**Grace to You** :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

**Equality in the Kingdom**
Scripture: Matthew 19:30-20:16
Code: 2345

I want to invite you now to open your Bible to the twentieth chapter of Matthew's gospel and as we joyfully work our way through this great great gospel we go seemingly from one glorious passage to another. And what we shall see today as we open the twentieth chapter is no less wonderful than the best of what we have learned already.

Just to get us started in our thinking one of the great notable faithful men of God was a prophet Ezekiel. A prophet like Ezekiel was common in the land of Israel, common among the people of God. God always had His spokesman and one of the duties that a prophet discharged was the duty of warning the people, warning them about sin. And it was especially Ezekiel's task to do that. He ministered to the people in exile. When the children of Israel had been taken into Babylonian captivity it was there and then that Ezekiel ministered to them. And he very often reminded them of the sins that had gotten them there so that they wouldn't repeat those same sins. And one of the sins that had gotten them there, one of the many things that had caused God to bring judgment upon them, was the fact that they were accusing God of being unfair, and they were striking against God's nature, against God's person, against His character.

And so in Ezekiel 18, twice Ezekiel says, "Ye say the way of the Lord is not equal?" Here now O house of Israel. Is not My way equal, are not your ways unequal? In other words God defends, rather Ezekiel defends God as being a God of perfect equality and if we think He isn't it's because our ways are unequal. He is the standard, not us.

Well that wasn't the first or the last time God has been accused of being unfair, inequitable, unequal in His treatment of men, and I think the writers of Scripture take on this accusation repeatedly. At least a half a dozen times in the New Testament the statement is made: God is no respecter of persons, and that's another way of saying God treats everybody equally. I think this can be illustrated to us briefly if we just consider what the apostle Paul says in Romans 2:9-11, listen carefully. "Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greek. But glory honor and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, for there is not respect of persons with God."

In other words judgment equally on those who know not God; blessing equally on those who do. In Colossians Chapter 3, we find repeated the same principle. Verse 24 says, "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance for you serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong

shall receive for the wrong, which he hath done and there is no respect of persons. God rewards those who do right. God judges those who do wrong and He has no regard for their individual personalities.

Now when it comes then to the blessings of salvation God give to all equally. All of us who come to the Lord Jesus Christ receive the same salvation. No matter what the circumstances of our coming, no matter how diligent or faithful our service it is God's pleasure to give us the same glorious salvation. Now with that as a background look at Matthew Chapter 19 and the last verse, and this should really be the first verse of Chapter 20. "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first. For the kingdom of heaven is like a man that is an householder who when out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarias a day he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace and said unto them, 'go ye also into the vineyard and whatever is right I will give you.' And they went their way.

Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour and did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle and saith unto them, 'Why stand ye here all the day idle?' They say unto him, 'Because no man has hired us.' He saith unto them, 'Go ye also into the vineyard and whatever is right that shall ye receive.' So when evening was come the lord of the vineyard saith unto the steward, 'Call the laborers and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.' And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour they receive every man a denarias. But when the first came they supposed that they should have received more and they likewise received every man a denarias. And when they had received it they murmured against the householder, 'these last have worked but one hour and thou hast made them equal unto us who have born the burden in the heat of the day.' But he answered one of them and said, 'Friend, I do thee no wrong. Didst not thou agree with me for a denarias? Take what is thine and go thy way. I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil because I am good?' So the last shall be first and the first last."

Now what a tremendous story this is. You will notice that the parable is bracketed by a repetition of the same statement: the first shall be last and the last shall be first, making it quite apparent that the parable is designed to illustrate that maxim, that statement.

Now in order to understand what our Lord is teaching here we want to look at four elements. We want to look first of all at the proverb, then the parable, then the point of the parable, and then principles. Let's begin with the proverb. It appears in 19:30 and appears in 20:16. It is basically the same. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. That's a proverb or a maxim. A proverb can be defined this way: it is a short statement of wisdom. It is a short statement usually of unknown origin or ancient origin expressing wisdom. And that's a proverb. The first shall be last and the last shall be first.

Now it may be that the Lord borrowed this particular proverb from His own day. We don't have any evidence of it in any other writings. We don't know that it appeared any place else, but it may have been a common statement. On the other hand, he may have coined it himself. We do know that He used it on several different occasions. So it was a part of His teaching to repeat this very simple and straightforward proverb.

