

But many who are first will be last, and the last first. “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ So the last will be first, and the first last.”

Matthew 19:30-20:16

Intro

Britt asked me a couple weeks ago if I'd preach this Sunday and he gave me the text.

- As many of you know, I am in the middle of camp season and busy with many details.
- While excited, I didn't have the time to dive into books, because I was going to be out in creation with junior highers.

So on the way back to camp, I decided to do some creative research of my own.

- Recite 3 verses you've memorized
- John 3:16
- The initial disgust—>talks with friends

Effective immediately: Bible memorization, but at least they know the stories of Jesus

Now, that's a cute little story about seeing the moral of a story play out in real life, but I want to rescue us from seeing this parable of Jesus as a moral fable.

Where We've Been

This parable is a continuation of the narrative we were in last week.

Let me remind you of the scene into which we enter

- the rich young ruler
 - The prize disciple
 - A morally upright man, rich, powerful, a (well-groomed) beard
 - And he walks away from Christ because he is a slave to his own treasure
- the disciples have left everything to follow Christ
- and Jesus' **promise** that nothing you leave for the sake of Christ will be reckoned as loss in the new heavens and new earth

And it's into this holy moment of the disciples wondering if it's all worth it that Jesus tells a story. He gave them a **promise** (no one will look back in want), but he also gives them a **parable** to cut to the heart.

This parable is going to shock us into seeing soberly the glorious, sovereign grace of our God.

The Bookends

19:30 and 20:16 are the bookends of the story.

- In a bit of poetic brevity, Jesus gives us the truth the disciples need. "The first will be last, and the last first."
- He will conclude the story with a reverse echo. "So the last will be first, and the first last."

Transition: What do these words mean? Let's turn together to verse 1.

The Story

read v1-2

- These are day laborers
- They have no work and likely need the work to provide for that day's meal
- They agree on the pay of a denarius, a fair wage

read v3-8a

- 1st hour=6am, 3rd hour=9am
- We don't know why, but the master desires more workers in his vineyard
- He promises to pay what is fair
- He goes out and hires workers at 9am, 12pm, 3pm, and 5pm

11th hour workers probably didn't get hired for a reason.

- Perhaps it's because they're known as lazy
- Maybe they wouldn't be effective (disability, weak, etc.)
- Maybe they crossed the wrong boss and so no one would pick them up.

You don't get left behind for no reason.

So we have the peculiar actions of the master, the different hired workers, and now the day is done. The master will pay them, according to Deuteronomy 24:14-15

"You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns. You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it), lest he cry against you to the LORD, and you be guilty of sin."

The boss is a little unique, but a good Jewish master. It's business as usual. Until we read the second half of v8.

The Turn

beginning with the last, up to the first

- The phrase that bookends the story is the phrase the whole parable turns on. Jesus invites his disciples into the upside-down Kingdom of God.

v9: And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.

Our reaction when a sinner gets saved

- Isn't that awesome?!
- Those in need got more than they deserved!
- We rejoice when this happens.
- Isn't it wonderful when the unlikely gets saved at church? An addict repents, we can put a guy on stage who cleaned up his life and clap.
- We all love a feel good story of grace.
- We THINK we love undeserved, unadulterated grace. We rejoice that God saves the unworthy

Transition: But verse 10 is going to reveal what's going on underneath a heart that isn't continually captured by the scandal of grace.

v10: Now when those hired first came, they thought they would received more, but each of them also received a denarius.

they start calculating

- If they got a full denarius, what must I get?
- If that **lazy 1 hr worker** is shown grace by God, I must be getting something AMAZING
- and they receive a denarius as well

read v11-12

Do you hear the sense of injustice and disgust in their voice?

-Grumbling

-You have made them equal to us

We love an unworthy person getting cleaned up and saved, but what happens when the undeserving sinner gets the same treatment as us, who have borne the heat of the day?

The Denarius is eternal life. All received all they needed.

Rewards are revealing

The workers take their eyes off of the giver and what he gave them
They compare it to what others received.

We have received the gift of life, yet we want to look at others and compare.

Are you grumbling against God? Disgusted who it would appear God has made equal to you?

- When the lazy coworker gets the promotion?
- When you're left waiting upon God in your singleness and Instagram blows up with weddings
- When the dysfunctional couple gets pregnant and you're still trying?

The Master's Reply

read v13-15

The master entreats one of his workers: Friend. Friend, hear these truths about God.

1. God is debtor to no one

- The story of the universe is not that we have worked hard for God and deserve a paycheck
- We rebelled against a holy God and our treachery against him deserves hell

- We are all poor day laborers who others would pass over and have no work unless a gracious master called us.
- **Romans 11:33-36**

2. God is always just in his dealings

- The first will be last and the last first because no one is meritoriously deserving
- Your work for God, be it an hour or a lifetime contributes nothing to your deservedness of salvation
- God is wise in his gifts
 - “Everything which he sends is needful, nothing can be needful which he withholds.” -John Newton

Look especially at **20:15**

- **Or do you begrudge my generosity? (ESV)**
- **Or is your eye envious because I am generous? (NASB)**

God’s generosity in his dealings has only served to reveal our envy.

3. God has his own plans and purposes

- His plan all along was to save a people for himself.
- The great treasure of the gospel is not that we receive earthly blessings
 - A happy family
 - A wife
 - A job
 - Riches
- It is that GOD has promised by himself, at the expense of his Son on the cross in our place, “I will be your God and you will be my people.”

At the final day we will see those who were drunkards, prostitutes, addicts, undeserving, and all who despaired of their own righteousness enter the Kingdom of God by the merit of Christ alone.

And the poor in spirit will receive white garments and crowns. But the greatest gift of all will be **God himself**. No one will be boasting about their own reward because we will all have the crown jewel of the immediate, eternal, unfading Presence of Christ!

Maybe you’ve been a Christian for years

- It feels like you’ve left so much more than others, You wonder if it’s really worth it
- Your heart is begrudging the generosity of God

Recount and rejoice in the riches you have in Christ
You have a **promise** and a **parable**

Maybe you’re an 11th hour worker

- You have not repented of your sin and trusted in Christ
- You are here this morning and I am preaching this text because God, in his generosity is calling you to give him your sin and you receive the riches of God in Christ.

All of us who have trusted in Christ, come and take communion. See in it a picture of our need and the generosity of God. You bring nothing to the table. Everything has been provided.