

# The Last Shall Be First

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[0:00] Please turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 19. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word.

Heavenly Father, we confess that we are quick to forget.

And we can so easily lose sight of the preciousness of Christ, the gift you have given us in Christ in your Spirit.

And Lord, we want to be reminded this morning so that the way we live, the way we think, the way we prioritize and make decisions are all shaped by the priceless treasure that Christ is.

And having received that gift, we may never lose that sense of wonder. And worship before your throne of grace.

[1:56] So speak to us, God. Address us as you are. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please stand if you are able to honor God as we listen to his Word as we pray.

It's like in Matthew 19, 27. Then Peter said in reply, See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have? Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you, In a new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, You who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

But many who are first will be last, and the last first. 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.

[3:14] After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace.

And to them he said, You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right, I will give you. So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.

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? They said to him, Because no one has hired us.

He said to them, You go into the vineyard too. 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.

And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now, when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more.

[4:23] But each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it, they grumbled at the master of the house, 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. But he replied to one of them, Friend, I am doing you no wrong.

Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?

Or do you begrudge my generosity? So, the last will be first, and the first last. This is God's holy and authoritative word.

Please be seated. The culture of our respective workplaces can have a distinct effect on how hard we work.

[5:30] If you have a laissez-faire boss who is totally hands-off at our workplace, you get little to no feedback or guidance about anything. Or

if you're at school, you can have a PI like that.

Your excellent work goes unnoticed. And in that kind of environment, people lose motivation. Because they rightly conclude that extra effort makes no difference. So workers check out, and that they default to the lowest acceptable standard of work.

In contrast, some bosses do a great job of rewarding performance, but in such an overt, graceless manner, ranking you as you're a top performer and you're an average performer and you're a low performer, that they create this hyper-competitive and cut-through culture.

In such an environment, employees constantly compare themselves to each other, which causes stress and anxiety. They stop helping each other because they see each other as rivals.

And they may even seek to undermine each other to get ahead because the workplace is competitive rather than collaborative. And people also start to optimize their work for the metrics that are measured, maximize the numbers that are being measured rather than going for the underlying goals that those numbers were meant to represent.

[6:50] These potential pitfalls can play out within the Christian life as well. Some Christians live without any thought of heavenly reward, as if they've already received everything that has been promised, as if there's nothing to look forward to.

And as a result, their lives are marked by this worldliness and lukewarmness. They don't think that their obedience matters very much.

They're not willing, for that reason, to make radical sacrifices for God. And sometimes also, even within the church, we can find selfish ambition and rival rather than humility and unity, which is why passages like Philippians 1-2 and James 3, 14-16 exist.

But is there a way to avoid these pitfalls? Jesus tells us that there is. Only a gospel culture infused with the grace of God can motivate us to work hard in selfless, self-effacing ways, rather than in a selfish and self-advancing way.

And I think this is the main point of our passage. We serve a generous king who does not pay us according to our deserves, according to what we deserve, but according to His grace.

[8:13] So we're going to talk about twin realities that are related to each other, maybe seemingly paradoxical at first. God generously rewards us according to our works on the one hand, but on the other hand, God mercifully repays us according to His grace and not according to what we deserve.

So chapter 19, verse 27, you may have, if you weren't here last week, you may have been no surprised at where we began, but it kicks off exactly where we left off last week after Jesus' interaction with the rich young man.

Jesus said in 19, 13 to 15, that the kingdom of heaven belongs to people who become like children. Children who occupy the lowest place in society, the last place in society, and because they don't yet contribute to society in any way, they are overlooked by people around them.

And yet Jesus says, if you come to God with empty hands and neediness and with a humble faith like a child, then the kingdom of heaven belongs to you. Then in 19, 16 to 26, He tells a rich young man who had great possessions that he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

Here is a man who had everything by the world's standards. He's the first in human society, unlike his children who are the last and the least, he is the great one, the rich one, but ironically, he's the one who lacks what is necessary to possess the kingdom of heaven.

[9:41] The child who has no status gets into the VIP lounge and this man who has everything is left out and killed. This young man idolizes his great possessions and that's why he's not willing to give it up to follow Christ.

He tells, Jesus tells him to sell all that he has, give it away to the poor and they come and follow him and then the man walks away sorrowful. But as this happens, you know, Peter, the representative and leader of the 12 apostles, pipes up with the question in verse 27.

