

**30<sup>th</sup> April 2023**

**Psalm 103:1-22**

*Of David.*

- <sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD, my soul;  
    all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
- <sup>2</sup> Praise the LORD, my soul,  
    and forget not all his benefits—
- <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your sins  
    and heals all your diseases,
- <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit  
    and crowns you with love and compassion,
- <sup>5</sup> who satisfies your desires with good things  
    so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- <sup>6</sup> The LORD works righteousness  
    and justice for all the oppressed.
- <sup>7</sup> He made known his ways to Moses,  
    his deeds to the people of Israel:
- <sup>8</sup> The LORD is compassionate and gracious,  
    slow to anger, abounding in love.
- <sup>9</sup> He will not always accuse,  
    nor will he harbor his anger forever;
- <sup>10</sup> he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
    or repay us according to our iniquities.
- <sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
    so great is his love for those who fear him;
- <sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west,  
    so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
- <sup>13</sup> As a father has compassion on his children,  
    so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;
- <sup>14</sup> for he knows how we are formed,

he remembers that we are dust.  
<sup>15</sup> The life of mortals is like grass,  
they flourish like a flower of the field;  
<sup>16</sup> the wind blows over it and it is gone,  
and its place remembers it no more.  
<sup>17</sup> But from everlasting to everlasting  
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,  
and his righteousness with their children's children—  
<sup>18</sup> with those who keep his covenant  
and remember to obey his precepts.  
<sup>19</sup> The LORD has established his throne in heaven,  
and his kingdom rules over all.  
<sup>20</sup> Praise the LORD, you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
who obey his word.  
<sup>21</sup> Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,  
you his servants who do his will.  
<sup>22</sup> Praise the LORD, all his works  
everywhere in his dominion.  
Praise the LORD, my soul.

## **Matthew 20:1-16**

### **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 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?'

<sup>16</sup> "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

## Sermon: God's Grace (Psalm 103:1-22 and Matthew 20:1-16)

Please have your **Bibles** open at **Matthew 20:1-16**

You should have a **sermon outline** to take notes if you wish.

Let me **pray** first...

### Context

Before we get into this morning's passage

Let's get the **context**...

[Slide 1-Context]

Last week in chapter 19 – a **rich young man** who wanted to know “*what he must do to get eternal life*” (v16) - **went away sad** when Jesus - knowing the **young man's love of his wealth** – told the young man to **sell everything** he had and **give to the poor** – and then follow Jesus (19:21)

Jesus then **told** His **disciples** – “*it's easier for a camel to go through eye of a needle than for someone rich to get to heaven*” (19:24) – that's because **rich people often love their wealth more than God.**

Jesus' **disciples** were **astonished** by Jesus' statement (19:25) – because in their **culture** – people who were rich and healthy and wise – were **seen as blessed by God** and **seen as absolute certainties to go to Heaven!**

The disciples are thinking – If this rich guy is not saved for Heaven – **then who can be?** (19:25)

Jesus replies (19:26) “*what’s impossible with man – is possible with God*” And that’s exactly why Jesus came – He CAN keep all the commandments – He CAN be sinless – He CAN always put God the Father first – and He’s prepared to die and rise again – so people can have forgiveness and eternal life.

All people have to do - **IS believe in Jesus - put Jesus first and follow Him** – which the rich young man is not willing to do!

So, in 19:27 - **Peter** – feeling superior to the rich young man - points out that he and the other disciples have left everything to follow Jesus!

But then **Peter** follows up with a **question** at the end of 19:27 - that reveals something about his heart – when he asks Jesus ‘*what then will there be for us?*’ – in other words ‘*what’s in it for us?*’

Jesus answers that there **will be rewards for following Him** - but the rewards might not be dished out like we think – look at v30 = “*But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.*”

Which brings us to the **parable** in our passage from Matthew 20:1-16 – which **explains what Jesus means by that...**

### **The Parable (Matthew 20:1-8)**

Let’s look at the **parable** – chapter 20 – verses 1 to 8

[Slide 2-Heading]

Remember a **parable** is: *an earthly story with a heavenly meaning*

As we read parables – we're meant to ask ourselves – 'where is God in the parable?' 'Where are we in the parable?'

