**Matthew 20:1-16 (ESV)**

**1** “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. **2** After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. **3** And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, **4** and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ **5** So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. **6** And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ **7** They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ **8** And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ **9** And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. **10** Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. **11** And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, **12** saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ **13** But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? **14** Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. **15**  Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ **16** So the last will be first, and the first last.”

**“Not Why Or How Much, But WHO!”**

To those loved by God and called to be His saints, grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The disciples had just watched a rich young man walk away, because he could not leave his possessions and follow Jesus. In reaction this sad event we read, “Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?”(Matt 19:27) Jesus confidently told them they would have great things, receive back a hundred-fold whatever was lost, and even inherit eternal life. However, His last words to them is where our parable picks up. Jesus says, “But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Matt 19:30).

The parable today hits home, because Americans are a work-based society. Those who came to this land had little help, but had to work hard with their hands. Thus, mottos follow us around like, “You get what you deserve, “No pain. No gain,” or even “Hard work crushes talent when talent doesn’t work hard.” It is not surprising how the unemployment rate is so closely watched by many. Likewise, the current president comes from the business world. Technology is great only another “brick and motor” store closing to internet rivalry saddens hearts. Work is good, but the Fall has left it vexing. Government tries to referee, but sinners never see fairness the same way. The kingdoms of man seek “equal pay for equal work,” but the kingdom of heaven is “equal pay for unequal work” before our master Jesus.

1. **The hired hands shared things in common from the master.**

* They had all been called by the master.
* Different times of the day workers were being hired.
* Baptism shows God is still seeking to save the lost by death and life in Jesus.
* They all were working in the vineyard.
* None was idle, but everyone had something to be doing.
* A good tree bears good fruit, or as James says, “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead” (2:26).
* They all received payment at the end of the day.
* Everyone got what the master promised no questions about it.
* This is that justification God gives purely through faith in Jesus so none can boast but in the grace of God for sinners.
* So here are the facts: all were workers, all worked, and all received payment time to go home.
* However, Jesus uses this parable to show how He sees things as God, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.”
* We can try to praise equality like Jesus, but it is always in the details of life where we start to see the problem.

1. **Some were swept away by jealousy holding contempt against the master.**

* The unfairness of it all came right from the start.
* Those last were paid first so you can sense the dishonor felt when no special recognition came to the first called.
* Next, the denarius caused a false excitement about money with those working a full day or twelve times longer than the last.
* Fierce pride came from jealousy that saw their judgment better than the masters saying, “you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.”
* In the end, those upset hired hands missed the generosity more than given to the others, but what was first originally given to them.
* This warning about unfairness is what we constantly must deal with as members of Christ’s vineyard.
* Long term Christians have nothing over those who at the hour of death have Jesus greet them to repent and trust in His kingdom of grace.
* More importantly, this parable speaks about the attitude of jealously found in the heart that snuffs out faith to worship works.
* Pride can infect the church with crafted sins of self-righteousness that demands rights and handles grievances as if it were God.
* The soul is in jeopardy whenever works become the centerpiece where sacrifices, efforts, or gifts mean more than the master Jesus.

1. **To see that grace is better than works trusts that the focus is always on the master.**

* Those hired workers with complaints had to come to terms with the master.
* Their eyes were caught up seeing evil against them, when all good only came to them from their master.
* Disciples of Jesus go the way of the cross agreeing that the purpose of being hired at all is from His love for us.
* To begrudge His generosity misses that the perfect sacrifice has been made and paid once for all.
* St. Paul worked harder than many, but in prison he saw it fit to confess, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”
* Grace is better than works, because to need and depend on Christ sees Him as the master.
* He is that master who had the purpose to pull you out of darkness into His light of salvation as given by baptism.
* Placed into His Church is to live before Him bearing burdens as Christians and facing the heat of those against the Gospel.
* Rather than looking for payment, see the great gift how Christ’s true body and blood replaces jealousy with His justifying work for you.
* Forgiveness once again today promises that the master’s grace calls, gives the privilege to serve, and rests upon Him alone to save.

There is something far better than fairness, but not from the ways of man. Christ today shatters works with the greater offensive of faith in His generosity. What and how much in His vineyard is nothing when compared to who is the master. We are at the eleventh hour, the last hour, plenty are standing idly by. Christ still calls out to those that have no purpose or place to hear His promise, “You go into the vineyard too.” Since we are saved by grace, take what He gives today and go home in peace. The kingdoms of man seek “Equal pay for equal work,” but the kingdom of heaven is “equal pay for unequal work” before our master Jesus. Amen. Now the peace of Christ that passes all understanding be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.