



Study #2 Matthew 20:1-16 - A generous boss

Introduction

We know from Jesus' teaching elsewhere in the Gospels that his parables deliberately seek to tease the hearer - as they listen they are having their hearts sifted by God's word. Parables force us to position ourselves - to choose one way or the other, not only in our attitudes but also in our actions

How individuals hear Jesus' words - and whose voice they hear within the parables - is a question of discipleship. Will we respond in repentance and faith? Are we willing to ask the questions that each parable is leading us to ask and see how God's kingdom is radically different from the ways of this world?

Study

1. At what point(s) in the parable itself do we see the workers' expectations overturned?
2. Where lies the sting in the tale of this parable for us as the readers? What about it overturns our expectations or upends our way of thinking about the way the world is/should be?

We are spectators to the dialogue between the master and the workers in verses 11-16. We hear their grumbling and perhaps are tempted to side with them in their complaint against the master. However when the master speaks and we find ourselves thinking that he has

been completely reasonable in his actions. The accusation that he has been unjust simply does not stand. So we inevitably find ourselves somewhat torn in our loyalty. We're left on the horns of a dilemma.

3. With whom should we side? It would seem that Jesus is deliberately seeking to unsettle his hearers.
4. Are you comfortable with what the master says in verses 15-16? (verse 15b Literally, "Or is your eye evil because I am good?").
5. In the parable itself who do the first and the last refer to? In the surrounding context of Matthew's Gospel who are they? (see particularly Matthew 19:13-15, 30, 21:31)
6. When it comes to the kingdom of God, who do you think Jesus is referring to as the first and the last? Who is the first and who is the last in the kingdom of heaven?

In a way similar to the parable from Matthew 18 from last week's study, this parable pushes against any sense of us trying to live or behave in a transactional way. We're being challenged to a whole new way of thinking - where God, who is so good, shows us what life is like in the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom that has invaded this world of darkness. No wonder its values turn this world's values on their heads! After all, it is <ins>God's</ins> kingdom! And because of who He is truly, it should be no surprise that the ways of the kingdom of heaven are wholly unlike the ways of this world.

When we think 'transaction' - you get what you deserve in life. God, on the other hand, says, 'mercy' and 'undeserved generosity'. I know which kingdom I want to live in!

The challenge for us is to live according to God's kingdom values knowing that they are seriously at odds with that of the world's. In the here and now, we choose to live according to eternity. We lean forwards.

7. Why might we be tempted to dismiss what Jesus is teaching here in this parable?
8. What might we think about the kingdom of heaven that would lead us, if we are brutally honest to not want to be part of it?
9. Why might you want to live in this kingdom?
10. What might make someone desire to change camps? i.e., from being a person who would not want to to one who would. What about the reverse?
11. So far in the study we've not sought to identify who might be the workers employed at different hours of the day. If you were to try to have a crack at doing this, who do you think most likely fits the profile of the workers arriving early and late?

Conclusion

Perhaps it is the character of the landowner that is the key. It is simply his kindness and consideration of all the needy labourers which is highlighted by the parable. After all, he comes out looking for new workers right throughout the day.

In the end, the rights of the workers are eclipsed by the right of the master to be gracious

and just. Kingdom rewards depend on God's sovereign grace. Therefore childlike trust is what is called for.

Jesus deliberately and cleverly led the listeners along by degrees until they understood that if God's generosity was to be represented by a man, such a man would be different from any man ever encountered. Huffman quoted by Carson.