



*Teachings of the Teacher – A study in the parables of Jesus*  
*The Laborers in the Vineyard*

**Matthew 20:1-16**

**Lesson 20**

It's not fair! This parable challenges us to consider God's right to do as He pleases, reminding us that all He does is just, right, and more than generous. It also challenges us to consider our attitude in our service. May our response to Him always be one of gratitude rather than acting as though we have been underpaid.

**OBSERVATION: Read Matthew 20:1-16**

1. Read through this week's verses using both your Observation Worksheet (the last page of this homework) and another Bible translation or paraphrase. After reading through these verses, what would you say to someone if they asked you what they were about?
2. Key words help us to better understand a parable. We have listed below key words of this parable. Mark each one in a distinctive way (either with a symbol, highlighting, or some form of boxing, circling, or underlining). Mark each of the key words each time they are used in the text.  
Key Words: words that refer to the *landowner* and the *laborers*  
the phrase *kingdom of heaven*, *right/good/lawful*, *receive(d)*, and any references to time
3. The contrasting word *but* is used three times in this parable. Mark each time this word is used. Choose one of the times this word is used. Record what is being contrasted and the significance of the contrast.
4. The *landowner* first hired *laborers early in the morning*. The next time he hired was *the third hour* (about 9:00 a.m.). Using this time conversion (the third hour being 9:00 a.m.), what other times did the *landowner hire laborers*?
5. What did the *landowner* say he would pay the *laborers*?

## CONSIDER THESE THINGS:

1. What rights does a person have over how they will distribute their inheritance?
2. Who is the best employer you have ever had? Why?
3. What are your thoughts when someone who has not worked as hard as you receives equal acknowledgement?

## THE PRELUDE TO THE PARABLE: Read Matthew 19:24-30

1. *And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.* When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" <sup>26</sup> But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:24-26). What did Peter ask in response to Jesus' statement?
2. Jesus' answer was what we might expect. Those who serve Him and sacrifice for Him will be rewarded. Their denials were not sacrifices, but investments. Jesus changed the focus of the conversation in verse 30. Verse 30 begins with the contrasting word *but*. Although people will be rewarded, what clarification did Jesus make?

## THE CALL TO LABORERS: Read Matthew 20:1-7

1. *The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.* In whose *vineyard* were the laborers hired to work?
  - a. God has provided a *vineyard* for believers to work in. Describe the *vineyard* God has placed you in.
    - 1.) What opportunities does this *vineyard* supply for you to labor for the Lord?
2. There is much to do in God's *vineyards*. What does Matthew 9:37 teach us?
  - a. What is to be our response to this need?

3. The *landowner* made an agreement with the first group of *laborers* to pay them a specific amount of money. How much did he agree to pay them?
- a. Although the *landowner* did not mention a specific amount that he would pay the other *laborers*, what did he tell them?

- b. These men went to work with the simple promise that that *landowner* would pay them *what was right*. Write the words of the following verses which speak of God's rewards.

Matthew 6:4

Matthew 16:27

Luke 6:35

Colossians 3:24

- 1.) God, like the *landowner*, has not been specific about the *rewards* He will give. Do you think you will be disappointed? Why or why not?

4. Why were the *laborers* he found at the eleventh hour *standing idle*?

- a. What can we learn from this about these men?

### **WAGES RECEIVED: Read Matthew 20:8-9**

1. What did the *landowner* do *when evening had come*?

- a. Who did he pay *first*?

- 1.) How much did he pay them?

- a.) Consider those who began working at the end of the day. Was this an unfair wage or was it more than fair?

- 2.) If you had been one of the *laborers* that began working *early in the morning*, seeing how much those who began at the *eleventh hour* were paid, how much do you think you should have been paid?

## THE LABORERS' COMPLAINT: Read Matthew 20:10-12

1. Seeing how much those who began working at the *eleventh hour* were paid, what did those who *came first* suppose?
  - a. What did they receive?
  - b. How much had they agreed to work for?
  - c. In what way was their payment unfair?
  
2. How did they respond to *receiving a denarius* for a day's labor?
  - a. List some synonyms for the word *complained*.
    - 1.) List some antonyms for the word *complained*.
  
3. According to Psalm 77:3, what is the result of *complaining*?
  - a. What have been some of the results/effects of your *complaining*?
  
4. Reflect upon the heart of Israel and the older brother (parable of the prodigal son) and share what you see.

Exodus 16:3

Luke 15:28-30
  
5. Reflect upon the *laborers'* complaint in Matthew 20:15. How does their attitude reveal them:

to be simply *laborers* and not servants?

to have little concern for the harvest?

6. Meditate on the following verses and record what they declare about God.

Deuteronomy 32:4

Psalm 111:2

Revelation 15:3

- a. Job, after being reminded of the power and glory of God declared *...I have uttered what I do not understand...* (Job 42:3). How does meditating on the character of God help you to cease from *complaining*?

### **THE LANDOWNER'S RIGHTS: Read Matthew 20:13-15**

1. The landowner's response to the *complaining laborers* is recorded in six statements. What were they?

- a. If you were complaining to the Lord about some perceived unfairness, how would these responses adjust your perspective?

2. Although *it is lawful for the Lord to do what He wishes with His own things*, what do you know about His character that provokes confidence rather than fear of Him *doing as He wishes*?

3. *...Or is your eye evil because I am good* (Matthew 20:15)? What sins are revealed in the attitude of these *laborers*?

- a. How do the *landowner's* actions in this parable reflect his *goodness*?

## THE CONCLUSION: Read Matthew 20:16

1. Jesus concluded this parable with the same statement he made to Peter just before he taught it. Peter asked the question about rewards after the rich young ruler asked Jesus about eternal life. In the eyes of the world, this young ruler was first; the disciples, mostly uneducated fishermen or from some sinful backgrounds, were last in the eyes of the world. When each one stands before the Lord, what will they understand about this truth?
  - a. What comfort does it give you to realize God's perspective is different than man's?

## REVIEW: Read Matthew 20:1-16

1. In what ways can God's grace seem unfair?
2. Why is it dangerous to compare your situation to others?
3. How does it make you feel to know that heaven will include ex-murderers, former child molesters, and people who put their trust in Christ only minutes before death?
  - a. How does it make you feel to know God has placed the words "ex" and "former" before titles man has given to your sins; and even more, erased the titles completely?
4. How can focusing on God's grace in our lives keep us from complaining and accusing God of being unfair?
5. In what ways have you been challenged by this lesson?

*And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,  
knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance;  
for you serve the Lord Christ.*

*- Colossians 3:23-24*

## Observation Worksheet

### Matthew 20:1-16

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup>Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup>And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, <sup>4</sup>and said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' So they went. <sup>5</sup>Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. <sup>6</sup>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?' <sup>7</sup>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.' <sup>8</sup>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.' <sup>9</sup>And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. <sup>10</sup>But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. <sup>11</sup>And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, <sup>12</sup>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.' <sup>13</sup>But he answered one of them and said, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? <sup>14</sup>Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. <sup>15</sup>Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?' <sup>16</sup>So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen."