

Jesus Gave a Parable About Laborers

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the blessings and rewards that we will receive as followers of Christ. In this topic, we will see that regardless of how long we have been a Christian, we will receive the full reward of eternal life that is promised to all who follow Christ.

Matthew 20:1-7 says, ““For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.” So they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, “Why have you been standing here idle all day?” They said to him, “Because no one hired us.” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.””” We see that Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a landowner who hired workers for his harvest.

In that day, the normal wage for a full day of work, six in the morning until six in the evening, was a denarius. During the time of harvest, people who were looking for work would go to the marketplace and wait for someone to hire them. As a result, landowners who had fields or vineyards to harvest would go to the marketplace to look for workers. Here, we see that Jesus used that way of hiring workers to show what the kingdom of heaven will be like. The Lord calls all who become Christians to become workers in His harvest. Ephesians 4:16 says, “From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

He has also given each of us at least one gift for the work which He has called us to do. 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” If the Lord has given us a speaking gift, we are to speak the Word of God. If the Lord has given us a serving gift, we are to serve in the strength that the Lord supplies. In this parable, God is the One who calls all of us to serve Him in His harvest field.

We see that some of the people were called the first thing in the morning at six a.m. and were promised a full day’s wages, if they would work in the landowner’s field. Throughout the day, the landowner went looking for additional laborers. The landowner went out at nine a.m. and found more workers and promised that he would give those workers whatever was right. The same thing

happened at noon, at three p.m. and at five p.m. The landowner asked those who were standing idle at five p.m. why they were not working. They told him that no one had hired them. He also told them that they would receive whatever was right.

Matthew 20:8-10 says, “So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, “Call the laborers and give them *their* wages, beginning with the last to the first.” And when those came who *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius.” A steward was the man who was the manager of the fields or vineyards of a person. It was his responsibility to manage the landowner’s finances and pay the workers at the end of the day. In this parable, we see that the landowner told the steward to pay first those who had been hired last. However, the landowner did something that was very unusual and chose to be generous, even to those who had only worked for a short time. He told the steward to pay those who had been hired later in the day a full day’s wage, even though they did not deserve a full day’s pay.

As a result, those who had been hired at five p.m. were given a denarius, which was the amount normally paid for working for an entire day. As we concluded the previous topic, we saw that Matthew 19:29-30 said, “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many *who are* first will be last, and the last first.” Here, we see that in this parable, Jesus said the last will be paid first. Every person who comes to Christ, in repentance and faith, will receive eternal life. This is true regardless of how long or short the period was between the time that person became a Christian and died. Some people become a Christian at an early age and serve the Lord for many years. Others, like the thief on the cross, turn to Christ only minutes or hours before they die. However, all will receive eternal life.

In this parable, Jesus said that those who had worked throughout the day thought they would receive more, since those who had only worked for one hour received a full day’s wages. However, the steward also gave each of them a denarius. In the kingdom of heaven, we will all receive eternal life, even though none of us deserve that life. Ephesians 2:4-6 says, “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus.” We are reminded, in these verses, that God is going to give all who come to Christ, in repentance and faith, the gift of eternal life, even though none of us deserve that free gift. In the parable, some who had worked all day supposed that they would receive more, instead of being thankful that the landowner had given them work and a full day’s wage.

Matthew 20:11-16 says, “And when they had received *it*, they complained against the landowner, saying, “These last *men* have worked *only* one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.” But he answered one of them and said, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take *what is* yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man *the same* as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?” So the last will be first, and the first

last. For many are called, but few chosen.” Here, we see that some complained against the landowner. We will see why they complained before we conclude this topic.

We see that the landowner heard the complaint and spoke to one particular person. This person is probably the one who had started the complaining. Jesus told that person, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take *what is* yours and go your way.” The word translated “friend” is a key to understanding these verses. It is only used four times in the New Testament and all are in the book of Matthew. It is used of children, in Matthew 11:16, where it is translated “companions”. It is used of Judas, in Matthew 26:50, when Judas had just given Jesus the kiss of betrayal. That verse says, “But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, why have you come?’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.” Jesus still loved and treated Judas as a friend, even though Judas had just given Him the kiss of betrayal.

In this parable, we see that Jesus shows why this particular person had complained. Jesus told this particular man, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?” In the parable, the landowner had shown great kindness to all, especially the one he rewarded who had only worked a short time. This kindness was shown because this man had received the offer of the landowner to work in his field, at the last hour, and had responded. In contrast, the one to whom the landowner spoke showed the condition of his heart by complaining about the generosity of the landowner. The landowner was free to show generosity to any person whom he chose, including those who responded to his offer at the last moment. The landowner also asked the complainer, “Or is your eye evil because I am good?”

In Matthew 22:1-14, we see a parable about a king who invited all to the marriage feast of his son. Verses 11-14 say, “‘But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few *are* chosen.’”” The use of “friend” is the fourth use of this word in the New Testament and the word that Jesus used as He spoke to Judas just after he had given the kiss of betrayal. We also see that the parables in Matthew 20:1-16 and Matthew 22:1-14 both end with the same words, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” The word translated “chosen” means *to be chosen by God* and means *to be chosen or elect*. It is used in 1 Peter 2:9, where we read, “But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” We can rejoice that God has chosen all those who respond to His call to the wedding feast of His Son.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain these parables so they can help others understand that God is a loving God who has chosen all who will respond to His call to salvation. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things to others.