Now some proverbs also come sort of in the form of a riddle and this is one of them. You really don't know what it means when you just read it the first shall be last and the last shall be first. What first, what last, and what does it man? And so bound up in this proverb is a riddle that must be solved. I began to read the passage this week and before I studied anything, any commentaries or anybody's opinion about it or before I looked at any books I just began to mull over and over in my mind what does that mean, the first shall be last and the last shall be first? And the only thing that I could figure out that it meant was that everybody will be the same, because if the first become last and the last become first, then the first to become last become first, and the last who are already last become first. So everybody's first. The only thing it could mean, the first are last and the last are first, everybody's the same. I mean you have a race and some people start our first and some people start out last and they all wind up at the end at the same, it's a dead heat. So you can call this the dead heat proverb. Everybody crosses the finish line at the same time. The last are first and the first are last, and that is the intent of the parable as it becomes very obvious in the context and the parable as our Lord opens it up to us. So we see the proverb.

Now let's look at the parable and you'll see how it supports that proverb, and it is a fascinating picture. Verse 1, "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man that is an householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard." Now we're talking about the kingdom of heaven, folks. This is a spiritual lesson. We're not talking about things on the earth; we're talking about things in the sphere where God rules through grace. We're talking about the salvation economy, in the sphere of God's domain, in the kingdom of light where Christ rules and reigns. We're in the spiritual dimension, God's world now, and in order for us to understand that dimension we really have to have some earthly illustrations don't we? Because we're so earthly minded. And so the Lord Jesus when commonly talking about the spiritual kingdom gave us physical earthly illustrations called parables. This is one of them.

And he begins by introducing us to a man and this man is an *oikodespotes, oikos* means house, *despotes*means ruler like we have a despot. So he's a ruler of a house. It must have been quite a large estate, in fact. He is the owner, no doubt, because in verse 15 he says, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? So that the money he paid the laborers was his own indicates that he in fact was the owner. So here is a man who owns a large estate, which incorporates a vineyard and early in the morning, now this would be prior to 6 o'clock because the Jewish day began at 6 in the morning and ended at 6 at night. They work from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. basically, a twelve-hour

workday.

And so early in the morning he went into the village, or into the town to hire laborers to come and work in his vineyard. Now this is not an imaginary scene to a Jew. This is a very real one, a very real one. They were very familiar with vineyards. The land of Palestine is basically divided into two kinds of land, for the most part, the plains and the mountain slopes. The plains like the valley of the Jordan, the valley of Sharon, Sharon Valley, and valley of Esdraelon, which is known also as the plain of Megiddo, or Armageddon will be centered. Those places are characterized by grain fields. But Palestine is also marked with mountains everywhere and the slopes of those mountains were terraced for the planting of vineyards. It was tremendously difficult work because they had to terrace the mountains and they supported those terraces with stones that they carried by hand and put in place by hand. Any soil that had to be taken from the bottom to the top to replace topsoil had to be carried on the shoulders of the men, so it was a great amount of effort.

In the spring they would plant the crop. In the summer they would prune it as it grew, and they would tie the branches down to produce the greatest amount of fruit, and then about the end of September they would come to the time of harvesting the grapes. And it wasn't long after that that the rainy season came and it was very important that they get the harvest in before the rain began and so harvest time was a hectic time. And it very likely is near the harvest time and the man who owns the vineyard knows that he's got to get his crop in and so beyond the normal servants that he has working for him he goes into the village to hire some day laborers who can come out and help him harvest his crop. He would have a very large number of men doing this and they would be gathered in town perhaps at a very common meeting place for day laborers in the marketplace, the *agura*, and there they would be waiting for those who might come and hire them. And this man shows up before 6 a.m. so that he can have them for a full day.

Now what kind of laborers are these? Well in the society of Israel there were people who owned the land, there were people who were employed by those who owned the land, there were the people who were employed on a long-term basis like household servants and household slaves and household workers and those who worked the soil and so forth. But the lowest folks on the economic ladder were the day laborers. They really had no guarantee of work beyond the moment. They came every day to the marketplace, stood around a special meeting point, and just hoped that someone would come and hire them. And the wages they received were usually very very low because they were so desperate they had to work for whatever they could get. I mean a Roman soldier was paid a denarius and he had an honorable job. And those who were well thought of and respected and maybe lifetime servants were paid a denarius a day. That was a good wage. That was a respectable wage. But a lay laborer might be hired for a lot less because he really wasn't in a negotiating position. If he didn't work he didn't eat that day because he could barely eek out subsistence for himself, his wife, and his family.

So God is concerned about these particular kinds of workers in the Old Testament. And in Leviticus 19:13, the Bible says, "The wages of the hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning." In other words, God says when you hire a man for a day you pay him at the end of that day. And in Deuteronomy it also says in Chapter 24 and verse 15, "You shall give him his hire on the day he earns it before the sun goes down for he is poor and sets his heart on it least he cry against you to the Lord and it be sin in you." So these people were on the bottom rung of the ladder economically and the Lord put that in the Levitical law in order that they might be cared for properly so that when they worked a day they were paid a day because if they didn't get paid they couldn't eat the next day. They weren't the kind that were stockpiling it up and having sufficiency apart from their daily labor. So it's a very vivid scene in a Jewish village as the day laborers gather in the morning and wait for somebody to come along and hire them to go work in the vineyard to bring in the harvest. That sets the stage.

