

The Day Laborer Parable 8-21-05

Matthew 20:1-16 (NIV)

¹ "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard.² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.³ "About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing.⁴ He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.'⁵ So they went. "He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing.⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?'⁷ "Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'⁸ "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'⁹ "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius.¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius.¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner.¹² 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'¹³ "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?'¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you.¹⁵ Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'¹⁶ "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

We are going to take this parable verse by verse and try to understand what Jesus was saying to His disciples and to us today. It is helpful to remember that the last account was of the rich young ruler. Jesus told him to sell everything and come follow Him. He couldn't let go of his god of wealth, so he went away sad. Jesus told the disciples that it was hard for the rich to enter the kingdom. They were amazed because they thought wealth was the blessing of God. Jesus explained that those who were first in this life would be last in the next and vice versa. Then he told this parable in regards to that expression about the last being first and the first last and ended by repeating the expression.

¹ "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard.

Jesus is the only one who came down from heaven to tell us the way God sees His kingdom. (John 3:12-13) Many of the parables are about the kingdom of heaven. The term is used interchangeably with the kingdom of God, salvation, and being a child of God. It is something that we can begin to live in right now, but the culmination of which takes place at the Second Coming. The landowner is God. The vineyard is the same as in many other parables. It represents this world. In Matthew 9, Jesus looked out at the masses coming to Him and He told the disciples to pray for more laborers to bring in the harvest. In Matthew 13, He told a parable in which He described the field as the world. (Matthew 13:38) The difference in this parable is that Jesus is making a point of the wages paid.

Commented [notes1]: ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man. John 3:12-13 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Matthew 9:37-38 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, Matthew 13:38 (NIV)

Peter had just asked what they would receive for giving up everything to follow Him.
² *He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.*
They made a deal to be paid a denarius. That was the equivalent of a day's wage for a Roman soldier. It was enough to meet your needs for a day.

If you go to Windsong Trailer Park at anytime of the day you can find laborers waiting to be hired. You make an agreement for their wages and they will come or refuse depending on the work and the wage. Some workers want lunch included. Others want a full day's work and don't want an hour or two. In most cities around the world this same type of arrangement exists as it has for thousands of years.

Jesus is telling us the kingdom of heaven is like that. God comes along and asks you if you want to work. (That has nothing to do with your salvation. It is an opportunity do something meaningful.) The day is your life. The evening is eternity. You agree upon Him meeting all your need, both physical and spiritual for eternity. That is our denarius. But to live in the presence of God your need is very great. It is salvation from your sins, but it is also transformation into God's likeness. **1 John 3:2** tells us that when we see Him we will be like Him for we will see Him as He is. He is going to complete the work He has begun in us. **(Philippians 1:6)** We will then consistently exhibit the fruits of the Spirit. We will forevermore overflow with love, joy, peace, patience and all the other fruits. We will be holy as He is holy. There will be no more struggles with the destructiveness of sin. That is your day's wage. That is the culmination of your salvation. It is a beyond our comprehension, yet we know it is coming. To get the fullness of the parable you have to grasp that concept. When evening comes, we will all have that very great need. Jesus comes to us and offers to meet that need that we could never meet ourselves. **(Hebrews 12:14)**

³ *"About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing."* ⁴ *He told them, "You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right."* ^{5a} *So they went.*

Around 9AM the landowner found some more people waiting for work. They didn't agree on an amount. He just said he would pay what was right. There are a few times when a vineyard needs a lot of work. There is pruning season. Grapes need severe pruning and all the prunings are piled and burned. There is the summer of weeding after good rains, and finally the harvest. The laborers are going out and bringing in the bundles of grapes and some may be crushing them for the juice to make wine. It is a joyous time, but it is very hard work.

^{5b} *"He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing."*

⁶ *"About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?'"* ⁷ *"Because no one has hired us," they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'"*

At noon and at 3PM and at 5PM he rounded up more laborers. Either this landowner had a bumper crop, or he had a heart for the unemployed, or both. I suspect it is both. There is a bumper crop of souls that need to know the kingdom is at hand.

