

## 092423 Sermon "God's Grace" Matthew 20:1-16

In today's parable, Jesus talks about heaven. When people hear the word heaven, they either think of it as an imaginary place or some vague space above the heavens. In Matthew 20, however, Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven as a landowner. Verse 1 says, "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard." This verse states that heaven is not just a physical space or location above but that heaven is like a landowner. After reading this story, you can see that the landowner spoken of here is God. So, heaven is like God. Heaven is a place where God's will is realized.

To put it another way, when you live a life following God by reading the Bible, discerning God's will, and living out his words, your life will become like a heaven even in extreme situations. In the Gospels, Jesus often talks about the joy of such a life. In contrast, even if we were to sit at church, if we do not put God in the center of our lives but worry/envy/foster anger for others, our lives will never be like the life in heaven. No matter how long we've been going to church. So, then I have a question for you. Is God within you at this moment? Are you living and enjoying by the principles of the kingdom of God? Or are you busy following and enjoying the principles of the world?

When we look at today's story, the landowner goes out to find workers for his vineyard at 6am, 9am, 12pm, 3pm, and 5pm. He went out a total of five times to look for workers. Every time he went out, he brought back not one worker, but several workers who needed a job. At the conclusion of the story, the landowner gave a day's wage to those who worked for one hour, and also gave a day's wage to those who worked all day. To be honest, if you run a business and run a store based on this principle, your store will probably go out of business quickly. The basic economic principle is to make maximum profits with minimum investment, right? This story was not based on efficiency and practicality. So, what on earth is this story about?

The last verse implies that the purpose of the landowner doing this was to give a denarius or a day's wage to the workers who did not have a job. Here we need to know the situation at the time of Jesus. The social situation at the time of Jesus was that many small farmers were driven off their land

into debt to pay Roman taxes. This was a violation of the command of the God of Israel that the land could not be taken away from those who worked it. But of course, this was no problem for the Romans. As a result, every morning many unemployed people flocked to find work for the day. The landowner in this parable pays all the workers enough to support their families. People who still wait until 5 have little chance of earning enough money to buy food for their families that day. However, this landowner of the vineyard gives them a full day's wages. When we understand this situation, this parable is about God's generosity or God's grace.

So, let's go a little deeper into this story and find the role that's right for you. Are you among the workers who came first? Or Do you feel like you are among the workers who came last? The meaning of this analogy may be taken differently depending on who hears it. To the Jews, we are the Gentiles. Therefore, Jews would consider us as the workers who came later. Does that mean all the Jews are the workers who came first? That's not necessarily true because the Jewish religious leaders would consider the outsider Jews as the workers who came later. In today's world, we may consider those who started their life in faith recently to be the workers who came later.

However, some problems arose with the workers who came early. At first, the workers were grateful for being hired and getting paid a denarius. But they started comparing themselves with the workers who came later and forgot about being grateful and instead started complaining.

Their complaint was this: "I worked longer than the people who came later so I am worth more than them. Why are you treating me the same way as them?" They were basically complaining that they should receive more money because they worked longer, although they initially began their work with gratitude after being promised a daily wage.

The importance is not in whether you were called first or last. Here, first or last is a relative concept. God considers everyone precious whether they came early or late. The importance is whether you are faithful to God after being called by Him. Are you faithful to the Lord, your God? Are you thankful to what you have received from God?

During my vacation last summer, I couldn't go anywhere because my son was doing an internship in North Haven. My wife drove him every morning, I picked him up in the evening, and because it was a time of traffic, I rode for an hour and a half to two hours every day. As I drove, I had a lot to think about. Although I was tired at times (I know I'm not supposed to be tired during my vacation), I was able to have many conversations with my son.

My son completed an internship for about 7 weeks and was treated quite well. He earned about \$5,800 Before Tax. It's the first fruit. One day, I said that to my son while picking him up. "Joseph, I hope you become a person who knows how to distinguish what belongs to God. It's the first time you've earned money by working, and I will be happy if you set apart and give a tithe to God. Of course, you decide, but the Bible says where your money is, there your heart will be also. Money is the best thing in the world, right? However, those who believe in Jesus confess that although they need money, money is not the best, but God is the best. I don't tithe because I'm a pastor. I don't tithe to impress others. I do it because of God. In order to participate in the good work that God began among us." On the following Sunday, he set aside his tithe and gave it to God.

Even now, my prayer for my daughter and my son is not for success in the world and become the object of others' envy. My prayer is not about that they earn a lot of money and eat well and live well. If they live sincerely and diligently, they can earn those things. My earnest prayer, however, is that they will not just be church goers, but will become true worshipers, people who love Jesus and put His words into practice. If you love Jesus and obey His words, you will naturally love your neighbors. I truly believe that. Even when I am no longer in this world, I hope my children can live their lives believing in God the Heavenly Father! I'm serious.

You don't have to worry about how you will run your vineyard with the principles you heard in today's sermon. Because God already works that way. However, if you are among workers in his vineyard who have realized the landowner's heart, there is definitely something you can do.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, whether you started your faith journey early or just recently, we should live a life knowing that God is gracious to us all. I pray that we remain faithful to the Lord, our God and

give thanks to God about whatever we have received from God. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, with your family, with your business, with your studies, and with the lives of your children. Amen.