

**“The first shall be last”**

**Matt 19:27-20:16**

**Scripture Ref: Ex 20:17; 1 Cor 13:4; Eph 1:7-12**

- 1. Last week we ended with a question from Peter and a reply from Jesus...**

**Matt 19:27-30**

27 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" 28 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

- a. Jesus is encouraging Peter about heaven, and trying to teach Peter to see that they are not *sacrificing*, but *investing*.**
  - b. In other words what they were doing for the kingdom was not a sacrifice, something that would just go away.**
  - c. But it was an investment – a down-payment to a future life.**
- 2. Now we can understand that – people make investments every day...**
  - a. We work for a five days, even ten days, because we know we'll be paid for that work.**
  - b. Some of you have a 401K or some other type of plan, and you put a certain percentage of your paycheck in each period, with the expectation that you'll earn a return and one day withdraw that in retirement.**
  - c. Perhaps you exercise so that you will stay healthy**
  - d. We all know – you invest in certain things, and you can get an increased return on that investment at a later date.**
- 3. So is that how it is with God? Is that how it will be in heaven? ...kinda...**
  - a. Jesus gives a parable to help us understand God's system of reward.**
  - b. The example that Jesus uses will be a little foreign to us, but to the average person in Jesus' culture, it was a perfectly normal day.**

***Hiring the Laborers***

**Matt 20:1** "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

4. The story opens early one morning in the harvest season. In the village are small houses built of stone.
5. The door to the house opens to a little yard that they share it with three or four other families. The women all bake bread in the same outdoor oven. The children play and learn together.
6. The men duck out by the alleyway and take off to the marketplace. Every village has a marketplace... the marketplace is the center of the village's public life. People buy and sell in the marketplace. Lawsuits are judged there. Men who are out of work go there early in the morning hoping to be hired. If there is no work, they hang out with their friends and pass the time talking. This happens every day in that part of the world.
7. Near the village in the parable there is a vineyard. The man who owns the vineyard is well off compared with most other people. He has a large house and plenty of land, and he pays people to work for him. He grows grapes. He sells some of them as table grapes in season. But fresh grapes do not last long, so he makes the rest into wine, raisins, and grape preserves.
8. In this village the landowner and the villagers need each other. To grow grapes and harvest them takes a lot of manual labor.
  - a. At times—especially at harvest time—the vineyard employs all the available men of the village. Without workers, the landowner could lose an entire year's crop in just a few days. So he needs a good relationship with the men of the village, since he looks to them to get his crop in.
9. The village needs the vineyard, too. Palestine was a relatively poor province of the Roman Empire. Without employment and daily wages, families went without bread.
  - a. So the day laborers and the grape grower work together for their mutual good. They supply the manpower he needs to keep his vineyard going, and he pays them the wages they need to keep their families going.

2 Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

10. The sun is barely up when the landowner goes to the marketplace and hires workers for his vineyard. He will pay each of them a silver coin called a *denarius*. This is the standard daily wage for a working man.
  - a. Everyone knows this, and everyone thinks it is a good wage. So the landowner sends the men out to 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.

- 11. Note: Early in the morning is literally "at dawn;" about 6:00 in the morning. The third hour was about 9 am; the sixth hour was about 12 noon; the eleventh hour was about 5:00 in the evening**
- 12. In the middle of the morning the landowner goes again to the marketplace, and sees more out-of-work men. He says, "You go to the vineyard, too, and I will pay you whatever is right."**
  - a. This time the landowner doesn't mention an exact amount. He only says he will pay what is right.**
  - b. The men understand by this that he will pay them for the part of the day they work. No one has a problem with this arrangement.**
- 13. The landowner goes to the marketplace again at noon and again in the middle of the afternoon. Each time he hires more men with the same understanding about their wages, that he will pay them what is right.**
  - a. Again they all understand that he will pay them for the part of the day they work. Again, no one has a problem with this arrangement.**

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.'