Commented [notes4]: ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.
1 John 3:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ¹⁴ Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.
Hebrews 12:14 (NIV)

(Matthew 4:17) They are waiting to find out what life is about. They are ready to repent of sin and enter the kingdom. They are waiting to become laborers themselves. They see the joy on your face as you work in the vineyard, and they want some of that purpose and peace they see in you.

Commented [notes7]: ¹⁷From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."
Matthew 4:17 (NIV)

I'm so glad that the Landowner employs me. While on vacation we saw people that seemed to have it all. They had no need to work. They just tried to find ways to fill their leisure time as they served themselves. I was anxious to get home and get back to working at things that serve an eternal purpose. (Galatians 6:9) I immensely enjoyed my vacation, but I'm glad I have work waiting for me in the vineyard. Have you accepted the call to work in the vineyard?

Commented [notes8]: ⁹Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.
Galatians 6:9 (NIV)

Think, for a moment, about these laborers that waited until late in the day. They probably thought they wanted a different kind of work. They may have not wanted to work at all. As the day progressed, they started to recognize their need. They knew the day was about over, and they were not going to have what they needed for evening. It surprises me that they were willing. After all, they just had one hour to left; why go to the trouble? They had hardened themselves to the call for so long that they could have easily gone on making excuses. Would they ever go? But they did! Have you ever seen someone in their last days receive Jesus? It happens. They say, "No one hired us." Really? Or did they just keep turning down offers. Whatever the case, the landowner sent them to work and they finally accepted the offer.

Jumping back to the application to real life, Jesus meets people late in life and asks, "Have you been standing around here all day long doing nothing?" Isn't that a great description for a soul without the knowledge of God and His purpose in their life? (Mark 8:36) That is where He met the thief on the cross. Are you standing around doing nothing or are you laboring in the vineyard? Have you found your purpose and the call of God on your life? It is so easy to get busy doing nothing and miss it. This is the black and white view from the kingdom of heaven. Are you laboring for what is eternal, or standing around doing nothing like those retired vacationers, or those day laborers that turned down work?

Commented [notes9]: ³⁶For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?
Mark 8:36 (KJV)

We sometimes think work in the vineyard is some type of Christian ministry. I believe Jesus is speaking to the motivation and direction of our life. I can drive a truck for Jesus or drive it for me. I can be an entrepreneur for the kingdom of God or for me. Hey, I can even preach for the kingdom of heaven or for Paul Wallace. (1 Corinthians 10:31) Whose field are you working in?

Commented [notes10]: ³¹So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
1 Corinthians 10:31 (NIV)

⁸ "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.'

Remember, Jesus is addressing Peter's question of what the disciples would receive for leaving all to follow Him. He ended that conversation by saying the first would be last and the last first. In this parable, the laborers hired at the end of the day are called up first to the pay desk. Jesus is the foreman that is distributing the pay.

⁹ "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius.

Wow! Everyone who leaves all to labor in the landowner's vineyard receives all they need for eternal life in the presence of their Maker. Even the deathbed convert will be transformed into the image of Christ. (Romans 8:29) It is necessary for heavenly existence. If one person there is less than the likeness of Christ, it wouldn't be heaven for everyone else. (Revelation 22:3-4)

¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'

Did Peter think the disciples deserved more than someone who left all to follow Christ later in life? We would naturally grumble if the person who worked for an hour got the same payment as those of us who worked 12 hard, hot hours in the sun. We are exhausted from a long day of labor. These last minute people never broke a sweat. The disciples seemed to forever be arguing about who would be greatest or get the highest position. (Mark 10:37)

This is the wrong mindset. First of all, it says that labor for the landowner deserves anything. We are obligated. (1 Corinthians 4:7) The landowner is the one who meets our needs. The alternative is doing nothing. We should be thankful for the work in the kingdom. Secondly, what a sad commentary on the greed of our hearts if we want more than we need. Instead of rejoicing that all the laborers had their needs met, I'm whining about how I deserve more than my needs. Is that guy who converted while on death row going to have the same salvation that I do? Does the thief on the cross inherit the same eternal life the disciples do? We better hope so, because it doesn't have anything to do with how much we labor. (Titus 3:5) Eternal life is Jesus! (1 John 5:11) If we are children of God, if we answered the call, God will finish the work He started so that we can dwell in His presence. We should be thankful that God is so gracious. If it was based on merit, it would be impossible.