In the parable - Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven - **to a landowner who goes out early to hire workers to work in His vineyard** – v1

The **scene set** by the parable was a common one in Israel where the **grape harvest ripened at the end of September** and was **quickly followed by a rainy period**. If the harvest was not gathered before the rains came – it **would be ruined** – and so to get the harvest done was a **frantic race against time**. Any workers were welcome – even if only for one hour!

[Slide 2a]

In the parable:

The landowner is **God**

The vineyard is the nation of **Israel** = God's people

Israel is often described in the Old Testament **as God's vineyard**

[Psalm 80; Isaiah 5]

The workers are the **people of Israel**

[Slide 2b]

But remember if the parable is to relate to us – the vineyard is also the **church** – **God's people** - and the workers are **US!**

[Slide 3]

In the parable – v2 – the **first workers** hired **have a contract with the landowner** who agrees to pay them **a denarius for a day's work**

A **denarius** was the standard daily pay for a labourer

The working day was usually **6am to 6pm**

The first laborers **start work at 6am**

Later on, at **9am** – v3-4 - the **landowner** goes to the **marketplace** – where all the workers hang out to get hired – it’s a bit like a **job centre** – and he **hires more workers**

The landowner doesn’t agree a particular wage for these workers – he **says he will pay them** “whatever is right” (v4)

Because there’s so much work...

The landowner hires **more workers at 12noon and 3 in the afternoon** – v5 – and does the same thing with them – he **will pay them** “whatever is right”

Then in v6 – there’s still more work to be done – so even with one hour of the working day left – **at 5pm** – the landowner hires more workers – v6-7 – and simply says “you also go and work in my vineyard” – no particular wage is mentioned at all. **These workers simply get hired and go to work in the vineyard.**

At the end of the working day in verse 8

There are a **few surprises**:

[Slide 4-Surprises]

- Surprisingly - the landowner tells the **foreman to pay the workers starting with the ones who were hired last and paying the first workers last.**
- Surprisingly the **workers are paid in front of each other.**
- Also - normally we would expect the **workers who have worked longest to get paid first – or at least that all the workers be paid at the same time.**
- And then another surprise is all the **workers got paid the same – one denarius** - whether they worked from 6am to 6pm (12 hours) or whether they worked from 5-6pm (1 hour)!

Jesus is describing an **upside-down Kingdom** – where **God’s ways are not the same as human ways.**

As we met in our growth group bible studies this week – we always ask the question – **did anyone have a light globe moment?**

One light globe mentioned was the fact that the landowner seemed to have an **inexhaustible amount of work to do in his vineyard** and **needed more and more workers** – so he continually went to the market place and hired more workers who were hanging about not doing anything. This should remind us that **God has a vineyard called the world** – where there are many who don’t know Jesus – and **there is a lot of Gospel work to be done in His vineyard** – but as Mark 9:35 says *“the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few”*



Perhaps we're hanging about the marketplace – instead of sharing the Good News of Jesus?

(pause)

Back to the parable – and at pay time there's a complaint

[Slide 5-Complaint]

### The Complaint (Matthew 20:9-12)

See v10 - The workers who have worked all day are not happy chappies – they've seen the 5pm workers get a denarius – so they're expecting to get paid more for working all day. But not so!

They grumble against the landowner – v11-12 – they say they've worked all day – done most of the work – and they've worked in the heat of the day! It's not fair!

What do we think?

(pause)

### The Landowner's Answer (Mathew 20:13-16)

[Slide 6-Answer]

You have to love the Landowner's answer to their complaint.