- 14. The landowner must be anxious to get his crop in, because he goes one last time just an hour before the end of the work day. And sure enough, there are still people there. "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?"**
  - a. The landowner has more work in his vineyard than the workers can do. It is a race against time to gather the grapes before they spoil on the vine or before the rainy season sets in.**
  - b. The landowner sees that there are unemployed people in the village just when he needs all the hands he can get, and these guys are just hanging out!**
  - c. So the landowner hires them and sends them to the vineyard for the last hour's work.**

### **Payday**

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.

15. Now it is getting dark, and the landowner tells his foreman to call the workers in and pay them. In ancient Palestine, day laborers were paid at the end of each day's work. This was based on Lev 19: "You shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning." (Lev 19:13)
- See the poor had no buffer of ready cash in the bank. The poor were always one day away from destitution.
  - They had to have their *denarius* or next day their families would have nothing to live on.
  - So the workers crowd around the foreman's table, and he opens his bag of coins to pay them. He begins with those who were hired last.
16. So far there is nothing out of the ordinary here. Everyone who might be listening to the parable knows exactly what to expect:
- The men who worked only one hour will be paid for one hour's work.
  - Those who worked half a day will be paid half a denarius.
  - Those who worked for the full day will be paid a full denarius.
17. Everyone will go home satisfied.
- The men hired last will only take home a little money, but at least they spent most of a pleasant day relaxing with their friends.
  - The people who worked hard all day will at least have a good day's earnings to show for it.
18. But now the story shifts – something out of the ordinary happens.
- Here is where the parable will catch us and make us think. Here is where the parable tells us something unexpected about God.
19. The people who were hired last, and only worked one hour, receive a full day's pay.
- The people who have only worked a few hours of the day receive a full day's pay.
  - Wow – that is AWESOME! All the rest of the workers around the foreman's table are now excited, they can see what is going on.
  - See... The people who worked all day are stoked because they are thinking, "*Man we are gonna make out! We will be given two danarii! Maybe even three!*"
20. But when everyone has been paid, every man has received the same: one silver coin.
- ...and the guys who worked all day are not happy with this.

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."

**21. So... what are we to get from this?**

**22. First – lets define the parts of the parable**

- a. Landowner – that would be God
- b. Vineyards – that is the work of the kingdom
- c. Workers – that would be us

**23. A group of people that worked five different shifts – but were paid the same thing – what is God telling us?**

**SLIDE #2 – BULLET #1**

***Principle #1 – Don't be Jealous***

**24. One thing we can take from this is to not be jealous of someone when they are blessed.**

- a. In America there is a “social fairness” doctrine growing: that everyone should not only have the same opportunity, but we should also have the same wealth. Our leader calls it “spreading the wealth around.”
- b. Joe the plumber didn't like it, and neither do I! Not only is it un-American, it's not biblical! The bible teaches us that if you won't work, you won't eat!
  - i. Now if you can't work, that is different – we are called to help those who can't. But... that is another sermon...!

**25. If we are not careful we can bring this social fairness doctrine into our Christianity. We see God bless someone and we think “so how come you haven't blessed me like that Lord!”**

- a. There are two things wrong with this way of thinking
  - i. #1 - It assumes that God blessed that person arbitrarily – that God just threw some good stuff to them, without any cause or reason – like maybe they were obedient, or maybe they have been a good steward of what they have, or perhaps God knows that they will be a conduit – and bless his Kingdom!
  - ii. #2 - If you want someone else's blessings, you must also be willing to take their problems?

**26. Here is the real issue being exposed: the bible teaches us “though shall not covet” – (Ex 20:17), and 1 Cor 13:4 tells us that love “does not envy”**

- a. and that is exactly what these guys were doing – they were coveting the later workers pay scale!

