

## Amazing Grace

Matthew 20:1-16

April 13, 2025

HDBC

**Grace** – Synonyms include Favor, mercy, charity, benevolence, clemency, leniency. In the Bible it refers to God's unearned gift of forgiveness for our sins, the gift of the righteousness of Christ, & our adoption into His family.

**Amazing** – Synonyms include Astounding, remarkable, wonderful, marvelous, surprising, mind-blowing, awesome, stunning, startling. It was the word John Newton used to describe God's grace in one of the most beloved and well-known hymns of all time.

I agree with John Newton. God's grace is **amazing** and so much more. In fact, in Jesus' day the grace of God was considered scandalous and unbelievable. Even today, the depth of God's grace will stretch our thinking. Most of us have devised our own definitions of grace that instinctively put limitations on the grace of God. That was true in Jesus' day.

**So, he told a parable** to illustrate **just how generously gracious, God's grace really is**. It is a response to a question posed by Peter. Jesus told rich young man he would have to be willing to give up all his riches if he wanted to follow Jesus. Peter then asked a question of Jesus.

*We have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?*

**Real question was . . .** Because we started first and have done so much, will we get more of whatever heaven is meant to be. **In the words of the late J.D. Grey, Peter was about to hug himself to death.**

**So, here is the question.** *Is there more grace for those who come first, serve longer, accomplish more or give up more?* Jesus responded with a story to make the answer clear.

## READ THE TEXT (Matthew 20:1-16)

### 1. The Subject

This is a Kingdom Story. *For the kingdom of Heaven is like . . .*

These words were intended to teach us something about the kingdom of God. **There is a lesson here that transcends this life, this realm.**

**It may sound** like a simple story of something that happened. Not so. This story was meant to point us beyond this life to teach us something about the kingdom of God. Simple story with deeper meaning.

### 2. The Story

Begins simple enough, but then takes a rather shocking turn.

**Setting:** It's harvest time. Race with the sun every day to bring in the crop. This was true 2000 years ago and it is true today. Farmers still run this race during each harvest season. It will be ruined if not gathered. Fields ripe, work is available. The farmer is obsessed with one thing. **Get the crop out of the farm and into the barns.** That leads to . . .

#### 1) The recruitment of the workers

**6:00 a.m.** - He goes to marketplace (state employment office) to hire workers. These are the early risers. **Men of the dawn.** Eager, anxious, know the situation and want to make money. Verse 2 tells us they negotiated and agreed on a price. One denarius.

**9:00 a.m.** - (3-4) He came back and found more workers. They were sent to field with promise that they would be given a fair pay. No specifics. **Noon, 3:00 p.m.** (5) Same deal. No negotiation.

**5:00 p.m.** - (6-7) Twilight time and **the story moves into the twilight Zone.** One hour remaining. No businessman would do this. These are lazy, shiftless men who hang-out at night and sleep during day.

**Been in hiding all day so they could avoid work.** Now they feel they are safe from the threat of employment. Threatened by his question. Offer excuse, but **instead of excusing them he accuses them**. They are sent to work. I'm sure they went reluctantly.

## **2) The payment to the workers (8-10)**

Normal procedure went like this. Day is done. Workers coming in with baskets of produce, waiting to be paid. Immediately Jesus' hearers would have noticed something unusual. The order of payment. **Last hired are paid first.**

Expected a piece of bread, not money, but received a denarius. They were amazed, as were the other workers. Why were they paid first? **The owner wanted everyone to see how generous He was.**

**Then pays the others last to first hired.** Finally those who have worked all day. They have already decided they will get paid more. Only received one. Grumbled & complained. Not fair. We hear that a lot today, don't we! Claim to deserve more.

## **3) Explanation of grace**

Owner reminds them they got what agreed to work for. They were the ones who haggled over price. Legalists! Demanded a guaranteed wage & when they got it they claimed to be cheated. The owner had every right to be just as generous as he wanted.

## **3. The Lessons**

**Advice on how to run a business. I wouldn't try it.**

**Advice on how to deal with lazy men. No way.**

**It is a story of grace!** Grace that allows us to be saved. This is not a story about rewards in heaven, but about the grace that enables us to be saved.

## Two things we learn about God's grace.

### **1) Grace is not affected by time**

God does not limit His grace only to those who receive Christ at a certain time in their lives. Those saved at 9 don't get greater grace than those saved at 39. God's grace works in all hours of our lives, as we will see in the parable.

**Some** entered early. Some very late. Many in between. They all received the same thing. Those who get saved at an early age do not receive a greater amount of God's grace.

Jim Dobson saved at a very early age.

**C.S. Lewis was middle-aged when he got saved.**

Man in his 80s responded during invitation to be saved.

### **B. Grace is not affected by works**

Those who went to work early were clearly able to do more work than those who came later. The amount of work that they did had no impact on the pay which they received. In fact, those who went into the fields one hour before quitting time probably accomplished very little if anything. Yet, they received the same pay.

**This is about grace . . . getting what we do not deserve**, not what we have earned. God's grace is not affected by my works. His grace to me is the same no matter how much I accomplish for Him. His grace is unaffected by the amount of work that I do for the kingdom of God.

**Some people worry about a statement like that.** They think I am saying that God is not interested in my working. Not so! God is interested in my work. I am responsible for serving Him. But those things do not impact, in the least, His grace or my salvation!!

## 4. The Takeaways

### 1) Everyone needs grace

It is the only way anyone receives the gift of salvation.

**They all received exactly the same thing.** *Entering the field is a picture of being saved.* Note that they all received same thing. This is not about works and rewards. It is about entering the kingdom. Regardless of when they entered or how much they did, they all received same thing. That is what grace does. ***It disregards our worthiness and accepts us as we are.***

### 2) No one is beyond grace

Those last hour workers are a reminder that no one is beyond the reach of grace. They had nothing to offer the kingdom. But they were welcomed in on the same basis as those who joined early. Imagine the worst people on the planet. None are beyond the reach of grace.

***Thief on the cross was saved at 11:59 and counting,*** but he entered Heaven and was just as precious to the Lord as Peter, James and John. He never taught a Bible Study, witnessed to a neighbor or even attended a church. But he was welcomed into Heaven with the same enthusiasm as ***Billy Graham or Paul.***

### 3) Grace is meant to be shared.

I have received the grace of God. I am now expected to pass that grace along to others. Includes telling others about Jesus, for sure. But more!

It means I will live graciously toward others. The grace that I received will be evident in the grace that I offer to others. **What does it look like?**

## **Things that indicate I am operating in grace:**

- 1) I must reject expecting others to always agree with me.
- 2) I must never turn my preferences into laws imposed on others.
- 3) I must reject the temptation to withhold forgiveness of others.
- 4) I must resist the urge to enjoy the failures of others.
- 5) I must never turn a blind eye when the weak are brutalized.
- 6) I must be quick to allow a fresh start for those who fail.
- 7) I must rejoice in the grace of God shown to people I may not like.

***The great scandal from people's perspective is that God would forgive and save horrible, wicked, evil people.***

***The great scandal from God's perspective is that those who have received His grace would not offer the same to others.***

I love this story. The more I read it and meditate on it the more amazing God's grace becomes to me. As we move through this Holy week, let's do so with a powerful understanding of the presence of grace at every step.

There was grace on Palm Sunday.

There was grace in the upper room.

There was grace in Gethsemane.

There was grace in the scouring.

There was grace on the cross.

***The grace of God comes looking for us even in the darkest and ugliest places. And when it finds us, it refused to leave us there.***

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come.  
Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.*