

Paying Workers the Same Amount

How many of you have ever been at a Menard's or Home Depot early in the morning to see workers looking for jobs from contractors? In today's scripture, Jesus tells a story of how many men would be waiting in village squares at dawn in the hope of finding work for the day. This becomes the context for Jesus' parable about a landowner who employs men at different times of the day. What is shocking in this parable is that, regardless of how many hours the men worked, whether they were hired first or last, they all received the same wage (vv. 8-10). This scripture is a continuation of Christ's discussion of salvation and eternal life in chapter 19. What he now wishes to do is to show the marvelous grace of God in salvation, in giving eternal life. He does that by sharing this parable – a parable which demonstrates God's marvelous grace as few lessons do.

To help understand this parable, I've divided it into **four** parts. **Part one** is that God's grace provides work for men – a field to tend. **Part two** is that God's grace seeks and calls men to work. **Part three** is that God's grace

pays the promised wages at the appointed time, at the end of the day. **Part four** is that God's justice will pay exactly what he promised.

Okay, let's start at the beginning – **Part One** – God's grace provides work for men. In this case, God gives a field to be tended. The great Landowner is God. The vineyard or field can be either the world **or** the church. The world, the church, and man himself are all due God's grace. It is God's grace that has created man. It is God's grace that has provided the field (the world and church) for man to work in. Without God there would be nothing. Which is exactly what it says in **Colossians 1:16**, "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." **Part Two** of this sermon is that it is God who goes out to seek and call men to work. It is not the workers who come to him. God's going out after man is grace, marvelous grace, as it says in **Luke 19:10**, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Every step involved in the call of God is of grace:

the call itself, the challenge to go and labor, the promise of wages (reward), the acceptance of the responses, and the sending forth into the field. God did not have to issue a call or take any of the steps that were taken. Each step is a marvelous demonstration of God's care and grace. Note another matter: the soul of man deserves something. It either serves self and sin or God and righteousness. Man either works for the world and its end or for heaven and its end. It is for this reason that God issues call after call, as we are told in **Matthew 9:37-38**, "Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field'."

God's first call to a person is directed at a person when there is a special willingness and eagerness to serve God. The first call is God's beginning to speak to the heart of a person. There is a tug, a pull, a voice, a thought, a movement in one's heart to listen and turn to God. Let's note two things. **First**, the landowner promised the workers a full wage. If the willing workers believed his

promise they would go into the fields and work. If they did not believe his promise, they would not go. Their belief preceded their work. He promised, and they believed and worked. God's call is by grace, not by works. The fact that Christ speaks of work and wages does not in any way mean that salvation is earned, that it is of works. We are saved by God's grace through faith. Which is what we can read in **Ephesians 2:8-10**, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

The **second** thing I will make note of is that the time of service was a day, which symbolizes a lifetime. When the day (life) ended, the willing workers would receive the promise of the landowner. They would be rewarded with exactly what he had promised and the reward would be theirs forever. The day was but a brief period in comparison with having their needs met. They could withstand any trial – "burden or heat" as it is referred to

in **verse 12** – for just a day, for it would soon end. They had **two** things to encourage them to remain with the work; (1) they had only a short period of time to work, only one day, and (2) they had the presence of the landowner himself. He was constantly encouraging them, fellowshiping with them, and reminding them of his promise.

Part three of this sermon is that God's grace pays the promised wages at the appointed time. When is the appointed time? In the evening (at death) when all work ends. This is the meaning of the evening, of the appointed time. There are **two evenings**, two appointed times for the servant of God. **First**, there is the evening or the time of death when the servant passes from this life into God's presence. He receives his reward of eternal life. God transports him into the Lord's presence, and the believer is transformed into the image of Christ. This is the reward **of** wages referred to in this parable. **Second**, there is the evening or the appointed time of judgment, when the servant's works are to be judged. This evening of judgment is not what this parable is

about. The foreman is Christ, God's Son, to whom God has committed all judgment, as we read in **John 5:22**, "Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted judgment to the Son."