**BULLET #2**

**Principle #2 – God is Gracious**

27. Remember what prompted the parable was Peter's statement: "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"
- a. Peter, and all the disciples, knew they had given up a great deal to follow Jesus. Peter wanted to know what they would get in return. A reasonable question.
  - b. He wanted to know: Would Jesus be fair?
  - c. Jesus assured Peter and the disciples that they will be rewarded – but this parable teaches that the principle of "many who are first will be last and the last first" means that God may not reward as man expects.
28. In other words – we see things from a human perspective – that if you work 5 hours, you get paid for five hours; if you work for 8 hours you get paid for eight hours.
- a. And everyone has to be treated the SAME – we check our paycheck to make sure we got all of our hours, all of our overtime.
  - b. We want everything to be FAIR – which means I want to be paid for what I did, but it can also mean I don't want the other guy to be paid for what he didn't do.
29. So it raises the question – is God being fair??? No – God is not being "fair", He is being "gracious!"
- a. See if we look at the response of the "landowner", we can see that he did exactly what he said he would do – he kept his word paid each man what he had promised.
  - b. See we have this perspective of fairness that is really not biblical – we expect that if you bless John, then somehow it's wrong if you don't also bless Joe.
  - c. Well to quote Clint Eastwood – fairness aint got nuthin to do with it!
30. That is because this is GRACE – it is the essence of God's *grace*, He rewards and blesses man according to His will and His pleasure, which is not necessarily according to what men deserve.
- a. See if we really want what we 'deserve', we'd all burn in hell!
  - b. (like when I get stopped for speeding, I tell the officer "I don't want what I deserve, I want grace!")
  - c. The system of law is easy to figure out: you get what you deserve.
  - d. The system of grace is often foreign to us: God deals with us according to who *He* is, not according to who *we* are
31. Gotta remember - God's grace always operates righteously. He never does anything unfair in grace.

- a. God will never be *less than fair*, but does He reserves the right to be *more than fair* according to the pleasure and riches of His grace.

**Eph 1:7-12**

*7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth -- in Him. 11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.*

**BULLET #3**

**Principle #3 – It's never too late!**

32. The parable, I believe, reflects the early church as the early workers.
  - a. They had the hardest time, they were persecuted, many were killed, even burned, for their faith.
  - b. They were just luck enough – or unlucky enough - to be the ones who were on this earth when Christ came.
33. But others have come since – perhaps they didn't have to go through what the early church went through, today we live pretty peaceful and free lives as Christians.
  - a. And if God chooses to bless you with the same blessing as some of the early church, who had a much harder time, who are we to argue?
34. Another aspect here is that sometimes a person comes to the Lord later in life, and they can feel like they are not of use to the Lord.
  - a. "I wasted the best years of my life, no I have nothing to give"
  - b. Simply not true! Whether you are in the 'early morning', third hour, sixth hour, or the eleventh hour – I believe that the person who shows up and says "Lord point me in the right direction" has a place in the vineyard!
  - c. And don't disregard the MOST important ministry in the church – PRAYER. I believe that the more prayer that happens, the more God will move.
  - d. IF you dot have a lot of energy left, you certainly have a lot of "spiritual energy" left, and you can move mountains in the church!

**BULLET #4**

***Principle #4 – Surprise!***

**35. We think that Peter and the other apostles, the early church fathers, the great evangelists, will receive great and wonderful rewards in heaven.**

- a. When we think of all of these people that have made such a mark on the world for Christ, it can be a little intimidating.**
- b. We might even become apathetic about the “Bema Seat” of rewards that Paul talks about in 2 Cor 5, as we think we’ll be sitting in the five millionth row back! Talk about a nose bleed section!**
- c. But Jesus has told us that He does not reward the way man does.**

**36. I believe there will be some real surprises in heaven!**

- a. Some of the people we think will get the lions share of the awards might be deep in the crowd, cheering the ladies that were prayer warriors,**
- b. The men who took care of the widows and orphans, the ones who are right now changing diapers in the nursery... they will be brought to the front!**
- c. Truly the last will be first!**

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