

## Parables About the Kingdom (part 1)

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Jesus often used parables to help His disciples understand difficult concepts, employing common phrases, images, and social situations that would make His teaching relatable. Perhaps there was no subject more challenging to them than the nature of the Kingdom, so it is no surprise that it was a frequent feature of his parables. This short series of articles will consider three parables about the kingdom, from Matthew 19:30-20:16, 21:28-32, and 22:1-14.

### Are You Happy With The Wage?

*“But many who are first will be last; and the last, first”* (Matthew 19:30). This verse serves as an appropriate introduction to the lessons about the kingdom of heaven, all of which will be explained using parables by our Lord. The way to eternal life is not through selfishness, arrogance, or pride, but through sacrifice and humility. We must turn ourselves away from every bit of deception and self-indulgence and accept the cross of shame – for it is only through humility that one can come to know the truth about the grace of God.

Matthew 20:1-7 familiarizes the reader with the scenario of the parable. It would have been common for employment arrangements to have been made in this manner. At a designated location in the city, all of the able-bodied men without jobs would gather together and make themselves available to landowners who were in need of laborers that day. In the parable, notice a few things about the owner of the vineyard. First, it is clear that he represents God. He is in charge of calling people to serve him, and is also in control of the wage. The laborers and the owner all agreed to a set price, so there was no deception involved by either party, just as God makes the terms of the kingdom of heaven clear to us. Throughout the day, the same opportunity for service is presented to even more people, some arriving to the work all the way until there was very little daylight left. Also see that there is always more room for workers in the vineyard (20:7), just as there is no limit to the number of people who can be saved. Next, a problem arises at the end of the work day (20:8-12) when the owner distributes the same payment to all the laborers regardless of when they started working. The men who had been in the vineyard all day complained that this was unfair and that they should be given proper compensation for their work.

- Indeed, a lesson that we can learn from this is that many people in the world can only find fault with God. How many of us are always trying to find something to complain about? Or how often are God’s promises not good enough?
- Is it unfair that babes in Christ be given the same spiritual and physical benefits as longtime members of the Lord’s body of saved people?
- We sometimes feel like the workers in this parable. Do you believe that your Christianity is more or less important than somebody else’s?
- The opposite problem occurs amongst younger believers. When we are new to the church, we sometimes do not want the burden of knowing that others are

envious. We want to think less of ourselves than we should. Instead, we each need to realize our value to God, newcomers and longtimers alike.

The landowner resolves the situation by explaining a few things to the grumbling workers. *“Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?”* (20:13) Indeed, no wrong had been done! In a completely fair and lawful manner, both the laborer and the owner agreed on a denarius as a fair price for a day’s worth of work. *“Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own?”* (20:15) And the answer is undeniable. Of course it is lawful for this landowner to pay his laborers whatever he wants, regardless of when they were called to service. *“Or is your eye envious because I am generous?”* At the root of the problem is envy. These laborers were not arguing with the owner because the wage discrepancy actually was unfair, they simply thought it was unfair because they wanted more. Instead of focusing their energy on their own work, they worried about everybody else.