God pays everyone out of a heart of grace and care. This is so critical to understand: God is love and he cares. He cares for all servants, no matter how old or how long they have been serving him. He cares, wanting the workers to have enough to meet their needs. A day's wage (the reward of eternal life) was necessary to meet their need. He would have no servant go away without at least that much. Therefore, he pays even the latecomers a full wage (eternal life). Like the criminal next to Jesus on the cross who was told he would be in paradise after he repented. Note another point: when we speak of eternal life and perfection, that is, of being conformed to the nature and image of Christ, God shows no preference. We shall all be made just like Christ, perfected in nature. We shall have different responsibilities and, apparently, varying degrees of glory; but we shall all be perfected in nature. We shall all face

the Judgment Seat of Christ which is mentioned in **2 Corinthians 5:10**, “For we must all appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” We shall all receive different duties in heaven because of good and bad service here on earth, but we shall all be perfectly happy and joyful in what we do. Some of you may remember when I have mentioned Oral Roberts said he would be in charge of Tulsa in eternity. We shall all be judged for our faithfulness on this earth. Some shall be set up as large articles and others as smaller instruments, but we shall all be perfectly complete and filled to the brim. We shall give an account for the trust and gifts put into our keeping. We shall be rewarded accordingly, but we shall be perfectly fulfilled. We shall all stand before Christ for what we have borne on earth, but we shall all be perfectly satisfied and fruitful.

God’s pay (reward) is not based on works and energy. It is based on God’s grace and justice, and it is based on God’s concern and care for all. Note that God is gracious

and just and caring. God's grace and care do not annul or erase his justice. God is not unjust. When God gives work to a man who is desperate for work, it is a caring and gracious act. Such was the case with the early call to the eager worker. Not to take advantage of the man's desperation is an act of grace. To offer and pay a full wage and not take advantage of the man is not unjust but the very opposite. It is a just and gracious act, a very caring act. Similarly, when God pays a man more than what he earned because God cares that the man has enough to live, it is a gracious and caring act. It is not an unjust act against the first or earlier worker. It is simply a gracious act that reveals God to be an enormously caring person. If God gives us what he promised us, he is not unjust if he gives something to someone else. He is not even unjust to us if he gives an enormous gift to another person. He is just, and he is enormously caring and gracious by keeping his word and giving to us and to the other person.

God's pay (reward) is not as man sees but as God knows and wills. Our eyes are evil because we are of an evil

world. Therefore, we judge and understand from an imperfect and selfish stance. God is good; he cares and is full of mercy and grace. Therefore, he gives eternal life to all who come, no matter when they come, at the early call or the eleventh-hour call.

Part four of this sermon is that God's justice will pay exactly what he promised. **Matthew 19:30** is the very statement that caused Christ to share this parable: "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." Remember that the disciples needed assurance of their salvation. Christ gave them assurance and promised the reward of ruling and reigning with him and living forever in **Matthew 19:27-30**. But Christ wanted them to know that they could not judge others, for they could not tell what was within a man, not for sure. They did not know who was to be highly rewarded and who was not. For example, who would have ever thought that the willing and eager workers who immediately responded to the Lord would expose a grumbling and jealous spirit? To prevent his servants from judging and showing preference among themselves, Christ closes his

discussion of eternal life and salvation with a strong warning: the last will be first. That is, many of the last (later-comers) will outstrip us unless we are fervent and zealous in serving God. We may have professed and served Christ for years before others did, yet we may fail to love as meekly as the later workers; fail to live as unselfishly; fail to respond as kindly; fail to endure as patiently; fail to witness as boldly; fail to relate as lovingly; and fail to look for the return of Christ as hopefully as the later workers.

Grace is a concept which is foreign to the human heart. That is why every other world religion has a merit-based view of salvation: do this and you will be saved or reincarnated to a better life. But to a world of sinful men and women, deserving of wrath, only a God of grace brings the hope of eternal salvation.

In summary, the general idea and moral lesson from this parable is that everyone comes to the vineyard (faith) at different points in their lives. Some people are lifelong disciples of Jesus, and some people convert only toward the end of their lives. In the kingdom of God, both

groups are treated the same. So, God, who is a generous God, promises to open his kingdom to all people, despite their circumstances.

Please bow your heads in prayer.

Bring us close to you, Father, and help us to proclaim the goodness of your generosity. Make us generous to others as you have been to us. We consider it a privilege to serve you, so help us to always be content with our service. Help us also to be content with what you bless us with in the way of wages or rewards. We know that all you give us, especially that which will come our way in eternity, is completely undeserved. Help us not to look at the service or the wages of others in such a way as to make us envious or jealous of them. We can easily forget that you are always fair and even generous when we fall into improper comparisons. We pray for these things in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and Savior. **Amen.**