Look at v13 – He explains he's not being unfair – those first workers had agreed to work for one denarius for the whole day (back in v2)

You can almost imagine the conversation “*friend, let me show you a document you signed this morning? This is your signature, isn't it?*”

*How much did you agree to work for? That's right, one denarius. I thought so!"*

The landowner says – v14 - if he wants to give the 5pm workers the same wage as them – **that's his business!**

And besides he says - v15 – *'don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money?'*

And the landowner accuses the first workers of being **envious of the 5pm workers** because he's been generous!

Now remember it's a parable – and the **landowner is actually God.**

**And the parable applies to us too!**

We are on very dodgy ground – when we - as God's creatures – **start complaining and grumbling against God** – the One who created everything and sustains everything.

The Apostle Paul picks up this point in Romans 9:20:

*<sup>20</sup> But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"*

### **Purpose of the Parable**

[Slide 7-Purpose]

What's the purpose of the parable?

**God** (the landowner) **runs His Kingdom the way He wants** – and we are not to question Him on that.

Every worker in the parable – got the **same pay** – one **denarius!**

Every worker was **equal!**

Likewise, every person in the Kingdom of Heaven is **equal!**

As a minimum – when we believe in Jesus' death and resurrection

**We get eternal life.**

The Denarius that was paid - if you like – represents eternal life

We can think of the parable as describing the way that people come to follow Jesus at **different stages of their lives:**

- The first workers – are those who've **pretty much followed Jesus since they were young**
- Then the 9am workers – are those who have **followed Jesus since they were teenagers or 20's**
- The 12 noon and 3pm workers – those who have **followed Jesus since they were in their 30's or 40's or 50's**
- And then the 5pm workers – those who have come to **follow Jesus late in life just before they die** (like the thief on the cross next to Jesus – came to believe just before he died)

It doesn't really matter – when people begin to follow Jesus – **they all get a denarius – eternal life!**

It also doesn't matter whether a Christian dies at a ripe old age or dies young – eternal life awaits both!

The people listening to Jesus – whether they were the rich people, the Pharisees, learned scholars, farmers, shepherds, fishermen, widows, poor people or lepers – it doesn't matter – they don't get into the Kingdom by their job description or their status or their circumstances or by how hard they work – they get into the kingdom by believing and following Jesus – and then they all get the same gift – eternal life.

In Jesus' Kingdom – the disciples, fishermen and tax collectors are just as welcome as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There are no rankings in Jesus' Kingdom.

The parable also tells Matthew's Jewish readers in the Early Church – just because the Jews have been God's people for centuries – doesn't make them more important than the Gentiles [non-Jews] who are joining their church.

The parable also tells the disciples – even though you have the privilege of starting Jesus' Church – that doesn't make you any more precious than others who come into the church later. All are equally precious to God.

But I reckon there's more we can learn from the parable...

### Lessons from the Parable

Here's three take home lessons from the parable:

[Slide 8a]

1. The parable teaches us: God's grace is always undeserved (by definition) and always surprising.

The **landowner** is a surprising employer.

He could have sent his foremen to hire the workers but he goes himself – because he **genuinely cares about his workers!**

He could have paid the 5pm workers an hour's pay – but he's compassionate – he knows an hour's pay won't feed their family – so he gives them a full day's pay.

**Isn't that a picture of God's grace – doesn't God always give us more than we need or deserve? Isn't He a generous God?**

Isn't that what our Old Testament reading from Psalm 103 says?

*He is slow to anger and abounding in love? (v8)*

*He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve? (v10)*

*He removes our sins as far as the east is from the west? (v12)*

Here's **some examples of God's grace:**

- Moses killed a man - but **God chose him to lead Israel**
- Jonah ran away from doing the job God gave him - but **God brought him back and gave him a second chance**

- David committed adultery and had a man killed - but God describes David as man after God's own heart
- Jesus told a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery that he did not condemn her and told her to go and sin no more
- Peter denied Jesus three times and **yet Jesus told Peter to feed his sheep and build His Church**
- Saul persecuted Christians - but Jesus made Saul the Apostle Paul
- Each one of us are only saved for Heaven – because God said I'll fix the problem of sin and death myself – by sending my Son.

