

## **Matthew 21-09-26a**

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're continuing our study in the Gospel of Matthew, picking up this morning at chapter 20.

We have covered 19 full chapters in the Gospel and we're running up to the conclusion. We've got of course, eight more chapters to go. But we pick up where we left off a couple of weeks ago with Jesus making a promise to the disciples with regard to the result of their following Him.

And the illustration of that truth comes in chapter 20. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll get started. Father, we are grateful for the fellowship and the opportunity to spend time together, to bear one another's burdens, to lift each other up in prayer.

And we thank you for that privilege. We thank you that we can come boldly before your throne to find grace for help in our time of need. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ and all of the wonderful blessings that we enjoy in Him.

We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together this morning, that the Holy Spirit will bring it to life in our souls, that it will be the influence that undergirds our thinking and our decisions and our actions so that we can live as you would have us live to reflect your light in this ever-darkening age. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

If you remember a couple of weeks ago when we were last in Matthew, the rich young ruler has come and gone sorrowing and Jesus points out the powerful pull that material things have on us. We touched on that a little bit on Thursday night looking at the bias that we have toward things that we have already procured, things that we have we think are more valuable than the identical thing that somebody else has. This is the distance between asking price and selling price.

We always tend to value what we have and this was in view when the young man went away sorrowing because he had great wealth. Jesus said this makes it hard to enter into the kingdom. Easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

All of the fanciful explanations of that, that there was a gate called the eye of a needle and a camel couldn't get through unless they unpacked it and so on, are basically spurious. There was no such gate. I think for a while I was enamored of that explanation.

It sounds good but if you read Edersheim, there was no such thing. There had been a prevalent saying among the rabbis talking about an elephant going through the eye of a needle and when Jesus says a camel, the camel was kind of the Lexus of the day or the Cadillac or the Lamborghini and only rich people could afford to own them and use them.

So the possibility is with God.

With men it is impossible but with God all things are possible. Then he promises when Peter answers and says, Sir, see we have left all and followed you, therefore what shall we have? And this is kind of hard to put into a good light. We have left all and followed you, what do we get? What are you going to give me for leaving all and following you? You could imagine a rebuke, you could imagine a put down from the lips of Jesus for, are you following me just for reward? Are you here just for what you will get out of it? But Jesus is gracious and says, truly I say to you that in the regeneration, in the regeneration, that word regeneration is interesting, in Greek it is palingenesia.

Palen means again or something that is renewed, something that comes back and genesia of course is where you get Genesis. So it is in the new Genesis, the new beginning, the new world if you will. In the regeneration, when the son of man sits on the throne of his glory, 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 namesake shall receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life. Jesus has moved from entering the kingdom to inheritance in the regeneration, in the new beginning. But, and here is where the real answer to Peter's question comes.

Many who are first will be last and the last first. Notice he does not say all. It is possible for a rich man to enter the kingdom.

It is very difficult but it is possible. And not everyone who is first is going to be last. Not everyone who is last is going to be first.

Many, probably most, probably the vast majority. But there are exceptions. But last and first we tend to think of as rank or station in life.

Jesus is going to play with this idea in his next parable and he is going to give the actual answer and the corrective that is needed for Peter's impulsive question in this next parable that we find in chapter 20. So that is the review and background. That is the context.

Why does Jesus give this next parable of the laborers in the vineyard? Well, we need this review because when you look at chapter 20 verse 1 the first word is for. In Greek this is gar, g-a-r, conjunctive particle. And it is introducing an explanation or an illustration or something that hooks back into what Jesus has just been talking about.

So what has he been talking about? Several things. One of which is service with sacrifice, service with suffering. The Son of Man is going to sit on the throne of His glory.

How does he obtain that throne? If you have never memorized Philippians chapter 2,

nearly all of you have, you will probably have it committed to memory just because I quote it so often. But remember when Paul talks in Philippians chapter 2 about the Lord Jesus who had the mentality, let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, when he denied himself, came in the form of a servant and in the likeness of men, he humbled himself and was obedient even to the point of death. What follows that? For this reason God has highly exalted him.

