

Matthew 20:1-16

The Parable of the Vineyard Workers

We are starting a new chapter today, Matthew Chapter 20. Matthew 20:1-16 is our focal point this morning.

You will remember that in Matthew chapters 5 through 25 Matthew presents five sermons. The other chapters in between are supportive chapters of those sermons. Matthew Chapter 18 was Sermon number 4, The Sermon on Relationships but in chapters 19 through 22 we have The Ministry of Relationships. So first He gives the teaching on it, and then He expresses and performs the ministry of relationships with the people as they travel. Remember He is heading toward Jerusalem, towards His crucifixion. And so He is on His way to Jerusalem, and He has these various relationships that He deals with.

In Matthew 20:1-16 we have The Parable of the Vineyard Workers. Two things about this parable:

First of all the parable is a continuation of Matthew 19:16-30 about the Rich Young Ruler. It is a continuation. We know that because at the end of chapter 19 at verse 30 Jesus said, "Many first will be last, and the last will be first." We will put that in context in a moment. The first will be last and the last will be first. Over in Matthew 20:16 we have the same statement only the phrases are put in reverse, "In this way the last will be first, and the first will be last." So we have these statements acting as bookends around this parable showing that it is a continuation of chapter 19 verses 16 through 30.

Secondly, notice in verse 1 of our text for today, the first word is the word *for*. That is a conjunction of explanation in the Greek text, **γάρ** (gar), conjunction of explanation, which shows the continuation that it does belong to the incident at the end of chapter 19. *For* is explaining what He means by "the first will be last, and the last will be first."

This whole incident is surrounded around the rich young ruler, who came to Jesus and wanted to know what he needed to do to be saved. Jesus relayed to him the last five commandments of The Ten Commandments and the rich young ruler said, "All of these have I kept from my youth." But Jesus purposely did not mention the first four commandments, all having to do with a relationship with the Lord. The last five having to do with a relationship with fellow man. One of those last commandments, there is actually six of them, Jesus did not mention, did not include. But five out of the last six He included, and the rich young ruler said, "All of these I have kept from my youth." And Jesus said, "Well, sell all that you have, and give to the poor, and come and follow Me, and you will have your inheritance in heaven." And the rich young ruler left sorrowful, grieving, because he had great possessions that he could not give up. You see what Jesus did was instead of quoting the commandments, the first four, He put His finger on the very thing in the young man's life that the young man served with his life, it was his god: his possessions and his wealth. And Jesus said, "You do well for your fellow man and with your fellow man, but with your life you are serving your wealth and your possessions. Go sell

all of that and come and follow Me, then your life will be set right." But he grieved because he had many possessions.

And so Peter looking at this - and the rest of the disciples - Jesus looked at them and He said, "How hard it is for rich man to enter into heaven." He says, "It is harder for a rich man to enter into heaven than a camel to pass through the eye of a needle," and so they said, "Well then who can be saved? It is impossible." Because they held, just like we hold in our day, and it is part of the Christian culture within our worldly culture that we live in, that you are blessed by God and have God's approval if you are wealthy, if you are doing well, if you are healthy, and your life is going well for you. And so if a rich man cannot enter into heaven unless it is with great difficulty, that is, giving up what he has piled up for himself, they said, "Then who can be saved?" Certainly, they held in their day that the rich are blessed by God because they are not sinning and because they are doing what is right in the eyes of God. And that the poor people are poor because they have done wrong, and they are in sin. We have that same kind of philosophy in our culture, that materially and financially and health wise you will be doing good if you are doing right in the presence of God; but if not, then God's judgment is and will be upon you.

So Peter says in verse 27 of chapter 19, "Behold, we have left everything to follow You. So what is it going to be for us?" Now there is no correction here even though he is bragging a bit, and we will see later on in Matthew that they are going to be arguing over who is the greatest, yet once again. **And Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that you who followed Me, in the regeneration whenever the Son of Man should sit upon the throne of His glory, you yourselves also will sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."** So you are going to have a part. You have given up everything to follow Me. He was telling Peter, "You are right." **And everyone who left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or fathers, or mothers, or wives, or children, or lands, on account of My name, will receive a hundred-times more, and will inherit eternal life.** You cannot give up and not receive back from God blessing. **But many first will be last, and the last will be first.** So what seems first to us in our human evaluation is last in the eyes of the Lord. And what seems last in our human evaluation is first in the eyes of the Lord. So carrying our human judgment and ability to evaluate is from our culture and from our flesh, and goes against most, if not all, of what is of the Lord and what is right in His eyes. And so He goes on to say after making that last comment, **Many first will be last, and the last will be first.**

Verse 1, **For the kingdom of Heaven is like a man, who is a housemaster.** In the Greek text it just mentions *a man, a housemaster*, emphasizing the humanness of this parable. This is not a majestic parable about heaven. This is how the kingdom of heaven operates in light of how the human operates right here on the earth.

For the kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a housemaster who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. *Early in the morning to hire workers for the vineyard* is around 6 am. We are dealing with Roman time throughout this parable and the Roman time is broken up into segments of three hours. So at 6 am the vineyard owner goes out early to hire workers for his vineyard.

