

Matthew 20:1-16

“The Kingdom and God’s Rewards”

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Context: Following Jesus’ encounter with the rich young ruler, Peter asked how Jesus’ disciples would be rewarded for their sacrifices to follow Him [19:27]. Jesus promised eternal life and hundredfold eternal reward. The Parable of the Vineyard Workers amplifies the teaching on eternal life and rewards.

Subject: The Parable of the Vineyard Workers

Object: Receive Christ and serve Him

The main idea: Christ rewards justly, generously and graciously.

I. The Parable of the Vineyard Workers [1-16]

A. The workers were hired for a fair wage [1-7]

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

³ And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴ and said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. ⁵ Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. ⁶ And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day?’ ⁷ They said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.’

The kingdom of heaven is like [1]. A parable is an earthly story that helps us to understand a spiritual truth. Jesus is presumed to be the vineyard owner, and the laborers who agree to work in His harvest are presumed to be His. The grape harvest took place in August, and farmers hired day laborers to bring in the crops before the latter rains came. The workday would begin at sunrise [1] and end at sunset (per Talmud). The laborers agree to work for a denarius [2] the typical day’s wage for a soldier or worker. At the 3rd hour (9:00 a.m.), noon, three and five p.m. additional workers were hired and offered a fair wage [3-7].

B. The workers were rewarded fairly, generously and graciously [8-16]

⁸ “So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, ‘Call the laborers and give them *their* wages, beginning with the last to the first.’ ⁹ And when those came who *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius.

¹⁰ But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. ¹¹ And when they had received *it*, they complained

against the landowner, ¹² saying, ‘These last *men* have worked *only* one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.’ ¹³ But he answered one of them and said, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take *what is yours* and go your way. I wish to give to this last man *the same* as to you. ¹⁵ Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?’¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”

At the end of the day the workers were paid starting with those that were hired last [8]. Those who worked only one hour received a full day’s wage [9]. The later workers were rewarded for willingness, and trust that the master would pay fairly. Imagine their joy as their pay exceeded their expectations. Those who worked all day saw that the guys who worked one hour got a full day’s pay. The full day workers expected to get more, but were paid the denarius they were promised [10]. They complained that it wasn’t fair since they had worked all day [11-12]. The master calls the complainers “friend” as a gentle rebuke, and then reminds them that he did no wrong. They were paid the amount that they agreed to [13]. If the master chooses to be generous and gracious in his rewards it is not wrong [14-15]. The complaining workers were jealous of the generous reward the master gave the others (an “evil eye” is a reference re jealousy) [15]. We will likely be surprised by the rewards in heaven. Some that seemed to be the least will receive the greatest rewards (“So the last will be first, and the first last”)[16]. Also the failure to serve or habitual wrong attitude may indicate that we are not His workers (“For many are called, but few chosen”) [16] ** *Perhaps a Kids Min volunteer more greatly rewarded than a pastor*

II. Three reasons to receive Christ and serve Him

A. Jesus rewards fairly [1Cor. 3:8-15] In the Parable of the Vineyard Workers, the master of the vineyard hired workers and promised a fair reward to each of the workers. To the first group there was an agreed upon wage, and for the remaining groups, the master promised, “Whatever is right I will give you.” Jesus always does what is right or just.

Nevertheless, one may object that it doesn’t seem fair that Jesus would only reward those works that are done after receiving Him as King and done with the right motive. Undoubtedly, unbelievers can engage in abundant charitable, kind, merciful, and altruistic works. God rewards works done that are motivated by love for God and a desire to glorify Him and advance His kingdom. Thus only works done after salvation will earn eternal rewards [1Cor. 3:8-15]. In a similar sense, it is fair that if I go to the personnel department of an employer with a great benefits package and ask for the benefits they would deny me benefits if I don’t work for them.

B. Jesus rewards generously [Lu. 19:11-27, Mt. 25:14-30]

In the Parable of the Vineyard Workers, the master provides rewards that are extremely generous. One would expect to toil for about twelve hours to receive a denarius. Yet the master provides abundant rewards to those who worked a fraction of the day. Jesus is generous and desires to bless His workers.

1. Use your God-given opportunities and gifts to serve Christ by serving others: In the **Parable of the Minas [Lu. 19:11-27]** each worker receives the same measure – one mina (a mina represents about 3 months wage). The idea that each receives the same portion is consistent with the idea that each of us have the *same opportunity* 24 hours per day to serve God in whatever He has called us to. Serve God in every realm: personal, marriage, family, career, calling, and community. Be sensitive to when, where and how God is calling you to serve Him in each of these realms and do so with joy. Knowing that Jesus rewards generously should motivate us to serve the Lord with gladness [Ps. 100:2]

In the **Parable of the Talents [Mt. 25:14-30]** the king's servants are given different measures (e.g. 5,2,1). A "talent" was the largest dry measurement in the Roman system weighing about 75 pounds, but the term is now commonly used to refer to gifts or abilities because of this parable. Those that used their gifts were praised, "Well done good and faithful" were rewarded generously and invited to enter the joy of their Lord.

Jesus has gifted you uniquely so that you can advance His Kingdom. As you discover those gifts use them in the home, church, marketplace, and community. Every time you do, with the right motive, you are earning rewards that the world can never match. Jesus promised a hundredfold return. A hundred percent would simply double the return, but a hundredfold represents a hundred times return. The world's return is unlikely to last a few years or generations, but the Lord's rewards are enjoyed through eternity. How does the promise of God's rewards motivate your service to Him in your church or community?

C. Jesus rewards graciously [Mt. 19:25-26, Eph. 2:8-9] The Parable of the Vineyard Workers also relates to salvation. The later workers were rewarded for willingness to work for the vineyard owner, and trust in the master. In essence, it was impossible to do enough in one hour to deserve a full day's wage. They were rewarded as a result of the Master's grace. Similarly, it is impossible to earn our salvation it is God's gracious gift through faith in Jesus [Matt. 19:26-26, Eph. 2:8-9]. In the parable, the day is a picture of a lifetime. The idea is that as long as you're alive it is not too late to receive Christ, His salvation, and eternal life. Consider the thief on the cross [Lu. 23:34]. Similarly it is never too early since you can experience Christ, and begin to earn rewards as soon as you do. Today would be a great day to receive Christ. You can trust His salvation and generous rewards. *How does God's grace in your salvation motivate your service to Christ?*