





PARABLES

Uncovering Good News

Parables are short stories with hidden layers of meaning. Jesus often borrows a phrase from the Old Testament when telling these stories: “whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” Sometimes the messages are clear, but other times the stories appear confusing and even out of place. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, there are no more parables! The gospel changes everything, including the way we read and understand these stories.

An outline of today's message

- 1 Quick overview of the parable
- 2 Read thru parable absorbing as much of the story as is beneficial to determine meaning.
- 3 See the twist. Feel the feels. Identify the problem. Then hear the landowner's words.
- 4 Let God transform your heart as we see his heart through this parable.



Matthew 20:1–2

The Setup

¹ “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

A painting depicting a rural scene with several people working in a field. In the foreground, three men are bent over, using tools to work the soil. One man is wearing a blue shirt and shorts, another is shirtless with dark shorts, and a third is wearing a light-colored shirt and shorts. In the background, a group of people is walking, and a man in a white robe and head covering is pointing towards the field. The landscape features trees and a bright sky. The word "workers" is written in white text inside a black rectangular box in the upper center of the image.

“workers”

Matthew 20:1-16

The story

³ “About nine in the morning 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 noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing.

Matthew 20:1-16 - The story continued

⁶ About five in the afternoon 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.'

The landowner recruited the first batch of labourers at about 6 a.m. These were probably the only labourers needed for the day, but he returned to recruit more at three-hourly intervals, including one at the *eleventh hour*, that is at 5 p.m., an hour before the end of the working day (20:2-7). The later groups were hired not so much because the landowner was desperate for more workers, but because they were standing there looking for work (20:3). It was their need and his generosity that determined their employment.

Joe Kapolyo
Africa Bible Commentary (Nairobi, Kenya; Grand Rapids, MI:
WordAlive Publishers; Zondervan, 2006), 1178.



Matthew 20:1-16

The Twist

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 five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius.

Matthew 20:1-16

Feel the feels. Identify the problem.

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 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.'

The point is not that the first workers are underpaid. The point is that the others are overpaid.

The owner gives them more than they expect and deserve.

Lee-Barnewall, Michelle. *Surprised by the Parables: Growing in Grace through the Stories of Jesus*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020.



Matthew 20:1-16

Hear the landowner's words

¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’ ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one 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.”

Let God transform your heart
as we see his heart through this parable

What is the landowner like?

He's audaciously gracious

He serves the undeserving

He ascribes merit to the meritless

He's merciful toward the miserable

He's most generous to the least deserving

Who is Jesus like?

The one sent by the owner into the vineyard

The one who went early in the morning

The one who agreed to the wages

The one who never grumbled against the owner

The one who truly bore the burden of the work
and the heat of the day

The one who made it possible for every 11th hour
worker to receive generously from the owner

What are we like?

11th hour workers

Jealous, envious, grumbling

We stand all day long doing nothing

We wrongly believe God owes us more

We give ourselves to low views of who God is and what he is going (or failing to do) in our world

What are we like?

11th hour workers

Jealous, envious, grumbling

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We give ourselves to low views of who God is and
what he is going (or failing to do) in our world

Even so, we receive a denarius

We are strongly oriented toward justice, and comparisons with other people matter a lot. We don't just think about how we are doing. We think about how we are doing compared with everyone else, and that affects how we act. But while we are wired for fairness, grace is what transforms and heals. We think differently when we focus on God's grace. Can you imagine what the last-hired workers thought? Each passing hour would have increased their dread in having to go...

...home to tell their families that they had failed to provide and everyone would go hungry. Instead, though, they realized that they wouldn't have to do this, that their families would have enough, even though they knew they didn't deserve it. I suspect they would have been overjoyed at their good fortune, profoundly relieved, and extraordinarily grateful.

Lee-Barnewall, Michelle. *Surprised by the Parables: Growing in Grace through the Stories of Jesus*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020.



What do you believe God owes you?

What do you believe God owes you?

Will we let God's generous heart
transform our jealous hearts?