Now we go to verse 2. "And when he had agreed with the day laborers for a denarius a day he sent them into his vineyard." That's a very fair wage. That's an honorable wage and very likely more than they would normally receive. That was standard pay for a soldier and a respected employee, generally accepted certain for day work as more than a fair wage. In fact, these men agreed it was fair and went to work for that amount, both owner and worker in agreement. And so he sends them off, if says in verse 2, into his vineyard to begin their work.

Now verse 3. "And he went out about the third hour," now if the day begins at 6 a.m. this is 9 o'clock in the morning, "and he saw others standing idle in the marketplace and said unto them, 'Go ye also into the vineyard and whatever is right I will give you,' and they went their way." He comes back at 9 o'clock and now there are some folks there who are idle and by idle it doesn't mean to say that they were indifferent to work. It simply means they were unemployed. It means they weren't working. It isn't that they didn't want to work or they wouldn't have been gathered there waiting for someone to hire them. They wanted to work. They hadn't been hired in the earlier time and now he comes back to hire them. You get the feeling that it isn't so much that he needs the workers as it is that he's compassionate on the fact that they have great need and if they don't work they don't eat.

And so when he finds them he sends them into the field to work and you'll notice that he negotiates no price. All he says to them is I'll pay you what is right and they took him at his word. In a village like that they would have known him to be an honorable man and they respected his word and if he said he'd pay them what is right they went on those terms. You see they weren't in a negotiating position. They had no choice. If they didn't work they didn't eat, they'd have to take whatever they could get. Consequently they were often taken advantage of, but apparently they trusted this man. And so without negotiating any price they went their way.

And verse 5 says, "They went out about the sixth hour," that's noon, "and the ninth hour," that's three o'clock in the afternoon and he did the same thing. He goes back again and again and keeps gathering more of them to go to work. Finally the day is almost gone and you come to verse 6, "It's the eleventh hour," 5 o'clock in the afternoon. Only one hour of work left. He went out and found others standing unemployed. They had been waiting all day. By now they're rather hopeless, depressed, realizing they'll have no sustenance for their family for that day, "And he said to them, 'Why are you standing here all day idle?' And they said to him, 'Because no man's hired us.'" It wasn't that they didn't want to work. It was just that nobody hired them. Oh maybe they were older, maybe they were weaker, maybe they weren't the clever ones; you know the broad-backed ones, the really strong ones. "He said unto them, 'Go ye also into the vineyard and whatever is right that ye shall receive.'" And you can be sure they ran to get all they could even knowing there was no other choice for them and not negotiating any price. "Whatever's right I'll give it to you."

Then verse 8 says, "When evening was come," that's 6 o'clock, the twelve hour work day is over, "The lord of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and give them their hire.'" That's the way it was said in Leviticus, that's the way it was said in Deuteronomy and this was an honorable man and the day was over and he was going to pay them for the day and so he says to his steward or his foreman, "You get them together and you pay them." And then he says this most interesting thing, "Beginning from the last unto the first." And now all of a sudden we've intersected with our proverb, haven't we? This first shall be last and the last shall be first and this in the parable is that. The ones who came to work last were paid, what, first, and the ones that came to work first were paid last. So it's obvious that that's what the proverb is saying and that's what the parable intends to illustrate. And we'll see why as we go through it.

So they all got in line to be paid. The guys in the front had worked one hour; the guys at the end of the line, twelve. "And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour they received every man a denarius." That's a whole day's wage, and a generous one at that, a respectable one at that. Well you can imagine as he went started at that point that the guys at the end of the line are saying, "Did you see that? Twelve times one denarius, he's paying a denarius an hour." And they started to get this silent expectation, that by the time we get there guys we're going to get twelve days wages. Things began to change as he went through the line apparently. It doesn't tell us, but we know from the implications of the parable that as he went through the 3 o'clock group got a denarius, the noon group got a denarius, the 9 o'clock group got a denarius and maybe they're getting a little quizzical about what is going on.

And then verse 10 says, "When the first who were last in line came, they supposed that they should have received more." Well you say, that's right, that's fair. In human terms if you're talking about employment that's the way we do things. Maybe you think that, but they likewise received every man a denarius.

