **But many who are first will be last; and the last first.**

That's a profound statement!... it will resurface at the end of the parable only reversed... verse 16 **So the last shall be first and the first last...this obviously is an important proverb...** an upside-down kingdom?... all this that made up the context will be illustrated by this parable.

### **Read 20:1**

So this is about the Kingdom of heaven as was chapter 19...**for the kingdom of heaven is like...** a subject Matthew is very fond of... Matthew mentions the *Kingdom of Heaven* over thirty eight times... Mathew is the only Bible writer who uses the term *Kingdom of Heaven*... Mark, Luke and John use the phrase "*The Kingdom of God*" for a total of fifty times.

The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God are basically interchangeable...in fact... the Rich Young Ruler uses both terms... .all kingdoms have a king... the king of heaven is God...

all kingdoms have subjects... those who are governed by the king... “we” are the subjects of God’s kingdom.

All kingdoms have territories... God’s kingdom is limitless... **“The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all”** (Psalm 103:19). it is both physical and spiritual... the kingdom of heaven is physical because it is a real place...

**Every authority that exists has been established by God** (Romans 13:1). So, in one sense, the kingdom of God incorporates everything that is...all in existence is in His kingdom...but it is also spiritual.

The kingdom of God is a spiritual rule over the hearts and lives of those who willingly submit to God’s kingship...His authority.... Those who defy God’s authority and refuse to submit to Him are not part of the kingdom of God;

Those who acknowledge the lordship of Christ and gladly surrender to God’s rule in their hearts are part of the kingdom of God. In this sense, the kingdom of God is spiritual...so in a broad sense... I think the way Jesus is meaning it here in this parable... the Kingdom of Heaven is about God’s rule in the hearts and lives of people

And God’s reward (physical heaven itself) for all those who have submitted to His rule in a relationship with Him....*so the kingdom of God is like...* this parable...this parable is very straight forward... there is no secret message that we have to dig up... if you have ears to hear.... You will hear. **[repeat verse 1]**

There’s a “landowner” or “employer”....he owns a vineyard... this would be a very familiar scene to those listening to Jesus... Vineyards are all over Israel...Vineyards were Israel’s most valuable properties...

The way it worked in that day... and still today to some extent... the landowner would have his permanent employees... they would do the day to day tasks of planting and caring for the vines... In spring they would prepare the soil... in the summer they would prune the branches...

In the fall... harvest would come... time was always of the essence... you had a short window to harvest the grapes due to changing weather... on the heels of the harvest would be heavy rains... if the grapes weren’t harvest before the rains came... the grapes could be greatly damaged.

So you had a short time between the grapes being ready to pick and the weather changing... the other problem was having enough laborers to harvest the grapes... temporary laborers were the key to a successful harvest... Normally. The landowner would send one of his men... the manager to go out and hire all the day laborers he could find.

Day laborers were the lowest people on the social ladder... they were unskilled and untrained workers... this reminds me of California back in the 80’s and 90’s where migrant workers from

Mexico, Central and South America would gather at specific street corners hoping to be picked up by anyone needing laborers...

Technically it was illegal to hire “undocumented workers”... but even some of the cities had built laborer hiring areas.... That’s much like the scene here... the foreman or manager would go to the “marketplace” and hire as many laborers as they needed to harvest the grapes.

These were men who relied on every dollar [shekel] they could make... they were pretty desperate people... God knew this would be this way, so He instructed employers to pay the laborers every evening at the end of each workday...

In Leviticus 19:13

**‘You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired worker are not to remain with you all night until morning.** [they’re hungry... they don’t have a savings account]

Deuteronomy 24:15

**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 does not cry out against you to the Lord, and it becomes a sin in you.**

they lived shekel to shekel...work was very important to these workers... if they didn’t work... they wouldn’t eat... neither would their families. Important to know the Jewish workday began at dawn and ended at sundown... in the fall that would be from 6:00 am to 6:00pm... a long twelve-hour workday.

Something that could sneak on by... notice that the landowner **himself** went out early in the morning to hire laborers for HIS vineyard... he didn’t have his foreman go out... He goes out and hires them...

## Read verse 2

So the landowner goes to the marketplace... sees some laborers...Most likely there are many, many laborers wanting to work...so he picks out some and hires them for the day... important to note the financial arrangement... it says **He agreed with the laborers...**

They basically made a contract... they shook hands on the deal...*you come and work all day for me... I will pay you one denarius for the day...*the amount is important... a denarius was a great wage for a day laborer...so these guys aren’t questioning the wage.