And when he agreed with the workers for a denarius for the day. Some of you have the King James text and it uses the word *penny*, "a penny for one day." It is the Greek word **δηναρίου** (denarius). It is a silver Roman coin that was valued at one day's wage in those days. So, **he agreed with the workers for a denarius for the day**, for working for the day, **and he sent them out into his vineyard.**

Verse 3, verses 3-4, this next group. **And when he went out about the third hour.** So this would be about 9 am in the morning. First group at 6, three hours later at 9. **He saw others standing in the marketplace, and he said to those, "You yourselves also go into the vineyard, and whatever should be just..."** The word *right* in the English text is the legal term for *justice*; whatever is right. **"Whatever is just, I will give it to you," and they went.** I do not know if I would go out if somebody told me, "I will give you whatever is fair." Yeah, what does that mean? But the vineyard operator said to this group at 9 o'clock in the morning, "Go out into the vineyard and work, at the end of the day I will give you whatever is right."

Verse 5, the next group, **And again, having gone out about the sixth and ninth hour, he did likewise.** So we went out at noon, and he went out at 3 in the afternoon and repeated this cycle to a group of people who were unemployed, standing idle, in the marketplace. "If you go out into my vineyard and work, I will give you whatever is right, whatever is just."

And then the next group, the fourth group, verses 6 and 7, **And having gone out about the eleventh hour.** This would be 5 pm. The end of the day is at 6 pm, so this is an hour before quitting time. **At the eleventh hour he found others who had been standing idle, and he says to them, "Why have you stood here idle the whole day?" And they said to him, "Because no one hired us." He says to them, "You yourselves also go into the vineyard, and whatever should be just (whatever should be right) I will give to you."** Only got an hour left in the workday, so **"Whatever should be just (or right) you will receive."**

So then, The Calling of the Workers. We have had, The Collection of the Workers and now verses 8 through 10, The Calling of the Workers for their pay. **So when it became evening, the lord of the vineyard.** Now he is called *the lord of the vineyard*, he is not called *a housemaster* anymore, he is called *the lord of the vineyard*. **He says to his foreman (or supervisor), "Call the workers and pay them the wage, after having begun from the last until the first."** Notice how I emphasized: *after having begun from the last until the first*. These little phrases are going to be brought together for us in the end about the last and the first. So he says, "Bring everybody in and pay the last workers first, and the first workers that I hired pay them last."

And when the ones came, verse 9 already, **and when the ones had come who were hired around the eleventh hour, they received each a denarius.** A day's wage. These are the ones who only worked an hour; they received a day's wage. **And having come, the first ones...** Everybody got paid up to the ones who were called out at the 6 o'clock hour in the morning. **They came and they supposed (or presumed) that they will receive more.** Now I would too. They sent them out to work one hour and they got a day's wage, even though they promised me a day's wage, I presume I am going to get more because I worked the whole day. **And they**

themselves also each received a denarius, a day's wage. Everybody who worked from 6 am until 6 pm received a denarius, one day's wage.

Verses 11 and 12 The Complaining of the Workers. **And after they received it**, that is, those who were first and called out at 6 in the morning, **they murmured** (or complained) **against the housemaster saying, "These last ones worked one hour, and you made them equal to us."** That is the point of the parable by the way, *equal*. **"You made them equal to us. We, the ones who have carried the burden of the day and the heat** (the scorching heat)."
You made them equal to us and they only worked one hour.

The Correcting of the Workers in verses 13 through 16. **But when he answered**, this would be the vineyard owner, **he said to one of them**, probably the one who is the spokesman for the whole group. **He says, "Friend, I am not doing you wrong."**

Now what is interesting here, just to add a little color to things, the word *friend* is not the normal Greek word for *friend*, **φιλέω** (phileō), it is a word that is used in two different instances in the New Testament:

- 1) It is used if you do not know someone's name and you are just speaking to someone out of the general crowd, "Hey friend, how you doing?" and you do not know their name.
- 2) Or it was even used for Judas Iscariot when he came out to the garden. The betrayal of Jesus in Matthew 22:14. "Friend, why have you come out here?" is what Jesus said to Judas when he was leading the soldiers out to betray Jesus out in the garden.

So *friend* does not mean someone that you are BFFs with. He is acknowledging this group, and he is addressing them by saying, **"Friend, I am not doing you wrong."** It is in the present tense; *I am not doing you wrong*.

The word *wrong* is the word *injustice* in the Greek text. And these technical points are what bring out the meaning of these texts for us. We could come up, maybe, with something different, and there are probably other things within the parable that we could bring out that it is teaching; but it is bringing out the lord's justice system. He told the field workers from the ninth hour, noon, 3 o'clock, and 5 o'clock, "You go out and work and I will give you what is just. I will give you what is right." And then he turns around and tells them in their complaint, "I have not treated you unjustly. I have not treated you with injustice here. I am not doing you wrong." **Did you not agree with me for a denarius?** Of course they did. The first group, they agreed to go out and work for a denarius. Did they get the denarius? Yes. What were the others promised? What was right. But they also got the denarius.