See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have? The pronoun we in the Greek construction in the original language is not necessary, so this is an emphatic.

It's saying, we ourselves, look, see, we ourselves have left everything and followed you. Unlike that rich man, but you just promised that rich man, hey, you sell everything you have and then come and

follow me, he will have treasures in heaven.

That newbie, that rookie, you just told me you're going to have treasures in heaven? Whoa, whoa, whoa, what about us? You see, we have left everything to follow you.

[11:03] What then will we have? So Peter's sensing an opportunity. He knows he's been following Jesus from the very beginning.

He knows that he and the apostles are the ones who have been with him all along. We have seniority. We've done more for you. We've cast out demons in your name.

We've preached for you. We've gone with you. What do we get? Peter's question, if we understand it rightly, is prideful and entitled.

He thinks that he and the apostles are so much better than the rich young man. Look at how much we've done for you. Surely the best heavenly treasures are reserved for us.

It's the kind of selfish question that we expect Jesus to rebuke. And Jesus does check and caution the twelve apostles in chapter 19, verse 30, going up to chapter 20, verse 16.

[12:07] But he begins with an exceedingly kind response in verse 28.

Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jesus acknowledges that his disciples have made real sacrifices, that they have made drastic life changes in order to honor him and follow him.

And think about what these apostles had done for a moment. Remember the contempt that the townspeople of Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, treated Jesus with earlier on in Matthew chapter 13, verse 53 to 58.

The townspeople said of Jesus, He's not this, the carpenter's son? He's not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas and are not all his sisters with us?

Where then did this man get all these things? And they took offense at him. Nazareth was such a small, obscure village that it doesn't get mentioned even once in the Old Testament or in the Apocrypha or in any rabbinic literature.

[13:19] Jesus comes from the middle of nowhere and he was the carpenter's son. He's an adopted, earthly, human father. Joseph was a tradesman.

He was an honest, respectable job to be sure, but he was a blue-collar job. Jesus was not the son of a rabbi. He was the son of a carpenter. This raises the question that the Pharisees ask in John 7, 15, how is it that this man has learned when he has never studied?

Is not his mother called Mary? That ordinary Mary, that plain old Mary from down the block? That's his mother. What can possibly be so special about this Jesus of Nazareth?

And all his brothers are with us. We play catch with them growing up. All his sisters are among us. Some of us are married to them. What can be possibly so special about this man who has no pedigree, who is so ordinary, and yet these disciples have left everything to follow Jesus?

Try to imagine that in a modern context. Let me bring it home for you. Imagine that some rando from a small town you've never heard of rolls into town.

[14:39] He has no impressive degree from respectable institutions. And he comes claiming that he's a prophesied Messiah, the Savior of the world. You Google him, which is what any sensible person does at this point, right?

You check him, you stalk him on Facebook and LinkedIn. Don't laugh when you walk down. And then you find, whoa, we have some mutual connections, some shared friends.

And you track down his family members. And oh look, they're about as ordinary as they can get. His dad's a plumber. But this man keeps gaining followers and to your shock and dismay, your friends start believing in him and following him.

And then you look up YouTube videos of this man speaking and he says crazy things. Matthew 10, 37 to 39, and whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

And whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

[15:54] He tells his followers that they must deny themselves, that they must renounce their own plans and desires, that he could die to themselves and give up everything and follow him. He demands exclusive allegiance.

He tells them that they must love him even more than they love their own family members. And you listen to this and you think to yourself, well, this guy's another case. My friends will soon come to their senses, they're not going to follow him.

But no, they leave their money and their property behind. They leave their professions, their careers behind. They leave even their families behind to follow this guy.

Would you not be deeply alarmed? Would you not try to dissuade your friends? Oh man, I think my friends got enmeshed in some kind of pyramid scheme Or a cult!

Or both! Please help! Imagine how foolish these disciples would have looked to many around them.

[17:06] But it turns out these twelve apostles were right. Jesus is killed as he predicted and he is raised from the dead as he predicted in any other situation with any other person.

The disciples would have been fools. But if Jesus really is the man he said he is, if he really is the Son of God, if he really is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, if he really is the crucified, risen Messiah, then he is worth forsaking everything.

Good Father, say hi. And that is precisely what Jesus calls us to today. Jesus told the rich John and to sell everything he has and give it away to come and follow him because that was the one thing, the property, the possessions that he had was the one thing that he was not willing to relinquish to God.