Not because he's the second person of the Trinity, not because he is due glory as God. He thought equality with God was not a thing to be grasped and he gave it up, he set it aside, he emptied himself. For this reason, humility, obedience, self-denial, willingness to suffer for God's plan and purpose, for this reason God has highly exalted him.

So when Jesus says when the Son of Man in the renewal sits on the throne of his glory, you also will sit on thrones. Their elevation is tied to and a result of his elevation because they are attached to Jesus Christ. When he sits on his throne, they will sit on a throne.

Not because of merit, not that that privilege has been earned by self-denial. Self-denial accompanies it but does not earn it. To illustrate this point, Jesus says in chapter 24, 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. 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. So 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. Not insignificant, that last phrase. And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius.

But when the first came, they supposed they would receive more and they likewise received each a denarius. When they had received it, they complained 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.

Many are called, but fewer chosen is in your Bible. You can scratch it out. It's not there.

There's a couple of things that are not here. All of your New King James text notes there when it says the text omits, you can safely cross all of those out. They all have been added by attraction from other places.

Well, the kingdom of heaven is like what did Jesus talk about just previously in the regeneration, talking about entering the kingdom and inheriting in the kingdom. There is privilege. There is opportunity that will be assigned specifically to the apostles and everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father or mother, scratching out wife, children or lands for my name's sake shall receive a hundredfold and inherit.

The key there is having left for my name's sake, motivated not by a bargain, not by an agreement, but out of love, out of recognition of who the Lord Jesus is and what he has done for us. His place in God's plan that defines our place in God's plan. For that reason, we are willing to forego other things.

But just because you are first in this life doesn't mean you'll be first in the next. And just because you get there early doesn't necessarily mean that there will be more. The disciples are the first to recognize who Jesus is.

They're not first in the social strata of Israel. In Judaism, they are looked down on and despised already, and it's only going to get worse. In what sense are they first? Like Paul says, we who were the first to hope in Christ.

So the kingdom of heaven is like. This is a very interesting parable. It has a lot of subtle details.

This landowner went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Normally, a vineyard owner or a large landowner would have servants, a household servant, a steward, much as Joseph did for Potiphar, who would handle the hiring of day laborers. This wouldn't be something he would do personally, but for a couple of reasons, Jesus has this landowner go directly to the laborers because part of what is in view here is this is a personal understanding.

To introduce a go-between, even though that might have been the custom or the usual, would clutter Jesus' point. So outside the usual, this landowner, there are some who say, well, he was so concerned about this vineyard that he wanted to personally hire the laborers who would work in it. And he had a great concern that this vineyard be tended.

And that's a possibility, right? I think primarily this parable centers on the understanding between this owner of the vineyard and the people who work in it. And so there's no go-

between introduced in Jesus telling of the story. So he went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

Now early in the morning is at daybreak. So he's out because it's the season for vineyards to be tended. We know this is the summertime, days are longer in the, you know, in the Northern Hemisphere in the summertime.

And so he's going to be getting there, say 530 in the morning, because the workday is going to extend from 6am to 6pm. So early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard, he went out to hire them. They are not servants.

They are not already part of the household. They are formerly non-acquainted. They've not been introduced to this landowner before.

So he meets them, they see him, he sees them. Then in verse 2, he agreed with the laborers for denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. Now he may have, it doesn't say where he went to find this first set of workers.

It just says he went out to hire laborers when he had agreed with the laborers. This could be a company, an outfit that provides laborers. We don't know.

It is unknown where they were secured, but they are the first. So he sent them into his vineyard. This would be at 6am.

So they're working away and he went about the third hour. This would be 9am. This is the Jewish workday, 6am to 6pm.

So he goes out at 9am. The morning is beginning to warm. The first set have been working for three solid hours.

Around the third hour, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace. Those of you who live in Dallas know that there are certain places in Dallas where people who don't have a job, but maybe have some skills or are willing to do whatever someone will hire them to do, there are certain places where they will stand. There are parking lots and there's no sign.

It's just an understanding that workers know to go there and stand and people who need some relatively unskilled labor will drive by and say, hey, I need three guys and he'll hire them at those places. There was one, I remember right off of Park Lane. For a while my route took me from Park onto Central Expressway and you drive by this convenience store parking lot and there would just be a couple of dozen guys in the morning standing there waiting to go out and dig or do whatever.

