

The Wage of God

Matthew 20:1-16

MPS God's wage is one of favor above what is fair; He gives grace generously to all who believe in Jesus.

OBJ Three truths about the Kingdom of God that compel faith in Jesus to receive the riches of God's generous grace.

READ Matthew 20:1-16

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' ⁵So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' ⁷They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' ⁸And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' ⁹And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, ¹²saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' ¹³But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first last."

Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus tells a parable to teach about the kingdom of heaven. A master of a house goes out early to find laborers for his vineyard. He agrees with the laborers for a denarius a day and sends them into the vineyard. A few hours later he saw others standing idle in the marketplace and he said to them, *"You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you."* They went as well. He repeats this at the sixth and ninth hour and hires more workers. Finally, at the eleventh hour, the very end of the work day, he goes out again, finds others standing and asks, *"Why do you stand here idle all day?"* They respond that no one has hired them. Satisfied by their answer, he sends them into the vineyard. At the end of the day, the master of the house instructs his foreman to call the laborers in and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first. Those hired last, at the eleventh hour, received a denarius. When those who were hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but they also received a denarius. This did not make them happy. They grumbled at the master of the house, stating, *"These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat."* The master of the house responds that he did not do them any wrong, but paid them what they agreed to, and tells them to take what belongs to them and go. The master of the house gives to the last laborer by his own choosing. And his choice was that though they did not work a full day, and some barely any of the day, he paid them a full day's wage. And he asks those who are grumbling, *"Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? So the last will be first, and the first last."* And with this last statement, Jesus completes his parable on the kingdom of God.

TRANS **Anyone need a job? Some days are better than others. Would you work for this person?** [Hold that answer.] Take a moment to let this lesson settle with you. IF you are going to understand this parable, and subsequently the Kingdom of God, you must be careful to understand what is being said, AND, careful not to infer what is NOT being said. **The best day is the one marked by God's grace and generosity.**

Matthew places this parable immediately following Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler. In this encounter, the rich young ruler presumed he could enter heaven by his good deeds, of which by his record he had done them all. But the deed Jesus mentioned, selling all his treasure and giving it to the poor, made him sad as he walked away because he had great possessions and would not do it. Following this, Jesus tells his disciples that only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven, for it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Rightly acknowledging this as impossible, they are astonished and ask, *"Then who can be saved?"*, to which



Jesus replied that what is impossible with man is possible with God. Then Peter responds, *"We have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?"* Jesus' answer concludes, *"But many who are first will be last, and the last first."* Jesus teaches that the values by which the kingdom of God operate are not like the laws by which this world operates. The economy of God's kingdom is not like the world's economy, where we are compensated according to our labor and performance, merit and value. The economy of God's Kingdom transacts by His grace so that all who believe in Jesus are recipients of His generous favor, and not measured by what is fair. **God deals with people by grace, not by merit nor worldly measure, so to bestow His favor generously and not simply give what is fair. Grace is greater than fair. God never gives less than fair; grace is always far greater. But if you will not trust, you will be left to grumble. Do you prefer "fair" or "favor"?**

God's wage is one of favor above what is fair; He gives grace generously to all who believe in Jesus.

We have to remember that Jesus is teaching about the Kingdom of God here, and not about worldly practices. The parable relates to something we can all understand, to try and help us with what we struggle to understand. And one thing we struggle to understand is how the kingdom of God operates.

OBJ Three truths about the Kingdom of God that compel faith in Jesus to receive the riches of God's generous grace.

1. God gives the riches of His generous grace to all who humble themselves and believe in Jesus.

Understanding what Jesus means when he states, *"the last will be first, and the first last."*, is not about the time of our arrival into the kingdom, but understanding HOW one enters the Kingdom. In calling his twelve disciples, Jesus said, *"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."*(Matthew 9:13) James tells us, *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* If one will not humble themselves and confess their sin before God, they cannot receive the Kingdom of God. **Humility is essential to believe and enter the Kingdom of God. Will you humble yourself today and respond to God's invitation to believe in Jesus?**