It was his idol, his money and possessions occupied the center, the ruling place of his heart and you can't serve God that way.

God must be God. God, he must be the center. He must occupy not the outskirts of our hearts but the center of our hearts, the throne of our hearts.

[18:34] If you are not yet a follower of Christ and you are here this morning, this is what it takes to be saved. This is what it takes to become a follower of Christ. It takes everything.

Everything. If there is something in your life of which you say, I can give you all those other things, I can give you a part of this thing, but not all of it.

That's not enough. You can't have two masters. That's called treachery. you can't have two lovers. That's called adultery. My Christian brothers and sisters, aren't we all fools who have left everything to follow Jesus?

Where are my fellow fools who give away tens of thousands of dollars in tithes and offerings for the edification of the church body and the advancement of the gospel year after year?

[19:45] Many. Who would rather give away their wealth than to keep it for themselves? Where are my fellow fools who embrace chastity in singleness or faithfulness in marriage and will not indulge in the lusts of the flesh for the sake of Jesus?

Who will gladly live like eunuchs for the rest of their lives if that is indeed what God calls them to?

Where are my fellow fools who after getting slapped on the right cheek turn to them the other?

Who forgive, who love and pray for their enemies and forgive people not seven times but 77 times who extend God's mercy even to repeat offenders? Where are my fellow fools who would rather pray and depend on God than to be anxious and take things into your own hands?

Where are my fellow fools who would rather be associated with the crucified Messiah and with these vilified churches and Christians than with the rich and the powerful and the famous?

Where are the fellow fools who have subordinated all other loyalties? Loyalty to kid and kin, loyalty to country, subordinated all of them to your loyalty to Christ?

[21:07] Where are my brothers and sisters who would rather die for Christ than live without it? All of these things seem foolish and crazy to the watching world because, he says in 1 Corinthians 2.18, the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 2.14, that natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to them, and he's not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

But as Jim Elliot, who was killed like a fool at the age of 22 by the Guarani tribe in the Amazon in Ecuador, while trying to tell them about the good news, the saving news of Jesus Christ, he once said before he died, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose. The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Is it not wise to give up what is passing away in exchange for what lasts forever? For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?

[22:39] What shall a man give in return for his soul? Isn't it better to forfeit the world that is passing away, this temporal world to gain our eternal soul? We are no fools.

For here is what we have to gain. Jesus said in verses 28 to 29, truly I say to you in the new world when the son of man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

If you're using the English standard version of the Bible, you might have a footnote after the word new world. And if you look at that footnote, it will tell you that the word literally means regeneration in Greek, which means new birth or renewal.

When exactly is that time? Jesus tells us when the son of man will sit on his glorious throne. Jesus will mention this time again later in Matthew 25, 31 to 32.

he says, when the son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

[23:54] It's the time of final judgment after Christ's return. At that time, Jesus promises the twelve apostles, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

I think there is a particular reference here to the twelve apostles, that's why there's twelve thrones. In Luke 22, 28 to 30, Jesus says to the twelve, you are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I have signed to you as my father assigned to me a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

So that the twelve who ministered alongside Jesus during his earthly life and ministry laid the foundation for the church and as such they occupy a special place in the age to come.

That's why I think in Revelation 21, 14, the new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven, which represents the people of God, has twelve foundations and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the land.

In Revelation 20, verse 4, it says that after Christ's return and during his millennial reign, there will be thrones and see it on those to whom the authority to judge was committed.

[25:10] So I think this reign and rule extends from the millennial kingdom to eternity beyond. And there is a particular special place for these twelve apostles. But I don't think that this is the exclusive privilege of the twelve apostles.

Yes, they occupy a unique place in redemptive history and within the kingdom of God, but the apostles are the foundation of the church. And we are part of the same spiritual house that God is building as a dwelling place for himself.

The apostles represent all of us, the people of God. And this is why scripture elsewhere anticipates that all the saints and the whole church will partake in this reign of Christ and in the judgment of Christ.

It says in 1 Corinthians 6, 2-3, do you not know that the saints will judge the world? Do you not know that we are to judge angels?

This lofty, glorious task that our heavenly father sees fit to entrust to us in this new age the judgment.