You say that's not fair. Oh? What had he promised to give them? A denarius. Did they think that was a fair promise, a fair wage? Yes. It wasn't a question of fairness. "When they had received it they murmured." It's an interesting word in the Greek, *egganguogo.*It's atamatapeatic. It's like grumble in English. They grumbled. They murmured. They complained. They griped and they stand there with their little hot denarius in their hand and they don't leave. And they said to the householder, "These last have worked but one hour and thou has made them equal unto us who have borne the burden in the heat of the day." And he wasn't unfair with them. He was just generous with the rest, but some people really have a hard time with other people's prosperity.

The issue here is not whether the householder is fair. The issue is the jealousy of the people who worked the longest, right? Don't impugn God, but they were filled with envy. They got what was right and fair, but they were filled with envy and they griped. And they made this little speech, you made them equal unto us and we borne the burden in the heat of the day, and they get real kind of expressive. The word they used for heat is the word for burner. It's the word that's often used of the scorching east wind that parches the lips and cracks the skin when that hot east wind blows. I mean they were really dramatizing their plight. It is hot in that part of the world and it might have been hot at the end of September when this was going on if indeed harvest is in view. But they're saying, "Hey we really have been through it all day," and you know there's something in you that if you've been in a labor situation saying they're right, there's no equity in that deal. Those other guys didn't work to get all they got like I did.

But he answered one of them, verse 13, and said, "Fellow," that's *tyrus*in the Greek, it means fellow, this is sort of a non-descript term. Friend is not a good translation of that. It's sort of a rebuking term. "Fellow I do thee no wrong, I do thee no wrong, dids't thou agree with me for a denarius?" Wasn't that our agreement? You came on those terms. I gave you that. "Take what is thine and go thy way." Don't just stand there go on. "I will give unto this last even as unto thee." And then this: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" And then this: "Is thine eye evil because I'm good?" You know what an evil eye is? Mark 7:22, jealously. And evil eye, you look and you resent what somebody else has got. I worked so hard to get what I have and this guy's old aunt dies and leaves him all this. Jealousy is a part of our fallenness, isn't it? You see it wasn't that they didn't get a fair wage. They got a very fair wage, a generous wage. It's that they couldn't stand somebody else getting the same thing without working as hard as they did. Instead of saying to them selves, isn't it wonderful that he's so generous to those who have the same need we have, but weren't hired early. Isn't it wonderful that even though they had to wait all day to be hired their need wasn't any less and he gave them according to their need not according to their effort, not according to their work?

Instead of saying that, that's what the magnanimous heart says. I rejoice that you received as much as I did because that's what you needed even though you didn't work as hard as I worked. That's the magnanimous heart. Well that's the parable. And he says, I have the right to give whatever I want.

Are you going to be jealous if I give it?

And then he repeats the proverb. So, the last shall be first and the first last. And by the way at the end of that verse it says in some versions, many are called but few are chosen. The better manuscripts don't include that. It seems to have been borrowed from Matthew 22:14, and we'll study that phrase when we get to that text. But he repeats that proverb.

Now let's come to the third thing I want to mention. That's the point. What's the point here? I mean we know the story. We understand that he paid them equally whether they started early or late they all got the same thing and that supports our interpretation of the proverb, doesn't it? The last shall be first and the first shall be last means everybody gets the same. Everybody ends up the same and that's exactly what happens in the parable. Everybody gets the same wage. And the last wound up being first in line to get the wage, the first wound up being last in line to get the same wage. It's the point of equality. The last shall be first.

But what is the spiritual point? I mean what is it saying about the kingdom? Well let's interpret the proverb in that sense. Go back to verse 1. The man is God, the householder. The vineyard is the kingdom, the sphere of God's rule. It is the kingdom of grace, the kingdom of salvation. The laborers are those who come into salvation. They come into the kingdom. They come into the service of the king, the service of God. The day, the day of work is lifetime. The evening is eternity. The denarius is eternal life and maybe you could even say the steward Jesus Christ to whom has been committed all judgment.

So what's it saying? It's saying this: no matter how long you worked in the kingdom, no matter how hard or how easy your circumstances were, no matter how difficult the task, when you get to the end you're all going to receive the same eternal life. Isn't that a great truth? That's really what it's teaching. Some people serve Christ their life long, some short. I mean you can imagine how those guys felt. We've been working all day in the hot sun and these guys show up at 5 o'clock when the breeze has come up and it's twilight and it's lovely and they'll just go around on the hill for an hour and they get the same amount that we get. But in the kingdom that's how it is friends. We all get the same. We all enter into the same eternal life. We all inherit the same glories in heaven. That is the essence of what our Lord is saying. No matter how easy or how hard our lot in life, no matter how long or short our service, to put it another way, the penitent thief will inherit the same glories of eternity that are going to belong to the apostles. Right?

