



The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)

Have you ever asked someone, “What’s in it for me?” Oftentimes, we approach God with this same question. That’s what Peter asked Jesus who answered with His parable, *The Workers in the Vineyard* (see Matthew 20:1-16).

Flanked by Peter and the rest of the disciples, Jesus had just encountered the rich, young ruler who was unwilling to sell his possessions and be generous to the poor (see Matthew 19:16-22). Jesus had told His disciples how difficult it was for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, but with God’s grace, all things were possible (see Matthew 19:23-26). Then Peter reacted: “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” (Matthew 19:27). Jesus responded with a story.

The Service is Varied (Matthew 20:1-7). Jesus began His parable likening the kingdom of heaven to a landowner of a vineyard who needed workers at harvest. He went out early to hire men to work, agreeing to pay the customary day’s wage of a denarius. They would work from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

A little before 9:00 a.m., the landowner hired more workers, agreeing to pay them “whatever is right” (Matthew 20:3-4). He did the same thing at about 12:00 p.m., again at 3:00 p.m., and yet again at 5:00 p.m. with only an hour remaining in the workday (see Matthew 20:5-7). Among the tired workers whose length of service had varied, a sense of urgency filled the air as a result of the bumper crop.

Street Smarts for the Restoration Road

Do you find yourself comparing kingdom service among fellow believers, somehow ranking their impact? Stop comparing and begin to recognize that each person is unique. Consequently, every believer’s relationship with God will look slightly different in their style of kingdom service. Today, seek God and pray, “Help me see your restorative work in the lives of every person I meet.”

The Reward is Generous (Matthew 20:8-12). When 6:00 p.m. rolled around, it was time to pay the workers. The landowner asked his foreman to call in the laborers and pay them their wages for the day, which was customary in the Law (see Deuteronomy 24:14-15). However, the landowner did something unc customary. He paid the one-hour workers first with a full day’s wage! The first group who had worked the entire day in the hot sun saw what had happened. They compared their service to that of the latecomers.

Eagerly expecting more, they began to grumble when they received only their originally agreed-upon per diem of a denarius.

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Do you see God's eternal reward among all believers as unfair? Do you want certain persons who have served Him longer to receive more of a reward, either here on earth or on the other side? Pray the following to your Heavenly Father: "God, thank you for your immeasurable grace that saved a sinner like me. You are a gracious and generous God."

The Motive is Revealed (Matthew 20:13-16). The landowner responded to one of the grumblers from the first group hired, revealing their motive: "Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" (Matthew 20:13-15). Whereas the latecomers had served the landowner with an attitude of gratitude, the first group had served themselves.

Jesus concluded the parable with the same point He used to begin it: "So the last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:16). God's grace in Christ evens the score with everyone (see 2 Corinthians 8:9). It's a tie. In fact, we are all the latecomers in the parable, and His grace of abundant and eternal life compels us to serve the Landowner with an attitude of gratitude (see Matthew 19:28-30).

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This week, don't use your gifts to serve yourself; rather, use them to serve God as you generously administer His grace to those you encounter (see 1 Peter 4:10). Do so with an attitude of gratitude.

Conclusion

When we receive God's unmerited favor, His undeserved love, we recognize that kingdom service is varied among those who walk this earth, yet His reward is generous to all, and our motive to serve Christ is revealed. An attitude of gratitude represents the heart of someone who has truly received God's amazing grace.