[26:23] Daniel 7-22 prophesies of a time when the ancient of age comes, the judgment is given for the saints of the most high. And the time comes when the saints possess the kingdom.

Revelation 3-21, Jesus promises that those who conquer as he conquered, that he will give them to sit with him on his throne. This is supposed to be an encouraging promise to those who are downtrodden and weak and disenfranchised here in life.

Are you downtrodden now? Are you reviled and persecuted now? Are you weak and powerless now? You can wait with hope because Christ has prepared for you a throne and a kingdom. But does God have something good for us only in this next life? What about here and now? Do we have anything to look forward to in this life?

Or is this life only suffering and misery and loss? Jesus says in verse 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

[27:39] If you compare this verse to the parallel verses in Mark chapter 10 28-30 and Luke chapter 18 28-30 we can see clearly that the promise that we will receive a hundredfold applies not to the afterlife but to the present life.

Jesus says in Mark 10-30 that we will receive a hundredfold now in this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions and in the age to come eternal life.

Luke 18-30 says that we will receive many times more in this time and in the age to come eternal life. so then there are wonderful promises for our life here on earth as well.

For the early converts in Jesus' day following Christ meant being kicked out of the synagogue being disowned by their families being rejected and persecuted by their society. This has been the norm and not the exception throughout Christian history.

Many Christians throughout history and even today Christians in many parts of the world following Christ means rejection and persecution by family and society.

[29:02] But Jesus promises that to those who give him the primacy that he is due in their lives become part of the family of God.

The church. And as the church lives out its calling as the family of God, as they share their lives and possessions with each other, we may lose our own homes, but we gain a hundred more in the homes of our Christian brothers and sisters.

We may lose our spouses and siblings and parents and children, but we gain hundreds more within the family of God. The church is not a mere club or a show that you attend on Sundays, or a non-profit.

It is the very home and family of the people of God, all those who have been orphaned and disenfranchised in this world because of their allegiance to Christ.

As Jesus said earlier in Matthew chapter 12 verses 48 and 50, stretching out his hand toward the disciples, here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God, will of my Father in heaven, that is my brother and sister and mother.

[30:13] And that's what many of you have been throughout the history of our church for one another. When you care for one another in sickness by delivering meals, cooking for each other, when you watch the children of the parents in the church like their uncles and aunties, when you take members into your own homes when they don't have a place to live, when you give away thousands anonymously to help an unemployed brother, when you fly to a different part of the country to help a sister move, when you secretly pay for a church member's medical bill because they can't afford it.

We do this because we are family. And God has abundantly fulfilled his promise in my life, in my family, a hundredfold and more.

And that's just the beginning. Afterward, we have eternal life to enjoy. In this way, God generously rewards us according to our works because our works are the fruit and evidence of the grace that we have received from God.

As Jesus said in Matthew 10, 42, whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

Even the least of our good deeds that we do in his name will be rewarded, will not go unseen. So take heart, my brothers and sisters.

[31:50] Verse 30 then concludes the preceding passage and begins the next. It's a pivot point. But many who are first will be last and the last first. Some people understand verse 30 as a positive statement affirming Peter and the apostles.

the rich young man is the one who was first in this world but he will be last. But you who left everything, you're last in this world but you will be first. That is a true statement.

It's what Jesus essentially said in the earlier verses 28 and 29. However, I don't think that's the primary function of verse 30. And here's why. It begins with the conjunction but, which indicates contrast.

Remember Peter's plow and entitled question in chapter 19 verse 27. See, we have left everything in follow due. What then will we have?

If Jesus is affirming Peter's attitude and posture here, you're right, you're right. You gave us so much to follow me, you'll be first, don't worry.

[33:03] I don't think that's what Jesus is saying. If that's the case, then we expect the coordinated conjunction for. For many who are first will be last and the last first. But no, we have but.

It keeps a contrast. And if you skip ahead to chapter 20 verse 16, you will see that the same statement is repeated in reverse order. So the last will be first and the first last.

This is what we call an inclusio. These two verses serve as bookends. the front and back covers of the book that enclose its content together and bind them together.

So I think for that reason, chapter 19 verse 30 goes primarily with the following parable. And it's intended as a caution to the apostles and to all subsequent followers of Christ.

Yes, you will have great rewards. I assure you of that. But don't you go importing selfish ambition, sinful comparison, and envy, and worldly striving for first place into your Christian life.

