

Matthew 20:1-16 – The Sovereignty Of God

Introduction:

1. Working hard for an A in English
2. Jesus' parable is meant to raise eyebrows and create a jealous confusion about fairness and justice
3. Jesus' parable hits our pride & humbles him, and it can cause deep anger for those who do not understand the sovereign freedom of God

Main Idea: God is sovereignly free to do with His creation and His creatures what He wills. Sinners are saved by God's sovereign grace. The proud, natural man views this as unjust, scandalous, and makes God look capricious. In reality, God is Creator and King, not beholden to His creaturely servants. He is infinitely generous, but always according to His unfathomable wisdom.

The Context (Matthew 19:30, 20:16)

Ancient Context

1. The poorest of the poor in Jesus' day would have to wait to be hired for the day by an employer
2. One Denarius (A Roman Silver Coin) was the wage for a day's labor
3. A typical workday was 6 AM until 6 PM

Scriptural Context

4. Jesus' parable occurs at the end of the scenario between Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler and His instruction to His disciples on those who in this world think they are first, who are last, and those who are last, who are actually first in the Kingdom of God (KOG)
 - a. The greatest in the KOG is the least and last of this world who have places their faith in Jesus Christ
5. Jesus ends His instruction to His disciples and this parable with the first will be last, and the last will be first forming an inclusion, connecting the parable to His instruction

The Parable (Mt 20:1-16)

1. **Verse 1:** The test is about the KOG; Jesus compares it to a wealthy landlord who chooses laborers to work in his vineyard
 - a. The workers are completely dependent on the landlord for work; the laborer needs the landowner, not the other way around
2. **Verse 2:** The landlord makes a deal with his first workers and they agree to work a full day for one denarius
3. **Verses 3-7:** The landowner hires workers throughout the day at different intervals promising to be fair in his wages
4. **Verses 6-7:** Turning point in the parable where the Landlord hires laborers one hour before quitting time
5. **Verse 8:** The foreman/steward pays the workers beginning with the last of the workers hired to the first in order
6. **Verses 9-10:** Those workers hired last were graciously paid one day's wage, a denarius, for their one hour of work; every worker got one denarius causing those hired first to be angry with the landlord

- a. The graciousness of the landowner provided for the workers he chose; the landowner from his riches supplied their need
- b. The landowner keeps his word and the Law of God (**Dt 24:14-15**)
7. **Verses 10-12:** The landowner's graciousness to those hired later cause those who were hired first to become jealous
 - a. Those hired at 6 AM had two complaints against the landowner
 - i. The landowner failed to consider the length of hours worked
 - ii. The landowner failed to consider that they work in the heat of the day and those hired later worked in the cool of the evening
 - b. In word they though the landowner: Unfair!
8. **Verses 13-15:** The landowner responds with two rebuttals:
 - a. The landowner kept his word, paying them what was agreed upon
 - b. The landowner has sovereign rights to do with his wealth as he pleases; He is generous to give to/grace whomever he pleases
9. **Verse 16:** Those chosen last paid the same as those chosen first

The Laborers: Envy Over Greater Grace

1. In the KOG, the laborers are the servants within the KOG who are in desperate need; they are dependent upon the King for sustenance
 - a. Contextually, those hired early are the Jews who have been part of the covenant community since Mt. Sinai while those hired later are the Gentiles, the sheep from other pastures brought into the fold
 - b. This reception of the Gentiles caused envy among the Jews (**Romans 11:11-12**)
2. The jealousy provoked is by greater grace
3. The natural man will find this parable offensive; the unbelieving Jews will be cut off the vine while the Gentiles will be grafted into the vine

The Landowner: Sovereign & Gracious

1. The Landowner is God who displays absolute sovereignty over His created order: The King chooses His surfs, and graces them as He wills
 - a. God has mercy and hardens according to His will (**Rom 9:13-18**)
 - b. God gracing whom He wills is scandalous to people (**Rom 9:22-24**)
 - c. God has all the rights! He creates some for honor, some dishonor
 - d. God is absolutely free to do as He pleases (**Psalms 115:3**)
2. Salvation is not sinners cooperating with God to be saved
3. God saves fully, all the way – He conquers our rebellious will in His mercy – No one can resist His will (**See Romans 9:19-20**)
4. God's grace irresistibly draws the sinner and the natural man hates this
 - a. He chose us in Him before the foundation of the World (**Eph 1:3-4**)
 - b. How do you respond to this truth? Humble gratitude? Anger because it is viewed as unfair or unjust (like those first hirelings)
5. God pours out grace in the measure He purposes (**Ephesians 1:4-6**)
6. The RCC teaches from this parable that salvation is a wage you earn
7. Martin Luther: Your little bit of contribution does not save you...

Conclusion: Grace for the Last & Least (Matthew 20:16)

1. Example: The Thief on the Cross at the end of his life was fully saved
2. The person saved early is lavished with eternal life as much as the last