Peter on the one hand crucified upside down for the cause of Christ, the penitent thief crucified for his crimes are both entering into eternal life to receive the same eternal glorious blessings, to be blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. You say that sounds like it's inequitable. No? It's more than any of them deserve. It's more than any of them deserve and it's God's good pleasure to give them the fullness of what they need.

So those who come to Christ early in life will receive the same eternal life that those who come to Christ late in life receive. Those who spend their life in an easy place, maybe not serving Christ with a great amount of toil and effort will receive the same eternal life that a person will receive who has served Christ at the cost of all that he owns and all that he ever has and even dies a martyrs death. Because you see, to begin with it's all according to the grace of the one who gives anyway, right?

So the benefits of the kingdom are the same for everybody. Boy that's a wonderful thing to think about. Folks what that does is it says to me and to you that we're not trying to earn our way in, right and the kingdom is not a merit system. Heaven is not a merit system. Eternity is not based on our merit.

A pastor came to see me, whom I know very closely, and he was telling me that his father recently died who all his lifelong had been a Christ rejecter, the very opposite of his son who has for years preached Christ and loved Christ. And when his father was in the hospital with a stroke and no longer able to communicate, just before he died he went in and he said, "I presented to him the gospel of Jesus Christ with all my heart, and I just told him how he could embrace Christ even at this point in his life, even though he had so strongly rejected him. He said I don't know whether he did or not because he never communicated again, but I did all I could to give him the message and I have the confidence to know this: that if he believed he'll inherit the same eternal life, who rejected Jesus Christ all his years, that I will who have served Christ. And that's really what this parable is saying because God is a God of grace and it's all grace anyway. Wonderful truth.

Now let me show you how the context leads into this parable. Now go back to Chapter 19 for a minute. You remember the rich young ruler, and the rich young ruler had come to find out about how to get eternal life. Jesus told him. He didn't want it because it meant sacrifice he wasn't willing to make, so he left.

In response to that Peter speaks on behalf of the twelve in verse 27. This is interesting. Peter says, "Behold, we have forsaken all to follow Thee." We did what he wouldn't do. I mean we have forsaken all and followed Thee. Hey we are the 6 a.m. group. I mean they were the first guys in, right? Really. When He began his ministry went along called those twelve guys. They were the first ones, the 6 a.m. group. This parable is primarily directed to them. And we have forsaken all and followed Thee and we've been going on through the heat of the day. I mean we've been bearing the burden for a lot longer than a twelve-hour day. It's been nearly three years now that we've been in this heat and we've been laboring and we've been in deprivation, wandering around itinerant with nowhere to stay and nowhere to call our own and cut off from all of our former relationships and so forth, and what are we going to get out of that? What shall we have therefore? What are we going to get? I mean we're the first group, the most sacrificial group, the beginning group. What's going to be for us?

You see they really thought they were going to get something really special. And I guess some of the other folks who came along later just weren't going to be able to get what they got. Now I believe they loved Christ, and I also am confident that they believed that He was the Messiah. They struggled with that, but I think they were genuine. And I don't want to discount that, but at the same time connected with their genuineness was sort of a cluttered up idea that they were going to inherit the kingdom, and that really excited them. And that the kingdom was going to come here and now; it was going to be political and earthly, and rich, and they were going to get in on it. They really were. They were excited about it. I mean they thought boy they're going to be in the first group and when the kingdom comes they're going to be right up there right arm, left arm for the Messiah calling the shots. That excited them. They thought any minute Jesus was going to bring the kingdom and that's why they were so continuously confused when it didn't happen. And you can imagine what must have been going on when they were walking around in a fog mumbling to each other after the crucifixion, when it looked like the whole deal had collapsed. And then when He rose from the dead they met together in Acts 1, they said, "Wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Is this it? Now we go into glory? Now we get our crowns and our thrones and all. They were somewhat crass. They were really looking for something special for themselves.

Now if you don't think that they were you need to look over to Chapter 20 verse 17, just after this parable. "And Jesus going to Jerusalem with them pulls them aside along the road." He gets them off in the trees somewhere, away from the crowd, and he has to explain to them why they are going to Jerusalem. So he says, "We'll go to Jerusalem and the Son of man shall be betrayed under the chief priests under the scribes and they shall condemn Him to death and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify Him. And He'll rise again on the third day." He says now we're going to Jerusalem guys, not to set up the kingdom but to die. You got that? That just went right on by. I don't think that computed at all in their little Galilean computers. I just really don't think that even got in because right after that in verse 20, "Then came to Him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons."