[34:08] Because first will be last and the last first. You guys following me? It will be clear when we get to the parable. God mercifully repays us according to his grace.

Jesus says in verse 1, for the king of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire neighbors for his vineyard. The conjunction for in verse 1 signals that Jesus is commenting on what he just said in verse 30, chapter 19, verse 30.

But many who are first will be last and the last first because for, Jesus explaining, for the kingdom of heaven is like this, like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire neighbors for his king.

The vineyard is an often used image, a metaphor for the people of God in the Old Testament. And Jesus used that image famously in John 15 to say, I am the true vine and the father is a vine dresser.

I am the vine and you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. The people of God are God's vineyard and God is the master who owns it.

[35:15] In this parable, the master of the house goes out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. This is an allusion to the practice of hiring day laborers. The day laborers were those who did not have permanent regular employment.

They did not even enjoy the minimum security that slaves enjoyed because at least slaves are guaranteed housing and food as long as they are working for their master.

In the absence of welfare programs like we have today, these day laborers were completely at the mercy of their employer. If they did not find work for that day, then there would be no food on the table for their families that evening.

most of us don't understand what that kind of job insecurity looks like. But there are people like this in our day and age also. People who rely on temp agencies like laborfinders.com.

People who wait early in the morning in front of hardware stores, parking lots like Home Depot. This happens for real in Home Depot, South Bay Boston. Hoping that contractors and homeowners buying supplies would hire them for the day so that they can get immediate pay for their manual labor.

[36:36] Some companies like People Ready exist to help day laborers like this. They have a location in Chelsea where workers typically show up between 5, 5.30 and 7 a.m., hoping to be dispatched to job sites for manual labor, construction, event cleanup, whatever it might be.

It's not month to month for these kinds of workers. workers. It's day by day, hand to mouth. A wealthy landowner with a vineyard, who also has a foreman that works for him, could clearly keep his own labor force if he wanted to.

But he is hiring these day laborers as an act of compassion, seeking to relieve the hardship of the unemployed. work. And that's why he hires again and again, even after he's already hired everybody necessary in the morning, the first hours of the morning.

So the master of the house goes out early in the morning. That phrase usually indicates the fourth watch of the night, meaning between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. Really early. He would hire workers during that time span so that they could start work right at daybreak at 6 a.m.

Early bird gets the worm, right? As they say. So he finds the workers that he needs, and in verse 2, after agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

[38:03] The master has found the laborers for his vineyard, he sends them to work, and now we expect the master to return home. But here the parable takes an unexpected turn.

It says in verse 3 and 4, and going out about the third hour, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, you go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right, I will give you. This is the third hour since daybreak at 6 a.m., so this is 9 a.m., where most of us for the work, and the master hires still more day laborers.

Why does he hire them? He says, because he saw them standing idle in the marketplace. The word idle in English carries a pejorative sense, like they're being lazy or something and they don't want to work, but that's not the meaning here.

The word used here that's translated idle simply means that they're unemployed. They're idle, they're standing with no work because they don't have work, they have nothing to do. They're waiting around, hoping to be hired.

[39:05] And the master hires them and promises them a fair wage. But the story doesn't end there. It says in verse 5, going out again about the 6th hour and the 9th hour, he did the same.

He repeats the cycle again at noon when the day is already half over and then he does it again at 3 p.m. And it says in verses 6 and 7, and about the 11th hour he went out and found others standing and he said to them, why do you stand here idle all day?

They said to him, because no one has hired us. He said to them, you go into the vineyard box. This, by the way, is where we get the English expression, the 11th hour, when you slip in the last minute, the last possible hour that something needs to be done and you can do it, that's the 11th hour between 5 and 6 p.m.

in the biblical time frame, the literal last hour before sunset. And think for a moment about what kind of workers are left behind until the 11th hour and not hired by anyone.

if you don't understand where I did it, think about those times when you were in school and you were getting picked for teams in recess.

[40:23] You're trying to divide up into teams, you've got two captains, who gets picked first? Yeah, the strongest, most athletic, and then the small, the weak get picked last.

So imagine what kind of workers these are. Maybe they're old and infirm, maybe one limb is shorter than the other so they walk with the limb.

Maybe they're really small and scum. And imagine what's going through the minds of these day laborers.

It says that they've been standing there all day because no one has hired them. Most people wouldn't wait that long, right? Many people would despair of work long before the 11th hour and would have left for home.

