

# PARABLE: WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

Matthew 20:1-16

## STRUCTURE

**Key-persons:** Jesus; in the parable: the landowner and the workers

**Key-location:** Jesus, on the road to Jerusalem; in the parable, a vineyard

### Key-repetitions:

- Jesus said, "Many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first": after talking with the rich young ruler (Mat 19:30); at the end of the Parable of Workers in the Vineyard (Mat 20:16).
- Landowner went out to hire workers: (Mat 20:1, 3, 5, 6).
- Pay: landowner agreed to pay workers a day's wage (Mat 20:2); landowner agreed to pay what is right (Mat 20:4); landowner told his foreman to pay workers their wages, starting with the last ones hired (Mat 20:8); the last workers hired received pay for a day's wage (Mat 20: 9); the workers who were hired first expected a larger pay, but were only paid a day's wage (Mat 20:10); the first workers hired complained about the pay (Mat 20:11-12); the landowner said they agreed to a day's wage, and that is what he paid them (Mat 20:13).

### Key-attitudes:

- Landowner's persistence.
- Workers' desire for work.
- Landowner's generosity.
- First hired workers' discontentment of wages paid.
- Landowner's sternness when correcting complaining workers.

### Initial-situation:

Jesus was in the second half of his third year of public ministry. The religious leaders' antagonism toward Jesus increased. The people flip-flopped between excitement for Jesus when he performed a miracle, and anger toward Jesus when they didn't like his teaching. Jesus already warned his disciples twice that in Jerusalem he would die and come back to life. Jesus was traveling toward Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. Jesus interacted with the crowd that followed him. He constantly found teaching moments for his disciples. Jesus just finished his encounter with the rich young ruler. He told his disciples, "Many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first."

### Initial-problem:

Jesus told a parable, "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 minimum wage for working twelve hours."

**Final-situation:**

Jesus gave the main point of the parable, "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

**BIBLE STORY**

Jesus told a parable. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a minimum wage for working twelve hours and sent them into his vineyard.

"About nine o'clock, the landowner went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, 'Go and work in my vineyard. I'll pay you what is right.' So they went.

"The landowner did the same thing at the noon hour and again at three o'clock. About five o'clock, the landowner went out and found others still standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?'

"They answered, 'Because no one hired us.'

"The landowner told them, 'Go and work in my vineyard.'

"Evening came and the landowner told his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages. Start with the last ones hired and end with those who were hired first.'"

"Each of the workers who were hired about five o'clock received the equivalent of the minimum wage for working twelve hours. Those who were hired first expected to receive much more. However, the first workers hired also received the minimum wage for working twelve hours. The first workers hired, took their money but grumbled against the landowner saying, 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour, yet you paid them equal to us who slaved twelve hours in the hot sun.'

"The landowner answered one of the workers, 'Friend, I'm not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a minimum wage? Take your pay and go. I want to give the worker 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? Are you jealous because I'm generous?'

"Therefore, many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first" (Mat 20:1-16).

**GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS**

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| 1. What catches your attention in the story?                  | 5. How did the characters face their problems?                                       |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems?  |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story?                  | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face?                     | 8. What does the story tell about God?   |

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. To what did Jesus compare the Kingdom of Heaven?
2. What wages did the landowner promise the first workers hired?
3. What wages did the landowner promise the others?

4. In what order were the workers paid?
5. Who was discontented and why?
6. How does this story apply to the Kingdom of Heaven?
7. Is it fair that the person who gets saved and enters the Kingdom of Heaven shortly before dying gets the same benefits in heaven as the person who was saved as a child and served God all his life?
8. What would you say to the person who plans to wait until just before dying to come to Christ, in order not to work so hard for Jesus or give up so much?

### LIFE-LESSONS

1. **The main lesson from the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard is that serving the Lord for a long time does not insure more benefits than received by the person who starts serving God late in life** (Mat 20:1-16). God bestows his grace of salvation upon all those who respond to his call, regardless of human merit.
2. **People who served God from their childhood have no right to complain about the benefits in heaven for senior citizens who come to Jesus shortly before dying.** The workers didn't have the right to complain because they received the wages promised by the landowner. The landowner had the freedom to dispense his wealth as he saw fit. God is also free to dispense his grace as he sees fit (Mat 20:13-15). The criminal who repented as he was dying will be in heaven (Lk 23:40-43) along with people who served God for many years.
3. **The Kingdom of Heaven will bring about a divine reversal of who is important and who is the least important on earth.** At the end of Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler (Mat 19:16-30), Jesus informed his disciples that many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first (Mat 19:30). Jesus concluded the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard with the same conclusion (Mat 20:14). In the Kingdom of Heaven, those who made personal sacrifices for Christ and were considered unimportant on earth will be rewarded and blessed. However, people similar to the rich young ruler and who were considered important on earth, yet who loved wealth more than Christ, will be unimportant in heaven.
4. **Entrance in the Kingdom of Heaven is by God's grace alone.** No person deserves eternal life. This parable teaches about God's grace. God gives salvation to repentant people who don't deserve it. God is generous (Mat 20:15).
5. **Don't forfeit eternal benefits for temporary benefits.** At the end of Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler (Mat 19:16-30), Jesus informed his disciples that many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first (Mat 19:30). Jesus concluded the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard with the same conclusion (Mat 20:14). Be willing to make temporary sacrifices on earth in order to obtain

eternal wealth. Be willing to accept disapproval from people now in order to obtain God's approval in heaven.

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### **Twitter Prayers** (short, concise prayers):

Invite listeners to pray about the story in "twitter" length prayers. Tell God:

- How they feel about the story.
- With which group of the hired workers they identify.
- Occasions when they grumbled about God's actions in their lives or the lives of their family and friends.
- How the story helps them to know God better.