**God's grace is amazing!**

Living under God's grace means we can't come complaining to God like the first workers did - saying "*Don't I deserve better than this?*" because God will reply "*Do you really want me to give you what you deserve?*"

[Slide 8b]

2. The parable also teaches us: - to have a right heart in serving Jesus. There were two types of workers in the parable – those who agreed a contract a worked for a denarius a day – and those who didn't have a contract and who just wanted the chance to work and they willingly left the pay to be whatever the landowner thought was fair.

**We should not serve Jesus for some expected reward or recognition.**

Serving Jesus means **being genuinely holy people who are preoccupied with God and not ourselves.**

When we are preoccupied with ourselves, we are **less dependent on God and less effective.** Whereas the more dependent we are on God, the more God works through us and the **more effective we become.**

The first workers were preoccupied with themselves – the other workers weren't – **they were just grateful to get work.**

Peter's question "*what's in it for us?*" is **alien to Jesus' Kingdom.**

Many Christians who have worked hard for God over a long period of time will have lowly place in the Kingdom of Heaven because **their motives were not purged of the idea of merit and rewards.**

Whereas others who became Christians later in life will be high in the kingdom because **they knew they had done nothing to boast about and never gave merit and rewards a thought.** They just responded to the unexpected gracious love of Jesus that called them and accepted them.

**All service in Jesus' Kingdom** ranks the same with God – it's not the amount of time spent serving at church – or how high profile the ministry we're involved in – but **the loving heart with which the serving is done,** that matters.

The 5pm workers – **just wanted the opportunity to work and left the reward to the landowner. That must be our attitude.**

**We only see the worker and the work - but God sees their heart!**

[Slide 8c]

3. The parable also teaches us: **Don't focus on what we haven't got but instead rejoice in God's gift of grace.**

As our **Psalm 103:2** says: *forget not His benefits.*

We need to understand the **danger of watching other workers and comparing ourselves with them.**

**Charles Spurgeon** puts it this way:

*“My last word to God's children is this: what does it matter, after all, whether we are first or whether we are last? Do not let us dwell too much upon it, for we all share the honour given to each. When we are converted, we become members of Christ's living body; and as we grow in grace, and get the true spirit that permeates that body, we shall say, when any member of it is honoured, 'This is honour for us'...If any brother/sister is greatly honoured by God, I feel honoured by their honour. If God blesses your brother/sister, and makes them ten times more useful than you are, then you see that God is blessing you — not only blessing them, but you also. If my hand has something in it, my foot does not say, 'Oh, I have not got it!' No, for if my hand has it, my foot has it; it belongs to the whole of my body.”*



For example, if someone is gifted at playing the piano like Chris or Elaine or Shoko – instead of grumbling to God – ‘*why can’t I play the piano?*’ – don’t we all enjoy the benefit of them playing the piano!

If someone is gifted in cooking and hospitality – instead of complaining ‘*why can’t I cook like that?*’ – don’t we all enjoy the benefit of morning tea?

If someone is gifted in evangelism like David Hinton – don’t we all get the benefit of fellowship with the people that come and join us?

Those 1<sup>st</sup> workers should have been rejoicing about the generosity of the landowner towards the 5pm workers instead of grizzling. In the same way, we should be rejoicing in God’s blessings and grace poured out on each person in our Church – and enjoy the benefits!

Let’s pray...

*Father God, thank you that your ways are higher and better than our ways.*

*Thank you for your amazing grace – in sending Jesus.*

*Help us to have a right and loving and humble heart when serving you – not seeking rewards and accolades.*

*Help us to rejoice in your grace and blessings bestowed on each of us in our church family. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.*

### **Benediction (Ephesians 2:8-10)**

*<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*