2. Grace produces increasing joy for God's generosity shown to others in welcoming them into the Kingdom.

This parable celebrates the richness of God's generosity that He bestows by His grace, the currency of His Kingdom. God is gracious and generous, not giving to us what we deserve, but because of His generosity, He gives what we do not deserve. Grace does not mean that God's favor is in any way unfair. The parable makes this very plain and clear by the master's words, *"Friend, I am doing you no wrong."* The laborers who worked a full day for a wage were in no way wronged. They only received what they earned because they saw the Master as nothing more than a way to make a wage, and not his generosity to bless those with favor undeserved. And as long as they were deserving of their wage, or first, in their own eyes, they would always forsake the master's generosity of grace in their lives. God is never limited by what worldly fairness determines as right or good, because what He bestows flows from His love to all who believe in Him. God's grace is never less than fair, it simply is not limited by what any worldly or human economy would determine as "fair". **God blesses out of the abundance of His riches to produce joy and gratitude in the one who believes to receive. The world's wage may pay your bills and provide some pleasure in this life, but only God's wage erase your sin's debt and bring you into His kingdom.**

Some might say, "But they were upset because they had been in the vineyard all day, and the others only arrived at the day's end." Yes, this makes perfect sense in worldly terms, and that is exactly Jesus' point. While they spent the whole day in the vineyard, they missed the blessing of the vineyard by ignoring the generosity of the master. The longer they worked, the more they moved up in the ranks, earned "seniority", and became worthy of the wage they were paid. This is not how the Kingdom of heaven works. **In the Kingdom, we become more like the king, not more worthy of the King's riches.**

Jesus is teaching about the Kingdom of God. The longer one lives in the Kingdom, the more grace fills with gratitude in our own lives and joy for the lives of others! This is why Luke records Jesus' words that tell us, *"there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."*(Luke 15:7) A life of joy and gratitude has no room for grumbling. Grumbling and gratitude can never coexist. Grumbling is the language of sin, the vocalization of our unrighteousness, and the surrender of our vocal cords to Satan's vocabulary of condemnation. Anyone can grumble because all have the unrighteousness that produces it. Grumbling tells you that you need a pit stop,



because your gratitude tank is empty. [Grumbling will always cause you to miss the glory of God's generosity, first for others but ultimately for you as well.](#)

Comparison is the killer of contentment, and the thief of joy and gratitude. Only the one who is full of grace celebrates others who enter the kingdom by grace. Grace fuels greater gratitude for God's generosity, while selfish greed produces begrudging and grumbling toward others. The longer you are part of God's Kingdom the more you refuse to grumble, and celebrate God's grace to all who come in. [You know you have received God's grace when gratitude and joy is produced by God's generosity toward others.](#)

Finally, we need not worry about advancement in God's Kingdom. We do not move from last to first in the Kingdom. We trust the riches of His grace! Therefore, we remain faithful to move more deeply into His grace and enjoy the riches of all that His generosity produces in us, joy and gratitude! Christian, be careful that you do not allow yourself to come to believe that God is beholden to you for any amount of service or life. There is a danger in that the longer we follow Jesus, the greater sin's temptation to think we earned it, or deserve more than we receive, like another we've compared ourselves to. This remains a constant temptation unto deception, that leads in deconstruction. We don't need to be "better negotiators", but more humble servants of God. [All of life is a gift of His mercy and grace.](#)

[3. God is searching today, inviting all who will believe, and it is not too late to come into God's Kingdom.](#)

There is not a moment when God is not searching for more to invite into His Kingdom. Even on the cross, Jesus welcomed the thief into the Kingdom. And this was with his dying breath, with NO TIME to do any good deed for God on this earth. God doesn't look at our deeds or the merit of our lives and give us what we earn and deserve. God looks at the cross of Jesus Christ to give us what He has secured for us, eternal life. And God is searching and inviting today!

CLOSE The only way we really have a problem with this parable is this: if you see yourself as the first. If you see yourself as a "last", then you love this parable. When it comes to God's grace, you don't deserve it, and you can't earn it – but God freely and generously gives it to all who trust in Jesus. And best of all – the Master is out looking for those today who stand idly by in great need of it. [Is that you? God invites each one of you today into His Kingdom of abundant grace and rich generosity!](#)

