



**St. John Chrysostom**

*If any have toiled from the first hour, let them receive their due reward;*

*If any have come after the third hour, let them with gratitude join in the Feast!*

*And those that arrived after the sixth hour, let them not doubt; for they too shall sustain no loss.*

*And if any delayed until the ninth hour, let them not hesitate; but let them come too.*

*And those who arrived only at the eleventh hour, let them not be afraid by reason of their delay.*

*For the Lord is gracious and receives the last even as the first.*

*Christ gives rest to those that come at the eleventh hour, as well as to those that toiled from the first.*

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## Around the Word Bible Study

Trinity, 2015

# Parables: "A Vineyard Story" Matthew 20:1-16

**Introduction:** Jesus uses the term, "the Kingdom of Heaven is like . . ." to set the stage, as he does for many of His parables. There is an important aspect to Jesus' use of the word *Kingdom* that we might not get from the English language. The New Testament Greek word for "kingdom" is βασιλεία (pronounced, "bâ-sî-lé-â"). This is no normal run of the mill Greek noun! It is a verbal noun - which means it is **active!** It does things! For this reason some biblical scholars favor the use of the more active word "reign."

God's kingdom is not just a place where He resides. God's kingdom/reign is His activity! It is His work of bringing His children into His kingdom, giving them a place within it, and giving them His gifts. The kingdom/reign of God is always relentlessly occupied with this work. We see this in the "landowner" who continually returns to the marketplace to pick up yet more workers for his vineyard throughout the day.

### Opening: Psalm 95

<sup>1</sup>Oh come, let us sing | to the LORD;\*  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our  
sal- | vation!

<sup>2</sup>**Let us come into his presence with thanks-  
| giving;\***  
**let us make a joyful noise to him with | songs  
of praise!**

<sup>3</sup>For the LORD is a | great God,\*  
and a great King a- | bove all gods.

<sup>4</sup>**In his hand are the depths | of the earth;\***  
**the heights of the mountains are his | also.**

<sup>5</sup>The sea is his, for he | made it,\*  
and his hands formed the | dry land.

<sup>6</sup>**Oh come, let us worship and | bow down;\***  
**let us kneel before the LORD, our | Maker!**

<sup>7</sup>For he | is our God,\*  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep | of his hand.

**Today, if you | hear his voice,\***  
<sup>8</sup>**do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,**  
**as on the day at Massah in the | wilderness,**

<sup>9</sup>when your fathers put me | to the test\*  
and put me to the proof, though they had | seen  
my work.

<sup>10</sup>**For forty years I loathed that generation  
and said, "They are a people who go astray | in  
their heart,\*  
and they have not | known my ways."**

<sup>11</sup>Therefore I swore | in my wrath,\*  
"They shall not enter | my rest."

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son\*  
and to the Holy | Spirit;  
as it was in the be- | ginning,\*  
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

Read Matthew 20:1-16

v. 1: "For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a land-

**owner who went out early in the morning to  
hire laborers for his vineyard."**

The word "For" to begin Jesus' sentence ties this parable to the words of Jesus which came immediately before. How does Matt 19:30 (as well as Matt 20:16 which frames the parable with the same words) help us understand the point/theme of this parable?

Parables are allegory. How does the use of vineyard imagery in other parts of Scripture inform our understanding of the part it plays in this parable? See Isaiah 5:1-7, John 15:1-11.

**v. 2: "After agreeing with the laborers for a  
denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard."**

The first workers hired do not go out to work until a specific wage is agreed upon. Workers who are hired later in the day go to work with no specific wage promised (cf. v.3-4). What might this contrast tell us about the motives and expectations of the group hired first versus the groups hired between the third and eleventh hours?

In light of the above, how might Peter's words in Matthew 19:27 relate to the first group and provide a little more context for Jesus giving this parable at this time?

**v. 5b: "Going out again about the sixth hour and  
the ninth hour, he did the same."**

Note that the landowner does not remain in the marketplace constantly. He goes out only at fixed hours, yet frequently throughout the day. What does this communicate about the nature of God's reign/activity?

**v. 6: "And about the eleventh hour he went out  
and found others standing."**

The landowner employs workers even at the last hour of the work day. These last workers will be able to do very little to benefit the vineyard, yet the landowner employs them. Even before the climax of this parable, how does this verse begin to hint at the absurdity of God's grace? How does Isaiah 55:8-9 shed more light on the nature of God as portrayed in this parable?

