

Come Follow Me
Elo Viz Production
Week 20

Matthew 19-20, Mark 10, Luke 18

I'd like to focus on the parable Jesus gives in Matt 20 today. It's the one about the laborers in the vineyard, but before we get to that, I think it is important that we understand the context in which this parable was given.

If we back up one chapter we read about a young man that came to Jesus and asked Him: "What shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (Matt 19:16)

Jesus responds with: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep all the commandments" (Matt 19:17-19)

"I have", he says to the Master (bold statement from the young rich man). It sounds like a touch of arrogance as he asks Jesus: "What lack I yet?"

"**21** Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be **perfect**, go *and* sell that thou hast, and **give** to the **poor**, and thou shalt have **treasure** in heaven: and come *and follow* me.

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had **great** possessions. (Matt 19:21-22)

This must have been a shock to those disciples standing around Him, who witnessed this exchange because Peter pipes up and says:

"Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?"
(Matt 19:27)

What do we get? What you just told that young man to do we have done. We left our families, and our homes to follow you. What's in it for us?

And it is against this backdrop that we get this parable of the laborers in the vineyard. It wasn't something that Jesus just pulled out of a hat as He sat teaching one day. It had a purpose, There was a setting, and an important situation that Jesus felt it was the time to teach them what the Kingdom of God is really like.

He begins with: "1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that is* an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire **labourers** into his vineyard." (Matt 20:1)

The phrase "Kingdom of Heaven" appears a lot in the book of Matthew, in fact more than 30 times. What is interesting is that Matthew is the only one that records that term "Kingdom of Heaven". In Mark, Luke and John they use more commonly the phrase "Kingdom of God". And they use that phrase a combined total of 50 times. Now, these two phrases are interchangeable.

They basically mean the same thing. In fact if we go back to the young ruler story we were just talking about Jesus uses both of those phrases in one teaching, He says:

“23 Verily I say unto you, That a **rich** man shall **hardly** enter into the kingdom of heaven.

24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a **rich** man to enter into the kingdom of God.” (Matt 19:23-24)

So what does it mean? What is the kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God? Well, every kingdom must have a few important things. First: it must have a King. You can not have a kingdom without first having a King. It is also important to have subjects. Those that are subject to, or ruled over by a king. And third there must be a territory. A place for the King and His subjects to live. Without any one of these three parts you can't have a kingdom. Well, when Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of heaven; God is our King and we are the subjects, and Heaven is the territory. But God's kingdom is special in the fact that it has a physical realm and spiritual realm. Jesus talk about this when He was demanded of the pharisees to know when the kingdom of God should come, and this is how Jesus responded:

“The kingdom of God cometh not with observation:

21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the **kingdom** of God is **within** you. (Luke 17:20-21)

This is the spiritual realm, the spiritual part of God's kingdom. Now, I know that there are some out there that say “We don't want a king; We don't want anyone to tell me what to do. We want to be free to do whatever we want, whenever we want. Well, the fact of the matter is that we all have a king. We all have someone or something we worship. Whether it is God, or our possessions, or ourselves. We all have something that drives us to make the decisions that we do in our life. And if you don't believe in God as your king, then there is something else that you have put into His place as your king.

For those that are Christians and do believe that God is the rightful king, are we truly committed to His rule in our lives and in our hearts? Sometimes, I believe we dethrone God for a time, when we decide that we can do a better job. We say: Woo woo God, hold on a second I dont like whats going on here, let me take over for a bit, and when I feel it is safe then I'll give you back the wheel. Or, more correctly stated. I'll give you back the throne of my life once I'm done doing what I want to do. And this is what Jesus is trying to teach them with this parable. That God is and should be our King and we should trust Him to do what is best for us at all times in our lives.

Let's continue:

So the Master or Lord of the vineyard goes out to hire laborers to work in His vineyard. This was a common practice in the days of Jesus. Men would go to the market and hang around there looking for work. Most, in that day, were lucky to be able to live off what they earned that day. President Holland says it this way:

“In the time of the Savior, an average man and his family could not do much more than live on what they made that day. If you didn’t work or farm or fish or sell, you likely didn’t eat. With more prospective workers than jobs, these first men chosen were the most fortunate in the entire labor pool that morning.”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2012/04/the-laborers-in-the-vineyard?lang=eng>

So, the Master of the vineyard chose some to come work, please notice something very important about this first group. The record says that:

“when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his [vineyard](#).” (Matt 20:2)

The correct translation of penny is a “Denarius”. Simply put; it was a sum of money that was worth a day's wage at that time.

The Master is being fair. I'll pay you a day's worth of wages for a day's worth of work. And the men agree and go into the vineyard to labor. This exchange takes place around 6am. We know this because a full working day in early Judaism was 12 hours; 6 am to 6 pm. But the Master goes back for more laborers, 4 more times in fact. Once at 9am, then again at noon, then again at 3pm and just before the days end at 5pm. But, please notice that there was no negotiation for wages with these laborers. All the Master says is:

“Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you.” (Matt 20:4)

That's trusting. Whatever is right. We talk often of these men that didn't have to work a full day to receive a full day's wage but what we often look over is that these men were willing to work not even knowing what they would get paid. Would you ever do that? In today's society would any of us really trust that we would be treated fairly, and take a job that we didn't know the compensation package before we showed up? That is a big ask if you ask me.

But the Master had a plan, He knew the whole time what the plan was. And it was ok that He didn't tell those who were called to labor.

“8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the [labourers](#), and give them *their* [hire](#), beginning from the last unto the first.” (Matt 20:8)

Now, this process is very strange and completely backwards from common sense. You would think that if you were going to surprise these last people who you called to labor with a wonderful gift you would do it in private and wait till all the other guys left. But the Master is doing something deliberate here. He wants the first to see what He is doing. Why? I believe it is because He wants to teach them something and it is the same lesson He is wanting us to

learn. As we read this story we all have the exact same feelings that these first laborers have. No matter who you are as we get to this part we all feel a tightness in our chest, a feeling of unfairness. How could this be? We cry out. Some even think; that it is great that you want to be generous but be generous to all of them or at least don't let the first guys see what you gave the last guys. We all think to ourselves: I would have done that differently... AND THAT IS THE POINT!!

God wants you to know that; HE IS DIFFERENT. And that He wants you to be more like Him.

If we really analyze this situation, who was treated unfairly? No one! The first ones chosen were lucky to be hired. They knew what they were going to receive a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. The other ones that were chosen later were lucky to have any work and any wage. There is a possibility that the Master of the vineyard knew these first men would not take the offer given to the other groups, to work without knowing the wage. So if you really consider the situation everyone was blessed to have any association with this Master. And the same is true for us today.

Any effort is rewarded generously. Remember what King Benjamin taught his people just before he passed:

“22 And behold, all that he **requires** of you is to **keep** his commandments; and he has **promised** you that if ye would keep his commandments ye should prosper in the land; and he never doth **vary** from that which he hath said; therefore, if ye do **keep** his **commandments** he doth bless you and prosper you.

23 And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him.

24 And secondly, he doth **require** that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately **bless** you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast?

25 And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you, Nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; yet ye were **created** of the **dust** of the earth; but behold, it **belongeth** to him who created you. (Mosiah 2:22-25)

That is what Jesus is teaching us with this parable. His whole ministry was an unwavering example of humility and love. And what He did, we are expected to do as well. So, be kind, and happy for others when God is kind to them. But, most importantly, be grateful to God for the kindness He has shown you. For His grace is the greatest gift of all.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.