

Parable Of The Workers
In The Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

MEMORY VERSE

MATTHEW 20:16

"So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen."

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

As many small prizes (pencils, erasers, stickers, etc.) as the number of children in your class, and a toy box or supply cabinet.

A chalkboard and chalk.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

The Laborers in the Vineyard

While your children are at worship, have your aide or other helper, take toys from the toy box, or crayons and pencils from the supply cabinet, and scatter them around the room. When your students return, tell them that you want some volunteers to clean up the classroom. Tell them that you will reward them with a small prize.

When the children who are cleaning up are over half way finished, tell the rest of the class that if they help with the remaining work, you will reward them with the same prize.

When the class is cleaned up, reward every child with the same small prize. If the original workers do not grumble, coax them a little with questions like, "Do you think it's fair to give the kids who didn't work as hard, the same prize?" After some discussion, explain that they are going to learn a lesson today that Jesus taught about this exact same situation.

LESSON TIME!

Jesus often told stories called parables. If you remember, a parable is a story that is “cast alongside” a truth. A parable helps us understand the spiritual truths Jesus is sharing, but for those not interested in truth they would not understand their meaning. Jesus wants each of us to understand more about His kingdom. He explained many of the parables that He told to His disciples.

For those who truly listened to Jesus’ parables, they would be able to understand more about the kingdom of God. This is why Jesus starts most of His parables with the phrase "The kingdom of God is like..." This means that if you understand the meaning of the story, you have understood more about what God is like. Do you want to know what God is like? Then let's listen carefully to today's lesson. Make sure you pay attention! Don't daydream!

MATTHEW 20:1-16

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius 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 to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And they went.

Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise.

And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?'

They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.'

So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.'

And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius.

But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius.

And when they had received it, they murmured against the landowner,

saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.'

But he answered one of them and said, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?

'Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you.

'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?'

So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen."

What Is a Parable?

Play "Pictionary" with your class. Have a student draw for the class on the chalk or dry erase board an object of your choosing, like a dollar, a skateboard, a football helmet, etc. Without saying anything, allow the class to guess what the object is. The first child to guess correctly gets a turn at the chalkboard.

After playing for a little while, explain to the class that Jesus was drawing pictures for the people He taught with words.

The parable of the workers in the vineyard has several important lessons to teach us. But first, let's try to understand the main truth. In verse eleven we read the response of the workers who were hired at the beginning of the day. "And when they received it (their money), they murmured against the landowner..." Why were they upset? Didn't they agree to work the whole day for a denarius (penny) and didn't they receive a denarius at the end of the Day? A denarius was a fair wage in those days. So why all the grumbling? They were grumbling against the landowner because they were envious of the other men who received the same pay for less time worked.

To illustrate how they might have felt, let's say your parents ask you to do all the chores around the house in one day; so many chores that it took you from morning to the evening to complete all of them. Your parents promise to pay you a whole month's allowance for the day's work (chores). So you work all day long anticipating the pay at the end of the day. Just as you are finishing the last chore your brother or sister walks over and helps you. All he or she did was to help for a few minutes. Then your parents walk over and hands him or her a full month's allowance. Then

they turn to you and give you your allowance. How would you feel? (Take time to let your class respond.)

This is how the workers who were hired at the beginning of the day felt. They were envious of the others! What is wrong with envy? Envy is a result of a poor attitude or outlook regarding another's good fortune. They also felt they were treated unfairly. Were they? No. The landowner has the right to do whatever he wants with his money, just like the parents in our illustration did.

The workers attitude about their service to the landowner was not good. They wished they could have served less for the same pay. Is that how you would have felt? Jesus wants His disciples to know that it isn't the work you do for God that is important, nor is it the reward that you receive. It is the attitude you have when you serve Him with your life. God wants us to serve Him with a heart of thankfulness and gratitude. We are blessed to be used as an instrument in God's hands to further His kingdom. **God is more concerned with our heart's attitude than our service.**

It is also important for us to remember to have a joyous heart for the people who God chooses to bless, even though they may not deserve it. The workers who came late and worked did not deserve a full day's pay. Just like the brother or sister who showed up at the end of the day and still got the allowance did not deserve it. The landowner and parents in our example were being gracious to them. Grace is getting what we do not deserve. Our salvation is by grace. We do not deserve to be forgiven, but Jesus died for our sins and paid the price for us. God will give us salvation even though we do not deserve it. The workers that did not work a full day did not deserve a full day's wage. The landowner was gracious to them.

Another lesson we can learn is that the landowner has the right to be gracious to whomever he wants to. In verse 15 the landowner explains to the grumbling worker, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?" God also has the right to be

gracious to whomever He wants to. We should again be thankful that God was so gracious to us in sending us a great and wonderful salvation in Jesus Christ.

We can also learn that we need to look at our own lives and not focus on others. God blesses all of His children greatly. We can't see the "big picture" of what God is doing in someone else's life. So it is not for us to worry about what God is doing in another's life. Let's keep focused on the Lord and what He has called us to do.

Today we have learned several things. First, we have learned what a parable is and why Jesus spoke in parables. Second, we now understand how important it is to God that we serve with a good attitude. It is not as important to God what the job is we do for Him, or the reward; what is important to God is that we serve Him out of a heart of love and thankfulness. **God is more concerned with our heart's attitude than our service.** This is the main truth of the parable.

Finally, we see that God is gracious and He gives His grace to us in His Son, Jesus. We should never be envious that God is gracious to others, for He has been gracious to us.

Review Questions

How many hours did the first group of workers work? The second group? The third group? The fourth group? The fifth group?

How much money did they receive?

What have you learned from today's parable about serving God?

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer asking for God's help with an attitude of service to Him. If any children have not responded to the gospel, give them an opportunity to do so.