A denarius would have been standard day’s pay for a Roman soldier of skilled labor... but very generous pay for a day laborer... these workers would have been thrilled at this arrangement... *it’s a deal!*

So they make their way to the vineyard and went to work... maybe there was a threat of an incoming storm or something... the landowner decides He needs more laborers... *we need to get the grapes picked.*

### **Read verse 3**

The third hour would have been 9:00am... so he goes out and finds some men “**idle in the market place**”...this doesn't mean they're lazy... it means they had nothing to do... they wish to be hired... but its now three hours into the workday so they are sitting there doing nothing.

### **Read verse 4**

No doubt these guys are ecstatic to get hired three hours in... I'm sure there was no haggling over wages... they were just glad to get something for the day... the landowner says he'll pay them **whatever is right....** So off to the vineyards they go.

Apparently the grapes aren't being picked fast enough... the weather report for the week must be threatening...

### **Read verse 5**

He goes to the marketplace at 12:00 noon and hires more help... they are also ecstatic to get work... half the day is shot... but they will at least make some money... but the landowner goes again at 3:00pm... in the afternoon!... with only three hours left of working hours.... He hires even more..... and tells them he'll pay them what is fair....

I'm sure the guys who've been working hard all day were glad to see reinforcements... glad to have more hands picking grapes...

### **Read verse 6**

This seems illogical... one hour to go of the workday... he goes to the marketplace... I'm sure these guys had no hope of getting work... they were probably playing cards or something to pass the time...afraid to go home to their wives...

### **Read verse 7**

So he hires them for one hour of work...gracious land owner!...think about these guys... it's very late in the day...they are desperate...for the landowner to hire them it had to be out of compassion for one hour of work would not make a big change in the days productivity.

Now here's where the parable becomes amazing...

### **Read verse 8**

This landowner is a respectable employer... he is following God's instructions as laid out in Leviticus and Deuteronomy... it is now night time... he tells his foreman to gather up all the workers... and pay them... *beginning from the last to the first.*



Line them up and pay each one of them... beginning with the last and moving towards the first...that would seem strange to us... we would expect the one's who worked the longest to be paid first... I'm pretty sure they thought that way also!

So the foreman has them all in a line...I immediately thought of years ago when my oldest daughter went to the State Cross Country meet down in Eagle near Boise... all these top high school runners from all over the state competing with each other.

At the conclusion of that brutal race...they would recognize the top six finishers... they had this pyramid shaped platform... the first place runner would stand on the top... second place just below her... third place below second place... fourth place on the bottom... fifth and sixth place stood off to the side.....

What an honor to even be on one of the steps... but to be on the top...that was very, very special... well... Jesus was in charge of that race... and He wanted us to learn what we learn here... He would have put the sixth place runner on the top and the first place runner on the bottom off to the side!

And I'm sure there would be some complaints!...That's what happens here!... the foreman pays each one of the laborers beginning with those that worked the least time...

### **Read verse 9**

A denarius!...they worked one hour and got a full days wage!...well at that point nobody was bothered by it... in fact the eleventh hour workers were overjoyed!... *we didn't expect ANYTHING... but we got a full day's wage!... Porterhouse steaks tonight!* ...Remember the landowner said he would pay them a wage that was "right".

We can assume the ninth and sixth and third hour laborers also received a denarius...all of them very happy with the day... they were all singing the praises of this landowner and his generosity!... still... I think everyone at this point is pretty happy about the whole thing.

I'm sure the all day workers were getting pretty excited... *obviously this landowner is a very generous person... look what he paid those who didn't work the whole day!...generous man!...If he got a denarius for one hour work... what are we who worked twelve hours going to get?* They were certainly anticipating a great wage for the day after seeing what the others got.

### **Read verse 10**

I would like to think that wouldn't bother me if I was one of the all day guys... but really... how would you feel?... I would feel as though the landowner was not a fair man!...I mean if the winner of that cross country race gets a pot metal, metal and the sixth place runner gets a gold metal... something's wrong with that!....right?

### **Read verses 11 & 12**

They were **grumbling**... this is a great Greek word... it is an onomatopoeic word... a word that resembles or imitates the sound it describes... grumble is onomatopoeic... *grumble, grumble, grumble*... hear it?... well... the Greek is *goguzo*....*goguzo, goguzo, goguzo*...they were grumbling.

