

Grace Among the Grapes

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[0:00] We'll be back in our Colossians study in two weeks after the Awana Awards ceremony, but tonight! we're going to take a slight detour and remind ourselves even more about God's grace! that we've been studying about in Colossians.

We're going to cover Matthew 19.30 through 20.16, the first part of 2016 anyway, in more detail, but we'll look at some other verses to set the context.

Before we get to that though, let's start with the question. How many of you like to finish last? Depends on what you're playing.

Nobody unequivocally is saying that he or she likes to finish last though, I notice. No matter what we're doing, nearly everybody wants to win. Obviously, finishing last is counter to our culture.

The desire to finish ahead of someone is not unique to us. It was true of ancient Israel in Jesus' day. I'm sure it's probably true of every society because that's just typical human nature.

[1:22] That's what makes a saying of Jesus so interesting. We're going to look at that saying tonight and explore what he meant by that. We find that saying on each end of the passage that we're going to look at.

If you look at Matthew 19.30, Jesus says, But many who are first will be last, and the last first. And then if you go to Matthew 20.16, the first part of that verse reverses the two clauses, but it says the same thing.

Jesus said, So the last will be first, and the first last. So without even looking at the scripture in between, let's think about how the first could be last, and the last could be first.

There are at least two explanations for that. One is that only one person is being considered. So if Mike is the only person who enters a race, he'll finish both first and last in that race.

The second possible explanation is that all participants finish in a tie. And that's the explanation that fits this parable. And we think of a tie as unexciting because nobody wins, but this is a tie that we'll like because everybody who finishes in this tie is going to be a winner.

[2:42] And we'll look at four things as we consider tonight's passage. We'll see the setting, the story, the symbolism, and the significance. So let's look at the setting or the context for this parable.

We won't spend too much time on the episodes before it, but the two episodes before the parable help explain why Jesus told the parable itself. Matthew 19, verses 16 through 26 have the story of the rich young ruler.

So let's reacquaint ourselves with the rich young ruler. Verse 19, 16 of Matthew says, Now behold, one came and said to him, Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? And then skipping down to verses 21 through 26, we see this. Jesus said to him, As usual, Peter felt compelled to make a comment after that.

Peter's question and Jesus' answer form the second section before tonight's passage. And we see Peter's words in verse 27. Verse 27 says, Then Peter answered and said to him, See, we have left all and followed you.

[4:40] Therefore, what shall we have? Then Jesus' answer in verses 28 through 30 sets up the parable of the workers in the vineyard. And here are 28 through 30.

So Jesus said to them, So Jesus said to them, Assuredly, I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

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. So now we come to the parable itself, and the parable centers around a single workday.

The workday began at 6 a.m. and went to 6 p.m. And so we'll see several references to times in there, and I have those blanks in your handout on purpose so that you'll have them in front of you to reference as we go through.

[5:48] The third hour, since we start at 6 a.m., the third hour would be 9 a.m. So the third hour is 9 a.m. That makes the sixth hour noon.

So the sixth hour is noon. The ninth hour would be three hours after that, which we know is 3 p.m. So 3 p.m. is the ninth hour, and then finally the eleventh hour, two hours after that, would be 5 p.m. Of course, that's when most people in our culture would think it's quitting time. So with those times in mind, here is the parable. We'll go ahead and read all the way from verse 1 through the first part of verse 16.

And again, this is Jesus talking here. And he said, 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.

[7:04] So they went. Again he went out about the sixth hour 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. 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.

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.

[8:20] 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. To really understand these verses, we need to put ourselves in the culture of that day.

Matthew 20, verse 1, is the verse that said, For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. This was a normal situation for that time period.

A landowner would have some permanent paid workers, but he wouldn't have enough of his own workers to quickly bring in the harvest when it was ready. In those cases, the owner would have to hire day laborers to help bring in all of the crop.

The day laborers were the lowest of Israel's labor force. They had to hope that somebody would hire them, and if they couldn't find work for the day, the laborers and their families might not be able to eat that day.

[9:25] And verse 2 tells us how much the landowner agreed to pay the first laborers he hired. It says, Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

The denarius is a silver coin, and it's the value of a day's wage for a Roman soldier. The denarius also was a typical wage for a full-time servant, so the agreed-upon payment was more than a day laborer would have expected.

After all, he was going to be paid like a full-time servant when he was just part-time. And notice how quickly the workers readily agreed to go into the vineyard. Look again at verses 3 through 7.

It says, 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 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?

[10:31] 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. So some questions for you.

How much does the landowner agree to pay the workers that he hires throughout the rest of the day? That's exactly right. He didn't agree to anything.

Verse 3 says, Whatever is right I will give you. And verse 7 says, Whatever is right you will receive. The workers hired later in the day were so desperate to work that they agreed to work without even knowing what they would be paid.

That goes back to what we discussed earlier. The day laborers who didn't find work likely would lack money to buy food. So they were happy to take whatever they could get. And then verse 8 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.

So let's pause here for a second and think about the scene. The verse shows that Jesus was careful to follow the Old Testament law even when telling a parable. Because the law required that day laborers be paid at the end of each day.

[11:48] That comes from Leviticus 19.13 and also Deuteronomy 24 verses 14 and 15. Leviticus 19.13 says, You shall not cheat your neighbor nor rob him.

The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning. And then Deuteronomy 24.14 and 15 say, You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates.

Each day you shall give him his wages and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and he has set his heart on it, lest he cry out against you to the Lord and it be sin to you.

So now let's look at what he actually paid them when he paid them for that day. That's in verse 9 of Matthew 20. And verse 9 says, And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius.

Think about that one for a second. The last workers were hired about 5 p.m. that left them only one hour to work in the field, yet they were paid a full denarius.

[13:02] The first workers were watching, so can you imagine what they must have been thinking at this point? The first workers had to be thinking that they were going to get paid a lot more because after all, they'd been working since 6 a.m.

and that meant the first workers spent 12 times as long in the field as the last people who were hired. But check out verses 10 through 12 again. Verse 10 confirms that the first workers did expect to get paid more, but they were in for a surprise.

Look at those verses. They say, But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more, and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.

So how do the workers describe the conditions they worked under? All of a sudden, it became a lot more grueling, didn't it?

They had the burden and the heat of the day. And the word they used for heat is a word for burner, and it's the word that's often used of the scorching east wind that parches the lips and cracks the skin, and that's what makes the hot east wind blows.

[14:17] And it may have been that hot, but the workers also were trying to make a point. Relative to the others, they were saying the first workers really deserved more because they were out there working all day long in the heat of the day.

So can you relate to that first group thinking that they might get paid more than the others and thinking that they should get paid more than the others? After all, that's kind of how our society is based too.

If I work one hour today and James works 12 hours today doing the same things, we'd probably expect that James would get paid 12 times as much as I do. Time to renegotiate the contract. Is there anything inherently wrong with feeling like you should get paid more if you work more? No, there's really nothing wrong with that. Expecting to be paid based upon the level of work you perform is normal, but as we look at the landowner's reply in more detail, we'll see what's wrong with the first group's response.

So let's break the landowner's reply into sections that each end with a question. And the first one is in verse 13. He said, But he answered one of them and said, Friend, I am doing you no wrong.

[15 : 30] Did you not agree with me for a denarius? So is the landowner correct? Well, remember, when they thought they were going to be the only ones hired, they were quite happy to work for a denarius that day.

Keep in mind that as we discussed earlier, a denarius was equal to what Roman soldiers and long-term servants were paid, so the first group of day laborers were paid pretty well, and they had no problem with the wage that the landowner proposed when he first proposed it.

So let's read on to see more of the landowner's response here, verses 14 and the first part of verse 15. He said, 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? So what's the correct answer to the landowner's second question?

Is it lawful for him to do what he wants to do with his own things? Absolutely. He can do with them what he wants to do because they're his until he decides to give them up.

[16 : 39] And why did the landowner give the same amount to the last people? Exactly. That's as simple as it gets. He wanted to give them the same amount because he wanted to do it.

And he really didn't owe an explanation any more than that. And now look at the landowner's last question at the end of verse 15. He said, Or is your eye evil because I am good?

Or actually, is your eye evil? And of course, we know that's where we get the saying evil eye. So how many people of you realize that the evil eye reference was actually a biblical term?

It's a Hebrew expression that refers to envy and jealousy. So he was getting the evil eye from the first workers, but had the first workers been cheated out of anything?

So why then were they so jealous of the last workers? They thought they deserved better. Exactly. They thought they deserved better. We can have at least two types of jealousy.

[17 : 45] One type of jealousy is wanting what someone else has. You know, I see Jerry's glass there and I'm thirsty and I decide that I want to have that drink. Another type of jealousy is begrudging someone for having something regardless of whether we want it or not.