Here come James and John and mother. And they're worshipping and desiring a certain thing, and He said to her, "What do you want?" And she said to Him, "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on the right hand and the other on the left in Thy kingdom." You know you often think John this lovely gentle sensitive meek humble, guy; James, so willing to be all that the Lord wanted him to be. Listen, these guys wanted to be the hotshots in the kingdom, folks. They were arguing about this all the time, who's going to be greatest in the kingdom?

You know even up till the Upper Room when Jesus washed their feet, they were arguing about who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom. That's why nobody would wash the other guy's feet. They didn't want to get disqualified. None of them wanted to take the role of a servant. They all wanted to be the head guy. So Jesus girded His own loins and washed their feet.

But here they even go along; they bring their mother, these are adults, their mother to appeal to Jesus to give them the right and left hand. Now He'd already told them, if you go back to Chapter 19 verse 27, that in the regeneration or the rebirth of the earth when the Son of man sits on the throne of His glory you will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, but that wasn't enough. They figured out in their minds, all right His throne will be in the middle, there'll be six on each side. We want the ones on the right and the left. I mean we want the inside seat, see. This is pretty crass stuff, pretty self-centered. They were hung up on that. And Jesus says you couldn't handle what I'm going to have to go through, and beside that, verse 23, it's not mine to give. It belongs to the Father to give that.

Verse 24, "When the ten heard it they were moved with indignation against the two brethren." You say why? Because they thought they shouldn't act in such an unspiritual way? No. Because they thought they might get something that they wouldn't get. They were mad because those two guys got there ahead of them. They wanted those seats next to Him. You can imagine if they had all gone to the kingdom and they'd all entered into it and there it was all, these guys would have made a mad dash to get the inside seats.

Now that'll put them in perspective a little bit won't it? They're just human, very human. And so Jesus is sick and tired of their quibbling about what they're going to get out of following Him and how glorious their place is going to be because they've given up so much, because they've sacrificed so much, because they followed so long, because they've born the heat of so many trials. And then the little incident that happens is kind of interesting. He gives them a speech about being humble, you know. "Whosoever would be great among you let him be your servant, right?" That's what I'm looking for, not people who want the chief seats, but people who want to serve. Like the Son of man who came not to be ministered unto but to serve, give His life, and so forth.

Well after that they run into a couple of blind guys. Now blind men were the outcasts. You know they just were along the road begging alms for the blind, alms for the blind, and you just said out of the way fellow and you went on your way. And here these blind guys and Jesus comes and they say, "Have mercy on us O Lord, Thou Son of David. And the multitude rebukes them." Be quiet you guys. This is important stuff, you know. "Hold your peace. And they cried out louder, 'Have mercy on us, O Lord, Thou Son of David,' and Jesus stood still and called them, and said, 'What will ye that I should do unto you?' And they said unto Him, 'Lord that our eyes may be opened.' So Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes and immediately their eyes received sight and they followed Him."

Now you can imagine when these two blind beggars joined the group the disciples didn't for a minute think that they were in their class. Just no way! I mean there was just no way they were they in the same league. And that's what Jesus needs to correct, you see. These guys came late. I mean it

was just briefly going to be the time for Jesus to die. These guys, what did they endure, right? A couple of blind guys along the road, they get healed, and they just come along for the ride. I mean there's not heat on them. These are the 5 o'clock crowd who came and worked for an hour in the cool of the day. Didn't seem to have to pay that high a price.

So you see it was the selfish, indulgent, envious, confused perception of the disciples that I think our Lord was dealing with. And all He's saying in this wonderful parable is, look salvation and eternal life isn't something that you earn. It's a gift that I give according to My sovereign will, and it is not a question of when you came in, and it is not a question of how long you worked, or how hot the day was or how hard you worked. There's nothing in that parable about how hard anybody worked. Nothing, because eternal is not something you, what, earn. And I'm going to give everyone the same reward.

So it's wonderful to know that isn't it? I mean you don't need to think, "Well I'm going to get to heaven and I know I'm just going to have a little shack over in the corner thrown together with a few celestial sticks and that's it. And I'm going to have this great mansion over here with 84 rooms and once in a while if you're nice I'll let you look at a few of them. No! But I know that in our minds we think that way, just like the disciples do. I've served the Lord, I've gone through this, I've suffered this, boy I've been through all this pain and all these deals and I've served the Lord. There's no difference. It's the same eternal life. I mean we're all going to be up there, He says tax collectors and harlots and beggars and blind people and people who've served all the life and martyrs and guys that got saved in a foxhole just before they got blown to eternity, we're all going to be there and we're all going to inherit eternal life, and we're all going to be blessed with all the spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, and it's just because that's the way God wants to do it. He promises us only eternal life and He'll give us what He promised and He'll sure give us a lot more than we deserve.