This verse notes that the landowner, "found" these others after having gone out at an hour when no employer seeking to gain a profit would be hiring day laborers. How does this reflect upon who gets all the credit (glory) for all who are brought into the kingdom of God? See also Genesis 46:4 and Ezekiel 34:11-15.

**v. 7a: "They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.'"**

The landowner's question from v.6b "Why do you stand here idle all day?" has no valid response. His accusation that they have been standing their "idle all day" contradicts their feeble attempt to shift blame for their predicament upon the landowner who has been by to hire workers several times already. What does this reflect concerning those who hear the Gospel proclaimed and yet do not respond? What does it say concerning those who claim to be Christian but who do not participate regularly in the life of the Church?

How does this last group, who offers an empty excuse for their long idleness, compare to the first group, who insisted upon a specific wage before they would agree to work?

**v. 8-9: "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."**

This verse is the key to the entire parable and the climax of the point Jesus is making (recall the verses that frame this text). What can be gleaned from the fact of the last group (those who had given empty excuses for not having gone to work earlier) receiving the payment which had been specified with the first group?

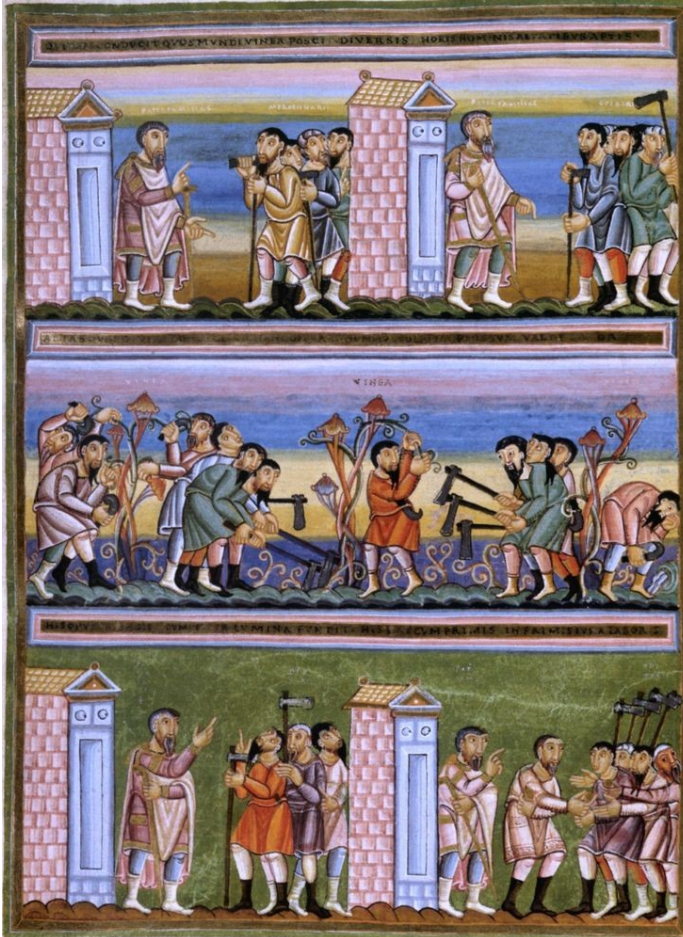
**v. 10-12: "Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'"**

Of the two groups highlighted (those hired first and those hired last)

which viewed their work in the vineyard as gift and which viewed it as a burden?

How does the first group of workers compare with the rich young man who went away from Jesus in sorrow? See Matthew 19:16-22.

How does the last group of workers compare with the "little children" who are being brought to Jesus in Matthew 19:13-15?



**v. 13-15: "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?'"**

How can the questions asked by the landowner of the worker in v. 15 pertain to us today?

The workers hired first were insistent upon a wage and thus were resentful that they received only what they were due when others were given the same. Those hired later and last were willing to work trusting in the landowner's word that they would receive "whatever is right" and were satisfied with what they were given. What is the only wage truly deserved? See also Romans 6:23.

Thanks be to God that he does not deal with us fairly, but instead with "generosity" (grace). Read Martin Luther's explanation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism. How can this teaching be applied to the point of this parable?

**Conclusion**

How does the teaching of Jesus through this parable fit with Jesus' words and actions in other parts of Matthew? See, for example, Matthew 9:1-22 and 5:21-39. How do these aid in conveying the full message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

**Closing: By Grace I'm Saved (LSB, 566)**

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** Rev. Jeffrey Ries (lcmspastor896@gmail.com) is pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tacoma, WA.