And that second type of jealousy comes into play here. Going back to my analogy of Jerry's drink, maybe I don't want his drink, but I don't want him to have it either.

And that's the type of thing that's in play here. Whoa. Whoa. I took care of that. Sorry, I'm going to move it over there. So all of the workers had a denarius, but the first group was jealous because the last group was paid the same.

So now that we've looked at the saying, the setting, and also the story, let's look at the symbolism because nearly every character or item in the parable is symbolic of something else.

So the vineyard represents the kingdom of God. The vineyard represents the kingdom of God. So if the vineyard represents the kingdom of God, who do you think the landowner represents?

[19 : 05] Yeah, you guys are sharp. The landowner represents God. So the landowner represents God. Here's another question for you. Whom do the workers represent?

Yeah, the workers represent us, the people that God calls into his kingdom. So the workers represent us, people that God calls into his kingdom. Here's one that's a little tougher.

What does the workday represent? Well, the workday represents each person's lifetime. So the workday represents each person's lifetime.

For those that are called into the kingdom, some are called early in their lifetime, some are called in the middle of their life, and some are called after they get even older.

Some are called at the very end of their life. The people called at the very end of their life are represented by those who are called at the eleventh hour. So here's one that's a little easier.

[20 : 11] Who do you think the landowner steward represents? Exactly. The landowner steward represents Jesus. Jesus. Jesus paid the wages necessary for us to enter the kingdom.

So what do you think the denarius represents here? You might want to try that one again. Right?

The denarius represents salvation or another way to say it, the denarius represents eternal life. So the denarius represents salvation or eternal life.

Remember the words of John 3.16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The parable in Matthew chapter 20 illustrates that verse. What does God promise in John 3.16? Everlasting life.

[21 : 15] Does the verse say anything about how young or old a person must be to obtain everlasting life? Think about the thief on the cross.

He got his salvation as late in his lifetime as possible just about but yet he still got that eternal life. So let's spend our remaining time tonight looking at the significance of the parable.

In addition to illustrating John 3.16 the parable reminds us of several more biblical truths and the first one is that God sovereignly chooses who will be saved.

God sovereignly chooses who will be saved. In John 6.44 Jesus said no one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him and I will raise him up at the last day.

We saw that illustrated in the parable the landowner went into the marketplace and found the workers for his vineyard. The second thing we see illustrated here the second thing of significance is that God accepts all who are willing to come to him.

[22 : 28] So God accepts all who are willing to come to him. We've already looked at John 3.16 where we saw that whoever believes will have everlasting life.

We just looked at John 6.44 under the last point. A few verses earlier Jesus said this in John 6.37 and 6.40 6.37 is where Jesus said all that the father gives me will come to me and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out.

In John 6.40 Jesus says and this is the will of him who sent me that everyone who sees the son and believes in him may have everlasting life and I will raise him up at the last day.

Sometimes we can get caught up in worrying how the first two points can both be true. We know they're true because the Bible teaches both. Suffice it to say for us God has it all figured out and with that being the case we should rest confidently in that.

We also see the second point illustrated in the parable because the landowner gave a denarius everlasting life to every worker who came to the field.

[23 : 45] The third thing of significance that we see from this parable is that God is still busy saving people. So God is still busy saving people. He'll continue to save people right up until the end of this age and we hear Jesus teach this truth in Matthew 24 14.

In Matthew 24 14 Jesus said and this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations and then the end will come.

Tonight's parable illustrates this point by showing people saved at nearly all hours of the work day. So in other words they're saved at nearly all spaces of their lifetimes.

that should give us some hope. We should never give up on someone that we hope to be saved.

That person may be someone that God will choose to save at the 11th hour.

The fourth thing of significance is that God always gives us what he promises. So God always gives us what he promises. In Titus 1 2 Paul wrote to Titus in hope of eternal life which God who cannot lie promised before time began.

[25 : 06] In the parable the landowner fulfilled his promises to every group. He gave everybody at least what he promised to them and in a lot of cases he gave them a lot more than they deserve and actually when you relate this to eternal life everybody got more than they deserve.

The fifth thing is exactly that point. God gives us more than we deserve. So God gives us more than we deserve.

Romans 3 23 tells us that. It says all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And then in Romans 6 23 we see this. Even those people that worked for the full 12 hours of the day got more than they deserved because they got the wages of a full-time servant or even a Roman soldier not what you would typically pay a day laborer.