You see when you get to heaven we'll all live in the Father's house. It says, "In my Father's house are many rooms." We're all living in the Father's house. Nobody's eight blocks down and four blocks to the right. We're all living in the Father's house and we're all the bride, aren't we? We're all the bride. None of us is just somebody who comes along. We're going to let you in the wedding, but don't think you're going to be the bride kind of thing. We're all the bride; we're in the Father's house and in Romans 8:17 it says, "We're all heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." We all inherit the whole thing equally. And in the Roman way of inheritance it was different than the Jews. The Jews give a double portion to the older son, but the Romans, when Paul writes to the Romans and he talks about being joint heirs, the Romans did it a different way. The Romans gave equal inheritance to all and the equality of God's inheritance given to us is wonderful. We don't each receive an equal part, we each receive the whole and there's not conflict because we're perfect. So we all inherit everything. We all live in the Father's house. We're all the bride. We all possess all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. Eternal life is ours in all its fullness.

You say, "Now wait a minute, John. Doesn't the Epistles tell us something about rewards for service and crowns for service?" That's a different issue. You get to that a little later in the Scripture. That's not the issue here. There will be differing rewards the Lord is pleased to give His children. That's not the issue here. The issue here is the equality of eternal life. And let me tell you something, folks, I don't know what those rewards are essentially. I mean I don't know what they really will turn out to be, but you can't get much better than everlasting life. Once you've had perfect everlasting life how can you have any more perfect than perfect? When we talk about hell and there's degrees of punishment, but hell is the absence of God, and if you have the absence of God you can't have more or less of the absence of God. And if you have everlasting life you can't have more everlasting life or less everlasting life, more perfection or less perfection. So whatever those rewards are God's going to have to show us in that day. I don't understand it I just know that He says He gives it to all equally. No distinction, male, female, rich, poor, Jew, Greek, in fact it says that the least of us is greater than the greatest man that ever lived when we enter into His kingdom.

Well let me close with some principles. I can't resist these because they flow right out of this and I'm just going to run them by you so hang on. First of all a principle that I see here is that God initiates salvation sovereignly. The householder went out to find the laborers and brought them into his vineyard. He comes into the marketplace to seek those who would come and serve in his kingdom. So since God does the seeking and God does the saving and God does the bringing into His kingdom, we have no right to put demands on what we ought to get, right, because we're only there because He sought us, and if He sought us early and we had our life to serve Him that was His choice. If He sought us late and we have a brief time that too was His choice and not ours. Therefore, we are no way worthy to make any demands, right?

Second principle: God establishes the terms. God establishes the terms. He told them that He would give them a denarius. They came on those terms. He set the price, they agreed. The rich young ruler wouldn't do that. Christ set the price; he wouldn't pay it. But these folks were poor and they were in need and so they came on His terms. Later on to the other groups He said, I'll pay you what's right. They came on His terms, right? They didn't argue. God sets the terms of salvation.

Thirdly, God continues to call men into His kingdom. I see the reason that you have the early group and the next and the next and the next, 9 o'clock, 12 o'clock, 3 o'clock, 5 o'clock, is to show us all through man's day God is calling people into His kingdom. It's an ongoing work. Jesus said in John 9:4, "We have to work while it is day for the night comes when no man can work." And all through the day God is calling men to Himself. Redemption goes on until the judgment comes.

There's a fourth principle I see here that relates to this whole thing and that is that God is redeeming those who are willing. God's redeeming those that are willing. The men that were gathered looking for work, they needed someone to care for them. They were dependent on someone else to provide

their needs. They were not the rich. They were not the self-sufficient. They were not the complacent. They were not the satisfied. They were the poor, and the meek, and the beggars, the ones without resources who came to the Master for what they could only get if they got it from Him. Those are the kind that are saved, those who have no resources. Those who at the end of the day of life, at the last hour of their life still have nothing. They have no resources and it is only the compassion of the owner who comes and gives them the denarius. It isn't that they could earn it and really we don't know why He didn't hire all these guys in the morning. It doesn't tell us. We don't know that, but neither do we know why God saves people at different point in their life, do we? We don't know that. But we know that the need is always there and in His sovereignty when He chooses He will come to those whose hearts are willing because they are without resources.

And a fifth principle I see here is that God is compassionate to those who have no resources. He reaches out to those who recognize their need. He reaches out to these guys, the householder does, and says, "Why are you idle? Because nobody will hire us." We want the right thing we just can't find it. Nobody will provide for us. We want resources, we want sustenance, we want bread and food, but we don't have anybody to give it to us and it's those kind of people that the Lord reaches out to isn't it who know their need.