But these workers, as they watch the sun sinking lower and lower, their hope of work dims further and further. workers? Ah, almost 11th hour.

[41:33] No employer has come by in a little while. Should I just call it home, call it, call it, call it the day and go home? But I have a family to feed.

I have no money. I can't go home yet. Got to wait a little longer. I must find work.

I'll wait. And at the last hour, the faith and persistence of these day laborers pay off, and this compassionate master hires them and sends them into the vineyard.

But the story doesn't end there. There's still one more twist. It says in verse 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.

Interesting. It's kind of backwards. Those guys were here first. It's already a sign of things to come. Verse 9, And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.

[42:45] These guys were literally just hired. They probably barely broke a sweat, working in the cool afternoon breeze, enjoying the twilight.

And knowing that they only worked for one hour, they were probably not expecting a full wage.

They were probably expecting a fraction of a denarius, crumbs from the master's table.

Yet each of them received a denarius, and they were probably ecstatic. Thank you, master. Thank you, thank you. This is so very generous of you.

You have no idea what this means to me, and what this will do for my family. And they go home bounding with joy, thinking of what they can buy. Paying the 5 p.m.

workers a full day's wage makes no economic sense. It's a quick way to go bankrupt. But it serves to highlight the uncalculating generosity of this master.

[43:55] And then in verse 10, we skip ahead to the workers who were hired first. Having just witnessed the workers who worked for one hour and got paid a denarius, they're processing the shock.

But there's also murmurs of excitement. Did you see that? I think he just gave them four denarius. the guys. Wow.

This guy's bloated. Imagine what it's going to give us once our turn. But each day, we seek the denarius.

God's sacrifice. Now, before I go any further, a caveat. I don't think this passage means that there are no different levels of rewards in heaven.

In the parable of the talents in Luke 19, the servant who used the one talent to make ten talents more is entrusted with ten talents. The one who made five talents more is entrusted with five talents.

[44:59] It seems there is different levels of rewards. Also, in 1 Corinthians 3, 12 to 15, we see that some will receive a reward when they are saved for their faithfulness, but others will suffer loss.

And even though they themselves will be saved, but they will be saved only through fire with no rewards to show for the work that they have done. These are all true and visible doctrines, and I don't think the parable of the vineyard labels contradicts any of that.

And those things won't matter in heaven for us because there's no sin and there's no envy. We'll all be joyful and contented. Well, what then is the point of this parable?

Let's look at it more closely. It says in verses 11 to 12, And on receiving it, they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, These last words only warrant one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.

Grumbling is never a good sign when you see the fire. In Luke 5:30, the same word is used to describe the Pharisees and the scribes who grumbled at Jesus and his disciples.

[46:06] Why? Because they saw that Jesus is welcoming tax collectors and sinners. They grumbled. How can you treat us the same way you treated them?

They worked one hour, we worked twelve. Those guys were shooting the breeze for eleven hours, and then they came to the vineyard one hour ago.

Look at the sweat on my brows. Look at how I've been tanned from being out in the scorching sun. My back is aching from the bearing the burden of the day. It's not fair to make them equal to us.

But the master answers in verses 13, 14. Friend, I'm doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go.

I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. The word friend sounds intimate and familiar, but the Greek word behind this is not the typical word used for friend that's referring to like an intimate companion.

[47:13] It's a word that refers to someone who you're associated with, but not necessarily at the level of friendship. A more literal translation might be a comrade or a fellow.

It's not dissimilar to how every British person calls like every random person, hey mate, you know, or like, it's really funny this week, my third daughter has been on this bro kick this week.

She picked up this bro language from somebody in school and she called everyone's bros. Like, hey bro, what's up with that bro? Hey, that's not a bro, that's your sister.

And so it's kind of like that. It's like, hey, mate, I'm not doing you any wrong.

In fact, Matthew is the only New Testament author that uses this Greek word that's translated friend here. And every time he uses it, the association is not good. In 1116, it refers to the generation that rejects John the Baptist and Jesus.

[48:22] In chapter 22, verse 12, in the parable of the wedding feast, it refers to a man who shows up to the wedding without a wedding garment and is subsequently thrown out into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and national teeth.