That's the case here. They're in the marketplace. So the landowner at 9am says, you also go into the vineyard and whatever is right I will give you.

This is different. The first group, they are laborers. They agree for a specific wage and they go and begin to work.

These guys are not necessarily laborers. They're not necessarily skilled vineyard workers. They are just others who are standing idle in the marketplace.

So they haven't been picked up by a contractor. They're certainly not servants for someone. They're just looking for work.

They're standing idle in the marketplace. He says, go into the vineyard and whatever is right I will give you. So they know the workday has already started and they trust this landowner.

They don't say, well I'm not going until you tell me what the pay is. When he calls, they respond. He calls, they respond and they don't know what the wage will be.

They do this with something that illustrates faith. There is no verbal contract for pay. He just says, whatever is right I will give you.

So they are trusting in the righteousness. Remember in Zechariah we saw where, behold your king is coming. He is just.

They're relying on the justice of this landowner. So the workers go. He went out again at noon and at 3pm and did likewise.

So every three hours now he has gone out. He went at 6, he went at 9, he went at 12 and he went at 3. There's something you can possibly read into that. But about the 11th hour he went out.

Now if you've had guys working since 6am, you added some more at 9, you added some more at 12, you added some more at 3, what is the status of this vineyard? There is an unlimited amount of work in this vineyard. It doesn't say he went and behold the laborers that he had hired were standing idle. There's no commentary on the quality of their work or the lack of their work.

But the fact that he goes out and continues to add laborers, you get the idea this is a big vineyard and there's no lack of work in it. So even at the 11th hour, this would be 5pm, he goes out and found others standing. The word idle is not there in verse 6. About the 11th hour he went out and found others standing.

He said to them, why have you been standing here idle all day? Idle is in the second sentence but not in the first. Now they said to him, because no one hired us, if they had been in the marketplace, if they had been in the places that the landowner went at the 3rd, 6th and 9th hour, they would have been hired. He has gone to a new place.

And these men evidently have been standing idle all day. Now they didn't go home, they

didn't go take a siesta. They have been standing all day and the landowner can tell they've been there all day.

You would get the idea that perhaps they're feeling very little hope. What are the chances they're going to get hired at the end of the day? And if they do get hired and only work an hour, what's the likelihood they're going to get anything worth the trip? By the time they travel to the vineyard and get started, the day is going to be over in an hour. So he asks them, why have you been standing here idle all day? And they said, because no one hired us.

It isn't that we're unwilling or unable, but no opportunity until now. So he said, you also go into the vineyard and whatever is right you will receive, that whatever is right you will receive isn't there. You also go into the vineyard.

That's all he says. So they've got the least promise. They have the least work.

Expectations are low. What could I possibly get for an hour? You know, what's one twelfth of a denarius perhaps? But whatever is right you will receive is not there. You also go into the vineyard.

He just says, go to the vineyard. And they go. That's all he says.

And they go. Not even a promise. So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, he's got a steward.

Why didn't he send the steward to hire these guys? There is personal, his personal name is on the line. Whatever you do in my name, I tease people when I go to tune a piano, a lot of times someone will offer me a glass of water. And especially when it's at a church, I will remind them that I'd be happy to get a drink of water because I know they're going to get a blessing.

Jesus said, if you give a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in my name. And what we do for his name, as he said up in verse 29, for my name's sake. And that's why there is this personal interaction between the vineyard owner and the workers.

But he has a steward. So when the evening had come in verse eight, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, call the laborers and give them wages beginning with the last to the first, beginning with the last. When those came who were hired about the 11th 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. The owner could have avoided controversy if he had paid the early guys first, they've been there the longest, get your pay, you can go on home, see what's for supper. And they wouldn't have known that the showed up at the 11th hour were going to get the same wage and that all the people that showed up through the

day got exactly the same wage.

But the landowner purposely, and for Jesus purposes, starts with those who were last. The last shall be first, the first shall be last. So these who started at the 11th hour get a denarius.

And he skips the ninth hour, sixth hour and third hour groups and goes to those who came first. They supposed that they would receive more. Why? Because they are looking at the picture the way Peter looks at the picture.