But relating that to us what do we deserve as sinners? Exactly. We deserve death. What do believers get instead?

We get life. We get eternal life. We see this principle several places in the parable. Even the workers who got the full day's work like we said got more than they deserved because of what they were paid and how they were paid, the rate they were paid.

[26 : 32] And those wages were paid by the steward representing Christ who paid the wages of sin for us. The sixth thing we see is that God blesses us for his good pleasure.

So God blesses us for his good pleasure. Ephesians 1 verses 5 and 6 say that God predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will to the praise of the glory of his grace by which he made us accepted in the beloved.

We saw that in the parable, didn't we? Because remember the landowner asking, is it not right for me to do what I want with my things? Well, that's exactly what God is doing for us.

He chose to save us and he's doing it because of his good pleasure. So let's think about that principle of work in the parable one more time.

Do you think the workers hired at the 11th hour added much value for the landowner? With only one hour left in the work day, the landowner simply had compassion on them and hired them anyway.

[27:46] And that demonstrates the merciful nature of the landowner. And of course, remember the landowner is God. That relates to the seventh thing that we see illustrated here and that is God gives us every spiritual blessing.

So number seven is God gives us every spiritual blessing. Also in Ephesians chapter one, we see this in verse three. Paul wrote, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Notice the tense of that too. It doesn't say he will bless us. It says he has blessed us. So if God has given us every spiritual blessing, what are we missing? Yeah, the answer is nothing, but we don't live like we're missing nothing very often.

If ever, we always think we're missing something and of course, we know a lot of false teachers try to convince people that they're missing something. So think about the workers in our parable.

The first group was jealous because the last group got the same wage that they did. However, if all the redeemed had eternal life and every spiritual blessing, should we be envious of the people who came to salvation later than we have?

[29:09] No, we have no reason to be envious because we're not cheated out of anything. We got every spiritual blessing ourselves and in a lot of cases, if we were saved earlier in life, we may miss out on a lot of bad experiences that others had to go through before they came to Christ.

So we listed seven items of significance, but they fall under the same general category. They're all evidence of God's grace. So they're all evidence of God's grace.

Given the evidence of God's grace that we have here and elsewhere in the Bible because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, let's think about the proper response to that grace.

The first thing is obvious, and that is that we should be thankful to God for saving us. So we should be thankful to God for saving us.

The Apostle Paul is perhaps our best example of how to be thankful, and we saw this a few weeks ago when we looked at Colossians 1, verses 12 through 14. In Colossians 1, verses 12 through 14, Paul says that he is giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

[30:29] Then he says, he has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of his love, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.

So obviously, we should be thankful to God for saving us. The second thing that should be our response is that we should be willing to work in the vineyard.

So we should be willing to work in the vineyard. In our parable tonight, every landowner's servant that he hired actually worked in the vineyard.

Some worked for only an hour, but all worked for whatever time they had left. Ephesians 5.15 says, see that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil.

There, the phrase redeeming the time likely refers to one's lifetime as a believer. So the phrase redeeming the time likely refers to one's lifetime as a believer.

[31:33] So we're to redeem the time. In other words, we're to make the most of the time that we have on earth in fulfilling God's purposes. That means we need to line up every opportunity for useful worship and service.

The third thing that should be our response is that we should rejoice when God saves and blesses others. This can sometimes be the hardest thing, right?

We should always be thankful and rejoice when God saves and blesses others. Psalm 68.19 says, Blessed be the Lord who daily loads us with benefits, the God of our salvation.

Notice the plural pronouns in 68.19. It says, The Lord loads us with benefits and he's the God of our salvation. We weren't meant to be the Lone Ranger here.

We're with other people and we should rejoice when those people are saved as well. So we started this study with a question and that question was how many like to finish last?

[32 : 35] first. And then we also talked about the saying in 1930 and 2016 of Matthew and as Matthew 20.16 says, So the last will be first and the first last.

Well, from an earthly perspective, none of us should be thrilled to finish in a tie. But from God's eternal perspective, all of us should be thrilled to finish in that tie.

Only God has the infinite resources to bless his children equally. So just like the workers in the vineyard who helped us to see God's grace among the grapes, we're recipients of God's infinite grace as well.

And that's why we can say, blessed be the Lord who daily loads us with benefits, the God of our salvation. moment. Thank you.