And then finally, in Matthew 26, 50, it's how Jesus addresses Judas who betrays him and hands him over to the Jewish authorities. These day laborers have agreed to do a whole day's work for the denarius, these 6 a.m.

workers. So the issue is not that the master is cheating them out of their wages. He's delivered on his promise. He's given them what he had promised. The real issue is that these 6 a.m. workers don't think that 5 p.m.

workers deserve their denarii. And the master diagnoses this problem precisely in verse 15. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?

Or do you begrudge my generosity? They are begrudging the master's generosity. It's fine and dandy that you hired me and gave me the wages that I deserve, but that guy over there doesn't deserve it.

[49:34] You should be generous to me, but not that generous. The sentence do you begrudge my generosity in Greek is literally, is your I evil because I am good?

It's a voted sentence. The phrase bad I or evil I is Jewish idiom for stinginess and jealousy. Earlier in Genesis, I sorry, Matthew 6, 22, 24, Jesus said, the I is the lamp of the body, so if your I is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your I is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness? No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other, but cannot serve God and money.

Someone who is stingy and ungenerous with their money, someone who serves money rather than God is described to have bad eye or evil eye. This bad eye is contrasted with the goodness of God and of Jesus.

Is your eye bad because I am good? And this harkens back to what Jesus said to the rich young man in chapter 19 verse 17. There is only one who is good.

[50:50] In other words, no one is good but God alone. As Romans 3, 10, 10 to 12 says citing Psalm 14, none is righteous, no, not one.

No one understands, no one seeks God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless. no one does good, not even one.

Here is the main point of this parable. No day laborer is entitled to the wage that the master generously gives. Why? Because he was not obligated to hire them in the first place.

Remember, these are day laborers, unemployed workers, the undesirable workers. It was the master's compassion that led him to hire these laborers in the first place, even at noon, and even at 3pm, and even at 5pm.

Fully knowing that he wasn't going to get full productivity out of them. Moreover, when he hired them, he didn't have to promise them a specific wage. He could have just told them, I'll pay you

what seems right, which is exactly what he said in verse 4.

[52:01] And when the time of payment comes, he could have given them a fraction of the denarius, and there would not have been a thing that these workers could do about it, because they can't find any other work.

A fraction of the denarius is better than nothing, and it's not like they have labor unions that they can go to. They have no recourse. These day laborers are at the complete mercy of the master, and that's the point.

The master emphasizes his sovereignty in verse 15, am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me. It's my vineyard.

It's my money. I choose the workers, and I choose the wages, and that's how salvation works. Who then are the 6 a.m.

workers, and who are the 5 p.m. workers? Is Jesus contrasting the 12, the earliest followers of Jesus, with the later followers of Jesus? Is Jesus contrasting the original Jewish converts with the later Gentile converts?

[53:08] The parable doesn't specify because I think it's making a more general point that applies to all of those situations. Jesus is reminding us that we receive eternal life as a gift and not as a wage, as we read in the assurance of pardon from Romans 4 this morning.

When it comes to our salvation, God mercifully repays us, not according to our deserves, not according to what we deserve, but according to His grace.

As it says in Psalm 103 verse 10, God does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. If God treated us according to what we deserved, none of us would be hired none of us would make the cut.

All of us would be waiting until the end of day and the sun sets and day after day, reaping left hanging with no money, no food. That's where we would be. God, He said, deals with us according to His grace and according to His generosity.

Jesus, who is in the form of God, the Son of God, who is the very God of very God, emptying Himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man, and being found in human form, He humbled Himself and became obedient, by becoming obedient to the point of death and death on the cross.

[54:38] The first became the last. Jesus, who according to Colossians 1, 15, 16, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the Word of God by whom all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, were created.

The Word of God who gave life to all of creation died on the cross for our sins. the first became the last. The master, the king, the king who deserves to be served by everybody, the king who deserves to be honored by everybody, came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for men.

The first became the last. The master became the slave, so that the slaves like you and I may go free. The Lord of life died and rose again so that we who were dead in our trespasses and sins might be made alive in Jesus Christ.

The first became the last so that the last and the least like you and I might become the first. That's the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that's the point of this parable.

As soon as you start to think that you deserve more than these other Christians, as soon as you start to begrudge God's grace and forgiveness toward fellow sinners, Jesus is warning us, you need to check your heart.

[56:18] Many who are first will be last and the last first. I had an illuminating conversation this week with one of my neighbors and I think God let me have the conversation in preparation for the sermon.