Lord, we have abandoned all and followed you. What shall we receive? Jesus says you're going to receive, but it's going to be granted based on my name, not on when you showed up or what you have forsaken. You do need to show up, you do need to forsake, but the reward isn't coming the way you think it's going to.

It's not coming on the basis of what human justice might expect. So when they had received it, they complained against the landowner saying, these last have worked one hour and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day. You can already begin thinking, is this going to be the attitude of Old Testament Israel when they see the church? And you say, well, wait a minute, they didn't grind away under the precepts and requirements of the law and they didn't be enslaved.

They were not enslaved as a people in Egypt and wander in the wilderness for 40 years and suffer all the indignities and hardships that the Old Testament people of God underwent. And there is that suggestion because there is a covenant with the first group. Those who are hired at the beginning of the day, it is a covenant.

Here is reward for your work. One denarius for a full day's work. No one else has that covenant, only the first set of workers.

Israel considers itself with some justification special in the eyes of God. And that has to do with the fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, those men of faith. And the covenant that God made with Abraham, the covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai, the Davidic covenant, and so on.

These are covenants with Israel. None of the rest of these workers, every three hours a fresh group. And then at the 11th hour, there is just a general promise, a vague responsibility that the landowner expresses to pay them what is right.

So these last men have worked only one hour, you have made them equal to us. Now, this is the fallacy that exists in intersectional talking and all of the, you know, I deserve something because I am in a particular class or category, I am this gender, I am this race, I am this economic status, I am defined by some particular attribute. And because of that, I deserve.

And if other people get what I think I deserve, you know, equal equality and equity are terms that are constantly being banned about today. You have made them equal to us. Is that really true? Because you pay them the same, they are equal.

Switching from recompense for labor to something personal, something having to do with value or whatever. What's really fascinating about this is there was a similar parable in Jewish literature back in that day, eventually got set down by the rabbis and is given in later Jewish collections. And it's a similar parable.

There was a king who hired some servants to do work. And as he walked around, he noticed that one worker was really extraordinarily gifted and was just excelling all others in the quality of his work. And so the king called him out from where he was working and had him held him by the hand and walked around observing the rest of the workers for the whole rest of the day.

And at the end of the day, when he paid the workers, he paid this one that had only worked two hours the same as all of the other laborers that worked a full day. And an objection came up and some of the laborers said, Sire, this man only worked two hours and you're paying him the same as you're paying us. Now, remember, this is a Jewish parable.

And the punchline of the Jewish parable is the king says, this young man's work is so excellent that he did more in two hours than what you have done all day long. Notice that the point is the exact opposite in Jesus' parable. In Jesus' parable, the pay is based on the grace of the landowner.

In the Jewish parable, it's based on the merit of the worker. I am so good I can earn in two hours what it takes you all day to earn, basically. So Jesus emphasizes here in the conclusion, I have done you no wrong.

Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Have I not fulfilled the contract that we agreed to at the beginning of the day? And of course he has. So why are you unhappy? You wouldn't be unhappy if you just came up and I paid you and you left. You would have been perfectly happy.

The only reason you're unhappy is because you're looking at how I am dealing with someone else. And you feel like if these people that worked a shorter time got a denarius, then you should have more. That's not what we agreed to.

Why do you care? Take yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your I evil because I am good? Is my goodness creating resentment in you? This is a powerful indictment of our relative thinking.

We'll have more to say about that when we return to Zechariah this coming Thursday.

Our mind gets influenced by relative anchoring. We see a thing and then we make a comparison and it's not just.

It's not right. And Jesus points out that exact thing here. These men would have been totally happy if there had been no other workers.

They agreed for a denarius. They received a denarius. They would have gone home happy.

But looking over at the next guy and seeing him get the same thing for one hour's work that they got for 12, now they're unhappy. Why are you unhappy? You felt like a day's work was worth a denarius. You agreed to it.

You worked. What's their complaint? We have borne the heat of the day. We have borne the burden.

We have done more work, more works than this other guy. But Jesus concludes the way that he started up in verse 30, the last will be first and the first last. And you can just scratch out that last line.

That's a that's a good point, but made in a different way in another place. What's the initial conclusion that we can draw here? This parable pertains at the macro and at the micro level, at the large view level. God's dealing with Israel.

Twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Seems to be a wonderful reward, but there are promises to the church. Look at Revelation 2 and 3. Sit with me on my throne.

Walk with me in white. Partake of the hidden manna. Proximity and closeness with the Lord Jesus, including rulership, mentioned several places in scripture.

We will reign with him. Here the disciples are promised that they will reign. Now think about this, and this is not intrinsic to the parable, but as we go to our break, think about what this means.

We associate thrones with regal glory, with riches, with privilege, with the freedom that all of those things affords. All of us at one time or another have been in charge of a thing or responsible for a thing and have had others that we organize their efforts, whether it's just in a family or whether it's in a company or in an educational setting or whatever it might be. Ask yourself this question.

If you really stop and think about the disciples, soon to be apostles, sitting on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Again, Thursday night when we were looking at that word for humble, you know, behold your king comes, he is humble. What does that word actually mean? Afflicted.

Moses was the most afflicted man who ever lived. Why? What was he doing? He was

judging the twelve tribes of Israel, right? He was adjudicating and he got so much of a burden that Jethro his father-in-law came and said, you've got to get some help and you've got to delegate this because this is too much of a burden. You're bearing this burden all the time.

You can't get anything else done. Rulership, there is privilege but there is also responsibility and it is a heavy burden to be just, to be fair, to call the balls and strikes accurately and it's not all it's cracked up to be. People say, oh I wish I was in charge.

Well, what you have to do when you are in charge to be just and fair, equitable for those that you have authority over is a burden. Executives often earn what they make when it's more than the people out on the shop floor because it is pressure. It is, there's a lot on the line.

If you make the wrong decisions, there can be tremendous unintended consequences. So when Jesus, Peter says, well what will we receive? And Jesus says, you'll sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. How much of a blessing is this actually? It's, the more you think about it, the more you realize that this is service.

I love Jody Dillow's book titled The Reign of the Servant Kings. To judge, to sit on those thrones and judge is a responsibility of service to the king himself. Well done thou good and faithful servant.

And so those who have been self-sacrificial and have suffered affliction and have followed the Lord Jesus for his namesake are going to have a new opportunity for service. Granted it is, it's large, but they have proven themselves. He that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in that which is much.

And they are going to be given a greater opportunity to serve. Notice these laborers, this is service. And we'll have more to say about that after the break.

But the quality of the Lord himself in his dealings with us in grace and faithfulness is the issue. And whether he calls us for an hour's work, three hours work, six hours work, nine hours work, that's a human standard of measure of value. But in God's eyes, in the eyes of the Lord Jesus Christ who will judge at his judgment seat, he's got a different standard.

He operates with a different measure. And we may think that our calling is unspectacular, that it doesn't involve much, that it's not that hard. We look at others and say, well, they've got less than me or they've got more than me by way of opportunity and calling and service.

Man looks on the outward appearance. God looks on the heart. And here, for the purposes of the parable, the vineyard owner says, I will give you what is right.

And what is right is known to him, and it's often not known to us, and it's often counterintuitive to us. So, this ought to give us a wonderful sense of peace that if we do what we do in Jesus' name and for his sake, God will take care of us. He will do what is right.

His grace is sufficient for our needs. His plan is perfect. The future opportunities for service and function that he will assign us are uniquely tailored to us.

And we don't have to worry about, well, what's he going to do for Israel in the millennium? What's he going to do for the Billy Grahams and the W.A. Criswells and the John MacArthur's and the Chuck Swindolls and the ones that we consider to be prominent and well-known, the Billy Sundays and the well-known, famous people in Christian life and Christian circles, past and present? What are they going to be doing? Where will they be? In the same way that he says, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, it's sufficient for us to see our assignment and to trust God for his grace, his faithfulness, his provision, and whatever blessing and reward attaches is right. What God provides for us in the ages that are to come, whatever it is, we have an inkling, we have a clue, we have a few hints, but whatever it is, because we are doing it for his name's sake, we are placing our trust in his character, in his grace, in his faithfulness, and to the extent that we can reflect that faithfulness and that integrity, whatever God does is going to be great, and it doesn't matter what he may or may not be doing for someone else. Let's pause here and take a break.

When we come back, we will pick up here in chapter 20 and see a few interesting parallels in the other Gospels.