**Scorching heat** there was not an exaggeration for effect... this was a scorching wind from the east... a sirocco... that was typical in September before the rains... an unbearable heat... these guys worked in the hottest part of the day and they got the same amount as those who came in the cool of the day and worked for only one hour!

What's the landowner going to say about this?...I love this answer... there's more than meets the ear!

### Read verse 13

Here's a rule...If Jesus ever calls you "**friend**"...duck!...look out!... In the New Testament, the only time Jesus uses the word "friend"... is when that person is in the wrong!... it's an ironical term in the Bible... there's irony when it is used.

All in Matthew... a few chapters ahead... Matthew 22... the Parable of the Wedding Feast... this man shows up to the wedding ***without wedding clothes***... probably showed up wearing a holy tee shirt and ripped jeans... **and he said to him, friend.... How did you come here without wedding clothes!**

What happened to him?... **he was bound hand and foot and thrown into hell**... the other time Jesus uses "**Friend**"...was in the Garden of Gethsemane when Judas and the soldiers arrive and Jesus says **Friend...** "**do what you have come for.**" **They came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.**

*Friend...let me get out the contract we made with each other this morning that you signed and were actually happy with!... Are you demanding in the name of justice that I break the contract you willingly entered and which I fulfilled to the letter?*

What Jesus showed us is that the contract... that was generous to begin with was completely honored and fulfilled.... While at the same time being extremely generous to the latecomers.

### Read verse 14

Ok... I hope you have put the pieces together... I hope you could see that the landowner is God... and remember it was the landowner that goes out and selects the laborers... He chooses them... who are the laborers?... they are all the believers in the kingdom of heaven... hopefully everyone in this room.

The vineyard is the kingdom... that twelve hour work day is time... the evening when the laborers get paid is eternity...eternal life....did you catch the foreman... or the steward as some

of your bibles say... he's the one that pays the laborers in the evening... that's Jesus Christ.. the one who rewards His own.

What does it all mean?... let me give you some ways to say it:

- Length of service and long hours of toil in the heat of the day constitutes no claim on God and provide NO reason why He should not be generous to those who have less.
- All the laborers are equally undeserving of the wage... it's so ingenious... God pays each one of them a wage much greater than they deserve... even the all day laborers. GOD IS NOT FAIR!!!!... that's right!... If He was fair they would get nothing!
- In God's kingdom... *God is no respecter of people*... meaning that God does not show favoritism or partiality based on rank, family, wealth, or any other cause...God is completely impartial!

God sees everyone equally! He doesn't hold the lives of anyone over another... everyone gets a denarius....back in chapter 19 what was Peter wanting?... **Behold Jesus... we have left everything to follow You...what then will we get?**

Jesus is saying here... Ahh Peter... **there are no rankings in God's kingdom**... the poor disciples... the fisherman and the tax collectors are welcomed by God along with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!...

- What about salvation?... some people come to the Lord early in life... some come very late in life... Some are Christians for many, many years before they die... It doesn't matter how long or how short... the reward is all the same to all who come to Jesus...

The thief on the cross who was lost until his final day was promised BY JESUS to be with Him that day in Paradise... alongside the apostle Paul and every martyr who lived their entire lives for Christ then lost their lives for Christ.

[late for the plane—those who got there early and me who got there late all go to the same place...at the same time... in the same seats... eating the same worthless little biscuit cookie!]

*“You mean to tell me I've been living my entire life for Jesus – since I was eleven! And this sinner comes along who's been drinking smokin and dancing for 85 years...finds Jesus and he gets the same benefit package?.....YEP!*

**Read verse 15**

“Is your eye envious?”... That’s a Hebrew idiom...*Ayin Hara*... “*an evil eye*”... the idea that a person or a supernatural being can bewitch or harm an individual by merely looking at them... a harmful negative energy created when one simply looks at something or somebody with envy.

Does it bother you that somebody lived a wretched life for most of their life and came to Christ.... Is your eye envious?

It ends where we began... are we any closer to its meaning?... **So the last shall be first and the first last...earlier... the first shall be last and the last shall be first**

Think of two runners... running a race... one is a much faster runner than the other and likely would get to the finish line way before the second runner....

The first runner gets to the finish line first... but he is last....

The second runner gets to the finish line last...but he’s first... what does that mean?

It means they both got there at the same time!...they are both first AND last!

Jesus is very clever!