There's a sixth principle I see here and it's this: All who come into the vineyard worked. They may have come in in the last hour but they worked. I don't see any deadbeats or freeloaders. They all worked. Some worked short, some worked long, but all worked, and that's the way it is in salvation. Your faith is known by your what, your works.

There's another principle here: God has the sovereign and ability to keep His promise. God said to that first group, "I'll give you a denarius." And I believe that part of the parable is to illustrate that God never gives less than He promises. Now some of us when we came to Christ we knew the fullness of eternal life that was prepared for us as far as man could know it. Maybe we'd been instructed very well in the gospel, maybe we'd been raised in the church, we really knew. We knew the terms, we knew eternal life, we knew the denarius, we knew it was that, but there may be others of us who came to Christ and we came in a desperation in a situation where there wasn't anything to negotiate. We came later on in life when we were really in need, and it wasn't so much that we were quibbling about what we were going to get, as that we really needed sustenance. Whatever He wanted to give would have been enough. But I think that the men who were told they were going to receive a denarius illustrates for us that God will always give what He promised. He said He'd give it and He did.

And the rest illustrates an eighth principle, that while He always gives what He promised, He also always gives more than we deserve. And the other groups show us that He gives us more than we deserve. So it's always of grace, it's always of grace, it's always of grace, and so the Holy Spirit slips both of those elements in the parable. All illustrations are imperfect but they get the point across to

show us that God will give what He promised on the one hand, but He'll also give us more than we deserve on the other.

And there's a ninth principle. Humility is the only right attitude. A sense of unworthiness is the only right attitude. There's no place for jealousy. No place for thinking I ought to have more in glory than you ought to have. No room for me to act the part of the older brother in the story of the prodigal son. You remember the younger brother went out and sowed his wild oats and lived and wasted all of his substance and wound up in a pig pen and he finally came home and repented and embraced his father and he killed the fatted calf and put a ring on his finger, put a robe on, had a party for my son, which was lost and is found. And all this great deal is going on when the son comes home and what's the older brother doing? I mean he's over there complaining why? Because he didn't get a fatted calf? He could have all the fatted calves he wanted. Because he didn't get a ring? He could have all the rings he wanted. Because he didn't get a robe? He had a lot of robes in his closet. He was complaining not because he didn't get what his brother got, but because his brother didn't deserve what he got in his eyes. He says I didn't even go anywhere. And you know as Christians we can say you know I've been faithful in the church and I've stayed in the church, and I haven't blown my life and I know these other Christians and they've bombed out and the Lord takes them back. Surely in heaven they'll be more for me. No. No that's the older brother mentality and it has nothing to do with the quality of grace. It has only to do with the evil eye and the jealousy of men.

And a final principle, and this is the overarching sunam bonem, this is the glorious principle that touches the whole parable and it is this: That all that we receive from God is a matter of His grace, His grace, undeserved blessing. And works are no part of it. The sovereign grace dispenses to all who come into His vineyard, no matter how long they work, or how short they work, how hard they work or how easy it seems, he dispenses the same eternal life. And the equalizer is grace because where you have sin grace covers it and where sin abounds what happens? Grace much more abounds. So grace just keeps erasing so everybody comes out at the same point to inherit the same eternal life.

Well I think that's what Paul is saying in Ephesians when he says that God who is rich in mercy for His great love where with He loved us. Even when we were dead in sins down there in the marketplace without resource, made us alive together with Christ, by grace through faith, for the purpose that He might show unto us the glorious of His kindness throughout all eternity. I mean He wants to dispense to us the fullness of all that eternal life is forever, and that's why He redeemed us.

God treats everyone equally. You come into His kingdom and His grace levels all of us to inherit the same eternal life. What a wonderful promise that exalts God's grace and eliminates any thought of man's attaining it. Let's bow in prayer.

I don't know how this message has come to your heart as the Spirit of God has applied it, but I trust there has been an application that is very direct.  My own response is thankfulness for there are many who have been more faithful than I, worked harder than I, longer than I under greater stress, and how I exalt the grace of God that I should ever be thought to receive an equal inheritance.  There are others who have worked less, fewer years, with less diligence, and I bless God that His grace is exhaled in giving them what He would give in an earthly sense given the most, because that can only tell what a gracious God He is, and that gives Him glory.  And so it is a time of thanks for me praising Him.  It ought to be for some of you a time too just exactly whether or not you're in His kingdom, a recipient of that grace or if you're still standing in the marketplace rejecting the offers and maybe it's 5 o'clock in your life and He's calling you to the vineyard, but you're like the rich young ruler.  You're not coming on His terms, so you stand outside the place of blessing, never to know His great grace, never to receive the eternal gift of life.

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