

Jesus' Greatest Hits

Workers in the Vineyard

Part 6 - June 17, 2007

[VIDEO: CHALLENGER RIDGE VINEYARD]

Q: How would you feel if you were a company manager and the owner suddenly announced that he was going to pay every employee - regardless of position, title, or seniority - your salary, the same wage that you make? Would you grumble and complain, or would you admire his generosity?

In the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, Jesus shows us that our benefits as believers are based on the generosity and goodness and grace of the ultimate owner.

The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, "You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. 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?" "Because no one has hired us," they answered. He said to them, "You also go and work in my vineyard." 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." The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. "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." But he answered one of them, "Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last. - *Matthew 20:1-16 NIV*



Harvesting grapes was hot and hectic work.

Temperatures could surpass 100 degrees! And when the field ripened it happened all at once; so, the entire vineyard would need to be picked fast!

- Workdays were about 12 hours long, from sunrise to sunset.



The day began about 6:00am (the *first* hour); so, the third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh, hours would've been 9:00am, noon, 3:00pm, and 5:00pm. The eleventh-hour workers were hired just *one hour* before quitting time.

Day-workers would gather at public markets to be hired. If men owned or worked a smaller farm, they'd take care of their chores first, and then go to the market for supplemental income.



The denarius offered here was a standard day's wage. Jewish law required hired hands to be paid the same day. Many lived from hand to mouth and that denarius they earned might be buying dinner for the family *that* night. A day off for day-workers could spell disaster.

The first-hour workers *negotiated* their pay arrangement.

[The Landowner] agreed to pay them a denarius for the day (20:2)

Didn't you [the workers] agree to work for a denarius? (20:13)

The rest of the day's workers were in no position to bargain.

He told them, "You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." - *Matthew 20:4 NIV*

They would have naturally assumed they would be getting a proportional percentage of whatever amount the early-workers had already negotiated with the landowner.

GRACE REIGNS SUPREME

The stars of this parable are those eleventh-hour workers!

He asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?"
 "Because no one has hired us," they answered. - *Matthew 20:6b-7 NIV*

They're not landowners. They don't work anywhere else. We know this because they've: "been standing [there] all day". But Jesus doesn't insinuate that they're lazy. In fact, He tells us why they haven't been put to good use: "no one has hired us"

These are the leftovers! They're rejects! Nobody wants them. They're old or crippled or slow or stupid, or a combination. They know they're unwanted and unworthy. But they still need food on the table. So, they stand in the marketplace and wait. And all day long they are passed over; like the kid who gets chosen last for kick-ball, or bombardment, or red-rover. How much hope do you think they had left at 5:00pm?!

There are three meaningful moments with these eleventh-hour rejects:



1. The landowner himself went to them.

A wealthy plantation owner would've sent his *foreman*. But this one *personally* sought them, and offered his invitation. This story shows us the Lord's passion for the discouraged, the discarded, the despised, and the desperate.



2. He cared about their bills, not their skills.

Can you imagine the expressions, as the owner comes down the path with his army of limping misfits? What's he thinking?! He knows these men and their families; they're from his community. And He knows they need the money more than he needs what they can contribute.



3. He gave them a gift instead of a wage.

The eleventh-hour workers knew their need. If the landowner had given them the wage they'd earned - 1/12 of a denarius - they couldn't have fed their families that night. And God promises *not* to pay us the wage *we've* earned!

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. - *Romans 6:23 NIV*



Our standing and status with God is based solely on His grace, not an accumulation of seniority, performance, or productivity. All of us are like those eleventh-hour workers who received much more than they could have earned, and far more than they deserved. [By definition] Grace is *undeserved* love.

HUMILITY IS KING

You've got to see the context of this parable! Jesus just asked the rich, young ruler to give up everything and follow Him. And the man went away sorrowful because he couldn't. And while Jesus and His disciples discuss, it hits Peter that they've done what Jesus asked the rich young ruler to do!

We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us? - *Matthew 19:27 NIV*

First, Jesus tells Peter that everyone who has sacrificed for His Kingdom will be rewarded a hundred times over. (*Mat. 19:29*) But, there's something subtle and selfish and self-important behind Peter's question, and so Jesus addresses it.

But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first. - *Matthew 19:30 NIV*

This warning bookends the parable: Put yourself first and you'll get the wages you bargained for. Humble yourself and serve, and you'll be lavished with grace. The first-hour workers weren't complaining that their pay wasn't *enough*; they were upset that it wasn't *superior*.

These men who were hired last worked only one hour ... and you have made them equal to us ... - *Matthew 20:12 NIV*

The third-hour, sixth-hour, and ninth-hour workers weren't complaining. They got more than they deserved too, so they kept their mouths shut (or they might have to give some back). When you know you've received grace, you don't want to talk about what you *deserve* anymore. You just want to rejoice!

According to Matthew, after this parable Jesus told them that he was going to be betrayed, condemned, mocked, flogged, and crucified. Not only would He be last, He'd be "dead last"! But then, Jesus' closest disciple, John, and his brother James approach with their mother and kneel before Jesus. And their mom asks an even more disturbing question:

"What is it you want?" [Jesus] asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said ... - *Matthew 20:21-22 NIV*

Q: "Aargh! How can I spell it out more clearly?!"

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave [Now, who wants to be first?!] Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom ... - *Matthew 20:26b-28 NIV*

We can only glorify God, represent Christ, and attract others into His Kingdom to the degree that we serve in His name. And we will serve only to the degree that we don't take grace for granted, or begin to believe that we've earned our paycheck.



Do you know why the first will be last, and the last will be first? Because: Where grace reigns supreme, humility is king! If you want true significance, don't worry who's working the hardest or sacrificing the most. Just get behind Jesus and serve.

Let's see how well you've been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this passage, we've learned that:

1. The early workers should've praised the boss's generosity.
2. Our significance comes from having *more* than others.
3. We can receive grace or reject grace, but we can't earn it.
4. The least worthy are often the greatest examples of grace.