He says to this group, verse 14, **"Take that which is yours and go."** This parallels the rich young ruler at the end of chapter 19; who had his material goods and his possessions and Jesus said, "Go sell, and give all that you have to the poor, and come and follow Me," and he could not, He had great possessions. These also could not follow the lord based on what they perceived to be injustice. In case you have not noticed it yet, their complaint of injustice runs parallel with a lot of what we think a lot of the times about the Lord's justice and how He treats

people and how He treats us. In light of the fact that we are His people, and yet there are others who do not know Him that are seemingly treated better than the hardships that we go through.

Take that which is yours (verse 14) and go. Another technical point, notice this, **But I will to give** - not *I will give, I will to give*. **It is My will to give this last worker as also I did to you.** The same denarius. **Or is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my things?** English text reads there *desire* and it makes it sound like the lord just felt like doing this, *it is his desire*. It is his will in his justice system in this case to treat everyone equal. Interesting. The lord's will is His choice. "I choose to do it this way, that is my will."

Next he says, **Or is your eye evil, because I am good?** Stop and think about it. Instead of me (the lord) being wrong and being evil. **Or is your eye the evil one?** How you see things, is it evil because I do things good? Wow. That is the problem, when we do not see things the way the Lord sees things. We are pulling this together here in a moment.

Verse 16. I do not want you to think that Pastor Bill went twenty minutes and took sixteen verses, and we are finished. We are going to pull this all together here in a moment. We are here for at least another 45 minutes. Make up for last week, I gave you last week off, so this week....

In this way (verse 16) the last will be first, and the first will be last. Whatever seems to be best (or *first*) to us in the human is usually last with the Lord. And what seems to be last, or what would be considered last, or the thing that the Lord would do at the least, is first in the Lord's eyes. And then you will notice at the end of verse 16 there is a phrase there that is bracketed in your literal translation because it is not in a lot of the original manuscripts. It is in chapter 22 verse 14. **[For many are called, but few chosen.]** The Textus Receptus has it, for the King James, but the others do not. **[For many are called, but few chosen.]**

Justice. His will is what is right. And whatever I have learned, whatever I have been raised to learn what is right, is probably wrong in evaluating the way God does things. All are equal in God's eyes. Catch this now, the equality is that God's justice for His grace is equal to everyone. God's justice in ministering His grace is equal to everyone. Everyone gets treated equal. It might not seem fair in the human because God is pouring out His grace even to those who do not deserve it even the more.

But few are chosen. The rich young ruler was called. These workers in the marketplace were called but were rejected. *Take your things and leave.* That is all you care about, is your things. I want to have grace on you. I want to have grace on these people, and you do not see that. You do not receive that. You do not receive My grace. Grace is not earned. Grace is given. In God's justice system He calls, He invites; but when it is rejected, they are not chosen. And what seems to be right, you know the rich young ruler - the disciples thought rich people are definitely blessed of God, they are the ones that are going to heaven, look how blessed they are of God with their material things. "But if rich people can't get into heaven, then we are doomed," the disciples thought.

The Gentiles thought the Jews were first. They are first, they are God's chosen people. But there will be many Gentiles, in fact that last phrase, "for many are called but few are chosen," which is original in Matthew 22:14, is alongside of the teaching about there will be many of the Jews who will be cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Many who think they are first are going to be last. Many think they are privileged because of religious position or right standing with God. A Hebrew or Jewish person must repent, as well as a Gentile. A Hebrew or Jewish person must be born again, the same as a Gentile. And the poor lowly Gentile who has no privileges and no promises other than if he repents, he can receive the Spirit of God, to that person who humbly comes before God.

Much like that incident where Jesus spoke in the temple where the Pharisee, the religious leader, was standing there praying. And there was a tax collector sinner, over praying. And the tax collector sinner was over there, could not even lift up his eyes towards God, and said to God, "God be merciful to me a sinner." But the Pharisee heard him and saw him over there and said to God, "God, I am glad I am not like this tax collector sinner. I am glad I am not like this sinner. I am glad I am a Pharisee. I am glad I am a Jew, a chosen person of God."

He who is first is last in spiritual evaluation. A Jew must come humbly. A Jew must come realizing their need for Christ. A Jew must come and take their rightful position. Interesting, the humility of a Jew is shown by how they take their position alongside of the Gentile who is saved. Equal. Equal grace. Cannot earn it. A person cannot deserve more grace than someone else. He pours His grace upon everyone who responds to the invitation, who comes. And those who come to receive God's grace are the chosen.

A lesson for us because we wrestle with dealing with what is fair with God. Not all the time do we agree that God's fair in dealing with me or dealing with other people. And yet God is fair. He is just. He is righteous in everything that He does because He has a will, and He has a purpose and that is to pour out His grace. He wants people to respond to His grace. And if they do not respond to that, they will be rejected. He presents hope and creates hope for everyone. It is not how good we are. It is even how bad we are. We can come and receive God's grace, even alongside of the person who seems to be the one who deserves. The one who is not deserving of it gets His equal grace poured out to them at repentance.

Let's close with prayer.