

## **Goodness and Generosity**

### **Matthew 20:1-15**

**Matthew 20:1-15 New International Version (NIV)**  
**The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard**

**20** “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> He agreed to pay them a denarius<sup>[a]</sup> for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

<sup>3</sup> “About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. <sup>4</sup> He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ <sup>5</sup> So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. <sup>6</sup> About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

<sup>7</sup> “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

<sup>8</sup> “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.

<sup>9</sup> “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. <sup>10</sup> So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup> When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. <sup>12</sup> ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

<sup>13</sup> “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? <sup>14</sup> Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. <sup>15</sup> Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous

Two friends met in the street. One looked sad and almost on the verge of tears. The other man said, "Hey my friend, how come you look like the whole world has caved in?"

The sad fellow said, "Let me tell you. Three weeks ago, an uncle died and left me 50-thousand dollars."

"That's not bad at all...!"

"Hold on, I'm just getting started. Two weeks ago, a cousin I never knew kicked-the-bucket and left me 95-thousand, tax-free to boot."

"Well, that's great! I'd like that."

"Last week, my grandfather passed away. I inherited almost a million."

"So why are so glum?"

"This week - nothing!"

This parable describes what happened in Palestine during the time of Jesus. The harvest ripened towards the end of September and then the rains came. If the harvest was not gathered before the rains, then the crops would be ruined. It became a race against time. Any one was welcomed to work even if it was only an hour. Some men would stand waiting to be called to work until the last hour of the day. This was proof of how desperate people were to work. The servant who was attached to a family was not ever in danger of starvation. However, the hired laborers were entirely at the mercy of chance employment and always living in a state of starvation.

The dilemma of the story is that according to the thoughts of the people the landowner did not act with fairness. Especially if fairness means treating each one strictly as he deserves. The first group of people were hired with a set amount at the end of the day. During the day others came and wanted to work for what was fair and were told to go work in the fields. At the end of day, he found others waiting for work and was told to go work in the fields. When it was time to be paid everyone received the set amount as the first workers. People grumbled about the paid and were reminded that they had a bargain to work for a set amount. The last group had no such bargain.

The point of this story is the writer is speaking to men who wanted their relationship with God in the Kingdom of God and their reward for serving Him to rest on their performance. This is a warning to the disciples. You must not claim a special place in the Kingdom of God because you knew Jesus and became a follower before others. The parable is a warning to Jews. They knew they were the chosen race and could not imagine a Gentile finding favor with God. But we learn from this parable that all people are equally dear to God. The people have no right to be upset with God if He chose to distribute His blessings by another

principle other than fairness. The principle we should take away from story is that God is generous.

The parables also teach us about God. No matter when a person enters the Kingdom, that person is equally dear to God and will be safe in the comfort of God just the same as anyone else who enters in the Kingdom. The parable teaches of the infinite compassion of God. The landowner knew that it is tragic when a person is not working and wasting his/her talents doing nothing. He also knew that the amount the man would receive for only working one hour would not be able to feed his family. The landowner showed his human tenderness went beyond justice and gave them more than they were due. The truth of this parable is the right of every man to work, and the right of every man to receive a living wage for his work. This parable shows the generosity of God with two truths. First it does not matter how much we give but the love in which we give the gift. The second truth is all God gives is of grace. Jesus as the landowner looks for those who ask for an opportunity to work. His generosity is far greater than the wages guaranteed. Jesus offers Himself to us without bargaining. Our relationship with Jesus is one of trust and love with generous giving. There is no room for bargains in this relationship.

In the Kingdom of God, the followers like the disciples will receive all that is due to him and the bargainer will always be upset with what he receives. The greatest reward will be to those who do not look for a reward but only an opportunity to work. Jesus offers Himself on the same basis. Our relationship with Jesus is based on love and trust with generous giving and receiving. The message of this parable is that we have been called to participate in God's own goodness, not simply as recipients, but as givers. His goodness was expressed in a generous act that did not rest on fairness but on a desire for the other's wellbeing.

In reflection answer these questions:

1. How has God shown Himself to be generous with you?
2. How has God's own goodness found expression in your relationship with others?
3. Is there one specific area of relationship in which you want to express more of Christ's kind of goodness?

***Sources: The Broadman Bible Commentary and William Barclay's The Gospel of Matthew***

Dear God, show us how you intend to express Jesus' goodness through us this week and how we can show goodness to others.

***Music: Because I Have Been Given Much  
Sung by Mark Dycus***

**Because I have been given much,  
I too must give;**

Because of thy great bounty Lord,  
Each day I live;  
I shall divide my gifts from thee  
With every brother that I see  
Who has the need of help from me.

Because I have been sheltered, fed  
By thy good care;  
I cannot see another's lack and I not share;  
My glowing fire, my loaf of bread,  
my roof's safe shelter overhead  
That he too may be comforted.

Because I have been blessed by  
thy great love dear Lord;  
I'll share thy love again  
According to thy word;  
I shall give love to those in need,  
I'll show that love by word and deed;  
Thus shall my thanks be thanks in deed.

*Music by Phillip Landgrave (1975)*

*Lyrics by Grace Noll Crowell (1936)*