

The Parable of the Vineyard Workers

Matt 20:1 “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. 2 After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

Early in the morning is probably about 6:00am.

The word **agreeing** is important! These men knew ahead of time what they were going to receive, and they decided to work for that amount. This is a perfectly fair arrangement.

A **denarius** is the wage for a full day’s labor, and that’s what they agreed to receive.

Matt 20:3 And going out about the third hour (9am) he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, 4 and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’

Notice these workers aren’t told what they’d receive. They’re simply told, “**whatever is right I will give you.**”

These guys were desperate for work, so unlike the earlier workers, they just went without even trying to negotiate a price. Who goes to work when you don’t know what you’re getting paid?

Matt 20:5 So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour (1PM) and the ninth hour (3PM), he did the same. 6 And about the eleventh hour (5PM) he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ 7 They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’

These guys are really desperate for work. They waited **all day** and hadn’t been hired, so they went to work without negotiating or knowing what they’d be paid. They’ll take what they can get!

Matt 20:8 “And 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.’ 9 And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.

These guys must have been ecstatic for two reasons. Even though they only worked one hour:

1. They were paid first.
2. They were paid for a full day’s work.

Matt 20:10 Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. 11 And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house,

Was the landowner unfair? No, he gave them exactly what he agreed to give them. He’ll remind them of this in verses 13-15.

Notice something. Since the men received exactly what they were told they would receive they weren't angry for not receiving what they deserved, their anger stemmed from what others received. If the other workers, who hadn't worked as long, had received less money, these guys would have been happy. So what they were actually upset about isn't that they only received a denarius. What they were actually upset about is the fact these other guys received a denarius as well. They were angry about the grace shown to others.

Matt 20:12 saying, '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.'

One time some neighbors hired my brother and I to take care of their animals about the same time:

- I think I took care of some animals for two weeks and there wasn't much to do
- Jason took care of some animals for one month, and had a lot to do

When the people returned, they paid us what they agreed to pay us, but I received more and Jason was understandably upset.

Now, there is a part of all of us that completely understand where these guys are coming from. It's the exact same part of us that understands where the other brother in the Prodigal Son story is coming from!

Notice the words, "**heat of the day.**" The people who started work later didn't have to endure that. You're told that to see how it looks even more unfair.

If we understand this is a parable about grace though, by definition grace is not fair. Grace is unmerited favor. It is receiving what you don't deserve!

This is a parable about salvation and not about rewards. Jesus teaches another parable about rewards, The Parable of the Talents, and in that parable people receive different rewards. Earlier in responding to Peter, in 19:28-29, He told the disciples they had a special reward as well as all those who'd made sacrifices to follow Him.

It almost looks like these parables contradict each other until we see they're about different things. How can they both be true?

There are a few things every believer receives regardless of when he gets saved ("starts work") and those are forgiveness for their sins, Christ's righteousness, and eternity with the LORD in heaven. But it would also be true to say that although heaven will be great for everyone, it will be different for each person based on the rewards each person receives.

In **Matt 19:29** He says, "**shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life**" showing that people received rewards and eternal life; this parable is only about eternal life.

When I first became a Christian and I started sharing the Gospel with my family, one of the most frequent criticisms I received was, "Oh, right, you're telling me if I just say some prayer at the end of my life and put my faith in Christ then I'm going to be saved? What about all these people who have

lived wickedly their entire lives? They can just get to the end of their lives and get saved just like this and that's it?"

If you really, really believe you're saved by God's grace, you can't get angry toward others who are also saved by God's grace whether at the beginning or end of their lives. It's a failure to recognize God's grace that leads to that anger.

Who is the premier example in the Bible of the man who only worked an hour and got his pay? The thief on the cross. He'll enjoy the full benefits of heaven as much as people who were saved most of their lives.

Matt 20:13 But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?'

He says, *"Didn't you get exactly what I promised you? Then don't call me unfair!"*

Matt 20:14 Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you.

Notice the words, **"I choose."** That is the only explanation given for why the landowner did what he did. The reasons for the landowner's generosity were known only to the landowner, and not in the recipients.

It's almost like **Rom 9:14-19** where God explains He has mercy on who He wants.

Matt 20:15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?'

Since God is the one pouring out the grace as He sees fit, He can give out as much as He wants to whomever He wants.

The **"evil eye"** was a phrase in use among Jews to denote an envious, covetous disposition, so this is a rebuke to people who look at others and are jealous of the grace they've received in their lives.

The guy who started work at the end of the day is like the thief on the cross getting saved at the end of his life.

Matt 20:16 So the last will be first, and the first last."

Jesus repeats the point He made to Peter at the very beginning in **Matt 19:30**.