Peter had said, "We left all to follow You. What will we have?" This parable says they would have the same wonderful reward that everyone who accepts the call receives. We will be fit for heaven. We will be saved. The work will be completed. Quit with the comparisons and one-upmanship. Thank God our desperate need will be met. Anything short of perfection cannot continue to dwell in God's presence. You would be miserable. Nor would God allow you to remain there.

In other parables, such as the parable of the king who left his servants with money to invest and returned to make them rulers over cities, God has a unique reward according to our investment. (Matthew 25:14-15) That is something wonderful and unique according to our investment. But this parable is focusing on the gift we have in common; that is the main thing. Without this need being met, we couldn't have the other rewards anyway. Eternal Life is the reward that will cause our hearts to overflow for all eternity. The individual rewards are the icing on the cake.

Commented [notes11]: ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
Romans 8:29 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.
Revelation 22:3-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ³⁷ They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."
Mark 10:37 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: ⁷ For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?
1 Corinthians 4:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,
Titus 3:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ¹¹ And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.
1 John 5:11 (KJV)

Commented [notes17]: ¹⁴ "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.
Matthew 25:14-15 (NIV)

¹³ "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?' ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

The gracious generosity of God is what is being demonstrated here. Whenever you turn and follow Jesus, in contrast to the decision of the rich young ruler, (Matthew 19:22) you will receive all you need for eternity. Isn't that enough? Don't be envious that God is generous. That would mean we aren't sharing His heart of meeting the deepest need of mankind. That would mean we are looking at being in the kingdom now as hard labor instead of realizing the alternative is doing nothing. (Romans 8:18) We should be grateful to serve such a generous Master.

I believe laboring for something that lasts is a privilege. I see being in the kingdom now, experiencing the peace and love of God, as not a burden but a joy. Laboring in the vineyard of the Lord is high and holy honor. To release all your plans and goals to the One who formed you for a purpose is to find life, not lose it. (Matthew 16:25)

Finally, after explaining the gracious generosity of God to all who will receive Him, Jesus repeated that reality we find so hard to face.

¹⁶ "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Just to labor for the King of kings is a privilege. In one sense, those who went to work early were already receiving part of their reward. The ones who signed up at the last hour missed out on the joy of laboring for the King. That may be one reason they get their reward first at the end of the day. Another may be that God wants us to get a vision of how gracious He is to us. None of us deserves a bit of His grace, and so the last receive their reward first. It is like an exclamation point to His grace.

There may also be an application to the early workers being Jewish and the late workers being Gentile because of the jealousy mentioned. It does appear that may have had application in that first century. You can pursue that on your own. (Romans 2:10)

I believe the message for us today is God's incredible grace. It is grace that calls us from doing nothing to laboring in His vineyard. It is grace that promises to reward us for doing something that is fulfilling. It is grace that goes back and calls workers even until the last hour of the day. There are five calls to labor. Five is the number that represents grace. It is grace that called the last first to the pay desk. It is grace that God's reward for our labor is all we need to live in His awesome and holy presence.

Peter wanted to make comparisons about rewards. Jesus answered from heaven's perspective. If we could see the grace of God unhindered by our worldly vision so blurred by selfishness and petty issues, the reward of that denarius would cause us to fall to our knees in gratitude. You go first. I don't deserve a day's wage. Just to know we will one day stand in that line, just to have had the opportunity to labor for such a generous Master, should cause our hearts to overflow with gratitude. Have you answered the call or are you standing around doing nothing?

Commented [notes18]: ²² When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Matthew 19:22 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: ¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. Romans 8:18 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. Matthew 16:25 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: ¹⁰ But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: Romans 2:10 (KJV)