I started talking to him about the amazing grace of God toward sinners and then my neighbor, who grew up Catholic, stopped me in my tracks and said this, you see, that's what I have a problem with. You see, these criminals on death row, they lived their whole life either on death row, and then all of a sudden, they find religion. And you tell me that God forgives them?

I told them, yeah, that is literally what Jesus tells the thief on the cross. Here's the thief on death row, he's not on death row, he's literally being executed for some capital crime, he has committed

no life or history of good works to show for himself, nothing he can claim to justify himself, no catechesis, no discipleship, no doctrine in his head that he can pop up and say, here, I know this, I know this truth, all he knows that Jesus is who he says he is, the Messiah, the Savior, he tells him, he asks him, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom because I think you're the king.

And then Jesus tells him, today you will be with me in paradise. if you begrudge death, if you begrudge death, you're becoming like the older brother.

[58:17] In the parable of the two sons, do you remember that story? Their two sons, the younger son demands early his inheritance money, give me what's mine because you're not dying soon enough, takes all the money and then squanders it with prostitutes, has nothing left for himself and he has to be enslaved by another and he's got nothing to eat and he's eating the pods of the pigs and as eating the pods of the pigs he comes to his senses and thinks, you know what, I could just go back to my father, ask him to hire me as a servant.

Even his servants eat better than me. And then the father receives him back as a son, puts the best robe on him, puts the signet ring on him, slaughters the fattened calf for him, throws a party, for what was lost was found, my son was lost, has been found, and then the older brother who should be rejoicing at the return of his younger brother is not happy.

Father, this son of yours who squandered his, your wealth, with prostitutes, comes back and you slaughter a fattened calf for him. Where's my fattened calf?

And the father calls him, son, literally everything I have is yours. What do you mean where's your fattened calf? You could have slaughtered all the calves.

It's not that he doesn't have a calf, that's what he's crying out about. No, he doesn't like that his younger brother who he thinks doesn't deserve the calf is getting the calf.

[60:13] When you, when we find, see, I think this happens to every Christian that we go through this page, the disciples, you've been walking with the Lord for some time, maybe you've read through the Bible a couple of times, you know, you're becoming more obedient, you sin less and less, and you think, oh man, I'm so much more righteous than so many of these people around me.

You know, like, oh, I go to church, I've been going to church for years now and I know some doctrine, I've read some books, I've read some books on theology, you know, maybe I've gone on a couple of mission trips and now you know, oh, I'm really, really on a road here, I'm doing really well for myself and then you start to get entitled and you start to get self-righteous and you start to think, oh, you know, I think I deserve this status I have with God.

And when you start to think that way, you begrudge the generosity of the master to sinners who don't deserve it because we have forgotten that we are that sinner who don't deserve it.

so that's the point. I don't think I can press the details of this parable so far as to argue that you know, these guys are not saved at all.

We don't know what happens to them. We don't know if they hit the denarius or not. but I can tell you that there are people who think they are saved and who have the status of God but who are not saved in the end.

[61:54] Isn't that what Jesus said in Matthew 7, 21 to 23? Not everyone will say to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, do we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty words in your name?

To translate that, we deserve it. We did all this. We deserve it. And then Jesus says, I will declare to him, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. In the parallel passage to our passage this morning in Luke 13, 26 to 30, Jesus says, and you will begin to say, we ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets.

But he will say, I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil. And behold, some are last who will be first and some are first who will be last.

It's a parallel passage by passage. There will be people who say, I know you. I ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets. I've been to your church services.

[63:05] I've been to your church services. So what matters is your posture and your heart before God. Is the grace of God, is the mercy of God still wondrous to you?

Do you know that you are a sinner saved by God's grace and grace alone? Do you know that you have no wages that you can bring to save and you can demand of God and say, I deserve it. I earned it. I worked for it. If you know that you have no such claim and no such right, then we will not be crushed the generosity of our master.

We will rejoice in the generosity of our master. Let's pray that we'll be people like that. Heavenly Father, Father, please help us.

We can so easily forget your grace and mercy. Remind us of how lost we were, what sinners we were, like those day laborers without hope, left to the very end.

[64:31] Not so that we can mope in our guilt and shame, but so that we can relish the grace that abounds all the more in you forgiving us and saving us.

And make us a people who freely dispense that grace and share that goodness of Jesus Christ with others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.